

*Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Lise Jaillant (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019), 280pp.

Reviewed by **Philipp Löffler**, Goethe-University, Frankfurt

Lise Jaillant's edited collection *Publishing Modernist Poetry and Fiction* is a significant contribution to the study of transatlantic literary culture during the interwar years. The volume's strength lies in its dual purpose: it provides a selection of carefully reconstructed publishing stories behind the scenes of High Modernism *and* it reexamines the contours of modernist literature as a field by shifting emphasis from the formal analysis of individual works to particular spaces of literary production, their secret agents, and semipublic institutions. To this end, *Publishing Modernist Poetry and Fiction* combines traditional scholarship on the history of the book with a more recent perspective on literary institutions. In doing so, it argues that the material conditions of book production and trade were as important for promoting the modernist aesthetic as the literary texts themselves: it was "book publishers that 'made it new' in the early twentieth century" (2), as Jaillant claims in her introduction.

Jaillant's book, to be sure, is not the first of its kind. Modernist scholarship has received new and increased attention over the past two decades precisely because there have been excellent studies and handbooks seeking to explain the rise of modernism on the grounds of the movement's variously related institutional, sociopolitical, and infrastructural frameworks. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker's three-volume *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (2009-2013) and Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible's *Little Magazines and Modernism* (2007) offer excellent overviews on the evolution of periodical publishing between the 1910s and 1950s. Catherine Turner's *Marketing Modernism between the two World Wars* (2003) and John Xiros Cooper's *Modernism and The Culture of Market Society* (2004) both position modernist aesthetic practice in its various entanglements with the evolving literary and broader economic marketplace in the first half of the twentieth century.

And yet, Jaillant's volume is still a novelty, insofar as it concentrates exclusively on book publishers, rather than magazines or newspapers, thus focusing attention on a branch of the publishing world peculiarly neglected in modernist scholarship despite the crucial importance of such presses as Random House or Harcourt Brace. Written by a group of experts on transatlantic modernist literature and its various afterlives, the bulk of the volume's chapters revolve around episodes involving collaboration and sponsorship agreements in the 1920s and 1930s that are as familiar today as they are underexamined. These include the Woolfs' rationale for manuscript acquisition at the Hogarth Press and their rejection of *Ulysses* (chapter 4); T. S. Eliot's editorial career at Faber & Faber (chapter

5); Sylvia Beach's crucial role at Shakespeare and Company in facilitating the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* before the book was distributed commercially by Random House (chapter 6); Alfred and Blanche Knopf's decision to open a London office for publishing books that would attract educated middlebrow readers as well as self-proclaimed elite poets and critics (chapter 2). Even the most exhaustively explored of these anecdotes are presented in often unexpected new light and are written in wonderfully readable academic prose. Grounded in rare and so far mostly inaccessible archival material (including images of dusk jackets, private letters, and journal entries), each chapter succeeds on the grounds of literary-historical fieldwork in illuminating individual facets of what Pascale Casanova, writing about Paris in the 1920s, once called a "world republic of letters."

*Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* also highlights a number of publishing cases and their surrounding contexts that have not yet become modernist textbook history, if they have been studied systematically at all: Crosby Gaige's transatlantic publishing network and his endeavor to bring modernist literature to US readers (chapter 8); Thomas Mann's complicated journey into US publishing and his teaching post at Princeton that Blanche Knopf helped to arrange after the Manns were forced to leave Germany in 1939 (chapter 2). Mercedes Aguirre's chapter on the Hours Press (originally founded by Nancy Cunard in Réanville, Normandy) shows how that publishing house became a short-lived but immensely influential artistic outlet for Paris-based writers in the late 1920s and early 1930s, including luminaries like Samuel Beckett and Ezra Pound. The chapter presents Hours Press not merely as one of the many institutional relay stations facilitating exchange between the literary avant-gardes, painting, and early photography. It also reveals a dominant primitivist fascination with African culture and art among modernists expressed in such cross-disciplinary projects as *Henry Music by Henry Crowder*, which contained sheet music for Jazz piano, new poetry, and illustrations by surrealist Man Ray.

Taken collectively, the chapters are conjoined by their ambition to portray the modernist movement as a culturally, artistically, and commercially hybrid formation whose members relied as much on the highbrow/lowbrow distinction as they needed to promote their works for readers on both sides of the divide. Eliot wanted to write difficult poetry, yes, but he also wanted to "bring the Moderns to the market," as Cooper argues: "The aim was to expand the consumer base," even though high Modernist poetry already had "a reputation as difficult, obscure, highbrow productions that the ordinary person could not possibly understand" (96). And what Cooper reveals about Eliot's job at Faber & Faber is just as true for the initiatives of the Knopfs as they entered the European market or Gaige's campaign for an elite US readership demanding pricey, rare editions of European modernists that were promoted to coexist "with inexpensive editions for a much broader market" (155).

These implicit instances of value translation—often phrased in Bourdieuiian terminology—are reconstructed throughout the volume with great care for historical detail. They become conspicuously visible, however, in the third section of the book, in which the authors explore the afterlives of modernism once the movement became absorbed into the cultural mainstream, not least because modernist literary practice was disseminated through an expanding network of creative writing programs in Europe and the US. If Mark McGurl has told the story of modernism’s fall into institutionality in *The Program Era* (2009), Jaillant’s volume shows how a growing readership of students pressured publishers to offer modernist literary art in cheap paperback formats. The history of New Directions may be the best-known example of this shift for the case of poetry, as Greg Barnhisel illustrates in his contribution (chapter 9). But New Direction Books accomplished more than just to popularize Pound and William Carlos Williams. The list of the firm’s authors cut across genre distinctions and readerships, and James Laughlin, the owner, was himself trained in institutional border-crossing, moving back and forth between Harvard, where he befriended progressive Americanists, like F.O. Matthiessen, and European avant-garde art and literature. Loren Glass’s chapter on the boosting of Beckett through Grove Press tells a similar story about modernism’s various trajectories into the post-WWII cultural middle-class canon (chapter 10). Glass’s argument, familiar to readers of his *Countercultural Colophon* (2013), is that Grove Press’s *Evergreen Review* was instrumental in establishing “the iconicity of Beckett’s exilic itinerary from Dublin to Paris” at the same time that the press “fused economic affordability and aesthetic quality without being dismissed as middlebrow” (196). The “paperback revolution” (196), in other words, was both the ultimate sell-out of modernist avant-gardism and the highest form of the movement’s consecration.

Some of the most iconic writers associated with the Modernist movement are conspicuously absent or mentioned only in passing (Fitzgerald and Faulkner, to name but two prominent figures) in *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry*. This, however, is not a real shortcoming. Jaillant never lays claim to comprehensiveness and instead very sensibly concentrates on selecting extremely important case studies that allow us to reconstruct the transatlantic dimension of modernist book publishing. While the choice of these criteria—“transatlantic” and “book publishing”—are reasonable enough, it is harder to accept why Jaillant limits the contents to studies involving fiction and poetry, especially since most of the publishing enterprises featured in the volume were invested in more than just the two genres. In fact, the chapter on Grove Press is explicitly devoted to the history of Beckett’s dramatic texts in a US reading context and thus seems to expose—almost subversively—the category restrictions that the volume’s title promises.

Finally, it would have been useful to define more solidly the implications of using *modernism* as a period label. For Jaillant, modernist works are those addressing “the huge social, economic and technological changes of the early twentieth century” (3). Yet what exactly does that mean, especially with regard to the volume’s socio-institutional interest in the nature of book publishing? Or: in how far is the period model of literary history and its implicit sense of historical linearity compatible with the ethnographic tools of the literary sociologist? Period labels, it would seem, promise a sense of coherence that book history and work on literary institutions inevitably challenge. The great merit of *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* is that it engages with these issues and questions, albeit without always reflecting consciously upon the consequences of its methodology for writing literary history in linear time.

Is this a weakness? Not at all. It’s one of the best reasons to read this book, which will be of interest to connoisseurs of modernist writing as well as readers working more generally at the busy intersection where literary form, the materialities of the literary text, and the institutions disseminating and promoting them within and across readerships on both sides of the Atlantic meet. One may remain reluctant to subscribe fully to Jaillant’s claim, quoted earlier, that publishers, rather than poets, “made it new.” But the volume leaves no doubt that book publishers advanced early twentieth-century literature in ways that we are still only beginning to comprehend. *Publishing Modernist Fiction and Poetry* is an important critical resource for understanding this connection in its multiple socio-institutional dimensions.