

The Corrections

Claims in circulation about The Women's Press, checked against the contemporaneous record.

The corrections below respond to claims that have circulated in press and academic accounts of The Women's Press since at least 2004. Each correction states the claim, sets out what contemporaneous documents show, and identifies the documents themselves, held in the archive on this website and at the London School of Economics. Researchers are invited to consult the documents directly.

Correction	The claim in circulation	What the documents show	Evidence
1. Who contracted the major authors	<i>The Press's landmark authors (Alice Walker, Janet Frame, Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, Patricia Grace) were discovered or contracted under Ros de Lanerolle's leadership.</i>	These authors were contracted or published by Stephanie Dowrick between 1977 and 1982/3. Of the 37 books contracted between December 1981 and October 1982, 14 were initiated by de Lanerolle. Walker was contracted by Dowrick in 1981 (Meridian; You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down); The Color Purple followed in 1983. Dowrick remained an active director of the Press until 1985.	de Lanerolle's report to the TWP board, October 1982; Dowrick to de Lanerolle, 17 June 1982 ("Alice Walker was really worried that we might lose her new novel..."); contract lists (archive).
2. The scale, duration and causes of the losses	<i>The losses were "small" and caused by the general recession.</i>	Cumulative losses reached £344,086 over the three years to end June 1991 (£822,100 in 2026 terms). The year ending June 1991 alone: TWP loss £96,873; Bookclub profit £3,205; interest costs £41,584. Costs accelerated during the period. Documented loss drivers include unearned advances, disproportionate internal costs, and an SF list produced to mass-market values without a mass-market readership.	Report by the Namara Group company secretary, June 1992 (archive), including the reconciliation of the £300,000 figure quoted in some press reports against the cumulative total.
3. The "corporate structure"	<i>The Women's Press sat inside a constraining "corporate structure" and was squeezed by a corporate parent.</i>	TWP was co-owned by Dowrick and Attallah and was based within the Namara Group, a small group of separate small-to-medium publishing operations, not a corporate. Production and distribution functions were shared with Quartet Books, expressly excluding editorial and the management of finances and staff. Attallah guaranteed the conditional overdraft and was solely responsible for debts. Solvency was a founding condition, stated publicly from 1979 ("...and for eventual solvency").	Founding record; Brenda Little, "A Press of Her Own", Cleo, June 1979; David Leser, "In Search of Stephanie", HQ, Nov/Dec 1993.
4. The Miriam Books timeline	<i>The 1991 departures were an act of principled resistance to corporate interference in a feminist enterprise.</i>	In November 1990, months before the dispute became public, de Lanerolle sent her business adviser Robert Oakeshott a detailed proposal for a rival publishing house, Miriam Books, stating that The Women's Press "faces decline if not demise" and would be "further weakened by the attracting of some of its key staff to Miriam Books". The document	Miriam Books proposal and accompanying handwritten letter to Oakeshott, November 1990 (archive).

Correction	The claim in circulation	What the documents show	Evidence
		was circulated among some but not all TWP staff; Dowrick and several senior colleagues were unaware of it. It was discovered and given to the board in late 1990. The public allegations of interference followed that discovery and concerns about the escalating losses (see above).	
5. The £500,000 buyout claim	<i>Attallah rejected a £500,000 management buyout offer from de Lanerolle.</i>	There is no archival evidence that a backer, or the finance, ever existed. De Lanerolle's subsequent ventures could not raise funds: Miriam Books published no books; Open Letters announced a June 1992 launch, produced a catalogue, and ceased trading five months later, writing to shareholders on 10 November 1992 that "the burden of debt carried by the company can no longer be sustained".	David Pallister, The Guardian, 27 March 1991; Open Letters press release and catalogue; letter to shareholders, 10 November 1992; figures supplied by de Lanerolle to Oakeshott (archive).
6. "Interference" and editorial control	<i>Attallah interfered editorially, failed to support his managing director, and resisted the growing focus on Third World women writers; some accounts characterised his conduct as racist.</i>	Both managing directors who worked with him across the Press's life deny any editorial interference. Kathy Gale: "Naim never once made any comment on the content of my or Stephanie's publishing or suggested that we should change it." The documented intervention was a request for tighter financial accountability after three years of accumulating losses, made by the person solely responsible for the debts. The interference allegation appears in the record only after concerns about losses are raised and the Miriam Books discovery, following nine publicly amicable years. Attallah was himself subjected to documented racist ridicule in the British press ("The Attallah", "The Ayatollah").	Ros de Lanerolle's defence of the arrangement with Attallah ('he wouldn't say don't publish that book') <i>British Book News</i> , February 1991 (archive). Gale statement; Attallah to The Guardian, 30 March 1991; Dowrick to The Guardian, 1991 ("That he held off for so long speaks volumes..."); archived press attacks on Attallah.
7. The revival years, 1991 to 2002/3	<i>By omission: most accounts end the story in 1991, as though the Press effectively finished with de Lanerolle's departure.</i>	Thirteen further years of publishing followed. Under Kathy Gale and Mary Hemming the Press returned a profit of £52,353 in the year ending June 1992, against the prior year's combined loss of more than £93,000, and delivered a profit in every full year of their tenure bar two when The Women's Press Book Club had been separated from The Women's Press (and was swiftly returned). New authors included bell hooks, Beatrix Campbell and Dionne Brand; the Press marked its 20th anniversary in 1998 and published until 2002/3. (De Lanerolle was MD of The Women's Press for only 9 of its 25 years as a publisher.)	June 1992 forecasts and results (archive); the publications record; 1998 anniversary material.

We would ask all researchers intending to comment on the history of The Women's Press to consider the documents published here, and to use our [CONTACT](#) page to reach Dr Dowrick or the TWP academic advisory team, to check assumptions against the record.