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PUBLISHING MODERNIST FICTION AND POETRY

BY LISE JAILLANT

Reviewed by Adrian Osbourne, Swansea University

With its pleasingly direct title, *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*¹ provides an engaging and informative entry into the burgeoning field of studies into the publishing history of modernist literature. The importance of little magazines to modernism's dissemination has been well documented, with, for example, Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible's *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (2007) and Eric Bulson's *Little Magazine, World Form* (2019) offering in-depth and contemporary assessments of journals such as *Criterion*, *The Dial*, and *The Little Review*. In *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*, Lise Jaillant brings together twelve chapters that look at how publishers large and small brought modernism to book.

The publishers and their author lists discussed in this collection provide a veritable who's who of anglophone modernism: Faber & Faber and Eliot; Shakespeare and Company and Joyce; Grove and Beckett; the Hogarth Press and the Woolfs' "friends"; and so on (Jaillant 2019, 76). Wyndham Lewis, as befits his energetic contributions to modernism, makes brief appearances in several chapters, so it is somewhat ironic that the most sustained engagement with his publishing history—in Adam Guy's chapter "Calder and Boyars"—examines the posthumous new editions of *The Human Age* trilogy (in separate volumes; 1965–66), *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1967), and *Tarr* (1968) by Calder and Boyars. As Guy argues, these publications "index the fact that Lewis's legacy and reputation were still being negotiated in the decades following his death" (Jaillant 2019, 220). In fact, the underlying point here—that the publishing industry's interest in such writers, both during modernism's heyday and the later attempts to determine its legacy, brought the not readily alignable worlds of avant-garde literature and commerce into conflict—is a thread that runs throughout the book. Almost without fail, each chapter relates how the press in question—with Faber & Faber and New Directions as notable exceptions—either folded or was swallowed up by one of the conglomerates that rule the oligopolical publishing industry today. While this is not the book's main focus, it nonetheless provides a sobering assessment of the arts' ability to withstand the forces of capitalism that is as relevant now as ever.

To return to *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*, and passing over the unpaid intellectual labor that constitutes the contemporary academic publishing model, Jaillant's introduction cogently outlines the project this book works toward, surveying the territory while issuing a call to academic arms: "It is time for modernist scholars to pay more attention to the book publishers that 'made it new' in the first part of the twentieth century" (2019, 2). Staking its claim to be the first edited collection to investigate the publishers that sold modernist titles in the US and the UK (with Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company and Nancy Cunard's Hours Press providing a French connection, even though the work they published was entirely or predominantly, respectively, in English), the book is divided into three parts: "Pioneers," "Fine Books," and "Publishing Modernism after the Second World War." These sections offer a chronological journey through modernist publishing from B. W. Huebsch's publication of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) to J. H. Prynne's *Kitchen Poems* (1968) by Cape Goliard.

Pioneers

In "Pioneers," Catherine Turner opens the collection with "Modernism, Reform and the Traditional Business of Books," which explores how B. W. Huebsch's imprint, mainly between 1906 and 1926, sought to publish barrier-breaking modernist writers while operating within the parameters of the established, and predominantly conservative, American publishing industry. While Huebsch ranked commercial value below his belief in literature's capacity to bring about change, Turner argues that he "opened the door only to a particular type of modernism, a modernism that focused on social problems" (Jaillant 2019, 17). The combination of his role as literary gatekeeper and his commitment to traditional publishing values meant that, for example, *Winesburg, Ohio* was in, while Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925) was out, as Huebsch's conception of modernism required a social critique and not experimentation for its own sake. Turner uses this to defend Huebsch from Sherwood Anderson's accusation that he passed on publishing *Ulysses* (1922) due to a lack of literary taste, suggesting instead that it was due to a perceived lack of a political engagement in Joyce's novel, however legally and financially prudent it may have been to avoid the ineluctable court action. Another strand that Turner's clear writing illustrates is how Huebsch's traditional publishing methods, which meshed with his desire to provide challenging texts to as wide an audience as possible, constituted an attempt to give integrity and respectability to modernist work, with one eye already on posterity.

"Young Americans" by Amy Root Clements discusses the firm of Alfred A. Knopf, including how it handled the American publication of *Tarr* (1918), "a particularly distinctive artefact of modernism" (Jaillant 2019, 36). Despite

an initially cool reception in the US, Lewis's first novel remained in print with Knopf some eight years later, when it was advertised as a privileged glimpse into a bohemian Paris where at any given moment, according to Knopf's advertising copy, an artist may set "the Seine on fire with a masterpiece" (2019, 37). However, at this time, Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) was about to make its American debut through Harper, and Clement indicates this formed part of a pattern of Knopf failing to retain their modernists. The reader is informed that Eliot was lost to Horace Liveright for want of an advance on *The Waste Land* (1922), but the reasons for Lewis's change of publisher are sadly absent. How *Tarr* stayed in print with Knopf for almost ten years would also merit some further investigation, when, as Clement highlights, in 1918 the *New York Times* derided "the writer's lack of skill" and suggested the novel would only please "the pretentious and the half-baked" (Jaillant 2019, 37). While the chapter opens with the questionable claim that the US of 1915 "had not yet established norms for determining which of its authors should be deemed meritorious"—which would presumably have been news to publishers, audiences, and reviewers of Hawthorne, Melville, Beecher Stowe, and Twain, to name but a few—and some of the asides feel unnecessary (do we need to know that Dorothy Bussy, whose translation of Gide was used by Knopf, had developed an unrequited passion for the French author even as he began a relationship with Marc Allégret?), its strengths are the overview of this important modernist publisher and particularly the foregrounding of Blanche Knopf's equally important contributions as cofounder and director of the company that bore only her husband's name.

Jennifer Sorensen's chapter provides a timeline of Boni & Liveright, followed by illuminating case studies of the company's promotion of modernist texts in relation to race and gender. Sorensen shows how Boni & Liveright's marketing copy for Djuna Barnes and Frances Newman oscillates bizarrely between a metaphor on the physical penetration of the female body—Barnes has been "shot once too often. But what a gallant wound!"—to an unreal intellectual merging between author and her fictional creation—"Katherine Faraday's [the protagonist of Newman's *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (1926)] ideas and actions are refracted in their transition through Miss Newman's mind" (Jaillant 2019, 62). Sorensen applies an equally keen and analytical eye to the publisher's editions of Jessie Redmon Fauset's *There Is Confusion* (1924) and Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death* (1926), exposing the problematic racial tensions and textual conflicts of marketing these Harlem Renaissance novels for a predominantly white audience.

The first section is completed with a chapter each on perhaps the most famous names of high modernist publishing: the Hogarth Press, by Claire Battershill, and Faber & Faber, by John Xiros Cooper. Both chapters offer an informative and rewarding read, with Battershill cutting through the mythos

to examine the commercial realities that made Hogarth a success, such as sales orders to Boots and W.H. Smith, while Cooper outlines the difference between the avant-garde and modernism to argue persuasively that modernism and the “fully deployed market society” are “in fact one and the same,” and that in Eliot, Faber & Faber had just the right person to not only show the age of modernity its own face for the first time, but also to sell it the mirrors (Jaillant 2019, 91).

Fine Books

This section of the volume examines the smaller presses that provided a link between the artisanal methods of the little magazines and the mass-market aspirations of the previously discussed companies.

In “Shakespeare and Company,” Joshua Kotin describes how Sylvia Beach acted as, inter alia, publisher, agent, banker, and lawyer for Joyce, all the while enabling the published version of *Ulysses* to approach Joyce’s vision by accepting constant revisions of the manuscript, even as it was at the printers. For Kotin, Beach accommodated her sole author in a way few other publishers would have managed, being equal parts “indulgent,” “idealistic,” and “visionary,” and without her, *Ulysses* “would not have been the book we know today” (Jaillant 2019, 120). The predatory nature of international publishing is also touched upon, as the editor of the American journal *Two Worlds Monthly*, Samuel Roth, took it upon himself in 1925–26 to publish, without permission, excerpts of *Ulysses*. Beach’s legal position was uncertain, and her financial resources stretched, so she organized a letter of protest against this copyright infringement, which attracted signatures from a stunningly diverse range of writers and intellectuals, including Albert Einstein, D. H. Lawrence, Mina Loy, Luigi Pirandello, and Wyndham Lewis.

Mercedes Aguirre’s chapter, “Publishing the Avant-Garde,” provides a detailed account of how Nancy Cunard’s Hours Press was no vanity project of a dilettante, managing in just four years to publish Beckett’s first book, *Whoroscope* (1930), and Pound’s *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930), with covers from artists such as Man Ray and Yves Tanguy. Aguirre makes a strong case for the importance of Hours Press in disseminating surrealist ideas and bridging French- and English-speaking avant-gardism.

Lise Jaillant looks at another short-lived press that focused on deluxe limited editions of modernist texts; her chapter “Flowers for the Living” examines the Gaige imprint, which ran from 1927 to 1929 and, among other texts, published *Orlando* (1928) and *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (1928) in the US. Jaillant effectively conveys Crosby Gaige’s efforts to produce fine editions of contemporary writing, as he attempted to bring into being the type of books he wished himself to collect. While the economic realities of the project led, perhaps inevitably, to the end of the Gaige press, Jaillant sees it as a turning point

in the history of modernism. Not only did Gaige promote Woolf as a collectible author in a male-dominated market, Jaillant also argues that Gaige's creation of fine editions of modernist texts for American bibliophiles constituted the necessary complement to the larger runs of cheap books emanating from other publishers; this formed a two-pronged approach that gave American readers access to the widest range of modernist editions yet.

Publishing Modernism after the Second World War

The final section of *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* focuses on the period of 1945–71, and it is interesting to see how the cultural and academic institutionalization of modernism, with the concomitant historicization, revisionism, and claims for legitimacy, affected, and was affected by, the publishing industry. Greg Barnhisel discusses the influential American publisher James Laughlin in “New Directions Books,” whose company is a rare instance of an ongoing concern today. Much of this is due to Laughlin's enduring vision for New Directions, which Barnhisel eloquently summarizes as a “conviction that experimental literature would renew a corrupted world” (Jaillant 2019, 176). This core ethos was combined with professional business practices that included market diversification; New Directions' “The New Classics” series reprinted “important predecessors or exemplars of modernism,” such as *The Great Gatsby* (1945), *Exiles* (1946), and *A Season in Hell* (1945), at the cheap price of \$1.50. At the same time, Laughlin produced small-run fine printings for a more exclusive, subscription-based readership. Barnhisel also rightly highlights how New Directions' “Makers of Modern Literature” series made a significant contribution to the growing field of critical modernist studies, which included Hugh Kenner's pioneering and influential study of Wyndham Lewis in 1954.

This is followed by Loren Glass's illuminating chapter on Beckett's lifelong relationship with Grove Press. Supported by images of the Roy Kuhlman book covers, Glass makes a compelling argument that these distinctive and iconic designs provide a complement to the formal and typographic innovation of a work such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954), in ways that “encourage the critical analogy between Beckett's writing and abstract painting” (Jaillant 2019, 206).

The final chapter, Matthew Sperling's “Cape Goliard,” underlines the harsh realities of incorporating a little press within a major publishing house. Sperling's account of Nathaniel Tarn's efforts to maintain Goliard's editorial independence and foster literary avant-gardism, when the executive board of Jonathan Cape held the power and purse strings, call to mind Cnut. And Goliard's cofounder Tom Raworth used the same combination of letters in a slightly different order to express his contempt for Cape's director, Tom Maschler. Sperling outlines the importance of Cape Goliard in publishing poets such as Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne, while persuasively arguing that

the press's swift demise in 1971 (four years into a legally nonbinding ten-year agreement) contributed to the effective effacement of modernism in the UK from the end of the 1960s onward. Following the closure of Cape Goliard, poets like Prynne and Raworth returned to the small presses and informal distribution networks, while American modernist poets such as Olson and Robert Duncan were barely in print on this side of the Atlantic as, in Britain, traditional poetry and the movement "structured the shape of the poetic field for the decades leading up to the end of the twentieth century" (Jaillant 2019, 248).

With its necessarily wide range of subjects, *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* may not, beyond Adam Guy's "Calder and Boyars" chapter, constitute an essential purchase for the Wyndham Lewis scholar, but the book provides an invaluable introduction, overview, and series of case studies of many of the most important publishers of modernism.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lise Jaillant (ed.), *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 280 pages.

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- Bulson, Eric. 2019. *Little Magazine, World Form*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Churchill, Suzanne W., and Adam McKible, eds. 2007. *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge.
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