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LITERATURE, LAW AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

**"Seeing the Actual Physical Betty
Kane": Reading the Fille Fatale in
Josephine Tey's *The Franchise Affair* in
the Age of #metoo**

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This article offers a feminist reading of Josephine Tey's 1948 Domestic Noir novel *The Franchise Affair*, with a specific focus on the figure of the fille fatale. I investigate the gender-political dimensions of justice and the law, in order to establish the psychological, literary and legal contexts for representing female sexuality and social class in the late Golden Age crime genre. The article furthermore discusses pedagogy, specifically using *The Franchise Affair* as a teaching and learning case study for the employment of critical pedagogy in the contemporary diverse undergraduate classroom.

Introduction: Framing Betty Kane

Josephine Tey's late Golden Age novel, *The Franchise Affair* (1948),¹ is often read as a revisionist historical crime novel interrogating the 18th century case of Elizabeth Canning (Bargainnier, 1981: 71; Light, 1986).² This revisionist lens is used to provide an intertextual and historical reading of *The Franchise Affair*. However, such a perspective minimises the highly problematic means used by the text for scrutinising and undermining the credibility and integrity of Betty Kane, a central female character in the story. In this article I argue that Golden Age novels are frequently discussed in a deferential light which minimises their problematic gender-political dimensions. I demonstrate that teaching Golden Age crime fiction in the age of #metoo provides a means of reclaiming the works and encouraging further discussion and debate around them. This might prevent texts such as *The Franchise Affair* from becoming fixed in certain readings. Instead, in this article I argue for a contemporary fourth-wave feminist rereading of *The Franchise Affair*, using current terminology such as #metoo, slut shaming and toxic masculinity³ to investigate and reevaluate Tey's novel.

The Franchise Affair is a Domestic Noir crime novel, written in a traditional descriptive Golden Age style with few references to violence and an intense focus on conflicting class and gender norms and values. Set in Milford in Surrey, *The Franchise Affair* presents a linear crime narrative following solicitor Robert Blair who is called to defend two women, Marion Sharpe and her mother. The two women are disliked in the local community, and live in a large somewhat isolated house called The Franchise. They stand accused of kidnapping, imprisoning and abusing a 15-year-old girl, Betty Kane, a wartime evacuee who has been adopted by a local family. In order to prove the Sharpes' innocence, Robert searches for circumstantial

¹ The title quotation is taken from Tey's *The Franchise Affair* (n.p.). An earlier version of this paper was given at the *Literature, Law and Psychoanalysis, 1890–1950* conference (see Beyer 2019).

² For the purpose of this article, I use an extended parameter of the Golden Age to encompass works such as Tey's *The Franchise Affair* which are perched on the boundary but whose literary discourse, setting and themes strongly link them to the Golden Age.

³ Thank you to Christopher Wells for drawing my attention to toxic masculinity, and for a very helpful discussion.

evidence to discredit Betty Kane. It is revealed that Betty Kane was not kidnapped by the Sharpes, but was in a sexual relationship with an older, married man called Barney Chadwick, who took her with him to Copenhagen on a business trip. In order to assemble the defence case and present the defence in court, Robert relies on his Irish lawyer friend from London, Kevin Macdermott. Through Robert and Kevin's discussion of the case, as well as Robert's private reflections, the reader is given a psychologised account of the reasoning behind Betty Kane's behaviour, showing her to be the criminal falsely accusing the Sharpes instead of the crime victim. Robert is given an added incentive to defend the Sharpes due to his attraction to Marion. The dramatic court scenes and confrontations towards the novel's end serve as the novel's didactic closure which finds the Sharpes innocent and Betty Kane guilty. This verdict is to a large extent achieved through the novel's dramatic use of the crime genre's conventions, in its visual framing and shaming of Betty Kane in the courtroom, and through the erasure of the fille fatale's childhood and humanity.

This article triangulates the three symbolic loci for the novel's construction and representation of the schoolgirl villain/victim Betty Kane: character (the fille fatale of Domestic Noir), the courtroom (which serves as the site for othering and shaming female sexuality), and the contemporary undergraduate classroom (where these issues may be challenged and reclaimed through feminist critique). The methodology used is textual analysis drawing on crime fiction criticism and feminist theory. Additionally, I'll be drawing on Foucauldian ideas of deviance, delinquency and discipline, and the idea of the 'docile body' articulated in his work *Discipline and Punish*. These concepts underpin my discussion of the fille fatale and the courtroom setting as a site for instigating punishment of the sexualised female body which has been insufficiently disciplined and therefore must be shamed. Finally, I use Tey's novel as a starting-point for discussing teaching and learning in the contemporary diverse classroom and using crime texts as a means of debating problematic contemporary issues such as slut shaming and toxic masculinity. I argue that the courtroom of the 1940s and the classroom of the 21st century occupy contrasting positions in their assessment of female sexuality, crime and the law. The three areas of investigation

examined in this article thus help us to assess the question of how to read the fille fatale Betty Kane, and to reclaim the novel by studying it through a contemporary feminist critical lens and vocabulary.

Domestic Noir and the Fille Fatale in *The Franchise Affair*

In *The Franchise Affair*, Tey uses the crime genre's conventions to scrutinise the construction of female sexuality. The Domestic Noir subgenre is defined a crime narrative set in the domestic sphere which concerns itself with female experience, and scrutinises the power politics of private relationships, thereby exposing the dangers that patriarchal society poses to women (Crouch, 2013). At the heart of *The Franchise Affair* is the highly ambivalent and problematic Domestic Noir female character of the fille fatale. It is necessary to spend a little time unpacking the meanings of the fille fatale character, as this figure has not been widely discussed in the critical reception of *The Franchise Affair* thus far. However, the term is central to my reading which locates Betty Kane within a tradition of Domestic Noir fiction by women writers which scrutinises female sexuality, crime and agency. Historically, the fille fatale is usually associated with 1990 postfeminist popular culture; however, we see the figure appearing in a proto-form in *The Franchise Affair* (Lindop, 2015). The fille fatale is a younger, underage version of the femme fatale character familiar from hard-boiled crime novels such as Raymond Chandler's 1939 *The Big Sleep* (Jaber, 2016; Lindop, 2015). The fille fatale is a sexualised "child-woman" who uses her erotic appeal to gain power over older men, reflecting the "fear that adolescent girls [are] increasingly vulnerable to corruption" and that the concept of a "normative girlhood" is increasingly outmoded (Hatch 2002, 171–173). The sexually provocative fille fatale is controversial due to her age and the challenges her character poses to conventional ideas about child innocence. The surrounding historical, literary and legal contexts for female promiscuity and sexual precocity are central to *The Franchise Affair* and its employment of the fille fatale figure. Defining these transgressive female characters, Megan Hoffman argues that they exhibit "excessive or deviant sexuality, are often portrayed as victims and villains in golden age crime fiction, and looking closely at these depictions offers a means of examining attitudes towards nonconforming women in the first half of the twentieth century." (2016:

40) The controversial *filles fatales* connects in complex and problematic ways with popular cultural discourses and tropes such as the sexually precocious schoolgirl, a topic I will discuss in more depth in the teaching pedagogy section of this article. The Domestic Noir genre constructs the underage girl as a criminal who exploits her sexuality as a means to empowerment and agency within a patriarchal society which trivialises her perspective and silences her voice. As Renáta Zsámba points out, Betty Kane fights back against the patriarchal culture's requirement of virtue and passivity (2013: 44). "Framing girls this way, coupled with popular culture's emphasis on powerful, active, highly sexualised, images of young woman in mainstream media suggests an increasing paranoia about the potentiality of young women", Lindop argues in her analysis of representations of the *fille fatale*.

My reading here does not comment on the courtroom unravelling of Betty Kane's alibi or condemn her criminality, as these are complex issues that deserve separate treatment in a lengthier format than the present article allows. I am, however, concerned with the actions of the adults around Betty Kane, particularly with the question of duty of care. Betty Kane's background story is tragic, yet curiously, the novel withholds empathy towards her, refusing to consider trauma or circumstances in her adoptive family as causes behind her behaviour. Having been evacuated to the Aylesbury district during the war, Betty Kane is left an orphan after both her parents were killed. The family she was evacuated to took her in and adopted her; however, her liminal position as outsider is used in the text to enhance the idea of her otherness and the threat she is seen to pose to the cohesion of the local community. In her perceptive article on *The Franchise Affair*, Sarah Waters argues that the figure of Betty Kane poses a specific challenge to hierarchical class structures and the stability of the nuclear family:

Betty Kane is an inflammatory figure because she's such a powerful meeting point for anxieties about gender, sexuality and class [...] The 15-year-old Betty, Tey's novel suggests, is a dangerously liminal creature, able to pass herself off as a schoolgirl or a tart, depending simply on whether she's wearing a blazer or lipstick. (2016)

The threat posed by the "inflammatory" Betty Kane is stressed repeatedly in the novel as she performs the various childlike identities available to her, such as innocent school girl, doting little sister, obedient daughter, and kidnapping victim (Lindop, 2015). Betty Kane's capacity for masquerade both intrigues and horrifies Robert Blair, as is evident in the novel's first description of her physical appearance, described through his narrative perspective:

The girl was wearing her school coat, and childish low-heeled clumpish black school shoes; and consequently looked younger than Blair had anticipated. She was not very tall, and certainly not pretty. But she had— what was the word? — appeal. Her eyes, a darkish blue, were set wide apart in a face of the type popularly referred to as heart-shaped. Her hair was mouse-coloured, but grew off her forehead in a good line. Below each cheek-bone a slight hollow, a miracle of delicate modelling, gave the face charm and pathos. Her lower lip was full, but the mouth was too small. So were her ears. Too small and too close to her head. An ordinary sort of girl, after all. Not the sort you would notice in a crowd. Not at all the type to be the heroine of a sensation. Robert wondered what she would look like in other clothes. (Tey, n.p.)

Through Robert Blair's observations, Betty Kane's body thus becomes a central symbolic locus for the slut shaming of the *fille fatale*. The revelation and unpicking of Betty Kane's masquerade (and her alibi) are central to this shaming process which is similar to a public undressing. I find it rather troubling that Robert Blair's first inclination here is to register inwardly that Betty Kane indeed has what he calls "appeal" (i.e. sex appeal), and to then go on to speculate about what she would look like in other clothes (or perhaps no clothes). However, the inappropriate and downright disturbing nature of his observations goes unquestioned in the text.

The *fille fatale* Betty Kane provokes strong feelings in the other characters in the novel, including sexual desire and rage. Waters comments on the degree of hostility in the novel towards Betty Kane (Waters, 2016). This hostility can be seen in Robert Blair's description of the spectacle presented by Betty Kane's appearance in the courtroom and his response towards her:

Its effect of inward calm, he decided, must be the result of physical construction. The result of wide-set eyes, and placid brow, and inexpensive small mouth always set in the same childish pout. It was that physical construction that had hidden, all those years, the real Betty Kane even from her intimates. A perfect camouflage, it had been. A facade behind which she could be what she liked. There it was now, the mask, as child-like and calm as when he had first seen it above her school coat in the drawing-room at The Franchise; although behind it its owner must be seething with unnameable emotions. (Tey, n.p.)

Here, Betty's Kane's *fille fatale* performance of sexual innocence is presented as a mask behind which she is presumed to conceal her true nature, rather than an underage girl who has been subjected to sexual exploitation and violently assaulted. This masquerade is typical of *fille fatale* characters, according to Lindop, who argues that, "Intrinsically, the *fille fatale*'s bad behaviour is aligned with her nubility, which she plays on in a variety of ways." (2015: 103) Robert Blair's obsession with Betty Kane's appearance represents the patriarchal normative male gaze and its capacity to categorise and dismiss female agency. Furthermore, his only partially concealed aggression towards Betty Kane is suggestive of the misogyny associated with most if not all of the male characters depicted in Tey's novel.

The *fille fatale* is inevitably slut shamed and punished at the end of *The Franchise Affair*. This closure is an ideological necessity which has the purpose of reinforcing a threatened patriarchal structure and shoring up the integrity of heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family. Megan Hoffman argues that, "[w]hen the young women in question engage in sexual activity outside marriage, they are either punished or, if they have sufficient potential for eventual marriage, are rehabilitated." (2016: 40). In *The Franchise Affair*, we see both of these narrative moves – Betty Kane is shamed at the end of the novel, whereas Marion Sharpe is redeemed through her relationship with Robert Blair, as they fly off to Canada together to start a new life. This oppositional treatment of female characters in the novel reflects unresolvable binaries in Domestic Noir's representation of female sexuality and crime, which the

courtroom scenes highlight and problematise in their ritualised display of docile bodies. The fille fatale serves as an embodiment of these unresolvable tensions which are most in evidence during the courtroom scenes. I will move on now to investigate those courtroom scenes in more detail, in order to scrutinise the politics of their representation.

The Courtroom as a Symbolic Locus for Shaming

The second part of my discussion of *The Franchise Affair* focuses on the role of the courtroom as a space for formally inflicting slut shaming on the fille fatale. The novel's representations of the courtroom scenes reveal the gender-political dimensions of justice and the law in crime fiction. The courtroom itself is a patriarchal space which serves a central function in formally proclaiming judgement and administering punishment on non-docile feminine bodies. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault is concerned with how external structures such as institutions of power produce subjects. The courtroom is one such external structure: highly ritualised, governed and overseen by a hierarchy of officials working for and empowered by the state. The use of courtroom settings and legal themes is relatively frequent in modern crime fiction, and serves a variety of generic and discursive purposes within the crime plot. Commenting on the role that legal proceedings and courtroom dramas play in crime fiction, Heather Worthington notes that, "The legal novel seems to have become part of mainstream crime fiction from the 1930s onwards [...] the narrative structures of legal discourse and the drama of the courtroom lend themselves to fiction." (2011: 59) The spectacle of courtroom confrontations and legal proceedings is central to Tey's novel and the way it uses the conventions of the crime genre in its interrogation of female sexuality (Worthington, 2011: 55; see also Walton, 2015). The courtroom serves as a normative space which reinforces who belongs in the community and who does not; as the outsider, Betty Kane is literally othered and cast out as a consequence of her crime. Additionally, in *The Franchise Affair*, the jury as an entity is repeatedly invoked and called upon as a peer-led enforcer of patriarchal social and sexual norms. The jury is shown to be subjective and biased in their assessment of the case – to the extent that, eventually, the jury opts to waive hearing

more witnesses give evidence, and the council for the defence. This is because, as the foreman says, they've reached their verdict already: they have already judged Betty Kane, and found her guilty as charged.

The Franchise Affair's courtroom scenes are key to the processes of constructing and shaming the female victim/villain and her social-literary position through their formalised performances, which maintain and enhance the legality of slut shaming discourses. Performance is a central aspect of the courtroom and the agents within it, linking Judith Butler's "notion of 'performativity' [with] politics and legality." (Young, 2016) In his research on the significance of the courtroom as a symbolic and performative space, Luke Scott further argues that,

one can read the Court as theatre, a stage on which ideal representations of the real are enacted; as parliament, a venue for the dichotomy of oppositional debate, observed by its public; as library, a body of precedents and the accumulation of social histories; and as church, the moral arbiter to a society of subjects, on whom it relies in their observance of its power relations. (2016, n.p.)

It is precisely through the regimented mechanisms and ritualistic performances of the courtroom that the female victim/villain at the heart of *The Franchise Affair* is scrutinised and judged, and, finally, shamed. Through the ritualistic regimentation brought to bear on the females within the confines of the courtroom itself, both Betty Kane and Marion Sharp are subjected to what Foucault terms "the normalising gaze" (1995: 184). According to Foucault, the "normalizing gaze [is] a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish [...] in it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth." (1995: 184) This "normalising gaze" is enacted through Robert Blair's perspective as representative of patriarchal law.

The Franchise Affair's intense scrutiny of Betty Kane's physical appearance in the courtroom, through the perspective of Robert Blair, is particularly significant in this regard. His observations emphasise the discrepancy between her appearance and

what he perceives to be her true promiscuous and evil nature, which is exaggerated and demonised in this passage:

Robert had not seen her since she stood in the drawing-room at The Franchise in her dark blue school coat, and he was surprised all over again by her youth and her candid innocence. In the weeks since he had first seen her she had grown into a monster in his mind; he thought of her only as the perverted creature who had lied two human beings into the dock. Now, seeing the actual physical Betty Kane again, he was nonplussed. He knew that this girl and his monster were one, but he found it difficult to realise. And if he, who felt that he now knew Betty Kane so well, reacted like that to her presence, what effect would her child-like grace have on good men and true when the time came? (Tey, n.p.)

This passage provides a powerful depiction of toxic masculinity and its demonisation of females. Although not physically threatening in this instance, Robert Blair's perception of Betty Kane represents a symbolic and physical loathing which has as its basis the threat that she poses to his masculinity and his own, only half-articulated and barely acknowledged, sexual attraction towards her. The "othering" of Betty Kane and the visceral categorisation of her as a "monster" seem chilling in light of the fact that she is an underage girl. The novel thus uses the courtroom convention as part of this othering of the *fille fatale*. Robert Blair's determination to prove Betty Kane's guilt is reflected in his anxiety over whether others, too, will be able to identify her as a slut and a liar. The courtroom in *The Franchise Affair* is thus revealed to be a patriarchally sanctioned symbolic space which makes a spectacle of girls and women and exposes female slut shaming.

The courtroom scenes reveal patriarchal society's reliance on 'docile bodies', to use Foucault's term, specifically female docile bodies. This representation suggests that the courtroom is not a neutral space, nor is the law a neutral instrument – rather, both are brought to bear on females in ways which are overdetermined by

the construction of female sexuality and the female body as promiscuous and evil. Betty Kane is judged on the basis of her gender, class, family status (adopted orphan, not blood relation), and age. Her body is not compliant or docile, but demonic, although it masquerades as a socially acceptable version of femininity. Eric Dunning states that "Foucauldian discipline requires that institutions individuate bodies according to their tasks as a means for training, observing, controlling and making them capable." (Dunning, 2010: 74) As we see in *The Franchise Affair's* descriptions, the court case is taking its toll on the jurors' bodies, as they are having to sit still for many hours and subject themselves to the regiments of the courtroom. As they adhere to the regulations and regimens of the courtroom, the jurors too are required to demonstrate mastery over their desires and represent docile bodies on behalf of the law. The playing out of the patriarchal drama of slut shaming the fille fatale culminates in the verdict stating the need for a disciplined body and sexuality, with the punishment of Betty Kane becoming, in Foucault's words, "the anchoring point for a manifestation of power" (quoted in Scott, 2016). Commenting on the courtroom as a symbolic performative realm, Luke Scott argues that,

The Courtroom and the Stage each make distinctions between representation and the *real* conditions to which they refer, and both draw out – by means of a complete physical enclosure punctured by strategic portals – a place in which society as a subject may be isolated, analysed and criticised, under the mutual recognition that this re-enactment is deemed to represent what exists outside in the social realm. It thus creates a parallel space in which society can be safely dissected. (2016)

The physical and visceral dimension of the courtroom's exposure and shaming of the fille fatale victim/villain is highlighted in the novel's representation of this space and the scenes set there. This physical and visceral dimension is further underlined by and echoed in the novel's phrase, "seeing the actual physical Betty Kane". The scopic economy defines Betty Kane as fille fatale and enables the deconstruction of her

persona to reveal the monster she harbours within. The courtroom scenes thus emerge as the primary formalised sites through which the novel enacts its condemnation of Betty Kane through its reliance on specific crime fiction conventions.

#MeToo: Teaching *The Franchise Affair*

In the third part of my article, I want to move on to discuss the contemporary classroom as a vital space for contemporary fourth-wave feminist intervention and critique. As we have seen, *The Franchise Affair* raises urgent and uncomfortable questions in regard to the representation and criminalisation of girls and young women, and their sexuality and agency. *The Franchise Affair* explicitly centres on femininity and female sexuality as sites for the construction and inscription of crime. The novel uses the crime fiction conventions of investigative analysis and clue puzzles, as well the fille fatale character, in order to mobilise its narrative of punishment of female transgression. *The Franchise Affair* would therefore make an excellent case study of the use of Golden Age crime fiction as a means of exploring and teaching feminist topics in the undergraduate English literature classroom. I argue that the contemporary diverse classroom may offer a resisting space in which to challenge the slut shaming and stereotyping of female sexuality embodied by the fille fatale. Crime fiction foregrounds crime and criminality, and as such the genre is central to a feminist project which seeks to reassess the fille fatale and acknowledge her victimisation. In considering the challenges associated with teaching this text to undergraduate students, using critical pedagogy, I would reflect on the students' likely mixed responses to the text, as well as examining my own ambivalence regarding the portrayal of Betty Kane. Critical pedagogy (de Jong et. al, 2018: xiii–xvi) would connect textual study with contemporary thinking and students' own ideas and experiences concerning the representation and performance of female sexuality and their gender-political dimensions. The classroom discussions resulting from these reflections would read the novel in light of the #MeToo movement and feminist rejection of slut shaming, thus raising important questions for curriculum selection and pedagogical practices. Seminar discussions of *The Franchise Affair* could thus present an opportunity to discuss contemporary concepts of slut shaming and the 'docile' female body. The issues raised in classroom discussions of this text might

illustrate, as bell hooks says, that "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks, 1994: 13). I argue that generating debate around the portrayal of the law and legal processes as upholding and endorsing the slut shaming and vilification of underage females may form an important part of decolonising the curriculum and interrogating the politics of representation within crime fiction.

In the classroom, discussions may focus on one of *The Franchise Affair's* central scenes of slut shaming the fille fatale, in order to examine the positions of the characters within it as part of a Domestic Noir crime plot, with a particular focus on female characters and their representation. Using feminist critical theory, specifically to underpin examinations of Tey's use of the fille fatale character, classroom discussions may explore examples of the novel's construction of Betty Kane and her sexuality as provocative and transgressive. These investigations of the representation of Betty Kane as fille fatale establish how a class- and gender biased perception of her character is used as justification for the violent treatment (physically and mentally) she receives, which are detailed in the scene where she is confronted and physically assaulted by Barney Chadwick's wife. In this scene we see Betty Kane shamed and verbally and physically abused, called names such as "tramp" and compared to stereotypical images from films of sexually promiscuous females:

A woman's voice called from the bedroom: 'Is that you, Barney? I've been so lonely for you.' I went in and found her lying on the bed in the kind of negligée you used to see in vamp films about ten years ago. She looked a mess, and I was a bit surprised at Barney. She was eating chocolates out of an enormous, box that was lying on the bed alongside her [...] for some reason or other she got in my hair. I don't know why. I had never cared very much on other occasions. I mean, we just had a good row without any real hard feelings on either side. But there was something about this little tramp that turned my stomach. (Tey, n.p.)

In this passage, it is very telling that Mrs Chadwick feels justified in assaulting Betty Kane despite the latter offering no provocation, nor presenting any form of physical

threat. Paradoxically, the passivity and victimisation of Betty Kane in the face of this onslaught are seen to further establish her "guilt", and to justify her deserved castigation. This scene might thus provide useful material for class room discussion of the extent to which the 'othering' of females central to the activity and sentiment of slut shaming is based on unconscious bias or unacknowledged prejudice, and the harmful implications of this for females. In fact, as my investigation of this slut shaming incident in the novel shows, the physical assault on Betty Kane is vindicated in the narrative through the assailant's claim that there is "something" about her victim, suggesting she deserved it. This unarticulated and undefined "something" serves a central function within the novel's female victim-blaming discourse which constructs Betty Kane as responsible for her own misfortune. Classroom discussions could then focus on definitions of slut shaming, and the significance of the term to students in the contemporary diverse classroom. This is an important subject, as pedagogical scholars have established. Deborah L. Tolman et al. argue that, "neoliberal sexual agency is a much-needed rendering of the rearticulated social and discursive landscape within which girls and young women navigate sexuality." (2015: 298) These debates around female sexuality and its cultural construction could be linked to other recent critical discussions around the stereotype of "sexy schoolgirl" (Ringrose 2012: 118), a cliché which has also been highlighted as problematic by female students (Winters 2016). The complexity of Betty Kane's position in *The Franchise Affair* reflects the insight by Tolman et al. that "the one-dimensional "slut/virgin" divide has become insufficient to account for alterations in gender norms and moral codes and the proliferation of language to describe young women's engagements with their own and other girls' sexuality." (2015: 299) Tolman et al. also problematise conflation of age groups, of girls and young women, and the impact on and significance for the way in which their evolving sexualities are regarded (2015: 300). This blurring of age boundaries and resulting confusion over sexual availability is a subject of central importance to both *The Franchise Affair* and related discussions of femininity and crime which we might embark on in the contemporary diverse classroom. Tey uses the crime genre's conventions to call attention to those blurred

lines and unstable boundaries, signalling them to be central in slut shaming the fille fatale.

Laina Y. Bay-Cheng discusses the gendered sexual norms which dictate young women's sexuality as reflected in the virgin-slut continuum. These norms form a part of what Bay-Cheng terms "enduring gendered prohibitions to constrain young women's sexual expression and to reinforce the sexual stigmatization" (2015: 332) of girls and women. As Brian N. Sweeney states, "[a]s a form of social stigma, slut shaming involves creating categories of sexual normalcy and deviancy. Shaming marks victims as different, as of a lower status, and as deserving of disrespect and mistreatment." (2017, n.p.) Classroom discussion might focus on the centrality of the stigma of female sexuality and sexual expression to *The Franchise Affair*, specifically working-class female sexuality. Indeed, the novel actively enhances and exaggerates the hypocritical stigma, which is carried by Betty Kane alone rather than the older male characters who desire her or have sex with her. References in the novel to Betty Kane the school girl, or dressed in a school uniform, are examples of the sexist cultural titillating stereotypes circulating around girls. These sexualised stereotypes reflect the fear in patriarchal culture over girls and young women owning their agency, attempting instead to reduce them to titillating uniforms and masquerade. Students are concerned with this sexist fetishisation of underage girls implicit in schoolgirl imagery. In a recent article, female university students commented critically on the prevalence of the "sexy schoolgirl" stereotype used in playful dress-up costumes, which seem to conform to the ideas associated with the stereotype, rather than challenge or subvert it. Describing her unease at "the unsettling representations of the school child" embodiments of sexual girl fantasies, student Lydia Winters argues that it "encourages the sexualisation of the school uniform." (2016) The article clearly demonstrates that the fetishisation of the sexually precocious schoolgirl is highlighted by female students as problematic. The fact that such imagery is perpetrated by Golden Age crime fiction novels like *The Franchise Affair* would be an obvious topic for discussion within the classroom as part of a feminist reading of *The Franchise Affair*. Commenting on the treatment

of non-conforming female characters in crime fiction narratives, Megan Hoffman further argues that their importance "does not lie in their inevitable containment at the narratives' conclusions, but in their disturbing potential for agency and the accompanying questions raised about the transgressive and the normal." (2011: 41) Reviewing teaching and learning practices of reading Domestic Noir and Golden Age crime fiction is very important for a revitalised critical engagement with the crime fiction genre. This is specifically the case for *The Franchise Affair* and its use of crime fiction conventions such as the fille fatale. As Lindop points out, the problematic figure of the fille fatale serves as a locus for cultural anxieties around femininity and youth which impact in harmful and debilitating ways in young women and their experience of corporeality and sexuality: "Framing girls this way, coupled with popular culture's emphasis on powerful, active, highly sexualised, images of young woman in mainstream media suggests an increasing paranoia about the potentiality of young women" (2015: 103). Engaging in these discussions is of vital importance, as Liz Clift states in her article on pedagogy: "As educators, we have a responsibility to talk about victim-blaming and slut shaming with students. By talking about the way society polices girls and women, based on the way they dress or their perceived sexual activity, we have the opportunity to foster caring learning environments, prevent suffering and save lives." (Clift, 2013) Teaching Tey's *The Franchise Affair* in the #metoo age thus necessitates a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies in the contemporary diverse classroom, decolonising crime fiction through a fourth-wave feminist interrogation of class and gender stereotypes in the age of #metoo.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Betty Kane

The interrogation of female sexuality is central to the crime plot of *The Franchise Affair* (Zsámiba, 2018: 84). This shaming process is enacted through the novel's crime plot, and is chiefly focalised through the portrayal of Betty Kane as a sexually precocious fille fatale schoolgirl victim/villain. By investigating the triangulation of the fille fatale character, the representation of legal discourses and courtroom procedures, and pedagogy in the contemporary classroom, this article brings renewed urgency to the reading of Tey's *The Franchise Affair* and, in extension of this, Golden Age and Domestic Noir crime fiction generally. Reading

the novel through a contemporary critical lens, utilising current generic terms of enquiry such as Domestic Noir and *fille fatale* to explain the novel's function, throws new light on Tey's representations and their gender-political dimensions. By putting the *fille fatale* on trial, *The Franchise Affair* highlights the courtroom as a symbolic and ritualised setting which has as its central purpose the exposure and condemnation of female sexuality. Insisting that Betty Kane is "seething with unnameable emotions" (Tey, n.p.), Robert Blair's callous dismissal of the girl's experience confines her to a position of unknowable and unredeemable Other. His worryingly "homicidal" toxic masculine rage at Betty Kane illustrates the intensity of the punitive judgment meted out to the *fille fatale* who transgresses patriarchal sexual norms for female conduct and expression. In contrast to its harsh judgment of Betty Kane, the novel's romantic ending in the brief Chapter 24 constitutes an unsuccessful attempt to erase the problematic textual tactics through which one woman's character has been 'rescued' at the expense of another's. Having initially turned down his proposal of marriage, Marion Sharp is stuck on a long-haul flight to Canada with her ageing mother and Robert Blair who has gate-crashed her trip overseas in a rather predatory way. As we are informed that Robert Blair's presence makes her laugh "softly and consumedly" (Tey, n.p.), Marion's sexual respectability is bought at the expense of Betty Kane's. Waters describes *The Franchise Affair* as "an ingenious book, a crime novel without a corpse, a detective story in which the victim is justice itself and the main weapons are ignorance, prejudice and careless journalism." (2016)

Slut shaming the *fille fatale* in *The Franchise Affair* constitutes the judicial and moral basis for the novel's resolution and restoration of order. Tey uses the crime genre's conventions in order to condemn and banish the existence of the *fille fatale* from the novel's exaggerated inward-looking small-town community which is almost like a caricature of Golden Age literary and cultural sensibility. However, despite the successful exiling of Betty Kane, the novel struggles to reconcile its own contradictions, evident in its treatment of the *fille fatale* who inhabits both positions of victim and villain. The courtroom provides a central symbolic locus for the judgment, disciplining and punishing of female sexuality. However, this patriarchally

sanctioned space has a vital counter-representation in today's diverse classroom in the age of #metoo. Here, through feminist and decolonised teaching and learning, we may reassess the opposing female stereotypes presented in the novel and the role and function of normative male-oriented legal authority. As Tolman et al. insist, "[a]s scholars, researchers and critical consumers of popular culture, to our continuous surprise and dismay, we find the slut/prude/virgin continuum to consistently be the primary hegemony that is imposed on girls." (2015: 301) Importantly, classroom discussions in the #metoo age can reevaluate *The Franchise Affair* by investigating it through a fourth-wave feminist critical vocabulary that moves beyond the novel's construction of a biased, punitive scopoc economy which frames "the actual physical Betty Kane" as a vamp and a villain, to an interrogation of the fille fatale character and the symbolic and generic spaces which inscribe and reinforce oppressive textual economies.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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