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***Res Difficiles, The Journal***

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*Res Difficiles, the Journal (Res Diff)* was co-founded in 2024 by Hannah Čulík-Baird (University of California, Los Angeles) and Joseph Romero (University of Mary Washington).

*Res Diff* is currently edited by Hannah Čulík-Baird ([culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu)) and Joseph Romero ([jromero@umw.edu](mailto:jromero@umw.edu)).

Since 2020, the *Res Difficiles* conference series has been a venue for addressing inequities within the field of Classics, examining issues arising out of intersectional vectors of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, class, socio-economic status and beyond. An outgrowth of this conference series, *Res Difficiles, The Journal*—an imprint of *Ancient History Bulletin*, a Green Open Access Journal—invites submissions from individuals, pairs, or groups, addressing “difficult things” within the discipline of Classics and related fields. *Res Difficiles, The Journal* seeks to publish the “traditional” argumentative forms of inquiry standard to the discipline, but also reflections upon pedagogical concerns as well as contributions of a creative, personal, or experimental nature, including interviews. In addition to individual submissions, we welcome pitches for guest-edited special issues.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

*Res Difficiles, The Journal* as an imprint of *AHB* adheres to the usual North American editorial policies in the submission and acceptance of articles but imposes no House Style. Authors are, however, asked to use the abbreviations of *L'Année philologique* (APh) for journals, and of the *Thesaurus linguae latinae* (TLL) for Latin authors.

Please direct submissions to Hannah Čulík-Baird: [culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu).

Submission of articles must be sent as .doc (or .docx) files in the form of email attachments. PDF files should be submitted in addition to the .doc file when the article contains Greek or other fonts; Greek text should be entered using Unicode. Authors will receive PDF offprints of their contributions. Copyright is retained by the author.

## NOTES TO READERS

As an Open Access publication, *Res Diff* may be read online via *Ancient History Bulletin*: <https://ancienthistorybulletin.org/res-difficiles-the-journal/>

*Res Diff* logo courtesy of Hannah Čulík-Baird

## **Res Difficiles, The Journal: Co-editors' Preface**

### **Hannah Čulík-Baird and Joseph Romero**

“how often do we truly love our work even at its most difficult?”

– Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic* (1978)

“Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.”

– Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016)

“The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty.”

– Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017)

#### ***Res Difficiles*. “Difficult things.”**

What does it mean to be “difficult”?

The first iteration of the *Res Difficiles* conference—which, through the function of Twitter, also came to be known as *Res Diff* (#ResDiff)—took place during a moment of acute global crisis at the onset of COVID-19 in Spring 2020. Initially envisioned as a small event to be held in person at the University of Mary Washington campus in Fredericksburg, Virginia, we pivoted towards a Zoom format, holding the conference online for free, subsequently publishing the video recordings on our website: *resdifficiles.com*. Since 2020, we have continued to hold the *Res Difficiles* conference series online for free every year—and continued to publish the recordings thereafter—inviting contributions from everyone who studies or teaches Classics (broadly construed), with papers aimed at addressing “difficulty” within the field. In this work, our contributors have examined issues arising out of intersectional vectors of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, class, socio-economic status, and beyond. As we prepare for our fifth iteration of the conference (#ResDiff5), we also now embark upon a new way to address inequity within the field of Classics: *Res Difficiles, The Journal*, a Green and Open Access publication and imprint of *Ancient History Bulletin*.

The contributors to the conference series over the last years have demonstrated how multivalent the concept of “difficulty” can be. “Difficulty” might be—and, as Nicolette D’Angelo and Jonah Stewart demonstrate in their contribution to this first issue, is most

often imagined to be—related to the “challenging” nature of an ancient text, especially in relation to sexual violence, whose “difficulty” is deepened by disciplinary resistance to the acknowledgement of power relations in the ancient world and the modern classroom.<sup>1</sup> In other contexts, “difficulty” relates to the conditions which create the need for student self-advocacy in higher education, with undergraduate student organizations such as the UK-based London Classicists of Colour and Christian Cole Society each seeking to create solidarity around the lack of institutional or curricular support for BIPOC/BAME students in Classics.<sup>2</sup> Or else “difficulty” might relate to lack of financial support which, as the contribution by Sportula Europe to this issue shows, creates material obstacles to academic life. “Difficulty” might refer to the circumstances which shape the need to create international resources and networks of support, as Michael K. Okyere Asante has discussed in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> Or perhaps “difficulty” might mean working to uncover narratives in ancient and modern texts which have been denied, such as Najee Olya’s reassessment of images of Aithiopians in ancient art, replete within classical traditions yet systemically excluded from scholarship and art history textbooks alike.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, “difficulty” might even refer to the challenges of addressing difficulty itself, especially with long-term sustainability, as Tori Lee has discussed.<sup>5</sup>

Our first papers in the new journal demonstrate the many ways in which difficulty may be conceptualized as well as addressed: Nicolette D’Angelo and Jonah Stewart theorize the difficulty of “difficulty” literature in Classics; Kelly Dugan examines the classicisms of the Black intellectual, Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford, and his understudied antilynching text, *The Tragedy* (1897), in the context of contemporary white paternalism; Sportula Europe describes the necessities and challenges of mutual aid in and beyond higher education.<sup>6</sup> Each of these pieces emerges from a particular moment in time—the world as it was amidst COVID-19 lockdowns and uprisings for racial justice following the police murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade, as well as countless others. The papers as a set are a reminder of what was surfaced during these mass events—a glimpse, amidst horror, of collaborative, ethical efforts—efforts which seem now to have receded, especially within institutional spaces, since we have “returned” to “regular life.” Indeed, hopes in the summer of 2020 that the discipline of Classics might address its own history and ongoing legacies have, to some extent, diminished in the face of enthusiastic revanchism within its mainstream, with promises to “diversify” and “rethink” amounting—*still*—to performative lip service, window dressing, commodifying tokenism. Even while institutions may have

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<sup>1</sup> See also the contributions to *Res Diff* (2020): Moss, “Teaching Lucretia: Addressing Sexual Violence as a Responsible Pedagogy”; Bostick, “From Awareness to Action: Using Your Power To Transform Classics.”

<sup>2</sup> *Res Diff* 3 (2022): London Classicists of Colour, “Building Communities and Networks for POCs in Higher Education”; Cheung, “The Christian Cole Society: Three Years On.”

<sup>3</sup> *Res Diff* 3 (2022): Okyere Asante, “Barriers to Access: Studying Classics in Sub-Saharan Africa.” Shortly after Okyere Asante gave his paper at *Res Diff* 3, his visa application to conduct research at Fondation Hardt and the American School at Athens was denied by the Embassy of Switzerland in Ghana—an immediate and ironic demonstration of the “barriers to access” which he had himself identified. For the widespread impact of visa denials to scholars holding passports from countries located outside of North America and Western Europe, see Daswani et al. (2022).

<sup>4</sup> *Res Diff* 3 (2022): Olya, “On the (In)visibility of Aithiopians: Interrogating the Presentation of Greek Images of Black Africans in Museums and Their Absence in Greek Art Survey Textbooks.”

<sup>5</sup> *Res Diff* 4 (2023): Lee, “Networking in the Margins: Towards a Future for Affinity Groups in Classics.” On the difficulties of sustainability, see also the postscript to Sportula Europe’s contribution to this issue.

<sup>6</sup> The contributions to the first issue emerged from the first two iterations of the conference series: Kelly Dugan, *Res Diff* (2020); D’Angelo and Stewart, *Res Diff* 2.0 (2021); Sportula Europe, *Res Diff* 2.0 (2021).

learned to use the language of inclusivity, stated ideals are often at odds with practical actions. A “gold rush” or “frontier” mentality has opened up a vein of scholarship written by established scholars seeking to enrich and enhance their own prestige, while individuals who live in the realities of the inequities under discussion are systematically marginalized or excluded from the scholarly archive. At the same time, there is an efflorescence of research relating to these intersectional “difficulties” produced by scholars with few options of support for the development and subsequent dissemination of their work. Just as the conference series aims to offer a collective gathering space for the discussion of “difficulty” (widely defined), so too does the new journal offer a venue through which efforts made disparate by systems of marginalization may come together in a collected form.

Although *Res Difficiles, The Journal* is not a replacement for *Eidolon*, an erstwhile venue for public scholarship, the significance of *Eidolon* upon the development of “difficulty” literature in Classics may be demonstrated by the citations in this first issue alone. *Eidolon* may no longer be active but we can certainly see how much the efforts of its contributors and editors have been successful in facilitating curricular change. *Eidolon*’s closure was followed by the destabilizing of Twitter through “new management”—fracturing and scattering online communities. Each of these events represents a significant loss for the potential of online spaces to offer alternative or annotating discourses to mainstream disciplinary concerns. Indeed, at our time of writing, networks of justice-oriented efforts are in many ways less secure than they were during the initial years of the *Res Difficiles* conference—that is, only a few years ago. In this context, the new journal offers a path to continue the systematic building out of resources for a more equitable field through the principles of sustainability, collectivity, generosity, and imagination. By purposefully publishing articles on unaddressed problems or understudied (or, rather, underpublished) themes, we may fill out the bibliographies needed for a curriculum which addresses the “difficulties” of ancient and modern worlds.

In co-founding a new journal, we not only offer a conduit for the scholarly energy which is dissipated in the face of rigid or unstable systems, but we also hope to enact new modes of compassionate and supportive editing in conscious contradistinction to long-standing disciplinary norms. Sasha-Mae Eccleston and Dan-el Padilla Peralta have recently underscored the fact that, within Classics, “existing systems of publication reward ruthlessly inward-facing citations and doxographies.”<sup>7</sup> In this statement, the co-authors extend and reaffirm Padilla Peralta’s prior critique of Classics journals as a “whites-only neighborhood.”<sup>8</sup> Contemporary and historical<sup>9</sup> practices of peer review within the discipline, with scholarly

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<sup>7</sup> Eccleston and Padilla Peralta (2022): 209, citing Padilla Peralta (2020) for “preliminary number-crunching”; cf. Padilla Peralta (2019a). On citation as feminist memory, see Ahmed (2013), (2017): 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Padilla Peralta’s delivery of this critique was itself interrupted by the public—but not isolated—performance of racism and white fragility at the 2019 meeting of the Society for Classical Studies. Indeed, several acts of racism took place at the 2019 meeting of the AIA-SCS in San Diego. A Marriott security guard attempted to bar from entry Djesika Bel Watson and Stefani Echeverría-Fenn, the organizers of the mutual aid organization, Sportula US, whose work was being recognized with an award at the event. Mary Frances Williams interrupted Dan-el Padilla Peralta’s report on the severely low (and in some cases, declining) number of women and BIPOC contributors accepted to Classics journals, with an accusation that he himself had not earned his position at Princeton but instead had been hired as an instance of racial tokenism. On these events, see Padilla Peralta (2019b).

<sup>9</sup> On the “difficulties” faced, for instance, by Frank M. Snowden, Jr., in his attempts to publish in Classics journals, see Keita (2000): 50n22, citing Du Bois (1946): x. On mainstream classicists’ refusal to cite Snowden’s work, see Rankine (2011): 53, Olya (2022). One of Snowden’s articles, “Μέλας-λευκός and *Niger-candidus*

contributions subjected to the capriciousness and contempt of reviewers empowered by their anonymity, have led to delays in publication or else outright exclusion.<sup>10</sup> “Exclusion” here manifests in the forms of the “shadow-book” as theorized by Kevin Young, that is “a book that we don’t have, but know of, a book that may haunt the very book we have in our hands.” Shadow-books are texts which “fail to be written” in various ways: their ideas are made to be stated askew from the author’s intent, or are expressed in code; they may never be written, or they may be written and lost.<sup>11</sup> What exclusion looks like within the landscape of peer review is not “merely” rejection, but the expectation of conformity or assimilation to a prevailing system of knowledge-making so dominant that its inward logics remain unquestioned.<sup>12</sup> Intervening in one vector of this system, Sarah Derbew, citing Charles Mills, has emphasized the need to examine antiquity “without the invasive operation of the ‘white eye.’”<sup>13</sup> In the context of Classics publishing, this means an active and thoughtful break from the “white-norming”<sup>14</sup> discourses of a profession whose “gentlemanly” origins survive not only in the cadences but also the thought processes of our academic disciplines. Rethinking *how* we write is as important as rethinking what we write *about*. Clearing away the “whataboutism” of academic discourses to allow a clarity of focus could be transformative for us as practitioners in the discipline. In the history of the study of the ancient Mediterranean, so much has been left on the table.

Although *Res Difficiles, The Journal*, like its host *Ancient History Bulletin*, is a peer reviewed venue, we as editors are committed to our execution of an ethical and respectful peer review process, for which the foremost guiding principle is our support of authors in the development and dissemination of their ideas. In this endeavor, we imagine what peer review might look like if it were based on a culture of “building up” and not “breaking down” the work of its community. Furthermore, we disavow the necessity of “prestige”—generated and safeguarded by the aforementioned “inward-facing” citational economy—for the creation of meaningful work. While we invite contributions from scholars and students working within Classics and related fields, institutional affiliation is not a prerequisite for submission. Likewise, while we will publish articles written with the tone, format, and single authorship traditional to the discipline, we also invite submissions which break these boundaries in a number of ways: for instance, in the form of compositions by co-authors or collectives,<sup>15</sup> or more personal reflections, or in the form of creative or otherwise

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Contrasts in Classical Literature” was, in fact, published in *Ancient History Bulletin* in 1988; for critique of this piece, see Derbew (2022): 31.

<sup>10</sup> On delay and conformity as regular outcomes of peer review, see Zuckerberg (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Young (2012): 11-15.

<sup>12</sup> Padilla Peralta (2021): 157: “What if the concept [of race] has insinuated itself into these [scholarly] procedures so effectively as to obstruct their capacity to produce forms of knowledge that are cleanly dissociable from the concept itself?” Umachandran (2022): 26: “And can the so-called discipline of Classics face up to its co-formation with white supremacy, that is, how anti-Blackness constitutes one of its foundational principles and how it is organized around ideas of the ‘human’ and of scientific knowledge-making.”

<sup>13</sup> Mills (1998): xvi cited by Derbew (2022): 15.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson (2004) cited by Eccleston and Padilla Peralta (2022): 208.

<sup>15</sup> Güthenke and Holmes (2018): 62: “collaboration alone is a limited model for imagining a truly open field, insofar as it can be understood simply as the conjoining of two specializations. What would it mean to imagine each of the partners as an interpretive community unto herself, at once multiple and engaged in forms of synthesis that are contingent, nimble, and creative? It is only by rethinking the very idea of the individual scholar, we want to argue, that we can unleash the full potential of larger interpretive communities.”



experimental writing.<sup>16</sup> In this work, there is room for the personal voice: more than that—the personal voice has power and honor.<sup>17</sup> We envision that many of our future contributions may resemble some of our conferences' past offerings, which have attended to intersectional issues of inequity within the field via a combination of personal testimony, scholarly investigation, and pedagogical theory. But we are also open to forms of work which we have not yet seen, or not yet even imagined.

Not lost on either of us is this moment in the academy. While not limited ideologically or geographically to the United States, where both co-editors live and work, we cannot help but be conditioned by our historical moment and the institution, that is, “higher education,” in which we practice. Just recently, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in two separate cases to eviscerate affirmative action in college admissions at Harvard and the University of North Carolina,<sup>18</sup> despite the demographic certainty that the U.S. will be “majority minority” within the next decade.<sup>19</sup> The *Res Difficiles* project is a symptom of these larger structural problems. We hope—through sustained and hardly easy (indeed: *difficilis*) yet necessary dialogue—to be part of a solution. Academics work under heightened scrutiny, yet higher education is once again asked to speak to some of society's anxieties while staying away from others. The calls to “mind your own business” come from without the house<sup>20</sup> and from within.<sup>21</sup> The calls to restrict academic work to (often utilitarian) knowledge and work-force development are loud and unceasing. That our work unavoidably has a political and moral dimension is problematic for some—for all?—but cannot, nonetheless, be avoided or ignored. The impetus for this journal is grounded in the principle that inclusion of dissonant voices, provided they are used in the liberation of the collective, is a necessary and appropriate remedy for the durable injustices that afflict us. Standing on this ground—and speaking and hearing our truths—is not always easy. Not a bit.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the kind of speculative fiction which would result from a class as imagined by Umachandran (2023): 483: “I can imagine a class in ancient political theory and its reception that is conceptually abundant, finding space for Octavia Butler’s dystopian forecasting (*Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*) to brush up against Plato’s *Republic*. Moving out from there, this speculative syllabus might work through recent advances in the queerness of Plato’s fashioning of Socrates and put these into dialogue with Butler’s queer family-making (the *Patternist* novels), and experiments with otherness of all kinds (*Xenogenesis*). In staging such an encounter, we are not seeking applications or influences of the classical. Giving these a wide swerve, we would recognize the dialogue between Plato and Butler’s science fictive and narrative experiments as its own vibrant political form. This speculative syllabus, which is cross-listed with Africana Studies as well as with English, is co-taught and encourages creative writing as well as creative thinking. How would students respond to writing assignments that would ask them to meditate on justice, or utopia, or family as a concept convened by Octavia Butler as well as Plato?”

<sup>17</sup> Rabinowitz (2001): 207: “the personal voice must be characterized as one committed to social change”; cited by Richlin (2014), 3–4. On the personal voice in Classics, see Hallett and Van Nortwick eds. (1997); and Hallett and Van Nortwick eds., *Arethusa* 34.2 (2001).

<sup>18</sup> 600 U.S. 181 (2023) *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina*, which reversed the foundational affirmative action cases, 438 U.S. 265 (1978) *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* as well as *Gratz v. Bollinger* 539 U.S. 244 (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003). On the latter two cases, see Gurin et al. (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Frey (2018).

<sup>20</sup> Usually, but not exclusively, state and federal legislators who use “ROI calculators” such as the one found in the following note to calculate appropriate investments in education.

<sup>21</sup> Fish (2008). An influential reflex of this trend is found in Georgetown University’s Center of Education and the Workforce: <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/collegeroi/>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> For a description and critique of the multivalent purposes of higher education and its various organs, such as journals, see Benson et al. (2017), who take Butts (1955) as a starting point.



This journal is for those who have ever struggled to find approachable readings for their students on topics of “difficulty.” This journal is for those who want to grow their ideas at a sustainable pace. This journal is for those unsure of where their work “fits” within their discipline(s). This journal is for those whose work has been sanitized or excluded from mainstream outlets just because an anonymous reader “doesn’t buy it.” This journal is for those who wish their work to be read by more than just the insular unit of institutional insiders. This journal is for those who wish to combine their scholarship and their activism. This journal is for those who wish to speak without euphemism about systemic injustice.

We express our gratitude to all of our speakers over the course of the last five conferences, with further thanks to our keynote speakers. We also express our gratitude to the contributors to the first issue, and to the leadership team of The Asian and Asian American Classical Caucus (AAACC), who will be guest-editing the second issue of *Res Difficiles, The Journal*. We look forward both to general submissions from individuals, pairs, and collectives, as well as pitches for future guest-edited issues.

We express our thanks to Timothy Howe, editor of *Ancient History Bulletin*, to Nandini Pandey for the initial invitation, and to Elke Nash and Luke Roman for joining us in this endeavor.

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## ***Reconceptualizing Difficulty in Classics Using Critical Pedagogical Approaches***

**Nicolette D'Angelo and Jonah Stewart**

**Abstract:** This paper offers a critique of traditional Classics pedagogy which has been historically avoidant of pedagogical theories from other disciplines, such as Education. Resituating the bibliography of difficulty literature in Classics through the discursive frameworks of critical pedagogy advanced by scholars such as Paulo Freire, we examine Classics' dependence upon a banking model of learning which positions students as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the authority of their teacher. Furthermore, we offer a critique of the prevailing pedagogical mode in Classics, which positions some students as the cause of "difficulty," as a fundamentally managerial practice. Finally, we offer some reflections on the potential of *conscientização* ("consciousness raising") to chart a course for disciplinary change within Classics.

**Keywords:** banking model, Classics teaching, *conscientização*, critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire.

"Reading the world always precedes reading the word,  
and reading the word implies continually reading the world."

– Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1998)

In this paper we—a classicist, and a scholar of education with classical training—aim to provide a set of conceptual tools for Classics<sup>1</sup> educators interested in critically reflecting on their pedagogical practices. Our primary aim is to canvass, and ultimately critique, the current state of what we call "difficulty literature"—that is, pedagogical literature concerned with "difficult" and/or "sensitive" topics, such as racism, misogyny, and sexual violence, that regularly crop up in secondary and undergraduate Classics classrooms.<sup>2</sup> We want to suggest that the very concept of difficulty merits scrutiny in its construction of the above topics as matters that are positioned as exterior to Classics itself.

No reasonable educator would deny there are challenges inherent to teaching "difficult" topics. In social environments rampant with systemic violence, such discussions are not only unavoidable, but necessary. This paper, in fact, emerged from the second iteration of the *Res Difficiles* conference series, during which educators and researchers have engaged in productive and nuanced discussions about how to navigate difficult conversations in Classics. The rise of similar initiatives organized around difficulty certainly seems promising as a first step toward a more reflexive Classics pedagogy. Yet even the most emancipatory

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, by "Classics" we mean the study of the languages and cultures of the Ancient Mediterranean, and we acknowledge the historical primacy of Greco-Roman languages and literature within this disciplinary formulation. "Classics" is but one of many formulations available to us as educators; on the possible futures of global antiquity or a critical ancient world studies respectively, see Seo 2019 and Umachandran and Ward 2024.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Rabinowitz and McHardy 2014, Hunt 2016, Parodi 2020.

projects in Classics still seldom engage with literature in education studies, critical sociology, and other allied disciplines: literature that would provide helpful theoretical backing to these initial intuitions and observations. As we will demonstrate, Classics' unwillingness to engage with pedagogical insights is symptomatic of wider disciplinary issues.

We argue that foundational work in critical pedagogy offers apt tools for both meta-reflection on Classics' harmful disciplinary impulses and for taking action to change them. It is necessary, however, to briefly clarify first how exactly we understand critical pedagogy and operationalize it in our analysis. We consider critical pedagogy to encompass an expansive set of pedagogical theories and practices that attempt to understand and unlock the emancipatory potentials of education. One key thinker associated with the origins of critical pedagogy is Brazilian activist and theorist Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) animated an ongoing global conversation about education and emancipation in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> We turn to Freire's work not to reify his status as founder or father of critical pedagogy, but because, as we will show, his critique of "banking models" in education is particularly pertinent to Classics. Colleagues of Freire's, such as bell hooks, Henry Giroux, Ivan Illich, Antonia Darder, and Ira Shor, among others, are all considered figureheads in the critical pedagogy movement, and likewise will inform our discussion implicitly if not explicitly.

The common thread uniting these thinkers is not identical theoretical allegiances, or even consensus around best pedagogical practices. Rather, all work from the base assumption that education is, and should be, a tool for facilitating consciousness-raising and transformative political action. Our critique is buttressed by both traditional and contemporary interventions from critical pedagogy, from core concepts developed by Paulo Freire (1968), bell hooks (1994), and Henry Giroux (2004, 2020), to Sara Ahmed's recent critiques (2012, 2021, 2023) of institutional diversity. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate critical pedagogy's purchase in providing educators with tools for meta-reflection about the structural causes behind difficulty in the classroom. Ultimately, we seek to chart a path from the world a discipline can portray and the world as it actually exists.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout our analysis, we draw on an array of critical pedagogical constructs and critiques to examine the state of play in Classics pedagogy. In Section I, we consider the disciplinary worldview underpinning Classics' unwillingness to engage with decades-old developments in educational theory and praxis. We draw from recent analyses of classicists' citational practices—particularly Dan-el Padilla Peralta's observations that the discipline's current citational practices amount to an insular "scholarly enclosure"<sup>5</sup>—and conclude that enclosure, too, has led to extractivist, shallow, and atheoretical engagements with pedagogical, educational, and sociological fields of study.

In Section II, we survey liberal and progressive Classics pedagogical literature to examine how liberal Classics pedagogy often unwittingly follows what Freire famously called the "banking model" of education, in which teachers are positioned as sources of authority, and students as vessels for receiving ordained knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Our core contention is that a banking model causes liberal, well-meaning educators to interpellate students as potential problems to be managed and corrected. Having established that banking models preclude

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<sup>3</sup> Giroux 1996 offers a thorough retrospective.

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrasing Giroux 2017: 27.

<sup>5</sup> Padilla Peralta 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Freire 2000[1968].

consciousness-raising in Classics classrooms, in Section III we offer a primer on *conscientização* (often translated as “raising critical consciousness”) and the conditions that allow it to take form in classrooms.

Ultimately, our goal in this paper is not to offer a set of cleanly operationalizable solutions to Classics’ pedagogical problems (the impulse to develop a bulletproof lesson plan, in fact, runs counter to the aims of critical pedagogy). Rather, our aim is far more modest: to explore how the current disciplinary formulation of Classics limits our ability to conceptualize and confront difficulty, and to introduce a preliminary vocabulary for injecting more criticality into Classics pedagogy.

## I. The state of play in Classics pedagogy

Classics has historically occupied an outsized place in the western cultural imaginary around education. This is perhaps due to the centrality of education within canonical texts such as Platonic dialogues and didactic poetry; or the continued use of classical pedagogical methods in universities and professional schools, such as Socratic methods; or the longstanding cultural importance of classical education to the maintenance and expansion of western empires,<sup>7</sup> among other things. And of course, the term pedagogy itself comes from the Ancient Greek παιδαγωγός and Latin *paedagōgus* (literally “child leader”), used especially in the Rome period and onward to refer to an enslaved person who oversaw a child’s moral, grammatical, and rhetorical education.

And yet, while many still presume Classics to be a key to resolving the perennial “crisis” of the humanities,<sup>8</sup> classicists themselves are beginning to realize that they are not educated for the classrooms of today (or ten years ago). Recent Classics pedagogical literature reveals increasing insecurity and a growing acknowledgment that the profession needs to rethink its approach to pedagogy. For example, classicists committed to social justice have vocalized the profession’s incompetence surrounding equitable and trauma-informed pedagogies.<sup>9</sup> As Bethanie Sawyer puts it: “the Latin teacher training program I graduated from did not prepare me quite so well as to teach my students.” Sawyer continues: “I never formally learned the importance of an inclusive and affirming classroom and curriculum, or how to achieve it.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, pedagogical debates remain either outdated or stagnant surrounding even the most traditional content. Take for example recent controversies over “grammar-translation” versus “comprehensible input” (CI) approaches in the Latin classroom.<sup>11</sup> Such a debate is surely worthwhile among practitioners at every level. However, the fact that CI—a method for language acquisition that has been established since the 1970s<sup>12</sup>—is still eyed with suspicion is symptomatic of Classics’ vexed relationship to pedagogy more broadly.

The result of this is not merely the embarrassment of being outmoded, nor the existential anxiety of being irrelevant: as we will show, Classics’ failure to consider—much

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Vasunia 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For a recent iteration of this argument, see Adler 2020, critically reviewed by Christensen 2021. For a helpful consideration of *which* humanities are under attack and worth fighting for, see Sánchez Prado 2023.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Dugan 2020 and Moss 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Sawyer 2016: 35, a view echoed by Kahn 2006 and Hill and Lee Chin 2021.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Bracey 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Krashen 1977. See also Krashen 2017 for a summary of the merits of CI.



less operationalize—contemporary pedagogical discourses and modalities causes material harm. In this section, we consider the wider disciplinary worldview underpinning Classics' pedagogical failures. We argue that the source of Classics' pedagogical pitfalls can be located in one overarching assumption that remains operative in the field: that the study of the Classics is, *per se*, a self-contained pedagogical pursuit. Indeed, as discussed above, education (or, at least, a good education) and classical education have been considered essentially synonymous for centuries.

Classics' presumed self-sufficiency, however, is the outgrowth of a wider, more pernicious disciplinary worldview that has become institutionalized in Classics. Following Dan-el Padilla Peralta, we start from the premise that Classics, in both its substantive interests and methodologies, perpetuates "scholarly enclosure." The figure of scholarly enclosure, proposed by Carolyn N. Bilotft, refers to "efforts to secure and reinforce specific scholastic territories."<sup>13</sup> Enclosure is readily observable in the citational practices of Classics as a field.<sup>14</sup> Padilla Peralta has argued that Classics as a field comprises one such enclosure, dominated at every level by "a highly aggressive ethics of inward-facing citation practices."<sup>15</sup> By Padilla Peralta's numbers, Classics journals cluster around 90-100% inward citationality. Within this insular marketplace of ideas, as shown by Stewart and Machado's analysis of *TAPA's* demographic data, contributions of scholars of color have been systematically ignored as well.<sup>16</sup>

If, as Sara Ahmed puts it, "[c]itation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before,"<sup>17</sup> then citational refusal is how we neglect or efface that debt—an erasure that is profoundly evident in classicists' citational practices. When sources coded as *outside* Classics are cited at all, classicists tend to do so as if these are untouchable theoretical texts outside Classics and, crucially, outside the realm of lived experience. Hence Padilla Peralta's 2020 Stanford University lecture, "The Haunted House of Classics," suggests that the field of Classics has so far sustained itself by "ghosting" disciplinary ancestors—ritually offering blood to some spectral presences and not others—in accordance with "the racial investments of the living."<sup>18</sup> A discipline's collective citational footprint, in this light, is a highly telling record of these investments.<sup>19</sup>

Though citational politics are a demonstrably harmful effect of enclosure, enclosure's grip on Classics is even more fundamental. Enclosure dictates the terms of legitimacy for which knowledges count as real and good, acting as a "machinery of universe maintenance"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bilotft 2019: 233. The metaphor is lifted from the process by which "lands once held in common were legally cordoned off into privately owned farms in sixteenth-century England."

<sup>14</sup> Padilla Peralta 2019, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Padilla Peralta 2020, see also Eccleston and Padilla Peralta 2023: 207-210. When classicists do turn to other fields, the approach is usually extractivist or "smash and grab," leading to shallow engagements with select fields, usually French theory or Russian formalism. "Smash and grab" is the approach even of more aspirationally just parts of the field, namely reception studies: Padilla Peralta details how promising recent volumes on topics like "Classics and extremists" or "marginality and canonicity" largely dismiss issues of race and critical race theory altogether. On "compulsive Victorianizing" in *Queer Classics*, see Umachandran 2023, esp. 473-475.

<sup>16</sup> Stewart and Machado 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed 2017: 17.

<sup>18</sup> Padilla Peralta 2020.

<sup>19</sup> On the politics of citation in Classics, see Kennedy and Planudes 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Berger and Luckman 1966: 123.

for the disciplinary mythology that Classics possesses singular, unproblematic access to capital-T truths. In this picture, Classics is positioned as a self-contained, self-sufficient educational project, existing in a vacuum distinct from “outside” disciplines and epistemologies. Subjects that pose a threat to this hegemony—especially those regarding race, racism and/or critical race theory—are routinely coded as unrigorous and addressed unrigorously.

By the lights of this mythos, the prospect of disciplinary change is both preposterous and threatening. Classics’ commitment to a curriculum that seems unchanged and unchanging is rooted in the worship of philological rigor that finds in “change” an assault on something that is beyond question. It is therefore assumed that there is a delimited body of knowledge that should be mastered, and that there are proper, authorized ways of mastering it. Of course, as Patrice Rankine has pointed out, “[e]verything we touch mixes with something else, and thus the pretense of a pure philology, set apart from its legacies and associations, is pernicious.”<sup>21</sup> The fantasy of pure philology, however, persists, and gives way to a pedagogical view in which ancient languages represent discrete objects of mastery to be unproblematically and linearly reproduced by students. The dominant assumption around Classics education accordingly remains that the discipline’s *content* is *inherently* pedagogical, holding a nearly mystical power to improve and humanize students regardless of an instructor’s training.<sup>22</sup> Pedagogical expertise is rendered redundant. Indeed, we might even venture to call Classics an autodidactic or *anti-pedagogical* discipline: it claims to simply teach itself.

This has real implications in the domain of accessibility and inclusion. Latin teacher Maia Lee-Chin describes the deliberate opacity of Classics pedagogy in a feature for Nadhira Hill’s blog, *Notes from the Apotheke*. Upon discovering that the bulk of curricular resources in Classics are targeted toward researchers in higher education, she concluded that “[i]t seems that scholars in Classics thrive on the field being inaccessible; it gives them a sense of prestige and power that they cannot receive from studying other fields whose scholarship are meant to be accessible to the public, like Education.”<sup>23</sup> When we consider the historical realities underpinning the enclosure metaphor, we appreciate how enclosure is at its core a project of privatization. In medieval and early modern England, a raft of enclosure statutes steadily expropriated and privatized lands which had previously been deemed common, barring the public from freely accessing the rudiments of survival: pastures, water sources, spaces to work and live in. While we would not directly equate the hoarding of classical learning with the expropriation of land,<sup>24</sup> we follow Henry Giroux in naming material enclosure and the enclosure of knowledge as constitutive of the same projects of domination. The task of critical pedagogical critique is to develop

...an understanding of how the political becomes pedagogical, particularly in

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<sup>21</sup> Rankine 2019: 348. See also Bostick 2020.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Pring 2016: 2, himself an influential scholar of *education*, who speaks of the “contribution of classical subjects to ‘making our children more human’” and Nussbaum 1998, who understands a classical education as a means for “cultivating humanity.”

<sup>23</sup> Hill and Lee-Chin 2021. Though this description is fitting for the broad set of disciplines and scholarly communities devoted to educational inquiry, it is debated within the larger subset of educational studies whether “education” comprises a field. See Biesta 2011 for a critical summary of the debate.

<sup>24</sup> Though the history of higher education in the US is inseparable from the history of indigenous land dispossession, starting with the land-grab universities created by the Morrill Act of 1862 (see <https://www.landgrabu.org/>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024). We thank Mathura Umachandran for this reminder.

terms of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions and collective forces—that is, how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped and desires mobilized, and how experiences take on form and meaning within and through collective conditions and those larger forces that constitute the realm of the social.<sup>25</sup>

How then do educational experiences within Classics differentially “take on form and meaning”? Our mandate in this critical pedagogical critique is to untangle how Classics’ (lack of) pedagogy takes form, and how it bears upon social conditions. While there are many dimensions here to disentangle, we are especially interested in the implications of enclosure on students, particularly students of minoritized backgrounds and identities. Using the case study of addressing sexual violence in primary sources and educational materials, we will show that even the most well-meaning, socially conscious educators in Classics reproduce the same relations of power that disregard the reality and substance of students’ lives. We are accordingly interested in how this phenomenon configures the student-teacher relationship.

## **II. The banking model, managerialism, and difficulty literature in Classics**

In this section, we argue that the current configuration of the student-teacher relationship in Classics pedagogy perpetuates what Paulo Freire called a “banking model” of education.<sup>26</sup> In Freire’s conception, the banking model describes the dominant form the teacher-student relationship assumes in capitalist and colonial contexts. Indeed, an important clarification is in order: at the heart of Freire’s work are those dispossessed by colonial violence. It is paramount that we engage with Freire in these terms: to do otherwise would venture into the very extractivism against which we have cautioned. Freire was first and foremost an activist<sup>27</sup> who developed his pedagogical praxis to work for the liberation of the Brazilian rural poor. We will not collapse this context in service of advancing an argument about classical education in the global minority. The banking model is relevant to us because, as an outgrowth of capitalist and colonial logics, it is ubiquitous. Moreover, given Freire’s focus on language instruction, it is particularly apt for Classics; the rote memorization of facts, such as endless language drills or date recalls with which all classicists are familiar, epitomizes the banking model.<sup>28</sup> Our intention is therefore to implicate ourselves, and our pedagogical practices, in Freire’s structural critiques—to identify the places where colonial impulses might influence how we engage with difficulty in our own contexts.

The banking model derives its power from a nested set of narratives: that is, the model not only is itself a narrative, but dictates the narratives that teachers impart to students. According to the banking model narrative, the teacher occupies the position of the “narrating Subject.” The teacher is positioned as authoritative, the possessor of worthy and

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<sup>25</sup> Giroux 2004: 62, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: Ch.2.

<sup>27</sup> Often overlooked is the centrality of liberation theology to Freire’s activism and thought; see Wilcock 2021. On activism and Classics, see, e.g., Bhalerao 2021.

<sup>28</sup> “The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power” (Freire 2000[1968]: 71). This is not to suggest that language teaching itself is invariably problematic, but, when approached uncritically, it can become a particular “scene of subjection” (Padilla Peralta 2018, citing Hartman 1997; see also Stray 1994 and D’Angelo 2020).

acceptable knowledge. Students, in turn, are rendered as “listening objects,” which act as vessels “filled” by their teacher's narration.<sup>29</sup> Within oppressive social systems, the knowledge that teachers are authorized to deposit is knowledge that works to prevent

critical consciousness which would result from [students'] intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely [students] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.<sup>30</sup>

If we think back to the fantasy of pure philology, a banking model is the ideal pedagogical vehicle for not only limiting the study of the ancient world to two languages and a handful of elite texts and subjectivities, but also dictating the terms by which students encounter and reproduce such a project.

But what happens when students do not readily take to banking? Always looming is the specter of student subjectivities compromising the depositing process. In traditional Classics pedagogy, where the stakes of a banking model are no less than maintaining the normative foundations of the discipline, such a threat is even more profoundly felt—even at the college and graduate level. Reflecting on their postgraduate experiences as Black classicists at Oxford, Sasha-Mae Eccleston and Padilla Peralta remember being vexed by their colleagues' “*seemingly ubiquitous obsession* with removing one's work from what was understood as lived experience, as if that detachment were the exclusive sign of intellectual rigor” (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup> In the desire to manage student subjectivities, the castigation of “outside” ways of thinking and being amounts to the normalization of epistemic injustice within the Classics classroom. Following Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., we might call this a “willful hermeneutical ignorance,” a situation in which “dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world” despite the testimonies of other knowers.<sup>32</sup>

Epistemic injustice does not occur spontaneously; it is achieved, and constantly maintained, by structural social processes. Banking models, too, must be actively maintained, which gives way to an anxious kind of pedagogical managerialism.<sup>33</sup> Freire critiques the ease with which the banking model shapes students into “adaptable, manageable beings,” since, after all, it is “the educator's role to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students.”<sup>34</sup> In this conception, students are interpellated as liabilities: potential sources of difficulty just waiting to derail a smooth lesson plan. Indeed, it is hardly surprising who will be labeled as difficult, ungrateful, or (to extend the metaphor) “subprime borrowers” within such a model.<sup>35</sup> Minoritized students, especially students of color, are not only extracted from at predatory rates (including by those who wish to discourse on the difficulties of teaching Classics): they also will suffer the gravest consequences when the discipline's conservative reflexes reveal themselves once more.

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<sup>29</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: 71.

<sup>30</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: 73.

<sup>31</sup> Eccleston and Padilla Peralta 2022: 201.

<sup>32</sup> Pohlhaus 2012: 716, building on Fricker 2007. On epistemic justice within Classics in and beyond Fricker's formulation, see Lance 2024.

<sup>33</sup> See Boltanski and Chiapello 2018[1999]: Ch.1 for a classic analysis of 20th century managerial discourses.

<sup>34</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: 73, 76.

<sup>35</sup> An insight we owe to Mathura Umachandran.

It is in this managerial impulse that we locate a banking model in liberal Classics pedagogy. In pinpointing this impulse, we want to avoid suggesting that no fruitful discussions have transpired between educators and students about the tilted power dynamics endemic to teaching Classics. Yet the regulation of students does not always resemble obvious forms of discipline and punishment. To the contrary, it is in many instances intended to be protective. Its methodologies and effects, however, are nonetheless dismissive of student agency and subjectivity. We therefore want to explore how a pronounced managerialism has become entrenched in self-identified liberal and progressive Classics educational spaces, a fact that becomes increasingly apparent in educators' engagement with this paper's concern: a discourse we call "difficulty literature."

It is first important to define what difficulty literature is and purports to accomplish. By difficulty literature, we mean pedagogical literature concerned with "difficult" and/or "sensitive" topics, including (but not limited to) racism, misogyny, sexual violence, and queerphobia. Difficulty occupies an outsized role in the psyche of Classics educators, as shown by, e.g., Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Fiona McHardy's now standard primer for Classics pedagogy, the co-edited 2014 volume *From Abortion to Pederasty: Teaching Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom*,<sup>36</sup> by various conference panels,<sup>37</sup> and by the series for which this paper was originally delivered, *Res Difficiles* (literally, "difficult things/matters"). Our case study for this section will focus on Rabinowitz and McHardy's volume, henceforth *Teaching Difficult Topics*, which, aside from one footnote on Freire, largely shies away from critical engagement with pedagogical theory. As in this titular example, "difficulty" as a key term is treated as self-evident, or purposely left ambiguous. The source of the difficulty in question is implied beforehand to originate either from individual "difficult" topics, and/or from Classics as a discipline, but—as we will see—this is not always the case.

If we are to think of difficulty literature as a genre, we can readily see how it is informed by enclosure and a banking model. These resources are, first and foremost, marketed explicitly for classicists.<sup>38</sup> The genre almost always follows a first-person narrative form, offering retrospectives and reflections on effective pedagogical practices, as well as lessons learned from mistakes and challenges. As a result, there is a genre-based bias toward recounting success and the rising conflict of pedagogical challenges generally enjoys some resolution in the end. That is, the educator is successful in overcoming difficulty to successfully implement a lesson plan. The purview is relegated solely to the teacher's experiences and positionality, casting them as "the narrating Subject."<sup>39</sup> This gives difficulty literature a definitively practical bent, focusing on the nuts and bolts of "what works" rather than attending to deeper conceptual problems underpinning the difficulty under discussion. This is, perhaps, not despite but because of difficulty literature's origins and historical debts to white feminism.

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<sup>36</sup> *From Abortion to Pederasty* was the first additional resource listed on the course page for a required first-year graduate pedagogy seminar taken in 2023 by D'Angelo.

<sup>37</sup> E.g., "Difficult Topics in the Classroom" at the 2021 AIA/SCS annual meeting.

<sup>38</sup> Compare the interdisciplinary nature of projects such as RaceB4Race, by and for BIPOC educators working in premodern critical race studies. As described on their website, a major initiative of RaceB4Race generally is "develop, pilot, and disseminate higher education curricula and pedagogy for educators at all stages of their careers" in all corners of premodern studies. See <https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race/Sustaining-Building-Innovating>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> See Freire (2000[1968]): Ch.2.



Difficulty literature grew out of feminist discourses and strategies for handling the topic of sexual violence in Classics classrooms, and sexual violence indeed remains a staple of the genre. Rabinowitz and McHardy's aforementioned primer *Teaching Difficult Topics* arose from conversations among feminist classicists about teaching ancient texts containing rape, which also gave way to a 2009 panel entitled "How to Manage Difficult Conversations in Classics Classrooms."<sup>40</sup> This emphasis is understandable, given the ubiquity of sexual violence in standard classical texts. However, in a recent, incisive critique, Holly Ranger has proposed that the prominence of sexual violence within feminist pedagogical scholarship may reflect a white liberal obsession with the body according to which "an alertness to sexualized threat to the body—the bourgeois white woman's sole marker of marginalization—is prioritized over an alertness to racism or classicism."<sup>41</sup> As a result, a story such as Philomela and Procne comes to be regularly invoked as an "empowering example of ancient myth and a revenge fantasy," not an Ovidian rape scene in which the rapist is explicitly racialized.<sup>42</sup> In other words, it is increasingly standard for white female educators to prioritize consciousness-raising around sexual violence without duly considering its intimate relationship to other axes of marginalization, especially race and otherness, both in antiquity and modernity (in our experience, the same shallow engagement attends the work of white scholars about ancient queerness and queerphobia).<sup>43</sup> Addressing these topics critically is not a zero-sum game. However, we find that existing priorities of feminist difficulty literature in Classics suffer from the tendency to reduce, rather than embrace, complexity and difference, without intersectional analysis or fundamental critique of structures of power.<sup>44</sup> Banking models likewise rely on the flattening of complicated realities and the furnishing of an easily deposited and easily digested educational product.

We see the pernicious implications of the banking model most clearly in how a managerial perspective ultimately misunderstands, or misrecognizes,<sup>45</sup> student subjectivities and experiences. In the introduction to *Teaching Difficult Topics*, Rabinowitz and

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<sup>40</sup> Rabinowitz and McHardy 2014: 2. Kahn 2006 discusses the harms caused by prioritizing the text over students' emotional responses to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but nonetheless models her student-centered pedagogy around Ovidian metaphors of transformation in order to reveal the redeeming power and singular genius of Ovid (see Ranger 2023: 36–38).

<sup>41</sup> Ranger 2023:36. In her literature review for the chapter, Ranger reports not being able to "find in any of the feminist pedagogical literature a critique of the discipline's normative aesthetic values; nor could I find any problematization of disciplinary methodologies of reading, nor any assessment of the ways in which the development of classical philology, and the institutionalization of its canonical texts and aesthetic value judgements, has been inextricably intertwined with misogyny, elitism and white supremacy."

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> On "rolling eyes" at whiteness as feminist pedagogy, particularly in queer spaces, see Ahmed 2023: 47–49.

<sup>44</sup> Ranger 2023: 38: "liberal feminist readings of Ovid [...] work to assuage false consciousness and cognitive dissonance by reading the 'right' way [to] operate within existing disciplinary structures and aesthetics without fundamentally challenging those structures or aesthetics." For a critical pedagogical approach that actually seeks to interrupt the conditions of sexual violence, see Anwaruddin 2016.

<sup>45</sup> James 2015: 100, discussing Bourdieu's argument that structural inequities preclude certain experiences and phenomena from even being *cognized*, much less being understood or addressed, notes that misrecognition relates to "everyday and dynamic social process where one thing (say, a situation, process, or action) is not recognised for what it is because it was not previously 'cognised' within the range of dispositions and propensities of the habitus of the person(s) confronting it."

McHardy do not cite Freire or related pedagogical critiques of managerialism, but they do draw a distinction between managing and teaching. They ask:

What is the difference between managing difficult conversations and teaching difficult subjects? Managing implies that we have the conversations, but we don't want them to blow up in our faces, so we manage them, to a certain extent attempting to control where the conversation goes. Teaching sensitive subjects suggests that we should or will have to teach subjects that some consider sensitive or personal.<sup>46</sup>

Each chapter in *Teaching Difficult Topics* accordingly employs a mix of both managing and teaching. Despite the editor's awareness that the urge to manage is to some extent about "control"—and that such an urge is fundamentally limiting—certain contributions justify managerialism with respect to teaching the topics most likely to "blow up in our faces," such as sexual violence. The rhetoric of constructing a "safe space" is often supplied as a pretext. One educator, reflecting on the challenges of addressing texts containing sexual violence as a male professor, writes the following:

[M]y goal is that everyone should feel that the classroom is a safe space, and to assist in this effort I tell students to think before they speak, and to avoid personal anecdotes in discussion, as these are often *tangential and highly emotionally charged*—keep the focus on texts. (emphasis added)<sup>47</sup>

The quote above unintentionally dismisses students' life experiences as "tangential" and "highly emotional," a source of difficulty to be evaded. Ranger considers such an approach—"a 'lean-in' version of philology"—to be the reigning model among feminist Classics educators.<sup>48</sup> Here, whether due to their ignorance, obstinance, politics, or even their trauma, students are imaged as pedagogical obstacles to the all-important teaching of the text (recall here Rankine's critique of "pure philology"). First, such an approach also presumes that there is something more important or sublime about the text than its "bad" stuff—e.g., Plato's and Aristotle's "philosophies" are more important than discussing either thinker's defense of slavery, racialization, or eugenics. Second, students are not interpellated as empty vessels *per se*, but, when they pose challenges to successful transmission of "good" knowledge, they are seen as problems to be managed. Students need not intentionally challenge the model to pose difficulty: if a student's identities and/or experiences reflect social realities that could disrupt the political sterility of the learning environment, the student presents a problem. Unsurprisingly, students marginalized on the bases of race, gender, ability, and other axes are subjected to more intense management, since their experiences are more difficult to flatten and regulate.

Under a critical pedagogical lens, in fact, safe spaces do not exist because students' lives are not safe. In the context of anti-racist education, Zeus Leonardo and Ronald Porter argue that, in promoting conditions of "safety," educators—particularly white liberal

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<sup>46</sup> Rabinowitz and McHardy 2014: 10.

<sup>47</sup> Thakur 2014: 160. See also, e.g., Liveley 2012: 546: "I hope in some way to help equip my students [...] to enter those worlds [i.e. the worlds of Roman love elegy] more safely." An exception might be Deacy and McHardy 2014, who advocate a "whole-university approach" to issues of domestic violence; in this approach, the challenges of "coping" with domestic violence are shared by both staff and students, though the accent remains on managing the "emotional labor" of responding to disclosures from "troubled students" (Deacy and McHardy 2014: 106).

<sup>48</sup> Ranger 2023: 38.



educators—enclose dialogue about race to an idealized and disembodied conversation. In “premiering racial pedagogy on assumptions about comfort,” white liberals “quickly degrade anti-racist teaching into image and *personal management*” (emphasis added).<sup>49</sup> Leonardo and Porter term such practices “pedagogies of fear,” since they are both motivated by fear of discomfort (on the part of the white educator), and exacerbate existing and unavoidable fear about racism (on the part of students of color).<sup>50</sup> Drawing on Frantz Fanon’s theory of violence, they seek to approach fear and violence as potential goods, asking what humanizing forms of fear and violence might liberate society from the dehumanizing fear to which it is subject.<sup>51</sup> In our assessment, a pedagogy of fear also underpins Classics’ approach to difficult topics: for fear of evoking fear in students, educators adopt an authoritative posture, opting to regulate, manage, and control classroom discussion. Safe spaces, configured as such, are banking models draped in sentimental neoliberal agitprop.

What happens if students prefer safe spaces, or refuse to engage with new pedagogical practices? The elephant in the room is that many Classics students may be attracted to the material precisely *because of* its unsavory affiliations with conservative epistemic projects and aesthetics—even if only initially. Two chapters of *Teaching Difficult Topics*—“Teaching Uncomfortable Subjects: When Religious Beliefs Get in the Way,” and “Too Sexy for South Africa? Teaching Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* in the Land of the Rainbow Nation”—follow the experiences of two educators who find themselves teaching religious or “fundamentalist” students.<sup>52</sup> The chapters are organized as a series of anecdotes of student distress, resistance, bias, refusal, and “extremism” both educators encountered in the Classics classroom. The first chapter’s author writes,

Evidently, what troubles students is not only the nature of the topics, but also the personal, sometimes biased perspectives that students bring into the discussion. How receptive the students are to new and controversial ideas depends to a great extent on their personal experiences and the education they are receiving, both formal and informal.<sup>53</sup>

While the authors of this paper can relate as classicists to the experiences thus described, we want to make a couple of uncomfortable observations. First, the minimization of students’ “personal experiences” mirrors the earlier chapter’s comments on sexual violence, albeit working from different justifications; students (here, their religious beliefs) are imagined as posing difficulty in/to the educator’s narrative. To immediately disregard these students’

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<sup>49</sup> Leonardo and Porter 2010: 139.

<sup>50</sup> See also the normalization of “shame as pedagogy” within Classics, an example of which was noted by Dan-el Padilla Peralta via Twitter (March 15, 2021) in his recent revisiting of Peter Brunt’s obituary by Michael Crawford: “Soon after I started being taught Ancient History by Peter Brunt, our year was summoned as a group and asked what we had read of the list of sources that we had been given; my rather short list provoked the entirely justified response ‘That’s disgraceful.’” As a disclaimer, we do not discourage work on negative affect in Classics more broadly. To the contrary, more work must be done on “ugly” or “minor” feelings that arise in the Classics classroom, like the extreme shock and extreme boredom, irritation, and paranoia, using the ideas of, e.g., Ahmed 2004 and 2010, Ngai 2007, and Hong 2020.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Anwaruddin 2016 for discussion of how Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler’s seminal theories of violence can inform critical pedagogical praxis that “disrupts the conditions” of sexual violence.

<sup>52</sup> Strolonga 2014, Sharland 2014. In the former example, the educator taught at a private religious institution; in the latter, the educator’s conservative “fundamentalist” students comprise a vocal minority (Sharland 2014: 121).

<sup>53</sup> Strolonga 2014: 107.

subjectivities and attempt to correct them merely by depositing “correct” information into them, is still nothing more than a banking model. By contrast, to meaningfully enact a liberatory pedagogy, educators must *start from* students’ subjectivities (as discussed further below). If this feels like a contradiction in principled radical action, that’s because it is. Freire believed it is a crucial aspect of the educator’s role to adopt “a frame of mind which can bear the burden of skepticism and which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish.”<sup>54</sup> And, due to the conservative appeal of Classics (and past exposure of most students to traditional teaching practices), it is not only those educators who choose to teach at religious institutions who should model such a skepticism.

### III. Toward *conscientização* in Classics classrooms

To review, we have argued that, when unexamined, the urge to manage can unfairly transfer difficulty onto the Classics student, which negates their agency and diminishes their humanity. This form of management is premised on a dehumanizing understanding of student agency: students are not seen as agents of their education, nor as active subjects who can contextualize their lived experiences, even “difficult” ones, on their own terms. Alternatively, under this model, student defect necessitates the intervention of the well-meaning educator, whose authoritative knowledge equips them to cultivate a “safe,” ultimately sterile classroom environment. In this concluding section, we reflect further on how to move past this mindset to *conscientização*, a principal component of Freire’s radical pedagogy. Generally translated as “consciousness-raising” or “raising critical consciousness,” *conscientização* entails both heightened awareness of social conditions and action to transform them. Freire positions *conscientização* not only as an antidote to banking models, but as the very thing that banking models seek to blockade.

We want to stress that *conscientização* is never achieved *a priori*, but rather manifests differently depending on the material conditions in which it is intervening.<sup>55</sup> Artist and activist Antonia Darder likens it to the metaphor “we make the road by walking.”<sup>56</sup> It therefore will (and should) look different in secondary schools, undergraduate classrooms, prison teaching, community outreach initiatives—even within scholarly conversations and debates. Nonetheless, there are several conditions which are central to successful consciousness-raising that we will unpack: namely, its fundamentally communal nature and its epistemic effects on how we think, and what we prioritize, in classrooms.

While we experience consciousness-raising in our own subjectivities, *conscientização* is a product of communal dialogue and action. As Darder explains, Freire “understood exceedingly well” that this particular dimension of *conscientização* was liable to misinterpretation.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, liberal humanist (mis)readings of consciousness-raising are rampant in social justice discourses. An overly subjectivist reading of *conscientização* privileges already legible, individuated lived experiences over a more principled systematic analysis of social issues, thereby “produc[ing] truths divorced from social and material conditions.”<sup>58</sup> We are reminded here of the previous section’s discussion of how pedagogical

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<sup>54</sup> Freire 1983: 33, discussed helpfully by Darder 2014: Ch.3.

<sup>55</sup> See Giroux 2020: 2.

<sup>56</sup> Darder 2014: 86.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

material surrounding sexual violence in Classics classrooms tends to privilege a singular subjectivity (that of the white liberal feminist). We cannot use this vantage point to raise consciousness around the social and material conditions underpinning a systemic issue such as sexual violence.

Therefore, given the systemic nature of the oppressive conditions it seeks to fight, *conscientizaçao* can only be achieved through collective action. The only path for resolving and surmounting these contradictions is solidarity. Indeed, Freire urges that “we cannot liberate the others, people cannot liberate themselves alone, because people liberate themselves in communion, mediated by reality which they must transform.”<sup>59</sup> *Conscientizaçao* is the communal exploration and resolution of the tensions between interlocutors, not simply the marriage of embodied and theoretical knowledge possessed solely by the educator.

bell hooks, for whose work “critical consciousness” is a key term, reminds us in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* that the classroom is a communal space, and thus that teaching is not about control.<sup>60</sup> Sharing an anecdote from a course she admits to have “completely failed on the communal level,” hooks writes: “More than any other class I had taught, this one compelled me to abandon the sense that the professor could, by *sheer strength of will and desire*, make the classroom an exciting, learning community” (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> Imperative to critical pedagogical work is to recognize that, though each classroom is different, *conscientizaçao* is a collective enterprise in which everyone’s subjectivity, agency, and experiences are constitutive of the realities we are tasked to teach. This work starts with the educator eschewing epistemic mastery in favor of a posture of curiosity.

Epistemic curiosity in Classics is not a lost cause. As Eccleston recently pointed out, “there is no shame in admitting” when one’s tools at present are lacking, or perhaps even irrelevant and detrimental.<sup>62</sup> Eccleston—co-founder of *Eos*, a community for studying Africana receptions of ancient Greece and Rome—was writing in the wake of 2020, after scholars unsurprisingly failed to intervene in anti-Black racism in the academy. To quote her at length:

If the model of intellectual one holds onto entails a stable mastery, the confrontation [...] crosses over from humbling to humiliation. But there are models other than mastery available. And in light of those models there is no shame in admitting that the way we have been trained, the skills we have learned to complete projects recognizable within our disciplines, may not empower us to do the work that emancipatory projects demand. We may very well have to *unlearn* those skills and, instead, learn from those excluded by the framing of our disciplines and the gates of our institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Eccleston is reflecting here on the 2020 special session of *Eos READS for Black Lives*. This session involved the study of several pairs of texts by Black diasporic writers from different eras,

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<sup>59</sup> Davis 1981: 62.

<sup>60</sup> For a nuanced discussion of Freire’s role in the field and shortcomings, including feminist critique of the sexism of Freire’s thought focalized through hooks’ and Freire’s friendship, see hooks 1994: Ch.4 and Green 2023: Ch.2.

<sup>61</sup> hooks 1994: 8.

<sup>62</sup> Eccleston 2021.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

including Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, as discussed by Eccleston in the piece quoted above. Many *Eos* READS discussion groups, including our own at Oxford, were naturally drawn to Fanon's characterization of the "colonized intellectual": someone who plays accomplice for the colonizer by normalizing, or making *thinkable*, the colonial power's frameworks of the world. "The colonized intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas and there in the back of his mind stood a sentinel on duty guarding the Greco-Roman pedestal," writes Fanon in the chapter entitled "On Violence."<sup>64</sup> Eccleston rightly diagnoses the pedestalization of Classics as an attachment to a colonial order, one which should prompt us to "[ask] how the kinds of knowledge we are said to produce might support life concretely."<sup>65</sup>

To pose such questions requires classicists to let go of the idea that they are mere commentators on their object of study, or observers of difficulty, but "active and complicit participants in the perpetuation of ancient literature and its ideologies" until proven otherwise.<sup>66</sup> This is why *conscientização* is fundamentally about the alternation of word and deed: it is an ongoing process of theorizing and practical action. In Classics and the humanities more broadly, then, we might think of the movement toward *conscientização* as ensuring that our experience of "reading the word" is governed by the embodied act of "reading the world."<sup>67</sup> Even critically minded classicists feel great allegiance to the written word and its potential to single-handedly educate us, transform us, afford us empathy. We are not alone in this error. As Sara Ahmed points out, in the radical philosophies of Marx and even Freire, the emphasis in discussions of theory and action implicitly privileges the former.<sup>68</sup> Marx urges that the point of interpretation is to change the world; Freire tells us that praxis requires "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it."<sup>69</sup> Ahmed proposes a compelling shift in directionality: what if embodied experience of the world itself gives way to transformative knowledge? What would Classics classrooms look like if students' and educators' experiences of the world were honored as an interpretative lens in and of itself?

In summary, we have proposed that foundational work in critical pedagogy offers both tools for diagnosing Classics' difficulty *with difficulty*, and reflexive practices for moving past it. Our primary critique of current pedagogical guidance in Classics is its dependence on a banking model: namely, its preoccupation with "managing difficulty," and unwitting interpellation of students as potential sources of said difficulty. Our closing discussion of *conscientização* provides a path forward, away from "difficulty" and toward classrooms that above all embrace liberation, achieved only by a cycle of dialogue and action premised on fellowship and solidarity. Finally, in offering this discussion, we acknowledge that a mainstay of critical pedagogical thought is retaining openness, reflexivity, and curiosity in critique. To claim that one set of approaches could fix problems as complex and longstanding as those endemic to Classics pedagogy would not only be enclosed and epistemically arrogant, but counterproductive to our aims. Pedagogy must be continually remade in response to changing social conditions. To quote Freire, "[t]he unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing

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<sup>64</sup> Fanon 2021[1961]: 11.

<sup>65</sup> Eccleston 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Ranger 2023: 38.

<sup>67</sup> Freire and Macedo 1998: 8.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmed 2012: 173.

<sup>69</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: 51.

activity.”<sup>70</sup> In this spirit, we eagerly welcome robust critique of this paper in the immediate and the long term.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Freire 2000[1968]: 84.

<sup>71</sup> We would especially like to thank Hannah Čulík-Baird, Joseph Romero, the anonymous reviewer, Holly Ranger, and Mathura Umachandran for their insightful engagement with and support of this piece through its many iterations.

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***Ancient Rhetoric, Abolition, and Reverend Peter Thomas Stanford's  
The Tragedy (1897)***  
**Kelly P. Dugan**

**Abstract:** Following the efflorescence of scholarship on Black freedom narratives and activism, this article examines Reverend Peter Thomas Stanford's *The Tragedy* (1897), an antilynching text which recounts a history of colonization and enslavement from the Mediterranean in the 7th century BCE to America in the late 19th century CE. Together with a study of the ancient discourses, Rev. Stanford's work is here situated in the context of the white paternalism of British and American publishing during the late 19th century, with particular attention to Harriet Beecher Stowe's preface to Stanford's *The Tragedy* (1897). The article analyzes how Rev. Stanford uses ancient rhetoric to argue for the sanctity of Black life, including both classical and biblical references, concluding with reflections upon pedagogical applications as well as the need for further study.

**Keywords:** Black literature, ancient rhetoric, Reverend Peter Thomas Stanford, Herodotus, Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Reverend Peter Thomas Stanford (ca. 1858-1909) was a Black author, activist, and minister who lived in America, Canada, and England in the late 19th century. In 1894, Rev. Stanford was selected by a group of transatlantic philanthropic Christian leaders and members of the public to return to America to conduct abolitionist research as a representative of England. After making the journey, his mission was to document and report on the ongoing lynchings of Black people in the United States. Rev. Stanford spent two years fulfilling this duty and published the results of his research in a historical narrative entitled, *The Tragedy of the Negro in America: A Condensed History of the Enslavement, Sufferings, Emancipation, Present Condition, and Progress of the Negro Race in the United States of America* (1897). Today, many scholars and students simply refer to this text as *The Tragedy*.<sup>1</sup>

*The Tragedy* recounts a history of colonization and enslavement from the Mediterranean in the 7th century BCE to America in the late 19th century CE. Rev. Stanford's research, including statistics, personal stories, and biographies of activists, emphasizes the experiences of Black people in the United States between the 17th to 19th centuries CE.<sup>2</sup> He shares with readers the staggering brutality of enslavement, the persisting hope of Black communities and abolitionist allies, and the contemporary state of violence against Black people in America. On the dedication page of *The Tragedy*, Rev. Stanford states that he carried out this research "in the hope of helping create a strong, healthy public opinion that will

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<sup>1</sup> The present analysis focuses on the 1897 edition that is available online for free through the *Documenting the American South* program hosted by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/stanford/stanford.html>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024. I also rely on a hard copy of the 1898 edition of *The Tragedy* which includes press comments as well as additional photos edited by S.D. Adkins in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The choice to capitalize "Black" and use lowercase "white" is based on the perspectives on the history of inequity and white supremacy put forth by Coleman (2020), Laws (2020); and Kanigel (2024).

make it impossible for outrages and lynchings to be much longer continued" (1897). His effort was endorsed by some of the most popular abolitionist voices of the day in America, Canada, and England. For example, the introduction to the *The Tragedy* was written by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), internationally known abolitionist and famed author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).<sup>3</sup> At the time of publication, *The Tragedy* was also widely lauded and earned the praise of powerful political and social figures such as US President William McKinley, British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone, and the presidents of educational institutions including Harvard University, Tufts University, and Amherst College along with many others (1898, p. 23).

The *Press Comments* section in the 1898 edition of *The Tragedy* offers insight into the positive reception of the text internationally. In February of 1898, the *Boston Courant* described *The Tragedy* as "intensely interesting" and "richly illustrated" (1898, p. 22). In support of Rev. Stanford's research, Rev. Francis Clark of the United Society of Christian Endeavor stated that Rev. Stanford "has done a grand work in this country and can do even a greater work on his return to England in removing prejudices and presenting the truth of some American matters to our English friends which they do not always fully understand" (1898, p. 25). Rev. Stanford wrote one of the few known historical texts published before the 20th century by a Black author centered on Black experiences diachronically. Over the course of a century, however, attention to Rev. Stanford's work has waned. Despite all the acclaim attested in the press comments and endorsements, when searching for lists of researchers and historians through the ages today, Rev. Stanford's name is not found next to white authors and historians such as Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), Henry Adams (1838-1918), and George Bancroft (1800-1891). This neglect, however, does not mean permanent erasure of *The Tragedy* and the activism of Rev. Stanford.

Over the last few years, scholars have given renewed attention to Rev. Stanford's writings and life due to his persevering impact on communities in America, Canada, and England. In 1889, Rev. Stanford became the first Black minister of Hope St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, England, known today as Highgate Baptist Church. To celebrate his contributions, scholars and community members have increasingly organized events and published new research. In 2020, Barbara McCaskill along with co-editors Sidonia Serafini and Rev. Paul Walker, published a book entitled, *The Magnificent Reverend Peter Thomas Stanford, Transatlantic Reformer and Race Man*. In 2021, I joined McCaskill, Serafini, and Walker along with an international collection of scholars to put on a conference in honor of Rev. Stanford entitled, *Black Southern Activism: A Transatlantic Legacy*.<sup>4</sup> While intended to take place in person in England and America, the event was moved online due to COVID-19. At the same time as these events, we created the Wikipedia page dedicated to Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford in order to increase awareness and access to his work. In just a few short years, there is much that we have achieved, but much more can be done to bring attention to Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford.

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<sup>3</sup> *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been critiqued for over a century for its negative depiction of Black people, for instance by James Baldwin in his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (Baldwin, 1955). During her lifetime, Harriet Beecher Stowe was criticized for her paternalistic approach to supporting Black people: for instance, in a letter from Martin Delaney to Frederick Douglass (Delaney, 1853). Acknowledging her popularity in this paper is not an endorsement of her approach to abolition.

<sup>4</sup> This project was supported and funded by an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation project grant through the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts at the University of Georgia and the Highgate Baptist Church in Birmingham, England.



The present paper explores the roles of ancient rhetoric in 19th century transatlantic abolitionist, antilynching, and antiracist literature by examining Rev. Stanford's engagement with ancient discourses in *The Tragedy*. Examples include a history of ancient colonization (1897, pp. 13-14), engagement with Herodotus' *Histories* (p. 14), reflections upon assassinated emperors (p. 72), and references to the *First Lessons in Greek* textbook by William S. Scarborough (p. 119). Alongside and interwoven with these references are biblical quotations from and allusions to the Old and New Testaments, including passages from the Book of Judges, the Epistle to the Romans, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. All these references function as part of Rev. Stanford's larger rhetorical system of persuasion intended to advance Christianity and to convince readers to support antilynching. Through a chronicle of the past, Rev. Stanford's work addressed the present but also looked to emancipatory futures for Black communities.

*The Tragedy* (1897) by Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford is just one example of how ancient rhetoric flows in and out of the intersections of education and activism in Black freedom literature. In recent years, increased attention by classical scholars has begun to improve disciplinary understandings of Black literature, especially in relation to abolition.<sup>5</sup> While such efforts have addressed the presence of classical rhetoric within the intersectional interests of liberation and education in Black traditions, there remains a wealth of material in need of further examination.<sup>6</sup> With this paper, I aim, in part, to introduce readers to the many ways in which Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford is rightfully part of this discussion, and to invite future contributions and collaborations in bringing the African American tradition to broader consciousness.

This paper is divided into five sections that provide historical background and examine ancient rhetoric in *The Tragedy* while contextualizing Rev. Stanford's work within larger patterns of abolitionist activism and education. The first two sections offer background on Rev. Stanford himself and the racist practices of the American publishing system through the centuries. The third section examines how Harriet Beecher Stowe endorsed Rev. Stanford's work by engaging with ancient discourses in her introduction to the text. The fourth section provides specific examples of classical citation within Rev. Stanford's writings. Finally, I end the paper with some pedagogical reflections on how Rev. Stanford's life and works might be taught. The overall goal of this piece is to provide readers with insight into *The Tragedy* by Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford and its place in the history of transatlantic abolition and freedom education.

## **I: A Brief Biography of Rev. Stanford**

Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford (Fig. 1) was born around the year 1858.<sup>7</sup> At birth, enslavers held him captive and kept him through his infancy and toddler years in Hampton, Virginia. These human traffickers, or, as Stanford refers to them, "flesh and blood jobbers" (1897, p. 57), had

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<sup>5</sup> e.g., Scarborough, edited by Ronnick (2005, 2006), Rankine (2006), Cook and Tatum (2010), Greenwood (2011), Malamud (2016).

<sup>6</sup> See also Brown (1849, 1851), Said (1873), and Keckley (1868). There is a great deal of scholarship still to be written on this topic and I invite any reader here to dive in and share what you find—whether you are a student, teacher, or learner of any kind.

<sup>7</sup> As with many enslaved people, his date of birth is not confidently known. For a thorough review of the possible dates and age of Rev. Stanford see the Introduction of McCaskill et al. (2020).

sold both his father and his mother by the time he was four years old. He was never reunited with them. Although not much is known about his earliest years, it is believed that, for at least a short while, Rev. Stanford lived with the Pamunkey Indian Tribe around the end of the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> In time, a young Rev. Stanford was placed in an orphanage until, at around eight years of age, the government-run Freedmen's Bureau handed Stanford over to Perry L. Stanford and his wife Hannah Stanford, a foster family in Boston (McCaskill et al., 2020). This family, however, did not bring Rev. Stanford freedom. Instead, they enslaved him once again for years to come.<sup>9</sup>

When he was around twelve years old, Rev. Stanford liberated himself by sneaking into the coal box of a train and traveling to New York City. The pre-teen Stanford had no resources at the time and lived on the streets making friends and getting by however he needed. By 1880, Rev. Stanford had built up a network of comrades and mentors, converted to Christianity, and was one of the first Black people to graduate from the Suffield Institute in Connecticut (McCaskill et al., 2020).<sup>10</sup> He then dedicated his life and writings to promoting Christianity, antislavery activism, and supporting Black communities in America, Canada, and England. In that time, not unlike today, activists like Rev. Stanford fought to spread their abolitionist message and publish their works. In order to contextualize the creation, printing, and spread of *The Tragedy*, the next section provides some historical background into the laws and practices that were designed to question and exclude Black authors, artists, and activists.

## **II: *The Tragedy* and Racist Obstruction**

Throughout the 19th century and before, many Black authors in America traveled or moved to England where they pursued their life goals and published written works, such as poetry, freedom narratives, and histories ([Wheatley] Peters, 1773;<sup>11</sup> Bayley, 1825; J. Brown, 1855). This pattern of publishing abroad was often a response to rejection, threats, and attacks by white publishers and other white people in America. White people finding new justifications for capturing and re-enslaving Black people in the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act in America also spurred this model. The very titles of publications of Black authors bear witness to the need for such travel and relocation: for instance, John Brown's *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, A Fugitive Slave Now in England* (1855).<sup>12</sup> England had abolished enslavement in 1833 and had a large community of abolitionists in a

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<sup>8</sup> This part of Rev. Stanford's life has been debated but evidence suggests he did live with an Indigenous community, likely the Pamunkey Indian Tribe, for about two years; see McCaskill et al. (2020), p. 5.

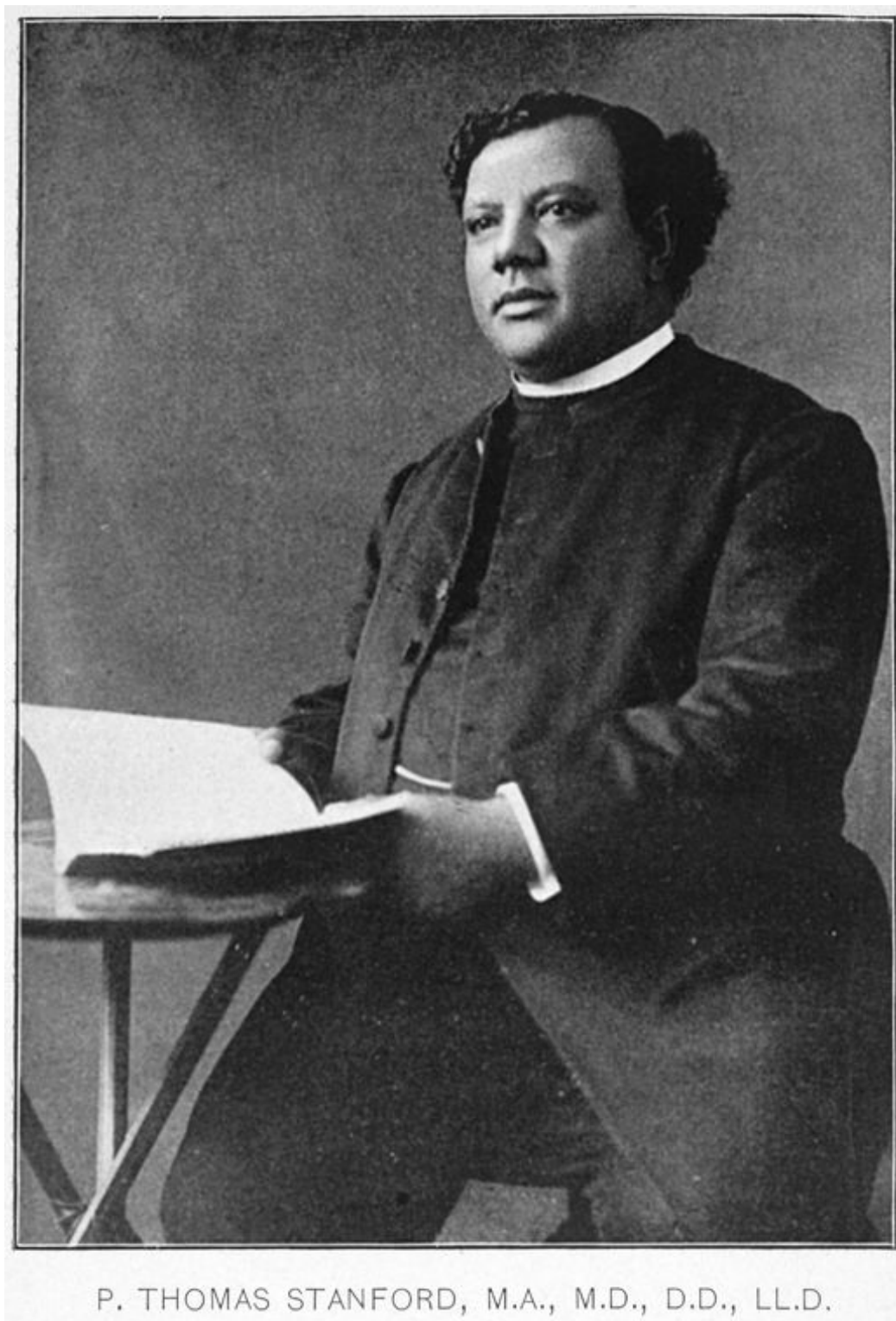
<sup>9</sup> Some may take issue with the use of the term 'enslaved' here since he was, in theory, a foster child of this family. However, the indentured servitude expected of him and many children like him is an extension of enslavement.

<sup>10</sup> Also referred to as the Connecticut Baptist Literary Institution (1833), the Connecticut Literary Institute, Suffield Literary Institute, and Suffield School. Historically, this institution trained men to be Baptist ministers. Today the school is known as Suffield Academy, a co-educational, non-denominational, private college-preparatory boarding school still in operation.

<sup>11</sup> Although Phillis [Wheatley] Peters is often cited by the name "Wheatley," that was the family name of her enslavers. Peters is the married name that she acquired herself after she obtained her freedom from enslavement. After freedom and marriage, Phillis chose to go by her name Phillis Peters and dropped Wheatley (Jeffers, 2020; Winkler, 2020). Out of respect for her choice and her life, I will do the same in my research.

<sup>12</sup> This freedom narrative is by the Black author John Brown (ca. 1810-1876), not to be confused with the white abolitionist John Brown (1800-1859).





**Fig. 1.** Photograph of Rev. Stanford (1897).

The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Public Domain.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-70bb-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>;

link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.

less hostile surrounding, helping to make the country more amenable to publishing works by Black authors.<sup>13</sup> Today, the evidence of this racist gatekeeping in American publishing is widely available in print and online. For example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill hosts an online database entitled, *Documenting the American South*.<sup>14</sup> Here, readers can find a large collection of digitized books written by Black authors from or based in America and other countries and colonies which were still authorizing enslavement, but which were published in England.

In 1772, Phillis Peters was a nineteen-year-old enslaved African woman in Boston, Massachusetts. She had learned Greek and Latin and was writing the epic poem *To Maecenas*. In striving to get her work published, she was forced to legally defend herself from those who questioned the authorship of her poetry. Prominent white men including Thomas Hutchinson, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, were compelled to write in support of her abilities (Malamud, 2016). Ultimately, Peters published her book of poems in England in 1773 entitled, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley of Boston, in New England*.<sup>15</sup> This discrimination against and questioning of Black intellect is ongoing today, including and especially in predominantly white fields such as “Classics” (Henderson, 2010; Posselt, 2016; Lepisto and Murray, 2019; Padilla Peralta, 2019).

White publishers and authors heavily filtered publications by Black authors on the transatlantic antislavery circuit, whether the text was published in England or America. Evidence of gatekeeping can be found in the publications of transatlantic antislavery activists such as Henry “Box” Brown (Dugan, 2019). The first edition of his narrative was written by a white man named Charles Stearns and entitled, *Narrative of Henry Box Brown, Who Escaped from Slavery, Enclosed in a Box 3 Feet Long and 2 Wide. Written from a Statement of Facts Made by Himself. With Remarks Upon the Remedy for Slavery by Charles Stearns* (1849).<sup>16</sup> A few years later, Brown rewrote his own freedom narrative (1851). Charles Stearns’ edition is saturated with ancient references. In introducing Brown’s story, Stearns states that “...all whose eyes gaze upon the picture here drawn of misery, and of endurance, worthy of a Spartan, and such as a hero of olden times might be proud...” (1849, p. vi). This passage conjures up images and stereotypes about the Persian Wars, the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, and the actions and legend of King Leonidas. Later in the text, Stearns reflects on the hypocrisy of enslavement, stating (p. 72):

It is a remnant of that spirit of barbarity, which formerly induced men to fight for conquest and territory, in the palmiest days of the ancient Eastern empires, when the fields of the earth, fair mother of our existence, were made fertile by the rich streams of blood, flowing from the mangled corpses strewn

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<sup>13</sup> England did and does have racism and discrimination. Written evidence shows, however, that many people expressed that they felt safer and chose to live in England instead of America due to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and other atrocities (Rivington, 2022; Virdee and McGeever, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> <https://docsouth.unc.edu/>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> On the role of ancient Hellenic and Roman discourses in Peters’ works, see Fikes (2002b), Greenwood (2011), Lamore and Shields, eds. (2011).

<sup>16</sup> Digitized by Google books: [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Narrative\\_of\\_H\\_B\\_Brown\\_who\\_escaped\\_from/prxcAAAACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Narrative_of_H_B_Brown_who_escaped_from/prxcAAAACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1); link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.

upon its surface, by the fiendish barbarity of a Sennacherib, a Cyrus, a Xerxes, and an Alexander.<sup>17</sup>

Stearns mixes ancient Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, and Greek imagery—including an allusion to Achilles clogging the river Xanthus with corpses and chariots in Homer's *Iliad* Book 21.<sup>18</sup> In Stearns' version of Brown's narrative, there are also multiple mentions of the sword of Damocles, as well as references to the laws of Draco, the assassination of Caesar, and the association of the death of the goddess, Libertas, with the passage of the Stamp Act, as well as many other allusions and references to antiquity.<sup>19</sup>

Following its publication, Stearns' account of Brown's freedom narrative was heavily criticized in book reviews for its overwrought style. The September 22, 1849 weekly publication of *Christian Register* states, "We wish the compiler had not worked the matter up quite as much, and had given it in a style of greater veri-similitude, more simplicity and better taste, and mixed it less up with irrelevant matter." In response, Brown wrote his own narrative in 1851 and had it published in Manchester, England. By this time, fearing re-enslavement due to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Brown had left America for England and lived there for the next twenty-five years of his life (Ruggles, 2003; Howard, 2021). The title of Brown's edition is simply, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself*. The inclusion of the phrase "written by himself" is a strong declaration of his agency over his own story and a departure from the earlier version. Notably, in Brown's edition, there were hardly any classical references except in the poem featured on the title page:

Forget not the unhappy,  
Though sorrow may annoy,  
There's something then for memory,  
Hereafter to enjoy!  
Oh! still from Fortune's garland,  
Some flowers for others strew;  
And forget not the unhappy,  
For, ah! their friends are few.

This poem was written by Charles Swain (1801-1874), a white English author and contemporary of Brown. In this passage, the capitalization of Fortune indicates a personification of fate and suggests a connection to the Roman goddess Fortuna. Fortuna is the goddess of chance and fate including the fate of enslaved and freed people, and ancient narratives regularly invoke Fortuna as the divinity who converts free men into enslaved men

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<sup>17</sup> Sennacherib (ca. 745-681 BCE), king of Assyria who campaigned against Babylonians; Cyrus (ca. 600-530 BCE), founder of the First Persian Empire; Xerxes (ca. 519-465 BCE), king of Persia; Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE).

<sup>18</sup> *Iliad* 21.15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Sword of Damocles: "O reader, have you no heart to sympathize with the injured slave, as he thus lives in a state of perpetual torment, the dread uncertainty of his wife's fate, continually hanging over his head, and poisoning all his joys, as the naked sword hung by a *hair*, over the head of an ancient king's guest, as he was seated at a table loaded with all the luxuries of an epicure's devising? This sword, unlike the one alluded to, did often pierce my breast, and when I had recovered from the wound, it was again hung up, to torture me. This is slavery, a natural and concomitant part of the accursed system!" (1849, pp. 48-49); cf. Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 5.61. Laws of Draco: "This people had just emerged from the depths of Egyptian slavery, and might have stood in need of such severe and terrible laws, so Draconic in their nature; but the refined inhabitants of polished Greece and Rome, needed not such barbarous enactments" (pp. 70-71). Assassination of Caesar: pp. 85-86. Libertas and the Stamp Act: p. 84f.

(e.g., Plautus' *Captivi* 304-305). Fortuna represents, just as other deities do, a theistic agency in the lives of humans, and as such, her association with enslavement and emancipation sends the message that those who are enslaved are there by the will of the gods, and not by the actions of mankind. As a result, Fortuna's role in abolitionist discourse can be interpreted as an effort to downplay the role of human agency in systems of mass enslavement. In the context of enslavement, Fortuna's power diminishes the agency of white people in enslaving Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities. Interestingly, no other explicit allusions to antiquity, outside of biblical references, are included in this second edition of Brown's narrative, an abrupt shift compared to the 1849 first edition written by Stearns—and an indication that classical references had come to be associated with white authorship.

Five decades after Brown's narratives, Rev. Stanford published *The Tragedy* (1897). This text is believed to have been written mostly by Rev. Stanford and not as heavily filtered by white authors, artists, and publishers as Brown's writing had been. However, the presence of white gatekeeping in the publishing process is still visible. For example, the introduction of *The Tragedy* was written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a white woman and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Harriet Beecher Stowe and her family are also credited with funding the education of Rev. Stanford (McCaskill et al., 2020). Her words in the introduction, as examined in the next section, illustrate how her statements function as stamps of approval on a work written by a Black man. Therefore, although the first edition of *The Tragedy* was published in America and written by Rev. Stanford himself over thirty years after the Civil War ended, it still stands as an example of a text that, at least in part, was filtered and approved by white American authors, leaders, and audiences.

### III: The Introduction to *The Tragedy*

The introduction to *The Tragedy* was written by author and abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896). Stowe was an educated white woman from Connecticut who studied Latin, religion, literature, and other subjects, particularly during her time at the Hartford Female Seminary (Hedrick, 1994). The audience for her books, poems, and other writings were mostly other educated white people who had likewise been steeped in allusions to classical and biblical texts. Given her educational background, interests, and audience, Stowe, unsurprisingly, includes allusions to ancient authors and texts in her introduction to *The Tragedy*.

Situating Stowe's contributions to Rev. Stanford's text in the context of the whiteness of contemporary systems of education brings insight into the functions and structure of her prefatory statements. The formal American higher education system began in the 1600s, and, from its inception, was constructed by white people in ways that mostly served other white people. As these modes of discrimination were being constructed and embedded, leading American institutions of higher education such as Harvard (1632), the College of William & Mary (1693), and Yale (1701) designed their curriculum around classical and biblical texts (Geiger, 2016). As a result of this system, modeled upon English and German educational institutions, Greek and Latin as well as theological education increasingly became synonymous with white education in many contexts in America and abroad. Simultaneously, enslaved Black people were banned from learning, reading, preaching, and community organizing. Therefore, in time, the practice of citing Greek and Latin texts as well as the Bible

became a signifier not only of education but of white knowledge systems.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, Harriet Beecher Stowe's references in the introduction of *The Tragedy* perform her white American identity through the citation of material which had become central to the contemporary curriculum. Her references to ancient authors and texts are expected (indeed, to some extent, generic) and not unusual for any author or presenter on the transatlantic antislavery circuit during her lifetime, regardless of race or gender.

Stowe begins the introduction to *The Tragedy* by distinguishing between tragedies that are "authorized" and those that are "unauthorized"—with which terms she described "violence *authorized* and made *legal* by men in whom power was vested" (1897, p. 3). In this process, she identifies the massacres of Armenians by Turkish forces in the 1890s as "authorized," stating, "This is an authorized, not an unauthorized, tragedy, which the whole world knows but has not yet been outraged enough to stop it" (p. 4). Stowe then compares that contemporaneous genocide to the ongoing enslavement of Black people in America (pp. 4-5):

In America,—which is known as the land of the free, whose people are rightly proud of a history that speaks of a noble, victorious struggle against tyranny; of the wisdom, foresight, and piety of the founders of the States; of the marvellous energy which transformed vast plains and forests into fields [p. 5] of wealth creating grain and fruit, built cities, established manufactures, and made a large sphere of art and science;—a long and revolting tragedy has been in progress, in which the Negro has suffered [sic] indescribable misery and been afflicted with diabolical torture. This also was a tragedy *authorized* by the powers that were, was recognized and defined by law, and endorsed and supported by not a few churches and religious teachers, in which the Negro was bound with chains, whipped with the lash, treated as a beast, sold in the common market as a thing, and, when he was no longer worth money, hurried to death and buried anyhow.

In identifying America as the "land of the free," Stowe identifies an essential and cruel irony in the construction of American freedom narratives which has been recently underscored by Barbara and Karen Fields ([2012] 2014, p. 11) as an "anomalous reality":

The French Revolution assigned universal validity to the slogan *Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!* By contrast, America's rendering of the same sentiments added asterisks, for it had to make sense of an anomalous reality: the presence of native-born people who were "foreign," hard-working people who were not free.

Stowe goes on to explain that freedom itself can create "unauthorized" tragedies such as the withholding of land and resources to the formerly enslaved (1897, p. 6: "Free, it is true, but untaught, homeless, moneyless, a stranger in a land whose people loved him not"). Stowe concludes her introduction by pleading for peace and equality with a citation of the Lord's Prayer, discussed below (p. 6), and ends her contribution by asserting that Rev. Stanford's words are true and ought to be believed by the readers (p. 9). In what follows, I offer an examination of the ancient rhetoric in Stowe's introduction, including biblical and non-biblical references.

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<sup>20</sup> Greeks and Italians in Stowe's time were not themselves considered to be white, a racial categorization that shifted in America during the mid-20th century (Painter, 2010).



When classicists examine primary sources, biblical references are often categorized separately, or omitted altogether, yet this attitude speaks more to the limitations of disciplinary boundaries which elevate Greek and Latin literature over contemporary evidence from the textual traditions of Christianity. Jesus, after all, lived in the Roman Empire. The use of both biblical and classical references from antiquity by authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford illustrate how 19th century authors perceived Christian and classical texts to be related and overlapping. Accordingly, I consider biblical references to be references to antiquity and therefore include them alongside other examples that are traditionally categorized as “classical” discourses.

Stowe illustrates her Christian beliefs and knowledge while she works to persuade and educate the readers who may be convinced by her words and the words of Rev. Stanford to support abolition and antilynching. In the introduction, she quotes directly from biblical scripture to support her pleas for change. For example, she reminds her readers that the fight to oppress and maintain power over others is a violation of the messages in the Bible by citing Proverbs 14:31, “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker” (p. 8). In the following paragraph, Stowe expresses hope for equality in America by invoking the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 stating, “Yet a little while, and surely, the righteous people of the States will once more make an effort, an effort of peace, in the name of ‘Our Father who art in heaven’” (p. 8).

Stowe’s non-biblical ancient references in the introduction are more indirect than her explicit citation of scripture. For example, she ends her chapter by stating that Rev. Stanford’s *The Tragedy* is a “little book, which pretends only to be a report of inquiries made” (p. 9). The use of the term “little book” brings to mind Catullus’ self-conscious representation of his own poetry (1.1: *cui dono lepidum novum libellum...?*, “to whom do I dedicate this charming little book?”), with Stowe’s introduction to Stanford’s work in some ways mirroring the structure of literary dedication and reciprocity between Catullus and Cornelius Nepos (1.3-7). Stowe’s reference to Stanford’s “little book” also echoes the words of Ovid’s *Tristia* (1.1), where the poet begins by addressing his text as *parve...liber*, “small book.” Catullus and Ovid performed ironic self-deprecation in order to initiate their own poetic endeavors, and Stowe’s use of the phrase “little book” likewise demonstrates a sense of initiatory humility (*The Tragedy* is, after all, two-hundred and thirty pages long). Yet, given the fact that Stowe was writing on behalf of Stanford, her “self”-deprecation instantiated an appropriative and white-paternalistic ventriloquism of the true author’s voice.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the “report of inquiries made” phrase in Stowe’s passage above harkens back to the very opening words of Herodotus’ *Histories* (1.1):

Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησέος ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἥδε, ὥς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται...

This is a report of inquiry by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, created so that what has happened will not be forgotten in time...

In this well-known passage at the beginning of the *Histories*, Herodotus refers to his text as a “report of inquiry” (ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις) just as Stowe defines Rev. Stanford’s text as a “report of inquiries made.” Herodotus (ca. 484-425 BCE) was a Greek historian who wrote the *Histories* about the Persian Wars and has been called the “father of history” since antiquity. *The*

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<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy, too, that Ovid anthropomorphizes his “small book” (*parvus liber*) in order to send it on a journey and speak on his own behalf, structurally mirroring the relationship between a Roman enslaver and his enslaved messenger.



*Tragedy* is both a historical text and an antilynching treatise. By positioning Rev. Stanford's *The Tragedy* in the legacy of Herodotus' *Histories*, Stowe signifies to the audience that this research deserves to be read and respected. This connection to ancient history is supported by her further engagement with the other "father of history," Thucydides (ca. 460-400 BCE). After her nod to Herodotus, Stowe writes the following (p. 9):

The writer aims not at sensation, but desires first to see for himself the facts in their true light, and, having seen, give to his readers an unexaggerated statement thereof. No cause is assisted by falsehood; no race of men can be permanently helped forward by fraud.

Here, Stowe, in stating that Rev. Stanford is not a liar, echoes a persistent concern of ancient historiography, namely that a historical account appropriately distinguish between a truth and a falsehood, or a "lie." This assertion of truth reverberates Thucydides' claim in *The Peloponnesian War* (1.21.1) that in examining evidence he set himself apart from poets and writers who arranged their words to be more attractive to hear than honest. With this reference in the introduction, Stowe thus encourages those readers who would recognize the nod to Thucydides to see Rev. Stanford as a modern-day fact-based Thucydides who cares about the evidence.

By invoking both Herodotus and Thucydides as she praises the research and writings of Rev. Stanford, Stowe associates him with two ancient historians revered particularly by white American and European readers. Combining references to Herodotus and Thucydides in the introduction, however, does more than give a tip o' the hat to the ancient historians and celebrate Rev. Stanford's achievements. These allusions to antiquity signify Stowe's own authority to the audience and serve to strengthen the weight of her endorsement of Rev. Stanford. Additionally, Harriet Beecher Stowe's identities as a well-known educated white woman author and abolitionist in America, in conjunction with her invocations of biblical scripture, Latin poetry, and Greek history, function to "legitimize" the writings of Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford. Although she did not write Rev. Stanford's text, her introduction to Stanford's *Tragedy* still illustrates the filtering and control that white people attempt(ed) to have over Black messages and literature (see Sekora, 1987).

#### **IV: Ancient Rhetoric in *The Tragedy***

*The Tragedy* consists of twelve chapters across two-hundred and thirty pages (see Fig. 2 below for Table of Contents). Rev. Stanford's rich, persuasive style brings in ancient, historical, modern, biblical, and non-biblical references. In this way, the text is a collection of abolitionist arguments set in historical prose. As Rev. Stanford declares on the dedication page, he carried out this research and composition "in the hope of helping create a strong, healthy public opinion that will make it impossible for outrages and lynchings to be much longer continued" (Stanford, 1897). In Chapter 8, simply titled "Lynchings," Rev. Stanford shares the horrifying stories of the murder of Black people including Dr. Rosamore Carmier, George Swaysie, Lou Stevens, and an unnamed Black woman falsely accused of poisoning a white woman (pp. 137-168). He also provides a chart of lynchings from 1882-1897 showing a substantial increase in the number of recorded lynchings: from 50 lynchings a year to over 200 by 1893, and a count of at least 40 Black people murdered in 1897 by the time of the publishing of *The Tragedy* (pp. 137-138). This type of recording of statistics is vitally important for conducting research on abolition today. Throughout the text, Rev. Stanford warns his audience that there will be more consequences for the violence and hatred against Black

**Fig. 2** *The Tragedy*: Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introductory
Chapter 2	Africa: And How the Negro Was Brought Thence, and Why
Chapter 3	America: And What Befell the Negro Therein from AD 1619 to AD 1712
Chapter 4	How the Negro Was Treated Down to 1844
Chapter 5	John Brown
Chapter 6	Immediately Before and After Emancipation
Chapter 7	The Beginning of Better Days, and of Progress
Chapter 8	Lynchings
Chapter 9	The Negro of the North
Chapter 10	The Negro of the South
Chapter 11	The Negro of the South, and His Friends
Chapter 12	Conclusion

people. The structure, content, and message of Rev. Stanford's work illustrate an unwavering pursuit of justice and social change with an emphasis on Black history and life.

The first chapter in *The Tragedy* is the introduction that was written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, as discussed in the previous section. Rev. Stanford's research and observations begin in the second chapter, entitled, "Africa: And How the Negro was Brought Thence, and Why." At the beginning of this chapter, Rev. Stanford states that what is happening to Black people is wrong and that there are, and will continue to be, repercussions for this inhumanity. These two points are revisited throughout the text and are supported by his references to historical events and biblical scripture. The following passage on Phoenician colonization from Chapter 2 is the first example of ancient rhetoric written by Rev. Stanford in the body of *The Tragedy* (p. 13):

The Phoenicians, who lived in cities on the coast of Syria, one of which was ancient Tyre, were devoted to the pursuit of the sea, and established colonies on the north coast of Africa, and created extensive commerce. It is said of them that they were the first people to circumnavigate Africa, and that Necho, who ascended the throne of Egypt in the year 617, B.C. was the navigator.

In this passage, Rev. Stanford discusses the role of Phoenicians in the colonization of Africa in antiquity. Rev. Stanford's phrase "it is said..." offers no citation for his statements on this colonization, but echoes an ancient practice of asserting common knowledge through phrases such as *feruntur/dicitur*, "these things are said"/"it is said."<sup>22</sup> However, the next ancient reference makes clear that Herodotus is a main resource for Rev. Stanford and likely the source of this observation on early colonization. In *Histories* 4.42, Herodotus discusses King Necho and his command over Phoenician ships that led to the discovery of Libya, the

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<sup>22</sup> The so-called "Alexandrian footnote," on which see Hinds (1998), p.2.

ancient Greek term for “Africa,” a name which did not come into use until later.<sup>23</sup> Immediately after the above passage, Rev. Stanford states (p. 14):

Herodotus, who was born in the year 484, B.C. was the first Greek who traveled in quest of distant lands and the founder of Grecian geography. He explored Egypt as far as the Cataracts of the Nile, and made excursions into Lybia [sic] and Arabia, and subsequently wrote accurate descriptions of the countries he visited.

Although Rev. Stanford identifies Herodotus as widely traveled, many scholars today, and even some ancient authors in the past, strongly doubt that Herodotus actually visited many of the places he wrote about. One reason for this doubt is that Herodotus wrote material that was at times exaggerated and othering, which combined myth and geography (Zali, 2018). Regardless, Herodotus serves as an important authority for Rev. Stanford, who invokes him as an ancient writer whose curiosity about the world beyond Greece or Europe extended to ancient Africa.<sup>24</sup> In citing Herodotus, Rev. Stanford not only “proved” the credential of his own education, but, importantly, demonstrated the presence of Africa in antiquity at a time when Africa as a site of cultural or intellectual production was consistently denied. As a result, Rev. Stanford not only associated himself with Herodotus as a fellow historian but also used the ancient material as a resource for his own research on the history of colonization and enslavement.

Throughout *The Tragedy*, like many of his time, Rev. Stanford interweaves biblical and non-biblical quotations and historical events to support his position. In Chapter 2, Rev. Stanford explains that he sees skin color as the most distinguishing feature among people but this visible element of humanity is not a marker of value. After declaring his position, Rev. Stanford finds support via the Acts of the Apostles, which reads at 17:26, “...God ‘hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth’” (1897, p. 17). The narratives in Acts, a New Testament book that continues the story of the spread of Christianity under the Roman Empire, illustrate the deep and inextricable link between the Bible and ancient cultures and communities. Rev. Stanford’s quotation reminds the reader that, according to some interpretations, the Bible itself teaches unity and equity without regard to skin color. Rev. Stanford was a Christian minister, and his intended audience includes many Christians, and so his citation of biblical evidence urged Christians to consider how their own doctrine argued for the sanctity of Black life. The use of biblical quotations to support inclusion and equality in Christianity appears frequently in many Black freedom narratives such as in the chapter entitled “Fear of Insurrection” in Harriet A. Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). There, Jacobs recounts how Black people were denied the opportunity to gather together for fear that they would unite against enslavers. Instead, Black worshipers were invited to take part in communion at white churches while the minister attempted to promote equity citing Matthew 23:8-11, “God is your Father, and all ye are brethren” (1861, p. 104).

Along with biblical quotations, Rev. Stanford brings in contemporaneous events to further support his statements. Also in Chapter 2, Rev. Stanford asserts that there will be consequences for enslavement and lynching. He identifies the Civil War among other events classified as “tragedies” as past examples of retribution. Rev. Stanford also states that the

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<sup>23</sup> Derbew (2022), pp. 10-12.

<sup>24</sup> On Herodotus’ Book 3 and the Persian/Egyptian/Aithiopian ethnographers, who define ethnic identity by mutual observation, see Derbew (2022), ch. 4.

Portuguese have “long since received the recoiling punishment of wrong doing, and are to-day among the weakest and poorest nations of the world” (1897, p. 16). He then reflects on how the introduction of the Portuguese human trafficking system disrupted the conversion of African people to Christianity. In his analysis of Portuguese-led enslavement practices, Rev. Stanford embeds the story of an unnamed woman who volunteered to marry an African king in Benin in order to help spread Christianity. Rev. Stanford rejects this type of effort to expand Christianity and states, “Men cannot preach the Kingdom of God, establish colonies in peace, prosperity and social order, and at the same time buy and sell, or steal and sell, flesh and blood” (p. 20). Here too we find a parallel between Rev. Stanford and the writings of Harriet A. Jacobs (1861) who, in her freedom narrative, asks the question directly, “Are doctors of divinity blind, or are they just hypocrites?” (p. 113-114).

Immediately after his statements on the hypocrisy of Christian enslavers, Rev. Stanford offers a quote from Matthew 6:24 which states, “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (1897, p. 20). Mammon is a term meaning “wealth” of debated etymological origin (Lat. *mammona*; Gk. μαμωνᾶς; Ara. مَمُونَة [*mamona*]; cf. Heb. ממון [*mamon*]; Oxford English Dictionary). Rev. Stanford is warning his readers through ancient and modern references that enslavement and the pursuit of wealth will have consequences. His admonishment continues when he explains that enslavement is “a tragedy whose end is not death to all concerned; a tragedy whose clearest fact is fire, the fire of cleansing and deliverance. It is strange that men will so depart from virtue and plunge so deeply into sin, when they know that catastrophe must follow” (p. 24). The power of his rebuke and seriousness with which he takes his duty is a hallmark of Rev. Stanford's style.

In Chapter 5, “John Brown,” Rev. Stanford continues his chronicle of enslavement by sharing the life and death of abolitionist John Brown (1800-1859). He praises the activist for his dedication and sacrifice and shares details about Brown's attempt to liberate enslaved people in Harper's Ferry, Virginia in 1859.<sup>25</sup> After Brown was hastily captured, tried, and convicted for this attempt, he awaited his death sentence in prison and wrote letters to his friends and loved ones. In *The Tragedy*, Rev. Stanford quotes from a letter by John Brown to a minister, dated November 15, 1859, in which Brown states, “...for God's plan was infinitely better, no doubt, or I should have kept my own. Had Samson kept to his determination of not telling Delilah wherein his great strength lay, he would probably have never overturned the house” (p. 65). Here, Brown is referring to the biblical story of Samson and Delilah from the Book of Judges 13-16. Samson, a powerful Nazirite leader, revealed to his lover Delilah, a spy for the Philistines, that the source of his strength was his hair. Delilah betrayed Samson; his hair was cut off, and he was captured by the Philistines. However, Samson's hair regrew. And, while in custody, Samson received permission to go to the temple where, with his renewed strength, he collapsed the building killing, himself along with the Philistines inside, thereby becoming a heroic figure of liberation to many.

In the letter cited by Rev. Stanford, Brown likens himself to Samson. Although Samson's original plan was to keep his secret about his hair, by changing his plans, and through his suffering, he was able to fulfill his destiny, destroy the Philistines, and save others. Brown too had changed his plans for the liberation in Harper's Valley and was captured. Over the course of a few years, delays and location changes impacted the original scheme. The Commonwealth of Virginia hung John Brown on December 2, 1859. In the letter, Brown expressed hope that this was meant to happen, just as Samson's capture and death was meant

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<sup>25</sup> Now known as Harpers Valley, West Virginia.

to be, and that his martyrdom would accelerate the end of enslavement. Rev. Stanford shares this quote from Brown's letter as he honors his sacrifice and reflects on the rise of the Civil War that followed shortly after. The inclusion of personal letters and correspondence in antislavery texts can be found in other 19th century works such as Louisa Picquet's 1861 freedom narrative, which includes a chapter entitled "Letters from the Slave Mother." At the time, Picquet was negotiating the purchase of her mother's freedom. In one of the letters, her mother states, "I would giv [sic] this world to see you and my sweet little children; may God bless you my Dear child and protect you is my prayer" (Picquet, 1861, p. 31). Louisa Picquet's narrative helped her to free her mother, and these letters remain a testament to the heartbreak and pain they suffered as a family enslaved.

In addition to biblical references and personal correspondences, Rev. Stanford directly discusses Black classical scholars, including William Sanders Scarborough.<sup>26</sup> In Chapter 7, "The Beginning of Better Days, and of Progress," Rev. Stanford celebrates the achievements of Black people and directly argues against stereotypes of laziness and lack of intellect, just as the Black women educators Anna Julia Cooper (1892) and Fanny Jackson Coppin (1913) did. He provides statistics on Black wealth<sup>27</sup> and recounts many Black inventors, authors, and educators such as Landrow Bell, Thomas J. Martin, and Phillis Peters. In regard to education and literature, Rev. Stanford states, "when we find the schools of Ohio using a Greek Grammar for beginners, written by W.S. Scarborough, a coloured man, of Wilberforce, Ohio, we can and do say that the natural incapacity theory is destroyed" (1897, p. 119). Rev. Stanford praises Scarborough for his achievements and considers him an example of Black success.

Rev. Stanford's praise of Scarborough and his *First Lessons in Greek* (1881) textbook is a testament to Scarborough's reach and reputation. Additionally, this reference is another indicator that knowledge of Greek and Latin was still considered a signifier of intelligence and education, just as it had been in the 1600s during the early years in the construction of the American higher education system. Enslavers kept William S. Scarborough (1852-1926), like Rev. Stanford, in captivity at birth. After the Emancipation Proclamation near the end of the Civil War, Scarborough was free to pursue his educational dreams (Scarborough, 2005; 2006). Scarborough then went on to study Greek and Latin at Atlanta University and Oberlin College, becoming a Professor of Classics and President of Wilberforce University.

In Chapter 11 of *The Tragedy*, "The Negro of the South, and His Friends," Rev. Stanford continues to shift his focus from pain and tragedy to hope and potential. In the conclusion of the chapter, he cites Romans 13:12 ("the night is far spent"; 1897, p. 226) in reference to the centuries of enslavement and oppression. Rev. Stanford ends *The Tragedy* with a short summary and dreams for the future in Chapter 12, "Conclusion." In this chapter, he pleads for religious leaders to get on the same page and have "one accord" (p. 229) as they speak their sermons, write their publications, and address the public. For Stanford, liberation for Black communities was inherently tied to religious belief: he asserts that Christianity is a necessity for Black people, one which would "result in enlargement of their wisdom and

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<sup>26</sup> On William Sanders Scarborough and other African American classical scholars of his era, see Ronnick (1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2004) and Fikes (2002b).

<sup>27</sup> Notably, before and after Rev. Stanford's comments, there were efforts by white communities to intentionally destroy Black wealth and united communities such as the Colfax massacre (1873), Wilmington massacre (1898), Tulsa massacre (1921), Rosewood massacre (1923), Linnentown destruction (1960s), MOVE bombing (1985), etc.



power” (p. 230). As he pens his aspirations, he quotes Matthew 7:7, “Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and the door shall be opened unto you” (p. 230). His final declarations include his dream of getting antilynching laws passed and his desire to spread a unified message of peace and humanity. However, it would take until the 2022 Emmett Till Antilynching Act, one hundred and twenty-five years after Rev. Stanford wrote *The Tragedy*, for such a law to be passed.

Each of the examples from *The Tragedy* provided above function to support Rev. Stanford's position that hatred against Black people and lynching in America must end. He pulls together ancient, historical, and modern discourses to persuade his audience that ending enslavement and lynching is right and in line with scripture. His work is as much pro-Christian as it is antilynching. Given the context of white education, the largely white audiences on the antislavery circuit in America and England, and the statements of purpose by the authors themselves, the evidence shows that Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rev. Stanford invoked ancient Mediterranean texts and imagery in *The Tragedy* in order to encourage empathy and to promote abolition among educated audiences of white Christian readers in America and Britain, who were inclined to recognize and respond to classical references as well as biblical scripture. The result is a rhetorical text that is both a historical account and an antilynching treatise which was praised by some of the most powerful figures in the world during its time, but neglected by many others for decades to come.

## **V: Teaching Implications and Conclusion**

Lynching did not end in Rev. Stanford's time nor has it ended today. Until very recently, no federal definition or law existed in regard to lynching. In March of 2022, part of Rev. Stanford's dream was finally fulfilled with the passing of the Emmett Till Antilynching Act (Shear, 2022). The law is named after Emmett Till (1941-1955), a fourteen-year-old Black boy whom two white men lynched in Mississippi after a white woman named Carolyn Bryant falsely accused him of sexual harassment at a local grocery store. Contributing to the widespread support for the bill is the public outrage over the continued murders of Black people in America now, including George Floyd (1973-2020), Ahmaud Arbery (1994-2020), Breonna Taylor (1993-2020), and so many others.

When considered together, the 1897 research on lynching by Rev. Stanford, the 1955 lynching murder of Emmett Till, and the 2022 signing of the Emmett Till Antilynching Act illustrate how deep and far back the fight for justice, change, and reparations goes. In June of 2022, a seventy-year-old arrest warrant was found for Carolyn Bryant who had falsely accused Emmett Till and conspired to murder him. Bryant is still alive at the age of 88 at the time of this writing. With the discovery of the warrant, Emmett Till's family and many other people called for her apprehension (Bella and Brown, 2022). In August of 2022, however, a grand jury declined to indict Bryant, an act that has left many angry and shocked (Somasundaram, 2022). This story is not over and the fight for abolition and antilynching continues.

One challenge in this endeavor is that, in order to go further with the conversation and take action in ancient studies, we need many more people to engage in this type of research. Teaching and analyzing the works of Rev. Stanford in the classroom, including discussing and contextualizing the content and structure, can go a long way. Courses on history, literature, language, religion, and education are all possible contexts. Entry points into his work can include activities on ancient rhetoric, abolition, Black literature, and Christianity. There is space for critique and examination of paternalistic views toward Africa and African



people as well as an analysis of historical accuracy. Although some of the messages bring up serious difficulties within abolitionist and antilynching discourses, this too is an arena for fruitful discussion.

Rev. Stanford has not traditionally been called a “classicist” nor would I argue for that label today. However, he clearly was educated in and engaged with ancient rhetoric. By including him in the conversations on activism, education, and ancient studies, we broaden our field, our own knowledge, and the potential for future research and education. Concluding her analysis of ancient reception in the work of the Vietnamese educator and author Phạm Duy Khiêm (1908-1974), Kelly Nguyen (2020) writes that he sought to educate French audiences about Vietnamese culture and “carved out a third space for himself, one that challenges conventional ideas and transcends categories.” I believe that Rev. Stanford did the same. He used classical and biblical rhetoric to connect to people and to educate them on the history and experiences of Black people, to uplift international communities, and to navigate the colonialist terrain with the resources he had.

The purpose of this research is not to prove that the abolitionist rhetoric of early Black literature is legitimate or worthy of value simply because of the presence of classical references. Nor is the goal to extract classical references from Black literary traditions for study outside of the context of their use by such traditions. And it is not meant to show that Rev. Peter Thomas Stanford was surprising because he was a Black man who engaged with ancient literature. So many Black people have done the same before, during, and since his time. All those goals serve white ends and egos. Instead, my intention has been to provide readers with more information and the tools to enter these discourses and continue learning and teaching about the long history of ancient rhetoric at the intersection of activism and education, particularly in Black literature. There is so much more to be done and we need more learners and educators to carry this work forward.

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## *Mutual Aid, Solidarity, and Classics in Higher Education*

### **Sportula Europe**

**Abstract:** This paper describes the efforts of the microgrant organisation, Sportula Europe, to offer material support as well as the kinship of solidarity to historically-looted and marginalised communities within Classics. Contextualising our work within critical intellectual traditions and the history of mutual aid practices, we reflect upon non-hierarchical approaches to ameliorate the material conditions of students and researchers in our field.

**Keywords:** microgrant organisations, mutual aid, solidarity, Sportula Europe.

### **Introduction and Background**

This essay is a brief introduction to the activities of Sportula Europe during our first year, concurrent to the first phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the values of mutual aid and solidarity which underpin our work. It emphasises our continuity and similarities with other mutual aid and microgrant organisations, and the way that our model differs from some of these groups, particularly in its long-term picture. 2020's *Res Diff* conference had a strong focus on pedagogical interventions, and 2021's programme showed a similar interest; our intervention was one of the few which didn't touch directly upon teaching and learning. Rather, we looked at the material circumstances and communities which are necessary to make teaching and learning possible across institutions and disciplines, to help people from historically-looted and marginalised communities to survive and thrive in a field which is often exclusionary, in institutions of higher education which are built for specific (white, middle-class, able-bodied, and often cisgender male) audiences. This was our first time presenting as a group, and in fact the first time that we all had our names publicly associated with Sportula Europe. Up until this point, we had maintained anonymity, partly because this initiative relies just as much on the people who give us donations as it does on our small committee, and partly because we were worried about the potential backlash which can target marginalised groups discussing inequity in academia, given the shameful treatment of the founders of the US-based The Sportula at the 2019 Society for Classical Studies Annual Meeting in San Diego.<sup>1</sup>

Our work as Sportula Europe takes direct inspiration from The Sportula, a microgrant initiative launched in early 2018 by a group of graduate students and ECRs based predominantly in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Although we are fully independent from The Sportula, we owe our existence to them, both because they paved the way for microgrant and solidarity work in Classics by showing how successful such an initiative could be—without having to compromise on its key values—and because we only came together as a European collective after The Sportula issued a call for a new group based in the UK and Europe. We imitated their structure of a BIPOC-only leadership group, which influences our politics and practices but does not restrict who can receive microgrants. We are indebted to their model

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<sup>1</sup> See Quinn (2019). For issues surrounding 'race' and racism in UK Classics more generally, see Dhindsa (2020). For a discussion of these dynamics across the Atlantic, see Umachandran (2019).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://thesportula.wordpress.com/>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.



of sharing the stories of micrograntees on social media (with permission), to highlight the financial difficulties faced by students and scholars in Classics which are often kept secret, as if this were a cause for shame. There are also differences in our practice: we decided early on that we would not be using our own personal funds to finance these microgrants, donating our time and labour instead; and we saw an urgent need to fill a gap in the representation of people of colour and discussions about race and ethnicity in Classics. The UK has only one Black professor of Classics and only a handful of Asian heritage; while groups and societies of Classics students of colour have arisen in recent years, there are no national organisations like MRECC (Multiculturalism, Race & Ethnicity in Classics Consortium), the Mountaintop Coalition or AAACC (The Asian and Asian American Classical Caucus); and in terms of higher education more broadly, the UK and Europe do not have historically Black colleges and universities, nor is there a long history of Black or Africana Studies departments—the first Black Studies course in Europe was established at Birmingham City University, UK, in 2017.

Four out of the five of us were raised in the UK and studied for our undergraduate degrees at UK institutions, so both our analyses and our reach tend to be heavily weighted towards the UK. However, we receive and fulfill microgrant requests from continental Europe (including areas which are not part of the Eurozone) and have responded to a growing number of requests from Asia and Africa. We also make a point of hosting translations of our website in a range of different languages (expanding beyond the exclusionary dominance of specific ‘scholarly languages’). Nevertheless, most of our requests have been from students in the UK. Similarly, although we take a broad definition of ancient world studies and have never turned away a microgrant request for being outside of our subject area, we have found it hard to shake off the mental constraints of conventional disciplinary boundaries. Expanding our networks is a priority for the near future. In what follows of this essay, we will set out the principles of mutual aid and solidarity that have guided us in our efforts so far, before thinking about what the future holds for projects such as ours in the future of Classics.

## **Mutual Aid**

There is a significant distinction between the kind of organising we do as a mutual aid group and the emergency relief efforts that appeared in 2020 to help with COVID-related financial burdens. We laud the efforts of, for example, the Women’s Classical Caucus and the Women’s Classical Committee on both sides of the Atlantic, Classics for All for their efforts to meet the unexpected and unusual costs that students met with from March 2020 onwards, including moving housing suddenly, paying for flights home, making backup plans suddenly, losing access to libraries and archives, etc. While we met and set up Sportula Europe in the context of the COVID pandemic, we take our organizational principles and starting points from understanding that the crises that COVID has revealed are not new but exacerbated and exposed by the pandemic. So while emergency relief funds are a welcome Band-Aid, they imply that the systems in which we were working prior to the pandemic were operating fine, or within tolerable parameters, or tending to improve. We also aim to foster a network of support organised on a non-hierarchical basis; for example, during the height of the pandemic we sought to foster community through online meet-ups. While material support is essential, so is a sense of kinship.

As a group of people who live at various intersections of social marginalization (as well as privilege), we know for ourselves through our lived experience and our witnessing of the

world and academic institutions in the last ten years, that the narrative of progressive improvement just is not true.<sup>3</sup> In the UK the austerity cuts to the public sector have determined and impacted our lives from the moment that we set foot in 'higher education'. So what we do as a mutual aid group within academia addresses the system-wide failures that compound systemic pressures, stresses, and harms on the bodies of black and brown, queer, disabled people. At its most ambitious, Sportula Europe imagines new ways of surviving and thriving together, orientated towards racial and economic justice. And that, to say the least, is not a short-term goal or one circumscribed to reacting only to the immediately present disaster of the global pandemic.

So what is mutual aid, if not emergency relief? Again it's not an accident that the first time that mutual aid entered the wider cultural conversation, beyond radical and activist circles, was in 2020, when states seemed slow or powerless or actively collaborating to make worse the kinds of large scale problems with which people were dealing. Dean Spade (2020, 3-4) recounts that on the day when the first COVID-19 case was announced in Hong Kong, some of the protestors who had been in the streets resisting police and the government turned their attentions to creating a website that tracked cases, monitored hotspots, reported hospital wait times, and warned about places selling fake PPE. What this mobilized and coordinated movement was in effect able to do was to implement grassroots political action at the level at which it was needed, in ways that were more effective at containing the first wave of the pandemic than any of government responses.

Another, earlier example of mutual aid that is often adduced to show the necessity and efficacy of grassroots organising, and how threatening it is, is the work of the Black Panthers, originating in Oakland, California. Though widely known and mistaken as *only* a politically militant group in favour of armed self-defence, the much more mundane and quietly radical work of the Panthers is overlooked. They dealt with and tried to improve the material conditions of Black peoples' lives around access to housing, healthcare, and education. Fred Hampton, deputy leader of the Illinois chapter of Panthers, was particularly passionate about the need for children to have a square meal to start the day. And so the Free Breakfast Program was set up. It was for this programme that the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, dubbed the Black Panthers 'the greatest threat' to the internal security of the country.<sup>4</sup> Why? Not only was it seen by authorities as a powerful means of indoctrination and radicalisation, but it also represented a powerful vision of a different world, a world 'of freely giving more than one expects to receive from his neighbours', to use the formulation of the early Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin in *Mutual Aid* (1902, 299). It is hard to miss the echo of Marcus Rashford, the young Black British footballer leveraging his celebrity to shame the British government into providing adequate food for children during the school closures enforced by the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The point of both of these examples is that there is a desperate need to see and act beyond the narrowly circumscribed political and life-making activities that states and institutions, job markets and pipelines plunge us into. As Mathura Umachandran observed recently 'capitalism is a death cult that many of us are not supposed to survive'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See also, for example, Ahmed (2012). For a more recent exploration of the 'nonperformativity' of UK higher education's 'Race Equality Charter', see Bhopal and Pitkin (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Hoover (1969), quoted by Spade (2020, 8).

<sup>5</sup> See Olusoga and Olosuga (2020).

<sup>6</sup> Umachandran, in conversation, undated.

Mutual aid is how we can make new ways of surviving and thriving, having political imagination beyond what is given to us.

That is not to say that we think of ourselves as the Black Panthers! It's to say that we are operating in a long tradition of getting past the strictures of capitalism, as well as colonialism. We could turn to any number of examples by which colonized people have improvised ways to craftily elude imperial surveillance and governance, to help one another get around the concentration of wealth and resources into the hands of the greedy few. And so *solidarity* is the principle at the heart of mutual aid, which in addition to having a longer term and more capacious political framework, sets us apart from emergency funds or outreach grant set ups.

## Solidarity

In her book *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (2020, 136), Lola Olufemi thinks of solidarity as follows (and it's worth savouring each word, so here's the quotation in full):

Solidarity is hard to define. In the simplest terms, it can range from: working across difference, standing together in the face of shared oppression and standing alongside those with whom you do not share a common experience of the world. It's a slippery concept, it moves about, it unites and divides the movements we are a part of. A feminist definition might understand solidarity as a strategic coalition of individuals who are invested in a collective vision for the future. At the core of solidarity is mutual aid: the idea that we give our platforms, resources, legitimacy, voices, skills to one another to try and defeat oppressive conditions. We give and take from one another, we become accomplices and saboteurs and disrupters on each other's behalf.

Sportula Europe then has solidarity at its core because we want to redistribute what wealth/resources/attention we have, we who understand ourselves as sharing some common experience of the world as much as of some common experience of discipline and institution. Classics has long regarded itself as a saviour, anointed with preservative functions of civilization. For example, W. E. B. Du Bois' emphasis on a classical, humanistic education as a means for African Americans to become 'co-workers in the kingdom of culture' underpins paternalist, conservative educational philosophies found in US classical charter schools and UK academies.<sup>7</sup> This is often accompanied by a disciplinary self-positioning as being in need of redeeming or saving, as if there is a pure core of Classics that needs recovering. We are not interested in aligning ourselves with either of the sticky ends of the saviour complex. Our shared and overlapping experiences as BIPOC, queer, disabled people in Classics has taught us that unless we make our own space to ensure our mutual survival and flourishing, this discipline will always fit us badly, set us as marginal, or in countless other ways, ensure that we are harmed.

Solidarity also means recognising that we as students and researchers study and work within a world much broader than our discipline or institution. How this recognition is translated into practical action depends much on specific geographical and temporal contexts, but we as Sportula Europe consider there to be a number of unifying features for

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<sup>7</sup> See Withun (2022) for a recent example of this Arnoldian perspective on Classics.

thinking about enacting a politics of solidarity in our roles of students, researchers, and teachers of the ancient world.

Firstly, solidarity means not simply bringing more people from more diverse backgrounds into the discipline. Solidarity works to change the discipline and the institution. It is about supporting each other and joining together on a non-hierarchical, spontaneous basis to effect structural change. To return to Fred Hampton, his unique threat to capitalist white supremacy was to bring together different groups who, on the surface, had little in common—the white Young Patriots, the Latin Young Lords, and the Black Panthers—forming a ‘Rainbow Coalition’ which offered a united front against a common enemy engaged in villainising the working class regardless of skin colour. Of course, this is not to say that all forms of oppression amount to the same thing, but solidarity means identifying common themes in different struggles and areas around which to organise, as well as being available as an ally to struggles different to your own.

As this should hopefully illustrate, solidarity is an altogether different creature from a politics of representation. Solidarity addresses material as well as epistemological conditions. How can one be expected to work or study if one is struggling to make rent, afford the weekly shop, or buy a train ticket home? Often these material struggles are bound up in layers of stigma, especially in a discipline which remains so intensely implicated in class. Solidarity aims to provide a basic level of security to allow our colleagues and friends to feel able to work and thrive. Yet it extends further than this.

As previously highlighted, much of our perspective is skewed towards the UK and what follows reflects this. In the recent book *Empire’s Endgame: Racism and the British State* (2021), the authors (Bhattacharyya et al.) draw attention to the inadequacy of such a politics of representation in a university context. Representational politics tends to be centred on those who already have institutional affiliation, as students, employees, and British citizens. Where does this leave outsourced support staff, whose immigration status is sometimes precarious, leaving them open to intimidation and abuse, most obviously seen at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), a college of the University of London.<sup>8</sup> In this case, outsourced cleaning and support staff, many of whom are from Central and South America, and were employed by the contractor ISS, began to organise for safer working conditions and sick pay. In 2009, the college called staff for an emergency meeting in a lecture theatre in SOAS, where forty immigration officers lay in ambush. The cleaning staff were taken away for questioning, and six were forcibly deported from the UK.<sup>9</sup> A campaign arose, demanding that cleaning staff be brought in-house, meaning that they would become employed by the university, rather than predatory, exploitative contractors, affording them the same levels of protection and rights as other university employees. The alliance formed between cleaning staff, students, and academic staff, framed by engagements with histories of colonialism, won a historic victory in securing in-house employment, giving them access to better working conditions and protection. This fight was followed by similar campaigns across the University of London, with skills and expertise gained from the SOAS campaign shared and reshaped for these new contexts. These campaigns, too—at the London School of Economics, King’s College London, and Senate House—were successful. When we speak of a ‘decolonised university’, we need to be clear of what we mean. If, as universities now market the term,

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<sup>8</sup> Chakraborty (2017).

<sup>9</sup> Toscano (2009).

decolonisation simply means more non-white faces and more ‘diverse’ course readings then, as *Empire’s Endgame* (2020, 87) asks, ‘who would clean the “decolonised” university”?

Solidarity is not a hagiography of trade union politics. It should be noted that, of the successful cleaners’ campaigns, two were carried out under the aegis of non-Trades Union Congress affiliated unions (King’s College London and SOAS were represented by Unison). Cleaners at LSE organised with United Voices of the World, a union that specifically works with migrant labour, and cleaners at Senate House were with Independent Workers of Great Britain, a fighting union that is specifically geared towards casualised and precarious workers, many of whom are migrants. Often, larger, more institutionalised unions are themselves fiercely divided, frequently along the lines of job seniority. A recent example from a university context comes from the balloting for the 2019-2020 University and College Union industrial action. Two ballots were presented at the same time: one on work conditions, including precarity and the gender pay gap; and one on a change in pension schemes which would see retiring UK HE staff lose on average 35% of their previously guaranteed pension.<sup>10</sup> At one of our institutions, neither ballot reached the threshold of a 50% response rate on the first attempt for industrial action to be called. When re-balloted, the pension ballot reached the threshold for industrial action, but the ballot over work conditions did not. The ballots were sent together, so this meant that a good number of UCU members felt motivated to protect their pensions (important as it is), but not to stand up for their precarious colleagues, who could only dream of having a meaningful pension, and who are paid unequally depending on their race and gender. These same precarious members are often the ones overwhelmingly represented on the picket lines, since principles of solidarity mean more to them—more than a tick on a ballot box—than the tenured faculty who cannot even be bothered to respond to a ballot in support of their colleagues, so long as they get their pensions.

This is why we, as Sportula Europe, do not solicit the patronage of famous Classicists. Their support may only go so far as to not jeopardise their own positions—although, of course, there are exceptions to this, nor do we hold this against them. We aim to build a non-hierarchical network of solidarity based on the principle that an injury to one is an injury to all, rather than providing a philanthropic outlet for senior colleagues to assuage their underlying guilt. Rather than a model based on unions such as UCU, we see the recent wildcat strikes of Teaching Assistants (TAs) at University of California campuses as an inspiration, bypassing hierarchies and demonstrating the value of their labour by withdrawing it. It is shameful that TAs at a number of UK institutions are not even able to participate in UCU industrial action because they are outsourced workers—like the SOAS cleaners—who do not have the same right to strike, or indeed the same protections, as university employees.

We aim to promote a network of solidarity on a short-term level by distributing microgrants to help to ameliorate the material conditions of students and researchers in our field. In the longer term, we share each other’s stories so folks know what the situation is like for different people. We collate resources on our website bibliography—and, increasingly, blog—that foreground marginalised voices, and we aim to amplify BIPOC and LGBT+ voices, conferences, and publications on our social media. We do not want a need for mutual aid or experiences of marginalisation to be considered shameful for the individual involved—it’s important to talk openly about these things. Ultimately, our model of solidarity is based on a vision eloquently expressed in a poem immortalised during the 1912

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<sup>10</sup> For more on UCU campaigns, visit <https://www.ucu.org.uk/campaigns>; link accessed Feb. 10, 2024.



Lawrence Millworkers strike, which saw predominantly migrant women with no common spoken language come out against pay cuts and the suppression of women's work: 'hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!'

### **What is to be done, now?**

We anticipate that readers will be familiar with the *New York Times Magazine* piece by Rachel Poser on Dan-el Padilla Peralta.<sup>11</sup> Many readers will know of the controversy provoked by Padilla Peralta's interventions. What bears emphasis, though, is how pieces such as this challenge the discipline to move beyond superficial diversity initiatives which still prioritise white comfort. Knee-jerk reactions to the discomfitures provoked by Padilla Peralta's contributions largely ignore his ultimate aims: 'my only rejoinder is that I'm not interested in demolition for demolition's sake. I want to build something.'

Padilla Peralta's vision of building something new chimes with recent calls within the Classics community to 'burn it down.' There is a productive ambiguity in what 'it' is—the discipline of Classics as it currently is, or the structures of white supremacy that are reproduced by certain approaches to the ancient world? Moreover, what does 'burning it down' entail? Supported primarily by BIPOC and underprivileged scholars, this provocative exhortation encourages us to think outside of institutional structures, voice our frustrations, and question the white supremacist origins that underpinned, and continue to underpin, the discipline of Classics—note 'the discipline of Classics', not the study of classical antiquity itself.<sup>12</sup> Criticisms of this metaphor claimed it was too violent a slogan, and at times invoked the idea of being homeless. The result of burning it down, according to some, would be akin to wiping the classical world from the face of the humanities. Resistance to the underlying premise of this exhortation willfully misinterprets calls to confront the institutional racism that is plaguing the field. Rethinking the discipline, as is already being done in many quarters, would reinvigorate the study of the ancient world, bringing into play new perspectives, methodological and theoretical frameworks, and new fields of research, but it would also expose the white supremacy that lies at the foundations of the discipline. A new, more vibrant, more dynamic study of antiquity would emerge from the ashes of the old discipline.<sup>13</sup>

However, we are strongly guided by our commitments beyond the academy. The principle of mutual aid which underpins Sportula Europe's mission can and does go further than informing our practices in seeking to ameliorate the material conditions of students and researchers in our fields. It also offers a dream of a world organized differently. The last few years have seen history lurch between racist state violence and pandemic, 'culture wars' to potential nuclear ones, which would spell the end of the beautiful experiments of humankind—all set against the background of a rapidly accelerating climate crisis. Yet, as scholars of the literatures and cultures of the ancient world and its reception, we ply our trade by immersing ourselves in this particular aspect of the story of our species and its place within the world. We know what we humans are capable of—the beauty and the terror. The *Iliad*, a text placed at the foundation of our discipline, is a poem about war, but has moments of tender poignancy which continue to touch something fundamentally human in us all.

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<sup>11</sup> Poser (2021).

<sup>12</sup> See Zuckerberg (2019).

<sup>13</sup> Umachandran and Ward (eds.) (2024).



Athenian tragedy, performed at the peak of Athens' imperial power and set in the palaces of royals, has provided vocabularies and narratological frameworks for struggles against colonialism, racism, and hetero-patriarchy. We can agree with Walter Benjamin that 'there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', yet at the same time we see in these documents of barbarism—from Greek epic to the Colosseum—the embryonic form of a different world of cooperation and solidarity. A new world requires a new humanism which has peeled back the layers of coloniality which envelop humanism as it is, to reveal a more multifaceted, more capacious, more humane core of humanity, living with, not against, the planet. Despite the seeds that have been sown, and the saplings that have thrived and flourished across the continents, such a world may never be built. Indeed, the horizon of possible futures is rapidly being obscured from view. However, be that as it may, the only reasonable remaining course of action is to 'be realistic, demand the impossible', and we do not want to not succeed for lack of trying.

### **Postscript**

In the period since writing this article, the Sportula Europe team have been on hiatus. This has been precipitated by a number of factors. With the COVID lockdowns lifted and life returning to a semblance of normal pace, the pressures of our day-to-day activities squeezed Sportula activities unsustainably. Similarly, managing the finances has proven challenging. This has especially been the case when attempting to distribute microgrants outside of Europe and countries without access to PayPal (many of our requests had been coming from Asia). Additionally, some of our members have moved outside of academia while others of us are lucky in no longer being precariously employed. We believe that Sportula Europe should operate on a 'for us, by us' basis, rather than risk sliding into self-congratulatory charity or box-ticking 'EDI activities'. Others of us are coming to the crunch-time of writing up theses and wrestling with the job market. Our experiences have shown to us that what may have felt very doable in the limbo of lockdown has been less feasible in the period since, especially with a small team dispersed across countries.

We are actively seeking to pass the baton on to others. Those of us with firm institutional affiliations hope to leverage our positions in order to give the best support possible to the future iterations of Sportula Europe.

Yours in solidarity,

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