

13 Critical Reception Studies

The White Feminism of Feminist Reception Scholarship

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I first read Virgil at the regional state school for girls I attended in Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands of the UK. The school had opted out of local authority control under the provision of the Education Reform Act 1988, which empowered it to set academic admissions criteria and freed it from adherence to the statutory national curriculum.¹ Consequently, I was taught a curriculum modelled on the British grammar school and designed to provide me with an education similar in kind to the training afforded to the middle-class and predominantly privately educated students with whom it was anticipated I would later socialise and compete at university. Latin was mandatory for all students for the first three years, as were elocution examinations; and these two things are not unrelated. The school's pedagogical strategy was effective: in 2009, 86% of its students entered higher education, many to Russell Group universities, in contrast to the total of 6% of Wolverhampton school-leavers who entered Russell Group institutions (Department for Education, 2012).² Over the course of my schooling I learned to invest in Latin as one of the educational characteristics that would enable me to leave Wolverhampton and to pass at an elite university, an investment significantly reinforced when I won a scholarship to study classics at the University of Cambridge; the proportion of Wolverhampton school-leavers who entered Oxford and Cambridge in 2009 was, statistically, 0% (Department for Education, 2012). It did not immediately concern my new peers that they had never heard of Wolverhampton, as my having Latin was the social signifier that reassured them I had attended a "good" school. But classics had not only facilitated my acculturation into middle-class educational life; it had also facilitated my acculturation into a particular kind of whiteness in which an assumed inherited ownership of Graeco-Roman antiquity and its study is leveraged to construct and maintain racialised, classed, and gendered hierarchies.³

Wolverhampton's most noted Cambridge classicist is the former conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Wolverhampton South West, Enoch Powell, whose political career and legacy has been defined by his 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, in which he claimed: "In this country in fifteen or twenty years' time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man . . . As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding, like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'" (Powell, 1968, quoted in Hirsch, 2018, 1–2).⁴ Powell's fusion of ventriloquised anti-immigrant "anecdotal imaginings" (Hirsch, 2018, 2) from the

“quite ordinary working man” of Wolverhampton (Powell, 1968, quoted in Hirsch, 2018, 1) with literary references to Virgil’s epic poem lent “scholastic legitimacy” (Hirsch, 2018, 54) to his racist construction of the “working man” as white and his incitement to interracial violence.⁵ Despite his invocation of Virgil in an explicitly racist context, biographies of Powell from both sides of the political spectrum have attempted to disentangle the man from his racist discourse by emphasising his classical training (Hirsch, 2018, 95). At the same time, classicists such as Edith Hall have attempted to disentangle classics from Powell, arguing that the MP “got Vergil wrong” (Hall, 2013). Hall’s cursory dismissal precludes any analysis of a relational link between Virgil’s racial fantasy, Powell’s classical training at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the MP’s racist rhetoric. Moreover, such philological quibbles have failed to deter the many politicians, historians and journalists who continue to invoke and reproduce Powell’s Virgilianism as a racist dog whistle (Hirsch, 2018, 95).

I have started my chapter with this reflection on locality, class, race and classics because, as scholarship by marginalised writers often notes, understanding and iteratively reflecting upon our positionality as researchers – where we write from, and who we write for – is a prerequisite for comprehending and dismantling the power relations of knowledge in which we participate and which we replicate in our research.⁶ My own journey with classics has been inextricably bound in with elitist educational pretensions and the neoliberal myth of social mobility, and it began in a post-industrial town through which a classicising discourse of racism still reverberates. Critically reflecting upon the anti-liberatory and (self-)alienating processes of acculturation to which I have been exposed – that is, the implantation of a particular aesthetic and affective attachment to “classics” – was the first step towards a more critical gaze at the discipline, its paradigms, its processes of valuation and canon formation, and the works of reception I study.⁷ In this essay, I examine the political stakes involved when (white) women uncritically cultivate classicism.

In 2017 Johanna Hanink identified critical classical reception as a mode of reception scholarship cognisant of the role of Graeco-Roman antiquity in the construction and maintenance of entrenched systems of oppression, including racism, colonialism, nationalism and patriarchy. “Reception 2.0”, Hanink observes, is characterised by a strong personal voice and “an open activist agenda” (Hanink, 2017), citing Dan-el Padilla Peralta’s elucidation of the classical poetics of hip-hop in *The Classics in/of Hip-Hop* (Padilla Peralta, 2015) and Helen Morales’ take-down of classicising diet regimes in *Fat Classics* (Morales, 2015) as examples of this new activist critical classical reception studies.⁸ Both of these articles, Hanink argues, not only analyse how an ancient text or motif has been received in modern culture, but engage “in open acts of calling out” – calling out the scholar peers who have neglected hip-hop’s classical receptions or calling out “the diet industry, for invoking the authority of Hippocrates” (Hanink, 2017). Yet while Padilla Peralta

takes care to contextualise the ways in which Jay-Z's classicism 'cuts against the grain' of a tradition of socially conscious hip-hop in which classical allusions have typically functioned as a metonym for white hegemony, Morales appears to take as read the intrinsic "authority" of the ancient texts she cites, even if she argues for these authorities to be "selectively" chosen (Morales, 2020, 45). The fundamental difference between the two articles is the difference between Black classicism and its scholarship, and the bourgeois whiteness of much feminist classicism and its scholarship. That is, the difference between a reflexive reimagining of the discipline of classics and the will to power of white feminism expressed in the desire to claim Daddy's authority for oneself.⁹ (I use "white feminism" here and throughout the paper not as an essentialising category – as in, the feminism of white women – but, following Sara Ahmed, to "summarise a relation *to*" the discipline, that is, to describe a feminism that is concerned with protecting the discipline's reputation and "not rocking the boat" [Ahmed, 2018, 340].)

An expanded version of *Fat Classics* is included in Morales' *Antigone Rising: The Subversive Power of the Ancient Myths* (2020). The book's subtitle explicitly invokes a scholarly paradigm predominant in one strand of this new "activist" reception scholarship, and with which this essay is concerned; namely, the narrative of the "subversive power" (Morales, 2020, 147) of Graeco-Roman literature to "empower" marginalised subjectivities historically excluded by classicising ideologies. Although the narrative of an appeal to the classical past as a revolutionary gesture has a genealogy parallel to the narrative of classicising conservatism, the 20th-century incarnation of the narrative of subversion has its roots in second-wave feminist literary criticism and its claim that women writers whose works engage with Graeco-Roman literature rewrite, revise, reclaim and resist the patriarchal literary canon (the touchstone essay is Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", 1972).¹⁰ More recently, this narrative of subversion has been supplemented with a white feminist discourse of "empowerment". Mary Beard's *Women & Power: A Manifesto*, for example, calls upon women to "subvert . . . those foundational stories of power . . . and turn . . . them to our own advantage" (2018, 89); while *Antigone Rising* claims that "[p]art of being empowered . . . involves understanding these myths . . . and turning them to our own advantage" (Morales, 2020, xvii). I will return to this narrative of empowerment in the final section of the essay, but suffice it to say here that neither Beard nor Morales use "empowerment" in its original sense of conscientisation; in their texts, "empowerment" is used to denote women's individual ascendance within the neoliberal capitalist order ("to give women . . . their place inside the structures of power", Beard, 2018, 58).¹¹

This scholarly paradigm of subversive empowerment has been widely assumed and adapted in 21st-century reception scholarship and not only for discussions of women's classical receptions. In Edith Hall and Henry Stead's *A People's History of Classics: Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain 1689–1939* (2020), for example, individual working-class engagements with ancient literature are similarly schematically framed as resisting and subverting culturally hegemonic texts, and "studying Classics is still largely presented as a means of transcending

one's [socio-economic] station" (D'Angelo, 2020).¹² The narrative of subversive empowerment has been so widely adopted in reception scholarship, in part, because of its utility to a discipline under pressure to demonstrate its relevance to contemporary revolutionary politics and thereby distance itself from its historical and ongoing associations with the disempowering and oppressive structures of conservatism, patriarchy and white supremacy. The narrative has also been institutionalised because it is, in effect, depoliticising, functioning as a "get out of jail free" card for a business-classics which continues at the institutional level fundamentally unchanged, with its epistemological and methodological frameworks – and its implication in wider societal oppressive structures – untroubled.¹³ It is a reformist narrative, not an abolitionist one, and Luke Richardson has written powerfully about the ways in which classics' absorption of its own critique has rendered reception studies little more than the "propaganda wing" (Richardson, 2017) of the discipline.

I wish to clarify at this point that it is not my intention or purpose to invalidate readings of ancient texts which have rejected received interpretations or translations to recover the queer lives, trans lives or Black lives in the ancient world that have "not only been overlooked, but [rendered] nearly unimaginable" (Hartman, 2019, xvi). There is a key distinction to be made between the discipline of classics and its objects, and between radical re-readings of ancient texts and their co-optation by the discipline and its tenured protectors to maintain socio-cultural and economic power and privilege. I am concerned here with the ways in which the narrative of the subversive power of ancient texts is adopted and deployed as a defensive "move to innocence" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, 10), a strategy that attempts to evade accountability and maintain disciplinary or institutional power.¹⁴ This move to innocence is repeatedly used to derail the conversations, most often begun by young scholars of colour, about the very real implication of the discipline in white supremacy and imperialism. We see the mechanism at work, for example, in the – now edited – Cambridge Faculty of Classics Race Equality Statement (Bhalerao, 2021), which was issued only after the grassroots agitation of students of colour and which could not admit to the discipline's implication in racism and imperialism without pointing to the ways in which classics "has at times been a force for great good (for example in relation to gay and civil rights movements)" (University of Cambridge Faculty of Classics, quoted in Bhalerao, 2021). As Lylaah Bhalerao identified, at the same historical moment as the American Civil Rights Movement to which the Statement appeals, Cambridge alumnus Enoch Powell was delivering his Virgilian "Rivers of Blood" speech; "[y]et no mention of the speech was made in the statement" (Bhalerao, 2021). This anti-revolutionary "counterproductive counternarrative" (Bostick, 2020) evades not only a sincere engagement with histories of racism, classism and sexism, but also a reflexive assessment of scholars' institutional and disciplinary complicity vis-à-vis classics.¹⁵ The white feminist narrative of subversive empowerment is a similar deflection; in such scholarship, critical voices are even explicitly dismissed as belonging to "nihilis[tic]" "keyboard warriors" (Morales, 2020, 147) whose abolitionist calls, it is implied, display a "lack of sisterhood" (Morales, 2020, 146).

To understand in greater detail the ideological work of this narrative of subversive empowerment, and to expose the false premise upon which the narrative is built, I will re-examine the classicising poetry of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Sylvia Plath, a pre-eminent and early example of a poet whose “revisionary” use of the patriarchal classical literary canon is said to empower her expression of (“give voice to”) a feminine lyric subjectivity.¹⁶ I begin with an overview of Plath’s educational and social introduction to classics. This is a recognisable trope of much reception scholarship, one that usually serves to demonstrate the philological credentials of its subject and in which the subject’s educational encounter with classics is presented neutrally. Instead, taking a history of scholarship approach that pays attention to the literary, institutional, pedagogical and ideological contexts that framed Plath’s encounter with Graeco-Roman literature, I will challenge the narrative paradigm of subversive empowerment that is applied to her poetry with an historicised narrative about value, canon (re)formation and acculturation in the late 1950s. As examples, I discuss Plath’s series of Virgilian bee poems and draw out the elements of the sequence that a white bourgeois gaze must overlook to make its claim for the proto-feminist “subversive power” of Plath’s classicising poetry. In the final section of the essay, I examine the persistence of this white bourgeois feminism and its occlusions in contemporary feminist public scholarship.

In 1955 Sylvia Plath won a Fulbright Scholarship to read English at Newnham College, Cambridge. The English Tripos was introduced at Cambridge in 1917 as part of a wider University enterprise in the early 20th century to expand its bachelor’s degree awards from mathematics, theology and classical philology, and it was intended to be taken after a Part I in classics (Collini, 1998). The 19th-century Cambridge syllabus had been shaped by the curricula of the elite public schools which supplied Cambridge with a stream of boys trained predominantly in ancient Greek and Latin; a university syllabus which simply required “more of the same” (Stray, 2001, 41) at degree-level ensured success for these students. The persistent influence of the public schools on the Cambridge syllabi of the 20th century is detected in the first principles of the two compulsory comparative elements of the modern two-part English Tripos instituted in 1926, which acclimatised the elite student to English: the Tragedy paper began with the ancient Greek dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the English Moralists paper began with the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle.¹⁷ The ordinances of the new degree course held an explicit aim to situate English literature as an inheritance of the Graeco-Roman classics, and it was underpinned by a Eurocentric assumption of the existence of a transhistorical canon of works and genres.

The primacy of the Graeco-Roman classics in the new English Tripos was reinforced by the prominence of ancient Greek tragedy in the aesthetic theory of one of its first teachers, I.A. Richards, known for his development of practical criticism and early espousal of the New Criticism. When Plath arrived in Cambridge in 1955, the Tragedy and practical criticism (“Criticism and Composition”) papers were associated

with Richards' contemporary and fellow proponent of the New Criticism, F.R. Leavis, whose lectures Plath attended. The New Critics, heavily influenced by the essays of T.S. Eliot, held a set of criteria for "classic" literature which relied on the acceptance of a shared canon of literature stretching back to ancient Greece and against which individual quality could be measured (Eliot, [1920] 1975). The subjective aesthetic value judgements of the New Critics were therefore expressed as an assessment of a text's placement in this purported tradition of texts objectively paradigmatic of "the human situation" (Richards, [1924] 2001, 63). Notwithstanding the individual modulations among the New Critics, they were united by an acute conservatism that reinforced the cultural hegemony of the classics. Their syllabi and pedagogy impressed upon the young Plath that classicising poetry was simply what poetry is.

Plath's letters home to the US from Cambridge in her first year as a Fulbright Scholar frequently express an anxiety about finding herself in a cultural and critical environment which assumed a shared knowledge and valuation of the classical canon. A few weeks into Michaelmas Term, Plath writes to a correspondent, "my enormous ignorances appal [*sic*] me . . . Grace is said solemnly in Latin, and everybody seems to have a classical background" (Plath, 2017, 975, 978) or to have "already 'picked up' Greek" (1093). Plath cringes at having "never read the classics" (1004) and "shockingly enough, never touched" (1085) the ancient dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides. Her main concern, she continues, is that she "must appear rather uneducated" (1004–1005) to her Director of Studies among Newnham's classically educated upper-middle-class grammar school girls. Plath's complaints draw our attention because she had read Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* in translation in high school and again at Smith College as an undergraduate for a paper on "Modern Tragedy in the Classical Tradition". While her anxieties may be located in a lack of grounding in the ancient languages, they suggest that Plath had perceived a particular discourse of classicism at Cambridge into which she had not been inducted. Her letters reveal a complicated nexus of desires – both to learn and to assimilate.

Plath read steadily and widely to "remedy" (Plath, 2017, 1005) the disparity between her American literary education – which she laments in her journal counts for nothing in Cambridge – and the knowledge required for the Tragedy paper. By the end of her first year, Plath had read her way through four lecture series in the history of tragic theory and the tragic genre from Aristotle to Eugene O'Neill, including all the extant plays of Aeschylus and a great proportion of Sophocles, Euripides, Plato and Aristotle. Plath also took the opportunity to see two performances of Greek tragedies, attending a production of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the 1956 Cambridge Greek Play, a performance of Euripides's *Bacchae* "[i]n Greek (!) . . . performed here every 3 years (even Oxford gave up plays in Greek in 1932!)" (1102), "complete with Cambridge students chanting Greek choruses, [and] modern original music" (1122–1123).¹⁸ In contrast to these effusive letters written shortly after she had seen the Greek Play, only a few months later Plath is coolly alluding to the play to two American correspondents as a cultural highlight of her time so far in Cambridge ("Cultural life is better than NYC! . . . Euripides' 'Bacchae' in Greek . . .", 1150; 1152). After six months in Cambridge, Plath's anxious epistolary positioning as one lacking a classical background has transformed

– via an ingenuous enthusiasm – into a self-presentation as a casually sophisticated elite student, fully assimilated into its classicising culture.

In February 1956 Plath also met the man who became her husband only four months later, the future Poet Laureate Ted Hughes. Hughes had studied archaeology and anthropology at Pembroke College, Cambridge and was head of a circle of young Cambridge poets heavily influenced by the work of Robert Graves and James George Frazer. While Plath's education at Cambridge had focused on Greek texts, Hughes' early classicism was more Roman (he had studied Latin at school, his second poetry collection, published in 1960, would be titled *Lupercal*, and his first classical "adaption" in the late 1960s would be Seneca's *Oedipus*). Plath soon aligned herself with Hughes and the Cambridge poets. They felt dissatisfied with the contemporary post-war British poetry scene and positioned themselves in particular against the Oxford Movement poets Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn and Philip Larkin. The distinction that Plath draws in her journals and letters between the poetry she and her husband were writing and that of the Movement poets centres explicitly on their respective uses of myth, for while the Movement poets had rejected myth, Hughes and his circle embraced myth, mysticism and anthropology (Plath, 2018, 94). Plath's classicising impulse was now additionally reinforced by a wish to assimilate to a Hughesian mythopoeitics.

Plath's creative response to the Tripos and her immersion in Cambridge's classicising culture can be traced through poems written at Newnham such as "Conversation Among the Ruins" (Plath, 1981, 21), which responds to elements of Euripides's *Bacchae*, to later poems which explicitly adopt the personae of ancient Greek tragic heroines, such as "Aftermath" ("Mother Medea in a green smock / Moves humbly as any housewife through / Her ruined apartments", 113, ll. 9–11), "Electra on Azalea Path" (116) and "Purdah", in which a Clytemnestra threatens to "unloose – / . . . The lioness, / The shriek in the bath, / The cloak of holes" (242, ll. 52–57). Plath's poetic innovation in many of these poems is to temper the conservative impulse of the poems' modernist mythic parallels – impelled by her New Critical training in "classic" poetry – with an autobiographical lyric "I" that resists the subjective effacement and alienation that cultural hegemony – the legitimising "tradition" – effects. Plath's celebrated cycle of bee poems, to which I now turn, captures this essential tension in her classicising poems between a conservative classicising impulse and a burgeoning impulse towards subjective lyric expression. At the same time, they allow us to see clearly what must be ignored to maintain Plath's status both as a subversive resisting rewriter of myth and as a feminist literary foremother.

Written over five days in October 1962, a few months after the breakdown of her marriage, the bee poems are typically read as an autobiographical allegory. The sequence of five poems – "The Bee Meeting", "The Arrival of the Bee Box", "Stings", "The Swarm" and "Wintering" – ostensibly form a narrative which describes the speaker's initiation into beekeeping, her receipt of a hive, the bees' assault on a scapegoat, the flight of the queen bee in search of a new hive and the winter hibernation of the bees. Each of the poems corresponds to a section of Virgil's fourth *Georgic*, a didactic poem – part farming manual and part political allegory – that treats the management of bees. Plath's bee sequence holistically

reworks Virgil's use of the bee society as an allegorical figure for civil strife for an account of domestic crisis. Direct points of allusion include the repeated references to the Latin language, Rome, Romans and Caesar, and the description of the old queen and her attendants in "Stings" (214) which follows the Latin closely: "Her wings torn shawls, her long body / Rubbed of its plush" (ll. 17–18); the "Honey-drudgers" (l. 22) who "thought death was worth it" (l. 51).¹⁹ But I am not as interested in the direct allusions to Virgil as I am in the discourse of classicism that runs throughout the poems and for which Virgil is a signifier.

The poems' allusive intratextuality works retrospectively as often as it functions to progress a theme through the sequence. In the opening poem, "The Bee Meeting" (211), for example, the speaker is handed a face covering by the village beekeepers: "a fashionable white straw Italian hat / And a black veil that molds to my face, they are making me one of them" (ll. 21–22). The scene is hallucinatory, suggestive of an initiation ceremony, and it seems as if the speaker is being assimilated, her individual identity effaced by her costume: a white hat to match the villagers' "white shop smock[s]" (l. 7), "white suit[s]" (l. 29) and beekeeper suits. As we read forward in the bee sequence, however, the colour black becomes exclusively associated with the bees, and so the black veil that moulds to her face in the opening poem is a mask which now retrospectively marks the speaker as a member of the hive; she is a cipher or scapegoat for the old queen who must die for the new queen to found a new colony. "Black" and "white" are key words in Plath's bee sequence, occurring 14 and 11 times, respectively, in 261 lines, alongside clusters of words evocative of or stereotypically associated with the two colours: for "black", variously, a "dark" cellar (217, l. 6) and hive (212, l. 12), a funeral veil, a black bat and "African hands" (212, l. 13), and for "white", read snow, ivory, the moon, lilies, milkweed silk, cheesecloth, cow parsley and hawthorn blossoms, asbestos, Meissen porcelain and Tate & Lyle sugar (I will return to these images).

Throughout "The Bee Meeting" the poetic speaker's subjectivity shuttles, as it does across the sequence as a whole, between an identification with the white-clad villagers (associated in the poems with Caesar, Napoleon and smaller figures of male authority, such as the "the butcher, the grocer, the postman", 211, l. 30) and the bees ("all women", 217, l. 38). At the same time, the speaker is explicitly racialised as white, and the bees as b/Black: "Black / Mind against all that white" (217, ll. 32–33). In the third poem of the sequence, "Stings" (214), the speaker's identification with the bees is at its strongest – "I stand in a column // Of winged, unmiraculous women" (ll. 20–21) – and her locus of identification with the bees is revealed to be in their shared domestic drudgery. As L.P. Wilkinson reminds us, the male poet's pastoral idyll in *Georgics* is "signalised by the astonishing absence of any reference to slavery" (Wilkinson, 1982, 320), and in "Stings", Plath implies that the male poet's idyll has come at the expense of the woman's cultural starvation and domestic labour. The images of enslavement throughout the sequence, then, are used to foreground the woman who, Plath implies, is the necessary yet unspoken condition of Virgil's (Hughes's) pastoral paradise. Given the bees' explicit association elsewhere in the sequence with blackness/Blackness, Plath's metapoetic identification with the figure of the enslaved here draws on a history of privileged

white women co-opting and downplaying racist oppression in their comparisons of women to slaves (Davis, 1981).²⁰ For at the moment in “Stings” at which the poetic speaker identifies explicitly with the bees, the word “black” – the word with which the bees are predominantly associated in the sequence – disappears, replaced with the word “women” (Plath, 1982, 214, l. 21). The speaker’s alignment with the bees is, however, revealed to be only provisional by the imagery of the final lines of the poem in which the “lion-red” (l. 55) queen bee flies triumphantly like a “red comet / Over the engine that killed her – | The mausoleum, the wax house” (ll. 58–60, *my* emphases); the speaker-as-Caesar abandons the hive.²¹

The erasure of race in “Stings” to facilitate an identification with the bees contrasts directly with Plath’s overdetermination of race in “The Arrival of the Bee Box” (212) to weaken the speaker’s identification with the bees. In this poem, the white speaker is explicitly in control. Just as “black” disappeared from “Stings” to align the woman with the enslaved bees, in this poem the colour “white” disappears, aligning the speaker with an unmarked male power. At the same time, the black bees receive the sequence’s most explicitly racist characterisation. Plath’s use of “African hands” (l. 13) to describe the speaker’s first sight of the bees may remind the reader of Virgil’s own African bees, the Carthaginians, compared to bees building a new city for the queen bee, Dido, when Aeneas first catches sight of the new city at *Aeneid* 1.430–436. Like the speaker of Plath’s poem, Aeneas stands marveling at the great “din” (Plath, 1982, 212, l. 5; *Aen.* 1.422) emitted by the workers, uncertain whether he meets friends or enemies. But the “noise” (Plath, 1982, 212, l. 17) of the bees, a “Roman mob” (l. 19) whose protests are categorised as “unintelligible syllables” (l. 18), is a racist trope – reinforced by the use of a derogatory slang term. Although the beekeeping term “swarmy” (l. 31) is still used today to describe the propensity of different bee species to swarm, its use here as a 1950s racist slur is made unequivocal by its pairing with the phrase “African hands” and the accompanying allusion to the Middle Passage in the description of the bees in a “coffin” (l. 3), “Minute and shrunk for export / Black on black, angrily clambering” (ll. 14–15).²² This is the hive-as-boat, an image retrospectively emphasised by the final poem’s explicit references to Tate & Lyle sugar (217, ll. 27, 29) – a grim metonym for the sugar plantations towards which the enslaved bees/hands are shipped.

While the bee poems’ use of black and white “evinces Plath as a poet both produced by the racial politics of the 1950s United States and superficially aware of a need to focus particular attention on racial politics” (Curry, 2000, 124; racial segregation in the US did not end country-wide in law until 1964, over a year after Plath’s death), the speaker’s construction of the negatively racialised other and consideration of her relationship with the negatively racialised other is only ever insofar as it comments on her self: her self-construction, her self-definition, her power, her whiteness.²³ In “The Arrival of the Bee Box” the power dynamics of race and gender are focalised in the line “I am not a Caesar” (212, l. 22), for at the moment the speaker seems closest to recognising her role in oppression, admitting that she is the owner of the bees, she points to the white male as the greater oppressor. She imagines instead her escape from the role of owner by transforming into Daphne, the ur-victim of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (“If I just undid the locks and

stood back and turned into a tree”, ll. 27–28; cf., in the same sequence, “I cannot run, I am rooted”, 211, l. 31). This is a crucial moment in the poem that performs the white feminist insistence on victimhood and innocence when challenged to see white women’s complicity in racism; that the speaker’s imagined flight is Ovidian “only intensifies [her] unmistakable signs of whiteness and privilege” (Tunstall, 2015, 232). In Plath scholarship, the speaker’s claim “I am not a Caesar” has been read literally, and yet the line seems heavily ironic, undercut as it is – once we understand the classicising imagery in these poems – by the speaker’s Caesar-like assassination in the opening poem (“Pillar of white in a blackout of knives”, 211, l. 52) and her Caesar-like apotheosis as a comet in “Stings”. At the same time, the irony of the speaker’s claim, “I am not a Caesar”, and the poet’s conscious alignment with the cultural conservatism and white male power that bolsters the racialised hierarchy between the speaker and the bees leaves room for a degree of self-awareness on the part of the poet about the corrupting quality of her classicising gesture that her feminist readers have lacked.

The cultural power that Plath has been taught the classical holds is gnominically personified across her poems in the dominating and volatile presences of Caesars. In the poem “Daddy”, the Freudian father-figure appears as Caesar/Kaiser, the Colossus of Constantine (“Marble-heavy . . . Ghastly statue with one grey toe”, 222, ll. 8–9) and “A man in black with a Meinkampf look” (l. 65). In this poem, the very recent history of classicism erupts – Plath was 13 when the Second World War ended – in the paired optics of classicism and Nazism. Plath’s explicit play with classicising Fascism here speaks to my reading of her use of classical allusion as a power play and a knowing alignment with a classicising discourse of white power at the expense of negatively racialised others (“Every woman adores a Fascist”, l. 48).²⁴ For all her recognition of the lethality of patriarchal oppression, and for all her ironising of her enthralled relationship to it in “Daddy”, her use of Virgil’s text to bring order to the chaos of a broken marriage and assert herself as a poet – in her place and time and with her educational history – ultimately aligns Plath with Daddy and white male cultural hegemony. This is not a “misappropriation” or “misreading” of the discourse of classicism Plath absorbed. The feminist reception scholar cannot square the claim for the bee poems as a proto-feminist revisionary poetic rebirth with the speaker’s knowing intoxication with racialised power and her co-optation of the racist oppression of others in her attempt at self-representation.²⁵

I returned to the late 1950s to demonstrate how an understanding of the literary, institutional, pedagogical and ideological contexts that framed Plath’s encounter with the classical reveals a confessional narrative of acculturation rather than one of subversive empowerment. My purpose was to expose both the unsound premise on which the contemporary scholarly paradigm of subversive empowerment has been built and some of the ways in which this bourgeois white feminist narrative fails to account for the structural oppressions of race and class as they intersect with gender – even in classicising poems such as Plath’s which explicitly

foreground and weaponise racialised difference. Much feminist classical reception scholarship of the 2010s and early 2020s has continued to centre a white bourgeois feminine subjectivity that prioritises gender and white innocence while eliding race and class. I have selected *Women & Power* and *Antigone Rising* for my analysis, in part, because they are both works of public scholarship (Hanink was also explicitly concerned with the ways in which “professional classicists make interventions . . . in public debates about the ancient past” in her original formulation of critical classical reception, Hanink, 2017). As I will show, both books disseminate a particular hegemonic discourse of classicism that co-opts and depoliticises a radical critique to reproduce whiteness. As critical ancient world studies scholars, we should be concerned that two books so symptomatic of the broader problem of white feminism and its occlusions and deflections are the public face of the discipline.

In *Women & Power*, for example, Beard casts Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” as an example of “women’s voices raised in support of women’s causes” (Beard, 2018, 25), passing over the specific context in which Truth was speaking as a Black woman whom white women had debarred from addressing a women’s suffrage meeting. Similarly, in an afterword to the second edition of *Women & Power*, written to update the text in a post-Obama political context (white supremacy is not explicitly mentioned), Beard reduces the particular character of the misogynoir directed towards Diane Abbott – the first Black woman elected to the UK Parliament and the longest-serving Black MP in the House of Commons – to merely another example of “the kind of abuse of women that I have been discussing” (Beard, 2018, 94).²⁶ While Beard concedes that the mainstream media and social media abuse of Abbott contains “more than a sprinkling of racism” (Beard, 2018, 95), the choice of phrasing here suggests that racism is merely the decorative topping on the primary problem of misogyny. The facile engagement with the compounding oppressive structure of racism for Black women throughout *Women & Power* can be read as what Brenna Bhandar has identified as the academic “insurance policy” (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, 27), that is, as a defensive rhetorical trope that functions to displace an intersectional analysis by briefly acknowledging race and class while continuing to universalise women’s experiences from a white bourgeois perspective.

This academic insurance policy is similarly deployed in an expanded version of *Fat Classics* (Morales, 2015) published in *Antigone Rising, Dieting with Hippocrates*. In its framing of fatness and discourses of anti-fatness as a personal issue, one of low self-esteem (34) and over-eating (45), the chapter fails to account either for the systemic and structural factors that affect diet, such as food insecurity, food production, “food deserts”, land theft and ecocide, among many others, or the ways in which the oppressions of race and class intersect locally and globally with those factors.²⁷ While the chapter concedes that the Hippocrates-citing “diet industry is built upon an ideology of racial, as well as gender, prejudice” (Morales, 2020, 41), the “trend” of anti-fatness as anti-Blackness is constructed as historical (“a trend in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”, *ibid.*) and features only as an aside. Elsewhere, Morales highlights the hyperbolic cultural rhetoric of anti-fatness without

commenting on its racialised language, which, via two carelessly chosen similes, seems to seep into the chapter's own analysis:

fatness . . . is something to be feared. We are urged to “make war on” obesity as if fat bodies pose an equivalent threat to ISIS and to “tackle” obesity like one might a home invader.

(Morales, 2020, 30)

As Da'Shaun Harrison reminds us, it is negatively racialised bodies who have been and continue to be the primary targets of the “wars” on obesity, terror and drugs (Harrison, 2021), and the text's uncritical invocation of this racialised image seems to troublingly precipitate the second image of the racialised “home invader” of the white imaginary.²⁸ The cumulative effect of the imagery here is to position the concocted threat of obesity against the “real” racialised threats of terrorism and home invasion.

Both *Women & Power* and *Antigone Rising* also explicitly employ a depoliticised white feminist discourse of “empowerment” that calls for women's individual mastery of ancient texts without an attendant analysis of the ways in which discourses of classicism continue to oppress the wider socio-demographic groups from which those individuals emerge. Morales' reading of Ovid's tale of Philomela as an empowering feminist revenge fantasy (Morales, 2020, 70), for example, underpins her call for “justice” for sexual assault survivors from “the modern gods – the police, the courts, and the media” (Morales, 2020, 97).²⁹ Such carceral feminism misunderstands who these gods are designed to protect and ignores the people of colour and working classes who will be the targets of increased punitive state power; it also reveals that Morales' presumed feminist subject is a bourgeois white one, unaffected by raced and classed state oppression.³⁰ It is a bitter irony that the appeal to the police state follows directly from a reference to the arrest and incarceration of Cyntoia Brown, whose imprisonment for an act of self-defence was a result of the state functioning exactly as intended for marginalised women of colour.³¹ *Antigone Rising's* treatment of the tale of Philomela illustrates white feminism's cisnormative and heteronormative alertness to sexualised threat over racism or classism and evidences a carceral feminist emphasis on shifting the dynamics of interpersonal power dynamics from men to women rather than dismantling systemic oppressions.³² The book's “empowering” reading of Ovid passes over the fact that the only rapist punished in the *Metamorphoses* is explicitly and negatively racialised, and it fails to acknowledge that while the individual Tereus is punished, the epic poem remains structured by the gender norms of a patriarchal society in which the act of rape interpellates the feminine subject (Enterline, 2000, 158).³³

The neoliberal desire for an individual sense of power over collective liberation (Sivanandan, 1985, 27; Gilroy, 1990) runs throughout *Women & Power* and *Antigone Rising*, with Beard calling for women to be given “their place inside of the structures of power” (Beard, 2018, 58) and Morales espousing a “lean in” mode of philology in which ancient texts are “selectively” (Morales, 2020, 45) chosen for their empowering potential.³⁴ The nature of this empowerment is most

often modelled as a “girl boss” feminism in which power is associated with status and the mastery of ancient elite male texts (“reading the original stories closely”, Morales, 2020, 143).³⁵ The real ideological work of the narrative of subversive empowerment, then, is the reification of a stable, transhistorical, universalisable and inherited classical canon that contains intrinsic and unproblematised aesthetic and cultural authority/power which exists to be harnessed by the (white) feminist reader. The “activist” appeal to philological mastery is thus undermined by its own cultural conservatism, and it fails to be radical in its suggestion that the path to feminist empowerment is via an embrace of elite, white, cis, masculinist culture.³⁶ Neither text outlines exactly how women’s control of cultural authority will be distinct from the ways in which patriarchy already oppressively wields cultural and discursive power. Moreover, the uncritical engagement with a hegemonic discourse of classicism that (white) women must adopt “to our own advantage” (Beard, 2017, 89; Morales, 2020, xvii), betrays a lack of awareness of the relational nature of power, and the ways in which – as we saw in Plath’s poems – white women’s inclusion within classicising discourses of power *necessitates* the exclusion and oppression of negatively racialised others.³⁷

In addition to the ideological assumptions and effects of white feminist scholarship, its repetitive employment of a schematic narrative is methodologically flawed: the validity of the narrative is assumed and never demonstrated, and the paradigm predetermines the “empowering” conclusion of the argument before any textual analysis has taken place. By the same token, the purposive “selective” (Morales, 2020, 45) sampling conducted in the search for subversively empowering literary foremothers not only mistakes visual representation for political representation but leads to the celebration of white feminist revisionary texts better characterised by their “bad feminism” (Hinds, 2019) than a “re-vision” that is historically and politically aware (the mainstreaming of white feminist classical reception scholarship has therefore also worked to erase from scholarly discourse Shelley Haley’s critical use of the term “reclaiming” [1993] in her argument that empowerment comes not from mastery of the master’s tools, but from unlearning and relearning).³⁸ And in its celebration of the recent proliferation of revisionary texts on the market, white feminist reception scholarship has so far failed to account for the ways in which this publishing upsurge is one manifestation of global capitalism’s relentless “commodification of difference” (hooks, 1992, 31) and its reconceptualisation of “minority readerships . . . as target publics” (Rosen, 2016, 33). In turn, trade books such as *Women & Power* and *Antigone Rising* profit from a far larger target audience than that of a university press monograph and generate higher royalties.³⁹ Any interrogation of the “value” of classics in the modern world – both to scholars and publics – must therefore also account for the ways in which the success of such trade books “evidence[s] that the symbolic capital of the canon is both healthy and fungible, convertible to economic capital” (Rosen, 2016, 33).

The instrumentalisation of selected works of reception to serve a positivist narrative about the enduring value and relevance of Graeco-Roman antiquity to contemporary politics has also led to the scholarly neglect of works of reception which

explicitly trouble the claimed universality of the classical. Sandeep Parmar's *Eidolon* (2015) is one such example, an emotionally ambivalent and politically complex creative modern version of the myth of Helen. In the afterword to her collection, Parmar recounts being "stunned" by an Indian poet friend's reaction to her work on Helen – that Greek texts were "*their* literature" – when, having been raised Sikh, "Hindu culture was as strange to me as Ancient Greece" (Parmar, 2015, 70). Later, on a research trip, Parmar happens across "a letter written by the infamous MP Enoch Powell . . . in 1935":

I believe I gasped, and then marvelled at the beauty of [the letter's] surface, of the care this man – a man who would live like a red-eyed demon in my mother's nightmares as a child in Wolverhampton in the late 1960s – [had in] his exact script copied out the funeral speech from Aristotle . . . What happened between 1935 and 1968 when the man stood and imagined he saw the river Tiber foaming with much blood? Was that now famous image the unnatural endpoint of a devoted classical education?

(Parmar, 2015, 71)

Parmar's reflection on "Western civilisation", "inheritance", and "ownership" and her unflinching critical and reflexive hyper-awareness regarding the real harms of the endpoints of the cultural hegemony with which she engages, and as it intersects with colonial, familial, educational and archival histories, bring the compromised stance of the white feminist reception scholar into focus. For, despite some concessions to the ways in which "the classics" have been retrospectively instantiated as the beginning of a purported "Western civilisation", white feminist reception scholarship uniformly fails to reflexively analyse the scholar's own acculturation into this iterative process of canon formation and her complicity in the reproduction of cultural and discursive power. The unspoken and necessary condition, while not sufficient, for many scholars' engagement with Graeco-Roman literature and culture is cultural hegemony, no matter our subsequent paths towards a more critical stance vis-à-vis the discipline or our ongoing unlearning of the processes of acculturation to which we have been exposed. The continued appeal, then, to the paradigm of subversive empowerment at a critical moment when "classics" is being problematised on all fronts is a defensive and self-justificatory move that works only to assuage the false consciousness or cognitive dissonance of the white feminist classicist, (sub)conscious of her presence in a discipline that continues to be implicated in white supremacism and misogyny. Hanink characterised critical classical reception studies as marked by "an open activist agenda" (Hanink, 2017), yet the "open" feminist criticality of a piece such as *Fat Classics* does not extend, as I have shown, to the authorial self.

A critical reception studies must begin from an analysis of the ways in which the disciplinary assumptions, foundations and narratives in which we have been trained reproduce structures of power and oppression; I have attempted to show here how a reception case study can be used to disrupt rather than reify classics by

exposing the hegemonic cultural values embedded in – and the ideological function of – even ostensibly “subversive” disciplinary paradigms. As reception scholars, we must recognise that discourses of classicism which construct and maintain racism and misogyny are not restricted to cultural texts on the political Far Right, and as feminists, we must critically reflect on the ways in which our feminist politics have been “strangled, stoppered, and hindered” (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, 168) by classics. To offer one definition, it can be said that the goal of activism is the transformation of power relations for collective material empowerment. It is imperative that feminists recognise that the white feminist narrative of empowerment relies on a hegemonic discourse of classicism as power that works only to increase women’s individual proximity to whiteness while necessarily disempowering the socio-demographic groups (racialised, classed) from which those individuals emerge.⁴⁰ The critical reception scholar must commit to the long-term and ongoing work of unlearning white supremacy as it is embedded in dominant disciplinary discourses of classicism, reception and feminism. As Hanink recognises, we have not been trained to do this, and as Carol Azumah Dennis cautions us, “[i]t is possible that this might not feel empowering” (Azumah Dennis, 2018, 202).

Notes

- 1 “Grant maintained schools”, such as mine, were state schools that received their funding directly from the central Department for Education; the statutory national curriculum must be taught in all state schools in England which receive their funding from local government. Grant maintained status was discontinued and replaced by foundation status in 2000. Sincere thanks to Mathura Umachandran, Chella Ward and the CAWS collective for their careful reading and provocations as this chapter developed and to Professors Katherine Harloe and Amy Smith for the invitation to present an earlier version of this chapter at the University of Reading in May 2021.
- 2 The Department for Education published school-leaver destination data for the first time in 2012; it was also the first time the DfE published the proportion of school-leavers attending Oxbridge or other Russell Group institutions. The statistics in the 2012 report, cited earlier, relate to school leavers who entered higher education in 2009. In total, 58% of Wolverhampton school-leavers entered higher education institutions in 2009; when I entered higher education in 2003, the statistics for my local authority area were likely even lower. Unfortunately, the report does not provide more granular data on school leaver destinations by gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background.
- 3 For personal and critical reflections on social discourses of ancient Greek and Latin, whiteness, and class, see Umachandran (2017), Wong (2019), D’Angelo (2020), and Agbamu (2021).
- 4 Powell quotes the Sybil’s prophecy to Aeneas that “I foresee wars, terrible wars, and the Tiber foaming with much blood” at *Aeneid* 6.86–87.
- 5 Although, as Hirsch notes, a contemporary trade union leaflet from the International Socialists warns workers not to trust Powell, in part, because he “writes Greek verse”; Hirsch (2018, 50–51). “This mythological and racist construction of the working class as white to the exclusion of its racialised members, who are in fact disproportionately represented in this class both domestically and globally, persists to the present day”, El-Enany (2020, 57).
- 6 On positionality, standpoint and reflexivity in research, see, for example, the key texts by Collins (1990) and Smith (1998).

- 7 On the need for scholars to (re)examine their affective and psycho-social attachments to classics, see Rankine (2019, 346) and Ranger (2023).
- 8 Personal voice scholarship has been defined in classical scholarship as an “explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism”, Nancy Miller quoted in Hallett and Van Nortwick (1997, 1).
- 9 Emily Greenwood has noted that white feminist theory’s appeal to the Graeco-Roman classics (quintessentially androcentric and patriarchal) “raises important questions about the cultural identity of feminist thought” (Greenwood 2009, 101).
- 10 For a problematisation of genealogies and metaphors of reception, see Ward (2019).
- 11 On empowerment as originally conceptualised by the Indian feminist development activist Gita Sen, see Zakaria (2021, 48–56).
- 12 Lorna Hardwick and Luke Richardson have both voiced the suspicion that no matter how “democratic” classical reception is, “conservatism [is] never far from the surface”; Hardwick (2015, 36) and Richardson (2017).
- 13 See Mansukhani in this volume on the mobilisation of Marx as a defensive trope and as the discipline’s paradigmatic “get out of jail free” card.
- 14 “Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler”; Tuck and Yang (2012, 10).
- 15 Nadhira Hill has identified this deflection as whataboutism, “the technique or practice of responding to an accusation or difficult question by making a counter-accusation or raising a different issue” (Hill, 2020); Hill (2021) reflects on Beard’s weaponisation of respectability politics to enforce disciplinary and social hierarchies.
- 16 The scholarship particularly emphasises Plath’s perceived autobiographical identification with Electra, as Bakogianni (2009) exemplifies; Kroll (2007 [1976]) was the first extended treatment of Plath’s “mythic system”.
- 17 The comparative Tragedy paper remains a compulsory element of Part II; the Moralism paper was discontinued from the 2020 matriculation cohort.
- 18 Emphases Plath’s own. Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* was performed in English at the ADC Theatre on the 10 February 1956. The 1956 Cambridge Greek Play was performed 20–24 February.
- 19 “Often they even wear down their wings as they bumble against the hard rocks, and freely give their lives under the load: so great is their love of flowers and the glory in making honey”, Virgil, *Georgics* 4.203–205.
- 20 When used by white women, the metaphor is typically stripped of specific features of enslavement, such as kidnap, rape, torture, death and racism. As Davis documents, this metaphor arose from the racism of the white women’s suffrage movement in the US, which opposed the enfranchisement of Black men before white women; see also Vergès (2021, 28–31).
- 21 These lines are usually read as alluding to Clytemnestra and/or Medea, e.g. Van Dyne (1984).
- 22 Plath also uses an unambiguously racist slur in the poem “Ariel”.
- 23 “Plath’s primary subject matter is that of the white female self buckling in on itself”, Curry (2000, 168).
- 24 “Daddy” also employs the same mechanism as “Stings” in the speaker’s co-optation of Jewish identity to position herself vis-à-vis male power.
- 25 This is also true of Plath’s other classicising poems, notably “Purdah”, in which the speaker takes on the role of Clytemnestra-as-odalisque, *CP* 242.
- 26 Abbott was the target of ten times more abuse than any other MP and received almost half of all abusive tweets directed at women MPs in the six weeks prior to the 8 June 2017 U.K. general election (Dhrodia, 2017).

- 27 See e.g. Berlant (2007).
- 28 We recall that South African Paralympian Oscar Pistorius claimed, initially successfully, that he thought it was an intruder in the bathroom into which he fired the shots that killed Reeva Steenkamp; “what was largely unspoken was that . . . the person [was] – could only be – imagined as black [*sic*]”, Rose (2015).
- 29 White women seek empowerment, paradoxically, by “*ceding control* to the punitive technologies of the state”, Phipps (2020, 79) (emphases in original). In Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.424–674, Philomela is raped and mutilated by her brother-in-law Tereus, before taking infanticidal revenge against Tereus with her sister Procne.
- 30 It also fails to understand the ways in which, as Angela Davis reminds us, individual emotions are inscribed by the retributive impulse of the state and the white supremacist prison-industrial complex: “we replicate the structures of retributive punishment in our own relations to one another . . . even those of us who are conscious of that are still subject to that ideological influence on our emotional life. The retributive impulses of the state, the retributive impulses of state punishment, are inscribed in our very individual emotional responses”; Davis, quoted in (Kaba, 2021, xxiii–xxiv).
- 31 See Kaba (2019). Morales also cites at this point in the text (95–96) Andrea Dworkin, who would have used a case like Brown’s to argue against the decriminalisation of sex work to protect vulnerable women.
- 32 Compare the claim in *Postclassicisms* that “[i]t would be a perverse set of values that could not distinguish between the worth of Homer and that of a stray pottery scatter in an archaeological survey – both of which have claims on our attention, but surely not equipollent ones” (The Postclassicisms Collective, 2020, 15), which betrays a failure to imagine the enslaved and working class lives of the ancient world whose traces are most often found only in material ephemera.
- 33 On the myth of the Black rapist and its employment in enforcing white supremacy, see Davis (1981, 155–181). “Thracian Tereus . . . his own passionate nature spurred him on, and besides, the men of his region are quick to lust: his own fire and his nation’s burned in him”, 6.424, 458–460.
- 34 Morales includes Sheryl Sandberg, author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013) in her list of “balls and courageous” women (93). As Sivanandan (1985) and Gilroy (1990) explain, in making change and empowerment a personal responsibility, neoliberalism is a mechanism of power, divorcing racism and sexual violence from wider systemic forces, and individuals from collective struggle.
- 35 A move identified as a desire for “equal opportunity domination”, Arruzza et al. (2019, 2); see also Lola Olufemi’s critique of “girl boss” feminism, in which power is associated with financial gain, and/as in relation to Beyoncé, one of Morales’ case studies, in Olufemi (2020, 4–6).
- 36 Despite a footnote directing us to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s essay, “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation” (108), *Antigone Rising* relies on appeals to “our culture” and “our aesthetic vocabulary” (100) and the myth of inheritance (5, 6, 67); this is also explicit in *Women & Power*: “Western culture” (xiii), “the tradition of Western literature” (3), “a tradition . . . to which we are still, directly or more often indirectly, the heirs” (20), “our classical inheritance” (21), etc.
- 37 It is, in part, for this reason that Disabled feminists and Black feminists often explicitly remove a desire for power from their demands for social justice; as disability activist Mia Mingus writes, “We don’t want to simply join the ranks of the privileged; we want to dismantle those ranks and the systems that maintain them”(2011).
- 38 On the institutionalisation of Black feminist critique as a process of “whitening”, see Bilge (2013).
- 39 In addition to the higher total sales of trade books, trade presses typically calculate royalties as a percentage of the higher list price, as opposed to a percentage of the net sales receipts, the latter typically used by university presses.

- 40 On non-performative scholarly “activism”, cf. Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò on the Flint water crisis (2022, 106): “In that moment, what [Flint residents] needed was not for their oppression to be ‘celebrated’, ‘centered’ or narrated in the newest academic parlance. They didn’t need outsiders to empathize over what it felt like to be poisoned . . . What Flint residents really needed, above all, was to get the lead out of their water”.

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