Commerce and Culture in the Career of the Permanent Innovative Press:
New Directions, Grove Press, and George Braziller Inc.

by

Henry S. Sommerville

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Supervised by

Professor Joan Rubin

Department of History
Arts, Sciences, and Engineering
School of Arts and Sciences

University of Rochester
Rochester, New York

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Curriculum Vitae

The author was born in 1971 and grew up in Gainesville, Florida. He attended Yale University from 1989 to 1993, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts cum laude in 1993, and the University of Texas at Austin from 1994 to 1996, graduating with a Master of Arts in 1996. He enrolled at the University of Rochester in 1998, where he received the Harkins Prize in 2000 and was co-recipient of the Donald Marks “Dexter Perkins Prize” in 2002. In 2003, he received the Friends of the Princeton University Library Visiting Fellowship. He pursued his research in American cultural history under the direction of Professor Joan Rubin.
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Abstract

New Directions, Grove Press, and George Braziller Inc. were exemplary members of the permanent innovative press in the years between 1945 and 1975. Positioned between the small presses and the large corporate houses, the permanent innovative press balanced its cultural mission with the demands that the institutional form of the for-profit business placed on the cultural producer. The publishers and editors of these companies were self-conscious about the conflict between commercial and cultural values. They attempted to dedicate themselves to cultural values, as they understood them, while also reaching expanding book markets with new commercial techniques. They promoted cosmopolitanism, artistic innovation, the elevation of modernist art, and the popularization of academic scholarship through their work in reprint and paperback publishing, book clubs, journals and anthologies, translation, and book series.
Introduction

On a cold Friday morning in February 1957, Barney Rosset, owner and publisher of Grove Press, considered a request from the University of California Press to publish some stories by Giovanni Verga. The stories were already included in Grove’s edition of *Little Novels of Sicily*, but the university press thought Grove might allow a non-profit publisher to share the territory. Rosset turned California down and objected to the implied distinction, writing, “Grove Press, although theoretically in business to make money, in reality has been primarily disseminating knowledge and, therefore, I suppose that puts us on a par with you.” Rosset was not alone among commercial publishers in emphasizing his commitment to non-commercial values or in indicating his disdain for profitability. The little magazine and small press flowered in reaction to the advent of the mass media in the nineteenth century and their spread in the twentieth. After World War II, publishers like Grove Press, New Directions, and George Braziller Inc. were
able, as no previous American publishers had been, to enjoy the benefits of the mass market in books while still insulating culture from the market’s demands. At a time when intellectuals suspicious of the culture industries wondered how cultural standards could be preserved and made widely available in a democratic society, a few publishers offered an unexpected example.¹

Concerns about the dissemination of high culture within American society animated considerable cultural activity between the World Wars. Joan Rubin has shown that in this period the creators of central institutions of middlebrow culture inherited from the Arnoldian tradition a belief that the spread of high culture could help reform society. The middlebrow project was to use the expanding commercial media to mediate high culture for American audiences. In the process, the makers of the middlebrow found an enduring tension between educating, which required

¹ Barney Rosset to Glenn Gosling (University of California Press), February 8, 1957, Box 241B (Folder: Mastro Don Gesualdo Verga), Grove Press Records, Syracuse University Library Special Collections Research Center.
maintaining intellectual and artistic standards, and marketing. Catherine Turner has demonstrated that in the same years publishers sought to use new marketing techniques to propagate the experimental literature of modernism. Alfred A. Knopf, B.W. Huebsch, and Harcourt, Brace saw no need to shelter the work of James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and John Dos Passos from the market. Instead they actively reached out to readers; they even expected publicity to contribute to these writers' literary reputations. The appeal to elitism, though present, was only one element in the marketing of modernism. Publishers promised that modernist texts would help readers understand their world, give them pleasure, and enrich their lives through literary education.²

Although Turner shows that publishers made culturally adversarial and technically difficult literature available through the market, the interwar publishers were frankly commercial, which influenced

their approach to innovative literature. The freedom
with which they mixed the products of high culture
with unpretentious popular books allowed just a little
of the former to leaven their list, reducing the
urgency to seek out such work and leaving many
accomplished writers to publish with small presses, if
at all. Although they probably did not expect most
prestigious literary work to pay its own way, they
showed only intermittent loyalty to literary authors,
depending on past sales or the sales potential of new
manuscripts. This was the case with Harcourt, Brace,
which parted ways with Gertrude Stein at the height of
her career.3

After World War II, publishers that did define
themselves by their dedication to non-commercial
values were able for the first time to reach mass
markets. These companies formed a “permanent
innovative press.” The exemplary publishers of the
permanent innovative press, New Directions Publishing
Corporation, Grove Press, and George Braziller Inc.,

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3 Turner, 124-125.
were distinguished first by demonstrating their adherence to non-commercial values by fulfilling the requirement that every book they published could be justified apart from potential sales. More than this, the tenor of their publications, as a whole, certified their advocacy of particular culturally-approved areas of art, thought, or reportage. The permanent innovative press shared this characteristic with the little press, a long-standing form of cultural enterprise, from which it distinguished itself in turn by the intention of institutional permanence. The little press typically takes as its mission the support of a specific group of writers personally known to the publisher and often disbands after the writers’ circumstances change. The permanent innovative press established business connections with all levels of the publishing industry and employed business methods that required large investments and long-term stability. At the level of business practice, it resembled the large corporate press more closely than the little press. Before 1945,
successful literary presses freely diversified their lists, considering it necessary to survival. Under conditions of greater abundance after 1945, diversified publishers grew into media giants and the permanent innovative press flourished modestly even as it preserved its cultural credentials.

The commitment of the permanent innovative press to non-commercial values may be mistaken for a rejection of business values. New Directions and Grove Press in particular have been described as unconcerned with or even hostile to business, but these publishers instead operated in a spirit of principled compromise. They were entrepreneurs by choice and understood practically, in the words of Lawrence Rainey, that “cultural activity” cannot be “distilled of its material complexity,” including commerce. The compromise required that, whatever their personal interests and commitments, they must pursue them with due regard to consumer response. Publishing, as Paul Hirsch shows, is one of the culture industries that employs a process of
“overproduction and differential promotion,” in other words, introducing a great variety of products and letting the market select which will receive further support. Overproduction guarantees that an industry will still offer variety, and, by exposing the consumer to a wider range of choices, will be more sensitive to changes in consumer preference. The publishers of the permanent innovative press matched the method of overproduction to an initial selection already skewed to innovation, and, in their chosen fields, enjoyed influence in American culture out of proportion to their stature as businesses.⁴

Taken together, the assets and gross sales of New Directions, George Braziller Inc., and Grove Press were worth less than a modest chain of grocery stores, yet these few firms published many landmark books during the 1950s and 1960s. Including those then living, the list of writers they published is extensive. They supported recognized American writers

Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Henry Miller, the émigré Vladimir Nabokov, and Jack Kerouac, and introduced William Burroughs, John Rechy, Hubert Selby, Jr., Edward Albee, Denise Levertov, and John Hawkes. They published now-famous foreign authors in the United States: Jean Genet, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Kenzaburo Oe, Khushwant Singh, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, and Jorge Luis Borges. They published other acclaimed literary authors including Eugene Ionesco, Amos Tutuola, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Yukio Mishima, Osamu Dazai, Carlo Emilia Gadda, and Janet Frame. They translated or reprinted hundreds of other literary works by deceased authors and published nonfiction, from the autobiography of Jean-Paul Sartre to The Autobiography of Malcolm X. They participated in the popularization of the quality paperback book, which greatly multiplied the circulation of difficult or unconventional texts. Their numerous book series made an important contribution to middlebrow culture. The permanent innovative press and its proprietors
operated book clubs, sponsored literary prizes, and created avant-garde periodicals. James Laughlin, founder of New Directions, even directed a non-profit foundation that promoted American culture abroad from West Germany to India.

The accomplishments of Grove Press and New Directions have attracted study; George Braziller has received attention so far in more anecdotal accounts. S.E. Gontarski studies both the editorial activities of Rosset and his editors and the public reception of Grove’s literary books, giving an account of Grove’s ability to contribute a discordant voice to literary canon formation. Brian McCord also studies Grove’s success with transgressive literature, carefully examining Grove’s “cultural production” of key texts. New Directions receives a perceptive study from Gregory Barnhisel, whose central concern is with Laughlin’s evolving ideas on the relationship of literature to political ideology. To see these publishers as a group, a permanent innovative press, the present study will give a wider-ranging account of
the business practices and publishing realities that shaped the literary decisions and the non-literary production of these publishers.5

In their many activities, New Directions, George Braziller Inc., and Grove Press participated in three closely related cultural trends, each involving redefinitions of cultural hierarchy. First was the movement to make the United States the center of a cosmopolitan artistic and intellectual community; second, the elevation of high modernism; and finally the transition of middlebrow culture into academic and specialist niches. Americans embraced the migration of European intellectuals to the United States during the 1930s and 1940s as an opportunity to overcome American parochialism, as David Hollinger has shown. The effort received a new impetus in the Cold War, as Americans sought to impress Western Europeans and

highlight the openness of American society. These publishers eagerly promoted cosmopolitanism; as leading purveyors of literature in translation, they were crucial to the international circulation of texts. The 1950s also saw the wide acceptance of modernist art and literature as the inheritors of the mantle of “high art.” Embracing this discourse, these publishers took a hand in publishing and marketing modernist texts and also found that they shared the ability to define high modernism by their business practices. Finally, the three publishers created middlebrow books that presented high culture in a format that assisted aspiring readers. In each of these areas they employed a full range of publishing methods, always with an awareness that as publishers they were committed to non-commercial values.6

The chapters that follow will analyze the careers of each publisher in the permanent innovative press,

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exploring the intersection between their conceptions of value, their cultural work, and the economic necessities and opportunities they faced. Chapter 2 examines the founding of New Directions in 1936 and the development of James Laughlin’s understanding of the boundary between art and commerce. As he created a permanent press devoted entirely to literature and art, he learned to justify commercial activities without compromising his literary commitments. Chapter 3 studies George Braziller’s ascent to the highest plane of literary publishing from a book club founded on selling remainders. Self-educated and self-made, Braziller embodied the middlebrow vision of democratic access to high culture, and he made a career out of his facility with the middlebrow approach.

Chapter 4 considers the rise and fall of Grove Press, restoring the full variety of its cultural contributions, which is sometimes obscured by the fame of its most celebrated authors and legal victories. Grove’s reputation for taking risks and antagonizing
established authorities is well deserved, but the publishing house became a dissenting political voice later than is commonly recognized and devoted more attention to middlebrow publication and the college market than fits comfortably with its iconoclastic image. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the development of New Directions after 1949 into a press dependent on the college market to maintain its “literature only” approach. As Laughlin diverted his ideological energies into the Intercultural Publications foundation, New Directions restricted its production of new titles and instead collaborated with other forces in the publishing industry to create an efficient, nationwide distribution mechanism.
Chapter 2
New Directions:
From Little Press to Permanent Innovative Press

In 1949, Robert Phelps launched Grove Press from his Greenwich Village apartment by publishing three obscure, long out-of-print works by authors of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. On August 16, Phelps wrote New Directions to ask for permission to quote from William Empson’s critical treatise Seven Types of Ambiguity in Grove’s forthcoming selection from the poetry of the English metaphysical poet Richard Crashaw. James Laughlin responded promptly, granting the permission for a modest fee of ten dollars, praising Phelps’s plan to produce inexpensive reprints of literary works, and placing a standing order for one copy of every future Grove Press book.¹

Laughlin’s gracious collegiality indicates that he welcomed the new firm into the field in which New

¹ Robert Phelps to New Directions, August 16, 1949; James Laughlin to Robert Phelps, August 24, 1949, Item 694, New Directions Records, Houghton Library (hereafter NDR). Item numbers in the New Directions Records refer to entire categories of classification, in this case the file for Grove Press, not to an individual manuscript.
Directions, over the course of almost fifteen years, had established itself, the field of what might be called the “permanent innovative press.” Like New Directions, Grove was not to be the momentary instrument of an artistic community, but the representative of literature to the larger society. This mission included publishing reprints of important “lost” works, like those on Grove’s list; it entailed keeping titles in print, dividing titles into series in the manner of large commercial publishers, and producing anthologies or magazines to publicize the press. In 1949, the scale of these enterprises was about to grow dramatically in terms of print-runs and sales, but already New Directions had established a pattern that Grove Press set out to reproduce.

Although Laughlin probably did not suspect that Grove would develop into a competitor to New Directions, he must have remembered that just three years earlier he had hoped to reprint, in a series called Modern Readers, what became Grove’s first book,
The Confidence Man by Herman Melville.\(^2\) In Laughlin’s enthusiastic response to Phelps, he gives no hint of disappointment or territoriality; the Modern Readers series, announced in 1946, included so few books that it never established an identity for itself and, while publishers rarely announce the end of a series as they do the inception, Modern Readers may have been discontinued by 1949. The series had been dedicated to relatively expensive reprints costing $3.50 instead of the one dollar usual for cheap reprints. The Modern Readers titles Laughlin projected in 1946 were squeezed off the list by a spate of books with greater potential. Also, Laughlin felt that New Directions had overextended itself in the late forties and he may have welcomed a publisher like Grove that sought to fill a need his firm was not large enough to satisfy alone.\(^3\) New Directions had reached its mature stature and could tolerate and even invite imitators.

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If the creation of Grove Press appeared logical in 1949, New Directions began in 1936 as an anomaly, intellectually and commercially. It revived the faltering tradition of the little press devoted to art rather than politics. At a time when the commercial press had adopted modern literature, New Directions appeared as the defender of the artist against the lures of commercialism as well as the false road of socialism. Its founder was a twenty-two year old Harvard undergraduate; though young, James Laughlin was already the editor of the literary page of the magazine *New Democracy*, an editor of the *Harvard Advocate*, and was personally familiar with Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams. Laughlin came from one of Pittsburgh’s wealthiest families, the Laughlins of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company; his early years were shaped by a training in upper class recreations and a stiff Presbyterianism. The poet, translator, and teacher Dudley Fitts helped interest James Laughlin in literature during his years at Choate School between
1930 and 1932, and Laughlin soon embraced writing as a vocation. Fitts taught Laughlin the modernist authors before the term “modernism” had established itself in the critic’s vocabulary. Although American awareness of the “new” style of writing had been growing for about a decade, it was still some years from entering undergraduate, let alone secondary, curricula, so Laughlin had a head start on many older writers and, more importantly as things turned out, publishers. Fitts’s help did not end with teaching the texts; he also provided an introduction to Pound when Laughlin traveled to Europe in the summer of 1933, after his first year at Harvard. Laughlin sacrificed a few days of skiing to visit Pound in Rapallo, Italy, and was rewarded with regular correspondence from the poet. By December, Pound was referring to Laughlin as “Dilectus Filius,” and giving Laughlin the names of writers to contact on behalf of the Harvard Advocate, including William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky. 

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From the perspective of a later time, these contacts appear not only precocious, but prescient; in 1933, however, they could have seemed marginal to the thrust of literary life. Indeed, the availability of a long-established modernist author like Williams to an undergraduate publication, even Harvard’s, indicates how few outlets existed for experimental writing.

Laughlin became the beneficiary of changing literary fashions in the authors he acquired. Following the First World War, the legacy of art-for-art’s-sake was adopted by writers and intellectuals repelled by the propaganda produced during the war and also by the new social and economic order characterized by advertising and large corporations. As historian Richard Pells argues, the twenties witnessed a “general revolt against ideology” among intellectuals and artists, who called for “a separation of art from all external pressures.” If art served as a refuge from society, the social content of art attracted less interest than the style or technique of presentation. According to this view,
literature contributed to society precisely through the development of new artistic techniques, innovations in language and form, that allowed artists to "restate and reinterpret" the human situation. In the twenties, artists like Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound believed that until this artistic work had been accomplished, the attempt to reform society would be futile. These writers, and their outlets, such as Poetry, Dial, and Hound and Horn, devoted themselves to what they perceived as purely aesthetic standards.5

Intellectuals from Edmund Wilson to Archibald MacLeish turned away from this vision during the Great Depression, accepting in its place the need for political, social, and economic reform. Art was assigned various degrees of autonomy; at one extreme some doctrinaire communists believed that ideology should direct artistic production. Historian Michael Denning, who makes a strong case for the artistic accomplishments of the thirties' left, nonetheless

celebrates the priority of social concern during this period.⁶ Among the minority of artists who did not take up positions on the left, a number, including the poet Ezra Pound, embraced the revolutionary creeds of the right, the schools of thought from which fascism sprang. Pound’s dogma of choice was Social Credit, as propounded by the English engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas. Social Credit proposed a single root cause for war and depression: the loaning of money at interest, or in Social Credit terms the private creation and control of credit. In practice, the movement tended to target Jewish banking families like the Rothschilds and, by extension, Jews in general, as the source of social ills.

James Laughlin, unsurprisingly given Pound’s powerful influence, became a proponent of Social Credit himself, but his commitment to this cause conveniently demanded that he devote himself to innovative literature rather than social protest. Only nineteen when he met Pound, Laughlin already thought

of himself as having a mission on behalf of literature. Perhaps reflecting the values of his teacher Dudley Fitts, he described himself as "full of 'noble caring' for something as inconceivable as the future of decent letters in the U.S." Though his ironic tone suggests that he feared sounding naïve, Laughlin threw himself into his mission. He approached Pound for advice in attacking Henry Seidel Canby and the Saturday Review of Literature, and he promised to "preach" Pound's poetry to "the few men in the two universities [Harvard and Yale] who are worth bothering about."  

Without Social Credit, Laughlin's cynicism about the general level of culture in the United States and his disdain for the popular journalistic treatment of literature would have been merely critical at a time when intellectual discourse demanded a constructive plan. Social Credit, in Laughlin's case, entailed reaching out to the cultural elite who could appreciate literary art; Pound, by contrast, strove, in his words, "to instruct the pore

7 Gordon, 3; and James Laughlin to Ezra Pound, August 21, 1933, in Gordon, 3.
The relationship between Laughlin’s literary vocation, his politics, and his family background is not clear. Laughlin resisted biographers during his lifetime and his handful of autobiographical writings give a mixed idea of his feelings about his family wealth. In 1992 he praised his forebears for the “thrifty intelligence” that had made his publishing ventures possible, writing: “Those old boys [his ancestors] are not a burden to me at all.”

Four years later, he sounded a different note writing to William Corbett, whom he commissioned to write a history of New Directions. Instructing Corbett to stress literature and not biography, he added, “Please, NO MENTION of J & L Steel. That’s been a curse for years. A huge family having 5 issue at each step of the ladder. My share of the stock was less than 1/2

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8 Ezra Pound to James Laughlin, December 2, 1934, in Gordon, 36.
of one percent of the total. I did not inherit anything till I was about 40."\(^{10}\) If the size of his family gave Laughlin little chance of rising to a position of importance within Jones and Laughlin Steel, he might have had a motivation for rejecting the business world altogether. On the other hand, his family money, at first in the form of an allowance and regular gifts, clearly allowed him to assume a literary mission on the business side of literature. A starving poet may create great literature, but a impecunious publisher cannot function at all.

It is also tempting to see Laughlin’s refusal of economic radicalism as a defensive instinct by a member of the upper class. Pound himself coached Laughlin to defend Social Credit to his family, if the occasion arose: “If yr granpap gets sore tell him DOUG[LAS] ain’t out to cut the throat of the industrials.” Elsewhere he wrote Laughlin, “I believe the new econ / is good for all industry. only bank

lice. to be killed off.”¹¹ Laughlin’s rebellion against the world of business stopped well short of wishing to see his family’s industrial fortune socialized.

As a result of Pound’s influence, Laughlin continued to espouse a belief in Social Credit ideas as late as 1946, when the movement itself had lost the impetus of the depression and been discredited in the U.S. for its kinship with fascism. Although Social Credit served Laughlin’s need for a reform program to espouse, he always gave literature the first priority, even in the climate of the thirties. Before meeting Pound, Laughlin expressed his mission in strictly literary terms. Even two years later, when, at Pound’s urging, Gorham Munson placed Laughlin in charge of the literary page of his Social Credit magazine New Democracy, Laughlin’s loyalty to the political cause was not uncritical. He shared his skepticism for the movement’s grander claims with

William Carlos Williams, another of Pound’s converts to Social Credit: “Munson wants it [the literary column] to center on New Forms, the idea being that Social Credit is the partial manifestation of a renaissance of all creative thought. That’s a bit thick for me.”

When New Democracy was discontinued less than a year later and Laughlin was freed from Munson’s editorial guidance, he reformulated the Social Credit critique to emphasize the primacy of literary innovation. Laughlin transferred the name he had given to the New Democracy column, “New Directions,” to the publishing venture. The continuity between magazine and publisher was evident in the contents of the anthology New Directions in Prose and Poetry 1936, which featured many of the same writers published in New Democracy and the Harvard Advocate. Laughlin also made room for a brief statement by Gorham Munson in support of Social Credit and, laying aside his former

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12 James Laughlin to W.C. Williams, September 20, 1935, in Witemeyer, 3. In the same letter, Laughlin also notes that he personally paid contributors of poems to New Democracy “out of my fund” since Munson was “broke.”
skepticism, began his preface by calling “the New Economics of Major Douglas” the “spearhead” of a “change in the state of the world mind.” But, he continued, after a year of involvement with Social Credit, he had concluded that the “emphasis of leadership” should be placed upon “the poet--the word-worker” rather than the economist.

The possibilities discovered by the new economics could only be realized if “poets,” in the honorary sense that included worthy writers of prose, could change the language, a task they would have to perform through isolated artistic invention. Poets, Laughlin argued, represented the “will of the individual to express his ego”; their ambitions were opposed by the “will of the community” to continue in its established paths. With this formulation, Laughlin affirmed that experimental writers acted as “agents of social reform” while also defending artistic individualism. The curious result was to argue, in effect, that

13 James Laughlin, “Preface,” New Directions in Prose and Poetry 1936 [1] (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1936), vii-ix. After the initial reference to each annual, it will be abbreviated as ND with the volume number and year.
economists and reformers were fine for cooking up ideas about how society might work, but real change depended on poets. The idea of the poet as agent of social change was not new, but Laughlin was unusual in giving it such a strong emphasis in the face of the economic calamities and political ferment of the 1930s.

The model Laughlin presented for the operation of experimental writing in 1936 and 1937 was simplistic, did not explain the function of literature, and, though glorifying artists, gave them a narrow technical function. The “word-work” Laughlin thought necessary extended only to words. Laughlin’s explanation of the paralysis of language was that abstract words, as opposed to “concrete” ones, lost their clarity as their original concrete meanings were lost; the words came to take their meaning from “associative word linkages” in which the individual words were not used precisely; finally, these sets of linked words, or “verbal patterns” could only be learned through uncritical memorization. Thus an
expression like “The American Way” inculcated in those who learned it the inability to think critically about the concept being named, because it did not refer to anything specific and concrete.\(^\text{14}\)

The idea that critical thought depends upon the use of concrete words and that abstract words cannot be used with precision is misguided because it holds language to an impossibly reductive standard. Furthermore, they reduce literature to the task of redefining particular words, or, as in Laughlin’s examples, making people aware of cliched associations. These arguments echoed the educational theory of the Basic English movement, which Laughlin mentions; they hint at logical positivism, which he does not mention; and they are reminiscent of ideas that William Carlos Williams had employed in an essay on Gertrude Stein, about her use of words “as things rather than as ideas,” and yet Laughlin’s summation does not express a collective goal of the experimental writers he

published.\textsuperscript{15} Laughlin’s critique also implies that non-experimental literature merely repeats the crippling associations and false thought of common propaganda. Experimental literature is made the handmaiden of clear, logical thought, without any reference to aesthetic goals, while the rest of literature is merely an encumbrance to rational thinking about social issues.

Despite these inadequacies, which Laughlin would begin to remedy by 1938, the theory with which he launched his enterprise served his current needs. It gave New Directions a veneer of social activism and, more importantly, a rationale for supporting the individual artist in his or her artistic researches. If the activist stance was a concession to the mood of the times, the goal of supporting artists represented the actual function of the new publisher. The need for New Directions may not have been felt by society, or even the book-buying public, but it was felt by writers having trouble publishing with the existing

magazines and presses. Despite the presence of some experimental writing in mainstream media in the 1930s, whole groups of writers found themselves excluded. Their work had not been selected for communication to a broader audience by the mechanisms of middlebrow culture. Laughlin’s venture served them at first as a small literary publisher would, merely getting their works in print. By the late forties, however, by keeping work in print and by using reprints to add breadth and prestige to its list, New Directions could mimic larger publishers closely enough to create around its list an aura of middlebrow acceptance, even without reaching a commercially significant audience. The immediate consequences of Laughlin’s venture for the careers of Pound, Williams, and Henry Miller showed the continuing need of innovative writers for a small press and the difficulty of marketing modernism in the thirties and forties.

Although Pound first counseled Laughlin to become a publisher and provided him the contacts that made him a credible presence in the literary world, it was
Williams who first availed himself of Laughlin’s aid. Apart from several anthologies, New Directions published only two original works in 1936 and 1937. The first was a surrealist pamphlet by Laughlin’s Harvard classmate Wayne Andrews, writing under the pseudonym Montagu O’Reilly. The second was Williams’ novel White Mule. Despite Pound’s long-standing support from abroad and a career of more than twenty years publishing in the literary magazines, including Poetry, Dial, Others, Contact, Hound and Horn, Secession, and recently even the New Masses, Williams in 1936 had difficulty finding outlets for either his poetry or his prose. Outside of literary circles, publishers were apparently unimpressed by Williams’ 1926 Dial award, Pound’s laudatory 1928 article in the Dial, “Dr. Williams’ Position,” or the 1929 study, written in French, that ranked Williams, Pound, and T.S. Eliot as America’s leading poets.16

16 The Dial award came with $2000, enough in 1926 to impress Williams’ non-literary friends in Rutherford, NJ. The French study was René Taupin’s L’Influence du Symbolisme Française sur la Poésie Américaine (1910–1920). See Mariani, 138, 305–306.
If Williams was a fixture in literary society and had gained some recognition, his writing did not recommend itself as a business proposition. Although Williams himself regularly covered some of the costs of his publications, they probably still represented a substantial loss for their publishers. A limited edition of a new book of poems, *An Early Martyr*, published by Ronald Lane Latimer in 1935, had sold only eight copies in its first year, at the luxuriously high price of $7.50 each. Another publisher, the Dragon Press of Ithaca, New York, lost interest in its collaboration with Williams so completely that it simply stopped communicating with Williams a year after it published the short story collection *The Knife of the Times* in 1932. By 1936, Williams had almost despaired of seeing his third novel, *White Mule*, in print, after two different agents in two years failed to attract an established publisher. Even the serialization of the novel in *The

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17 Mariani, 388, 369, 324.
Magazine that year failed to excite interest in the work.

So it happened that young James Laughlin could publish a major new work by an established literary author without coaxing, without even a mediocre advance, but simply by his willingness to publish what no one else would. So thrilled was Williams by the offer to be published, and at no expense to himself, that he addressed his answer to Laughlin’s offer “Dear God.” If we choose to see Williams as accumulating “cultural capital” by playing a literary game, as deliberately turning his back on commerce to establish his membership in the sacred order of artists and planning consciously or unconsciously to make money out of that status once established, then we have to admire the great patience of such a strategy, patience that could bring Williams to rejoice, after decades, at finding a fledgling publisher who, without offering real financial rewards, offered only the chance to appear in print without cost. For New Directions as

18 W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, October 27, 1936, in Witemeyer, 5.
well there was no guarantee that Williams’ work would ever interest a large public or that it would enjoy the profits in the event that it did.

In the case of Ezra Pound, who soon had more New Directions titles than Williams, an author previously established with the mainstream press reverted to small press publication. The expatriate Pound had published steadily in the U.S. during the 1920s and early 1930s. The first three volumes of the avant-garde Cantos appeared from Farrar and Rinehart, publisher of the great best-seller of the early thirties, Anthony Adverse. Liveright Inc. and its successor Liveright Publishing Co. published Pound’s prose and an American edition of Personae, a collection of early poems. Although Liveright had the stomach to publish Pound’s Jefferson and/or Mussolini in 1936, New Directions began to handle prose titles with Culture and a translation of a Confucian text entitled Ta Hio in 1938. A book of literary essays selected by T.S. Eliot, Polite Essays, followed in 1939. Culture, Pound’s “intellectual autobiography,”
was not published under its provocative British title, *Guide to Kulchur*, and was allowed to languish in obscurity lest it draw unwanted attention to its author’s political views.\(^{19}\)

In 1939, after publishing *The Fifth Decade of Cantos* in 1937, Farrar and Rinehart, who had been steadily losing interest in Pound as his literary reputation waned and his notoriety as a fascist sympathizer waxed, allowed New Directions to take over their Pound copyrights.\(^{20}\) New Directions advertised the first four volumes of the *Cantos* and a reprint of the *ABC of Economics* in *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* 5 in 1940, bringing its Pound titles to eight just before Pound became unsaleable and almost unmentionable in the U.S. In January 1941 Pound began to broadcast messages critical of the United States on behalf of fascist Italy.

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\(^{20}\) Barnhisel, 80.
Laughlin did not publish Pound again until 1948, but he never renounced his connection to Pound as a person and a poet. Pound’s political disgrace may even have improved the friendship from Laughlin’s vantage point by helping him assert himself against Pound’s domineering interest in his publishing activities. In 1939, when Pound was desperate for his help, Laughlin finally condemned anti-Semitism to Pound and demanded a contractual clause to free him from publishing “anything that can be fairly construed as an attack on the Jews” before New Directions took on the publication of the *Cantos*.\(^\text{21}\) Gregory Barnhisel, in his extensive study of the author-publisher relationship, found that Laughlin, though loyal to the idea of Social Credit, was determined to prevent the identification of New Directions as a political publisher. Laughlin regretted the association of Social Credit with fascism and discouraged Pound from

\(^{21}\) James Laughlin to Ezra Pound, December 5, 1939, in Gordon, 108-110.
expressing anti-semitic ideas during the poet’s 1939 visit to the U.S.  

Laughlin took measures to suppress or minimize Pound’s fascism for the sake of Pound’s and New Directions’ reputations in the literary world. From a political standpoint as well, Laughlin regretted Pound’s embrace of fascism. He told Delmore Schwartz in 1939 that when Pound “became a Franco and Hitler man, I found the going thick.” From a literary standpoint, Laughlin found Pound’s recent *Cantos* a falling off from his earlier work.  

If the prospect of commercial gain from the works of Ezra Pound entered Laughlin’s mind in 1940, it must have been a very distant prospect. Publishing Pound, like publishing Williams, was about rescuing an artist from the neglect of the existing press, a glorious mission but neither a political nor a commercial one.

The case of Henry Miller, another expatriate American author found objectionable in his native

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22 Barnhisel, 72-73, 75. Barnhisel also perceived Laughlin as gaining more control in his relation with Pound around 1939. See Barnhisel, 78.

23 James Laughlin to Delmore Schwartz, April 27, 1939, quoted in Barnhisel, 73; Barnhisel, 87.
land, shows some parallels to that of Pound, but ends with the author’s growing popularity. This popularity made Miller momentarily appealing to larger publishers, but ultimately New Directions published even the less scandalous Miller works. Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, published in Paris in 1934, was a novel, in George Orwell’s phrase, “full of unprintable words.” Laughlin began to correspond with Miller soon afterward and arranged to publish an excerpt from his work *Aller Retour New York* in the Harvard Advocate in 1936. When Cambridge authorities confiscated that issue on the grounds of obscenity, Laughlin had an early taste of censorship, but was undaunted. In the fall of 1938, Laughlin planned to publish a limited edition of *Tropic of Cancer*. New Directions had already demonstrated a sober literary interest in Miller, publishing passages from *Cancer’s* sequel *Black Spring* in the 1936 and 1937 annuals. In his enthusiasm, Miller failed to hide his surprise, writing, “I never expected you to come across with publication, in view of your family etc—I am still
dazed!”24 As it turned out, Miller would be disappointed.

*Time* magazine broke the story of the impending publication in November 1938, heading a section of the “Books” page “Dithyrambic Sex.” In their customary style, the editors at *Time* poked gentle fun at the book while making it clear that they were familiar with it and not unduly shocked; they even conceded that Miller’s treatment of his subject “lift[ed] this mess above ordinary pornography.” *Time* backhandedly complimented New Directions as the “centre for experimental writing in the U.S.,” but it also exposed Laughlin’s plan for a quiet limited edition.25 By late spring of 1939, Miller had heard “from various sources” that Laughlin was delaying publication because of the publicity created by the *Time* article. While Laughlin assured Miller that he was only waiting until he had $5000 saved to cover marketing and legal

25 “Dithyrambic Sex,” *Time* 32 (November 21, 1938): 96. *Time* described “experimental writing” as “that cloudy area of modern letters with its little magazines, obscure poems, defiant manifestoes, communications from Ezra Pound.”
expenses, he also began plans to publish a book of essays, which appeared in the fall as The Cosmological Eye. In 1940, Laughlin remained reluctant to release Miller from the contract for Cancer because “at any time changes might occur in my family” that would make publication possible.26 Laughlin, who was not to inherit any of his family wealth in his own right for more than ten years, relied on his father and aunt Leila Carlisle for gifts that would allow him to operate New Directions. He was convinced, he remembered later, that publishing Miller would alienate his aunt, who became his chief benefactor after his father died in early 1938, and endanger the whole enterprise.27 After New Directions published a second collection of Miller’s essays, The Wisdom of the Heart, in 1941, Miller broke with Laughlin, complaining that his books had been edited and retitled without his permission. Laughlin allowed Miller to look elsewhere for publication of the

Miller’s freedom only taught him the value of New Directions’ support. Although Miller quickly made contracts for a new book with Doubleday, Doran, and with the Atlantic Monthly for excerpts, the work in question was a vigorous attack on the United States, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, which Miller had begun planning in 1939, even before returning from Europe. The deals with both publisher and magazine fell through, and for three years Miller published pamphlets with tiny independent West Coast publishers. In 1943, the rift with Laughlin was healed and New Directions brought out another collection of essays, *Sunday After the War* (1944) and, circumspectly waiting until the war was over in 1945, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*.\(^2\)

By that time, Miller’s *Tropics* books had been read by thousands of American soldiers in France, in addition to civilians at home who obtained smuggled

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\(^2\) Wickes, xii.

\(^2\) Henry Miller to James Laughlin, December 7, 1939, in Wickes, 29. See also, Wickes, xiii, xv-xvi.
or pirated books. Fortunately for New Directions, this success came after Miller’s experiment with the publishing establishment had ended; Miller did not publish any major works elsewhere until Grove Press finally published *Tropic of Cancer* in America in 1961.

Pound, Williams, and Miller may be major figures in later literary histories, but from the perspective of the publishing industry of the late 1930s, they were marginal and could be wooed and won by a small new firm. We should resist the conclusion, however, that the kind of writing they did was simply unmarketable, or that New Directions, in publishing them, renounced any hope of successfully marketing their work. As Catherine Turner documents in her study *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars*, the new generation of American publishing houses, led by B.W. Huebsch, Alfred A. Knopf, and Harcourt, Brace, advertised and marketed the “new” literature of modernism beginning in the 1920s. The most notable successes fell to Random House, with the publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1934, and to stodgy
Charles Scriber’s Sons, which found in Ernest Hemingway one of its top-selling authors of the thirties. As Turner argues, publishers’ advertising attempted to sell modernism as art, appealing to the desire for both aesthetic experience and social distinction, and, on the other hand, to sell modernism as a source of information about contemporary life and intellectual fashion.

Even established firms did not necessarily publish these works merely for literary prestige, as the case of Gertrude Stein shows. After Harcourt, Brace and Company’s 1934 reprint of The Making of Americans failed to repeat the unexpected success of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, the firm dropped Stein. Harcourt’s commitment to modernism did not extend to losing money on Stein’s acclaimed, pioneering, but difficult work.\(^{30}\) If New Directions showed a greater commitment to difficult writers, it also sought a smaller market and, in the context of

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that market, judged a writer’s marketability differently.

New Directions, like Harcourt, did not believe that publishing modernism was, by definition, bad business. Even for a firm like New Directions, survival depended on sales. Subsidized publishers operate, for the most part, just like unsubsidized publishers. Publishing houses are traditionally started by people with money from other sources, especially family money, but few publishers have been wealthy enough to sponsor an enterprise of any size without the business operation almost paying for itself. In Laughlin’s case, and probably in most similar cases, the family money served to launch the business, provide cash when debits exceeded receipts, and absorb small deficits at the end of each year. Even such a limited subsidy could add up to substantial sums over the course of ten years, but the cost of the entire operation would be vast in comparison. Once launched, New Directions had to operate mostly on its own revenue.
Laughlin's commitment to the business side of his publishing firm is evident in his personal efforts at selling his books and his early arrangements for a sales force. As he wrote later, Laughlin had at first "imagined that if one printed a book by Pound or Williams, loving angels and apsarases would carry it on swift wings to bookstores, libraries, and readers in all corners of our Great Land, including Arkansas and Alabama." When Laughlin realized that someone must actively sell the books, he undertook the job himself, working his way west, stopping at books shops and department stores. He later remembered embarking on these trips during reading periods at Harvard, "load[ing] up his ancient Buick with books" and going as far as Omaha three times. Probably realizing the

32 Laughlin's version is given in "Some Irreverent Literary History," 223, and also appears in William Corbett, typescript, 1997, Item 6 Folder 2 (WCA). Correspondence from the period confirms one trip, ending in Minneapolis, in September and October 1938. See James Laughlin to Franklin Watts, March 7, 1939, Item 4719, NDR. Laughlin also mentions his plans for this trip to Delmore Schwartz in March 1938, referring to it as "my sales trip" (suggesting that no earlier trip was planned in 1938). Laughlin might have made "reading period" trips as late as the beginning of 1938, but he would have had only six titles.
tedium and inadequacy of his efforts, in 1938 Laughlin also asked friends in the publishing business to recommend salesmen from around the country who already traveled for other firms and might be willing to pitch New Directions books on the side. Following his friends’ suggestions, Laughlin made arrangements by the summer of 1939 for the East Coast and the Midwest, the South, and West Coast.33

Laughlin’s appeal to prospective salesmen shows that he thought about how to present New Directions’ books in a commercial setting. In describing his list, he avoided the term “experimental,” so important in his prefaces to the annual anthologies, substituting “modern,” a vague term with a long history in advertising discourse. In similar ways, Laughlin showed his awareness of the categories into

33 The salesmen were Franklin Watts (East and Midwest), Ralph G. Morrissey (South), and Donald Corbin (West Coast). For details, see the correspondence from 1938 and 1939 in Item 4719, NDR. Another salesman may have covered the Northwest, as well. For Laughlin’s statement that New Directions sought salesmen “already travelling for a larger firm” see James Laughlin to Paul O’Neal, February 8, 1939.
which the mechanisms of marketing sifted new books: He chose terms associated with artistic literature. In one appeal, he wrote, “We do about a dozen books a year of a literary character--high quality and very modern”; in another, “I might describe New Directions as the ‘highest-browed’ publishing house in the country.”

Emphasizing quality, Laughlin promised that all ten of the Fall 1938 books were “tops in their fields” of poetry, criticism, and fiction. He admitted that, despite their excellence, the commercial potential for the books was limited, but claimed that the books sold well when offered to the appropriate customers. “It is not the type of thing” he wrote, “that sells in quantity or that appeals to the department store buyer”; but, he assured his correspondent, “We have a nice little trade with good stores serving an intelligent clientele.”

Laughlin did not, however, envision all his customers as connoisseurs. To a prospective salesman with

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34 James Laughlin to S.J. Reginald Saunders, April 3, 1939; James Laughlin to John D. Chase, July 2, 1938, Item 4719, NDR.
35 James Laughlin to John D. Chase, July 2, 1938, Item 4719, NDR.
experience in the academic market, Laughlin added that “college stores are among our best outlets and, of course, we are aiming straight at the libraries.” Indeed, Laughlin noted that they gave libraries a discount of twenty-five percent “to combat the jobbers” who bought the books wholesale and sold them to libraries below the list price.\(^{36}\)

New Directions’ interest in improving its commercial situation soon led it to experiment with a close association with another publishing firm, one run along more usual commercial lines. In 1940, New Directions abandoned its modest individual sales arrangements and contracted with the newly founded firm of Duell, Sloan and Pearce to handle sales and distribution. C. Halliwell Duell, Samuel Sloan, and Charles A. Pearce, who had founded their firm the previous year, were still in their early thirties but had among them more than three decades of experience at leading publishing firms such as Appleton, Doubleday, and Harcourt, Brace. Although Duell, Sloan

\(^{36}\) James Laughlin to Ralph G. Morrissey, June 6, 1939, Item 4719, NDR.
and Pearce quickly became one of the most successful publishing firms founded in the thirties, New Directions abandoned the arrangement in 1941 and resumed the management of its sales force. The reasons for the failure are unfortunately unclear; eight years passed before New Directions again attempted to share expenses with other publishers, fellow independents Pantheon and Pellegrini and Cudahy, although in that case an ambitious plan to combine sales and distribution led only to the sharing of office space.37

If New Directions operated as a small, independent press in its early years, it also adopted some of the practices of large, established houses. Laughlin introduced the first subdivision of the firm’s titles into named series after just three years of operations, when he had published only about two dozen titles altogether. The New Classics, a series of $1 reprints, was launched in 1939 with William Carlos Williams’ *In the American Grain*. In 1940,

37 James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, March 22, 1949, Item 930, NDR.
Laughlin began the Five Young American Poets series, packaging new poets together to overcome the sales resistance that met a single volume by an unfamiliar name. Three volumes were produced before the series was dropped after 1944. Another effort on behalf of poetry emerged in 1941, this time an attempt to harness the commercial potential of book clubs and subscriptions, a purpose revealed, perhaps with a certain irony, in the series’ original name: the Poet of the Month. The name suggested that quintessential Middlebrow institution, the Book-of-the-Month Club, but instead of an agreeable best seller the series offered John Donne, Rainer Maria Rilke, Malcolm Cowley, Theodore Spencer, George Barker, and Delmore Schwartz. The series also sported its own packaging gimmick: readers could buy individual volumes for thirty-five cents or get twelve bound together for $4. The series lasted three years, long enough for the famous book club to threaten legal action, forcing New Directions to change the name to Poets of the Year.

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Much more ambitious was New Directions’ series of critical studies, the Makers of Modern Literature, commissioned from critics of the stature of Harry Levin (whose James Joyce began the series in 1941), Lionel Trilling, and Horace Gregory. Although promised studies by John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Delmore Schwartz, and Yvor Winters never materialized, the series flourished, accounting for four of twenty-four new books on the 1947 list. Laughlin intended the series for a middlebrow audience, promising that its authors would not be “historical scholars,” as he phrased it in an advertisement, or, more bluntly, “professorial moles,” but “creative critics” and “practicing poets and critics.”39 Several advertisements used the term “critical Baedekers” to suggest that the books in the series would help the uninitiated find their way to an understanding of important modern authors. The audience included students, for whom the price of the books was kept

low, but reviewers considered books like Trilling’s
*E.M. Forster* valuable critical studies, not mere
student guides.

New Directions added two more series in 1946: Modern Readers and Selected Writings. Modern Readers offered similar material to the New Classics, but included books that could not be offered in such an inexpensive format, priced at $3.50 rather than $1.50. Selected Writings followed the example of Viking’s new Portable series by combining selections from a single author’s works together with a critical introduction, thus combining in a single volume the functions of the New Classics and Makers of Modern Literature. Because New Directions could not pay large fees to reproduce other publishers’ works, the scope of Selected Writings was limited to authors who had depended on the house for American publication, such as Dylan Thomas and Paul Eluard. As with earlier series, Selected Writings employed uniform packaging and a built-in critical apparatus to make New Directions’
modern texts accessible to students or to readers unfamiliar with modern literature.

Of these series, the most important, the largest, and the longest lasting, was the New Classics. New Directions’ foray into the publication of reprints most clearly shows how the company grew into an established publishing enterprise and staked out a place for itself in the terrain of middlebrow modernism. Introducing the New Classics series in the 1939 annual, Laughlin declared his intention to do for poetry, criticism, belles lettres, and “unconventional fiction,” what the Modern Library had done for fiction. Even more than the creation of a series, the undertaking of reprints gave New Directions the appearance of an institution in the publishing world. Publishing reprints affected the reading public, and hence the larger culture; it often had little to do with supporting the authors reprinted, who were as likely to be dead as alive. In the context of the 1930s, publishing reprints also allowed Laughlin to

shape his list and define his enterprise by adding
prestigious authors at little expense without lowering
his firm in other publishers’ eyes.

In the larger perspective of publishing history,
the use of reprinting to help a publishers’ reputation
must appear surprising. Not until the early 1900s did
a few hardcover replinters bring cultural
respectability to an enterprise necessarily connected
to commercial practices. Reprint houses existed to
find larger audiences for cheaper editions of
previously published books; because they had smaller
profit margins, they relied on low prices and
aggressive marketing. Established publishing houses
regularly denigrated the quality of the texts selected
and the books produced, but some replinters
distinguished themselves for quality in texts or
printing craftsmanship. E.P. Dutton introduced the
British Everyman’s Library in the U.S. in 1906 to the
applause of observers who criticized the tone set by
other reprint series. In 1926 Grosset and Dunlap began producing books at least as attractive and durable as the original editions, raising the price to one dollar from fifty or seventy-five cents. The new publishers of the 1920s did not share the hostility of older firms to reprints; Alfred A. Knopf, for example, promptly began a hardback series of Borzoi Pocket Books to reprint the firm’s most successful titles. Among the new houses, Random House was the most indebted to the reprint business; originally founded for the purpose of taking over Boni and Liveright’s Modern Library; it increased the size, stature, and sales of that series before embarking on original publication. The Modern Library balanced the tasteful selection of titles with successful promotion and

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sales to become one of publishing’s premier middlebrow enterprises.\(^{43}\)

Laughlin’s belief that the Modern Library could be counted on to reprint more conventional fiction, leaving the “unconventional” free for New Directions, indicates how tastes had changed in the twenties and early thirties. In 1917, Boni and Liveright were able to stock the Modern Library with titles by H.G. Wells, August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, Feodor Dostoevsky, and Maurice Maeterlinck, because these modern and “unconventional” works were not widely understood to be promising commodities.\(^{44}\) When Bennet Cerf and Donald Klopfer purchased the Modern Library in 1925, they paid for the reputation the series had gained for intellectual excitement, not for its sales, which the new owners soon quadrupled.\(^{45}\) Klopfer and Cerf demonstrated that modern business methods could bring a measure of popularity to difficult philosophical and literary works.

\(^{43}\) Modern Library’s place in middlebrow culture is explored at length in Satterfield, “The World’s Best Books.”
\(^{44}\) Satterfield, 19.
\(^{45}\) Satterfield, 36-37. For the quadrupling of sales, Satterfield relies upon Donald Klopfer’s reminiscences of 1976.
The Modern Library was so successful that reprinting the “classics” of modernism became prestigious not only among middlebrow readers, but among authors themselves, their agents, and among literary publishers. James Laughlin, in copying the Modern Library, did not copy its business organization or financial success, but he could copy its practice of granting texts simultaneously timeless status as “classics” and contemporary relevance. The career of the New Classics series shows that being an exclusively literary publisher no longer required serving a specific artistic community, but could also involve haggling with the holders of reprint rights, an activity that, in turn, shaped the activities of the more established publishers who held those rights.

New Directions’ reprinting enterprise, like the Modern Library, relied heavily on the new publishing houses of the twenties and on Alfred A. Knopf, in particular. When a firm like Knopf arranged for reprints, it had to balance literary and commercial

46 On authors’ esteem for the Modern Library, see Satterfield, 120, 130.
values and to choose the right reprinter for each work, both in terms of literary respectability and commercial potential. As Jay Satterfield shows in his study of the Modern Library, Knopf only granted reprint rights to the Modern Library on titles he could neither maintain in expensive editions or reprint himself in the Borzoi Pocket Books series. The Modern Library, drawing on the lists of Knopf and others, “kept dozens of important titles with only moderate sales potential in print,” in the twenties and thirties, through effective marketing.47

New Directions, even lower on the reprinting ladder, asked to reprint titles that neither Knopf or Random House thought suitable for reprinting on their own lists. The first such request came in 1938, when Laughlin asked to reprint Franz Kafka’s Amerika. Despite the neglect into which such titles had fallen, Knopf was often hesitant to grant rights, even for small editions expected to sell out in two or three years. Knopf hesitated to share the prestige a title

47 Satterfield, 139.
had brought to his list in exchange for the modest profit New Directions might yield. In the case of Amerika, Knopf, as it turned out, did not hold the rights or plan to publish an edition immediately. When New Directions went ahead with the book in 1940, Knopf first complained and then tried to print the book itself from New Directions’ plates (although the plan was dropped, probably when it turned out that the plates had been destroyed). Even such grudging cooperation was useful to New Directions in acquiring titles; it was also useful to James Laughlin, who established a personal relationship with a leading figure in the field of publishing. Even when Knopf reissued titles primarily to keep them out of the hands of reprinters, it improved the availability of modern literature.

In its first ten years, New Classics owed some of its most prestigious titles to Knopf, allowing it to season its advertisements and publicity materials with the names of Gustave Flaubert, E.M. Forster, and D.H.

48 Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, July 7, 1941, Item 930, NDR.
Lawrence. Laughlin, like most trade publishers, placed much importance on getting the right names on his list; for example, he wrote the Knopfs, “I’ve wanted to have a Lawrence novel in the NC series,” and, “I feel that we definitely ought to have one little Gide volume in that Series.” Laughlin repaid Knopf for his contribution partly in praise by acknowledging the importance of Knopf’s career. He wrote Alfred on one occasion, “I don’t mean to [bother you too much,] but you just seem to have published most of the books in the past that are good enough to be worth digging up again,” and on another occasion mentioned his “very high regard for the role you have played in making American publishing international in scope.” In 1948, Laughlin went as far as to dedicate the tenth New Directions anthology to Alfred and Blanche Knopf “who...have so greatly enriched American

49 Gustave Flaubert, Three Tales (1944); E.M. Forster Room with a View and The Longest Journey (both 1943); D.H. Lawrence, The Man Who Died (1947).
50 James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, June 12, no year [probably 1945 or 1946]; James Laughlin to Blanche Knopf, January 16, 1950, Item 930, NDR.
51 James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, June 12, no year [probably 1945 or 1946], and James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, September 24, 1945, Item 930, NDR.
culture by providing English translations of significant European books."\(^5^2\) By allowing New Directions to reprint Knopf titles, Laughlin implied, Knopf would continue to benefit American culture.

New Directions’ reliance on Knopf helped shape the larger publisher’s actions as well. In his correspondence with Laughlin, Knopf did not treat New Directions’ requests strictly according to their business potential, but adopted an approach compatible with Laughlin’s idea that the publishers shared a cultural mission, and with the widely held belief of publishers that their profession operated according to a gentlemanly code. In practice, Knopf accepted a tacit standard that, all other considerations aside, he should make an out-of-print title available to a reprinter unless he intended to reprint the title himself. Although Knopf was under no obligation to allow reprints, in letters to Laughlin in which he refused permission he always did so on the basis of

\(^5^2\) New Directions in Prose and Poetry: An Annual Exhibition Gallery of New and Divergent Trends in Literature 10 ([no place]: New Directions, 1948), 5.
his own publishing plans. Explaining his unwillingness to grant Kafka’s The Castle to New Classics, Knopf admitted that “while we have never sold it, I somehow can’t bring myself to letting it leave my list”; Knopf therefore arranged to reissue the book with a new introduction by Thomas Mann.⁵³ Laughlin endorsed Knopf’s conception of the duties of the publisher even when Knopf turned down his requests; in 1941 Laughlin wrote, “I am very glad that you are going to reprint the Gide and Forster titles [Where Angels Fear to Tread and Howard’s End]. That shows a real sense of literary responsibility on your part.”⁵⁴ In this case, Laughlin also went on to suggest that New Directions author Delmore Schwartz could write an introduction to the reissue of Gide’s Vatican Swindle, and asked for less desirable Forster titles. As a fellow partner in the enterprise of

⁵³ Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, June 14, 1940, Item 930, NDR. Knopf also confirms the principle that he should allow reprints of anything he is not planning to publish in Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, June 23, 1941, Item 930, NDR.
⁵⁴ James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, September 26, 1942, Item 930, NDR.
literature, Laughlin could presume upon Knopf’s sense of obligation.

Laughlin’s presumption extended to proposed joint efforts at promotion. Laughlin promised to bring Knopf books to the attention of the “young intellectual crowd” or, as Laughlin also described them, the “advanced intellectual critics,” particularly the group surrounding Partisan Review.55 Perhaps these circles were already aware of Knopf’s publications, but New Directions did offer some services to the larger publisher, for example, listing an author’s Knopf titles on the jacket of New Classics volumes that originated with Knopf. In the midst of the E.M. Forster revival in 1942, Laughlin wrote to Bernard Smith at Knopf proposing that they try to get Forster reprints by both houses reviewed alongside the critical study New Directions commissioned from Lionel Trilling. Laughlin made detailed proposals for joint

55 James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, September 26, 1942; James Laughlin to Bernard Smith, November 5, 1942, Item 930, NDR.
advertising and a joint “mailing piece” to alert likely Forster readers.\textsuperscript{56}

Perhaps more important than specific formal agreements between publishers was the personal relationship between the principals of the two firms. The relationship had begun auspiciously in 1936 when Knopf let Laughlin know he would be “mighty glad of an opportunity to consider” a book manuscript when Laughlin had written one.\textsuperscript{57} They corresponded cordially about business until February 1945 when Laughlin earned a severe reprimand from Knopf by offering reprint rights to Flaubert’s Three Lives in Great Britain. In fact, Knopf had obtained the American rights from the work’s British publisher, Chatto and Windus.\textsuperscript{58} This embarrassing episode had faded quickly enough that in September Laughlin proposed that he and Knopf meet in person to discuss Laughlin’s “brash” suggestion that Knopf simply give New Directions all its Kafka titles to reprint, since

\textsuperscript{56} James Laughlin to Bernard Smith, November 5, 1942, Item 930, NDR.
\textsuperscript{57} Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, May 21, 1936, Item 930, NDR.
\textsuperscript{58} Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, February 8, 1945, Item 930, NDR.
the larger firm had “so many important projects” already underway. They met regularly thereafter and Knopf gradually warmed to his younger colleague, congratulating him on his 1947 list: “I think you are going to become a publisher in spite of yourself and your skis.” He expressed his approval more forthrightly six months later: “More than ever I must share Henry Laughlin’s admiration for the unconventional way in which you are able to conduct what seems to be a very sound business indeed.” In such praise, Knopf acknowledged that New Directions pursued a different business plan and yet still succeeded in business terms.

At the same time that praise and flattery began to flow both ways between publishers, the Knopfs began to make requests of New Directions, signaling the arrival of the small firm in American publishing. Blanche, who oversaw much of Knopf’s publishing

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59 James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, September 24, 1945, Item 930, NDR.
60 Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, September 3, 1947, Item 930, NDR.
61 James’ much older cousin Henry Laughlin was president of Houghton Mifflin. Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, March 8, 1948, Item 930, NDR.
program in European literature, expressed an interest in some of Laughlin’s French discoveries, the novels of Julien Gracq and Albert Camus’ plays.\textsuperscript{62} Alfred noted the rapid sales of New Directions’ Camus volume in September of 1948, writing, “If you have been able to sell 3,000 copies of this production at $3.00 in almost no time at all, I think you are little short of a wizard and I would like to have your sales organization for ourselves.”\textsuperscript{63} Later that year, when Laughlin answered a request from Blanche to reprint the plays, he found himself finally in a position to bargain for what he needed from the Knopfs; in exchange for the plays he asked for Camus’ novel \textit{The Plague} to add to the New Classics. New Directions was becoming a source for other publishers, from Grove Press to Knopf, as well as a publisher and a reprinter.

The Knopfs’ respect for Laughlin and New Directions constituted an important business asset in

\textsuperscript{62} Blanche Knopf to James Laughlin, June 11, 1946, Item 930, NDR.
\textsuperscript{63} Alfred Knopf to James Laughlin, September 28, 1948, Item 930, NDR.
itself, but the relationship between publishers reveals how intertwined commercial and literary values could be. Although New Directions could claim more literary than financial success, Knopf praised Laughlin specifically in terms of his business acumen, welcoming the young iconoclast into the world of the publishing industry. Laughlin in turn praised the Knopfs for their contributions to literature, never betraying envy or special admiration for their firm as a business. Furthermore, Laughlin was willing to bracket the plainly commercial activities of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., judging its avowedly literary efforts according to a different measure. This is suggested by a slighting reference Laughlin made about his competition in a letter to Blanche. When he asked to reprint the Plague, Laughlin noted his fear of seeing the title given to Modern Library, who were “debasing their list so terribly by adding dreadful piffle to it in the last few years.”64 Did Knopf’s extensive list include no “piffle” itself? Was Laughlin forgetting

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64 James Laughlin to Blanche Knopf, December 18, 1948, Item 930, NDR.
that larger publishers made no pretense of limiting themselves to literary publishing? The problem of “piffle” in the Modern Library was a problem of context; the Modern Library represented itself as the purveyor of excellent literature; its poor taste betrayed the reading public and the authors already on the list, to whom Modern Library was responsible for maintaining its integrity. Knopf, according to Laughlin’s formulation, was under no constraint to make its entire list literary, but, in Knopf’s own operations and in granting reprint rights, it was obliged to consider the contexts in which it presented literary work. Literary values as well as business needs bound the two publishers together, although they pursued both in their separate ways.

New Directions commercial activities and its assumption of the public profile of a middlebrow publisher, rather than the obscurity of a small press, did not involve any conscious rejection of the primacy of literary value or the service of authors which defined New Directions in the late 1930s.
Surprisingly, Laughlin maintained a harsh anti-commercial rhetoric from the founding of his press to the end of the 1940s. Present in business and personal correspondence, Laughlin's rhetoric finds its most considered expression in the prefaces to the annual anthologies and a handful of other published statements. The earliest of these was the postscript appended to William Carlos Williams' *White Mule* in 1937, in which Laughlin wrote:

> It is time to damn the book publishers as hard as you can damn them. They are traitors and enemies of the people. . . . They have made a book a thing no more valuable than an automobile tire. . . . They have made writing, which was an art, a business.\(^{65}\)

Both the existence of this postscript, in which Laughlin uses another person’s book to editorialize about the publishing industry, and the harshness of the sentiments expressed betray Laughlin’s youth and inexperience, but almost ten years later Laughlin continued in a similar vein. Speaking of the past decade in 1946, Laughlin charged that:

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There has been little fundamental change in the attitude of the sinners who are profiting from the control of our literary activities. . . . They believe that the biggest jackpot comes from applying to books and writing the merchandising methods developed to sell the mass production of ice boxes, hair oil[,] and chewing gum.66

Coming from a businessman who gave a certain amount of thought to the “merchandising methods” appropriate to publishing, such extreme statements demand an explanation.

Examining Laughlin’s anti-commercial pronouncements as a whole, one finds that the term “commercial,” as Laughlin used it, refers not to involvement in commerce, but to “a publishing system where the making of money is the primary objective.”67 A person or organization that is commercial treats its products as nothing more than commodities. “Why does the commercial publisher not encourage good writers and promote the best books?” Laughlin asked. Because of “the idea of ‘business,’ of what is ‘good

business,’ of what will pay off. . . . Books are no longer literature, they are merchandise.”

The automobile tires and chewing gum that Laughlin scorned symbolize products that have no intrinsic value; they are like the proverbial widgets of an economics lecture, true commodities, stripped of everything but their production cost and market value. Curiously, following Laughlin’s definition, everything placed on the market does not qualify as a commodity. The taint of commodification is conferred by the producer’s intentions. Laughlin, because of his dedication to literature, the purity of his motives, would not treat books like hair oil, although he would, of course, sell them. Laughlin blurred the fineness of this distinction when he used the term “business” to denote the activity of the commercial publisher. In the postscript to White Mule, he twice complains that publishers “have made literature a business.”

The values that Laughlin invoked in his prefaces are those of gentleman publishers. He endorsed the

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68 James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 9 1946, xvi.
69 James Laughlin, “White Mule and New Directions,” 293.
Arnoldian injunction to improve the common life through the spread of culture. Publishers who withheld the benefit of improvement from society while seeking their own commercial advantage were guilty of “treason” against society. Also in the genteel tradition, Laughlin appealed to the reverence for art as something sacred, an attitude familiar as part of the highbrow conception of art described by Lawrence Levine and others.\textsuperscript{70} Laughlin wrote, “They [the publishers] have forgotten that the word is holy.” Laughlin’s penchant for using phrases remembered from his Presbyterian upbringing dovetailed with his rhetorical sacralization of art. When he first lured Delmore Schwartz to New Directions in 1938, and Schwartz claimed to have received a counter offer from Simon and Schuster editor Clifton Fadiman, Laughlin presented Schwartz with a simple alternative: “If you want to make money, Fadiman can do the best for you, but if you want to serve God and not the Devil, I can

do best for you.” Laughlin may possibly have intended to be ironic, but a young author’s literary career was at stake.

What is absent from Laughlin’s set of values is as telling as what is included. Laughlin did not frame his case as a particular defense of modernism, experimentalism, or the avant-garde. In one instance, in 1939, he specified the essential characteristic of artistic literature as “technique.” Modernist literature, he suggested, in an argument strongly reminiscent of T.S. Eliot and his disciples, was actually the preserver and champion of literary tradition as the modern world “approach[ed] a dark age for the art of writing.” Commercial literature, with its blithe disregard for technique, was the barbarian at the gates, the true adversary of the Western artistic heritage. Once again, Laughlin appealed ultimately to the values of high art. This strategy allowed Laughlin to use the rhetoric of the defenders

of high art and to avoid making too controversial a stand on behalf of artistic experimentation. Around 1938, Laughlin appeared to have made a conscious decision to avoid special pleading for the avant-garde, perhaps in response to criticism, from Ezra Pound and others, who challenged his taste. He countered that the tradition of excellence was his first allegiance, but that he could best serve that tradition by publishing the living experiment of the day, even if it was often mediocre.

By framing his criticisms in terms of values shared widely in the literary and publishing community, Laughlin complicated the task of differentiating between the commercial publishers and the “pure” publishers. If houses that never touched an experimental book could still serve at the holy altar of literature, then the commercial publishers could not be distinguished by their reactionary tastes. Instead they were betrayed by their attack on established standards of literature. To dismantle these standards they manipulated writers and the mass
audience. First, publishers perverted the mission of “pure” writers, those determined to follow only the dictates of art and genius. Pure authors resisted the pressure to make money and the pressure of politics; they would not, as Laughlin put it, beat the “shiny new Greater American Benevolent Imperialist Drum” in support of American efforts in the Second World War.\(^7\)

Commercial publishers neglected “pure” authors or, worse still, accepted a first book and then, after the book failed to earn back its advance, pressured the author to write something more likely to sell. As the “thorough subjugation of talent to the dollar” progressed, Laughlin warned, the serious writer was threatened with “extinction.”\(^4\)

Commercial publishers also influenced the other end of the publishing cycle, degrading and confusing the tastes of the reading public. Laughlin was not badly disposed toward the mass reading public; he found that when they came across good literature, as

\(^7\) James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” *New Directions 1944 [8]: An Annual Exhibition Gallery of Divergent Literary Trends* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944), xvii.

some soldiers did during the war, they appreciated its quality and wanted more. But commercial presses made it difficult to identify such work by manipulating the book-reviewing media, which in turn influenced individual book-buyers, libraries, and bookstores. Because publishers' advertising supported the book-reviewing media, Laughlin believed, the reviewers recommended whatever was submitted from major advertisers, saving their rare bad reviews for the output of independent houses like New Directions.75

The "merchants of culture," in Laughlin’s view, used their money to seize the authority that rightfully belonged to a "cultural elite."76 Laughlin, the powerless independent publisher, could only take revenge by lashing out regularly at the "puffy tout[s] of the kept literary press" who, as he put it in

another preface, “shower slobbery praise on utter mediocrity.”  

From his pulpit in the New Directions annuals, Laughlin regularly suggested solutions to the problems caused by commercial influence in publishing. Often these schemes involved voluntary restraints on commercial practices. In 1940, as war began in earnest in Europe, he recommended for America a “disarmament conference among publishers at which they would agree to limit” advertising, refuse any advertising to newspapers whose critics would not “at least read the books and not just the jackets,” and cut the number of new titles published by half. Another scheme called for all writers of “serious stuff” to make a collective agreement with “five or six of the smaller publishers, firms manned by men who really like good books,” to publish all their books and no “junk.” In return, if they became successful, the authors would not abandon the small presses.

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77 James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes” ND 8 1944, xvi; James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes” ND 9 1946, xviii.
78 James Laughlin, “Preface,” ND 5 1940, xix.
79 James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 9 1946, xxi.
third scheme called for a “large charitable and educational Foundation [sic]” to endow a weekly review with enough money to publish “critics like Wilson and Trilling and Levin and Kazin” without taking any advertising, at least until the review was so successful it would be immune from threats to withdraw advertising.80 Finally, in perhaps the most pathetic scheme, Laughlin gave his readers a list of “modest proposals” for individuals wishing to help save literature: to subscribe to the little magazines; to encourage any “enlightened” local teachers or librarians; and to give a lift to “friends who are on the edge of elite taste” by leaving good books out where they would find them.81

Laughlin admitted that these proposals were somewhat fanciful, but another strain ran through his critique of commercialism, one that was eminently practical and, in many ways, predicted the career of the permanent innovative press in the 1950s and 1960s. The commercial press was not only irresponsible or

sacrilegious, Laughlin maintained, it was also bad business. The danger was not just that literary culture in the United States would die off, but that the commercial publishers themselves would die with it. “Short-sighted” publishers were “digging for themselves one hell of a deep and muddy grave,” because they were addicted to mass production and the techniques of publicity.82

As the growth of the mass market for culture inspired fears about standardization, Laughlin called for what we know as niche marketing. Publishers, he declared, could find ample readership for literary books if they were only willing to sell them to a market segment rather than the mass market. In 1942, Laughlin reported that the early years of New Directions had uncovered “an avid public for writing of a non-commercial character.”83 A few years later, Laughlin averred that this public was not only hungry for good books, but had begun to actively reject the

82 James Laughlin, “Preface,” ND 5 1940, xix.
bestsellers.\textsuperscript{84} “When the public is given access to good writing,” Laughlin wrote, “it will prefer it to the commercial product. . . . There is really no reason why a public cannot be built that will support a small literary culture.”\textsuperscript{85}

As always with market segmentation, the line is fuzzy between reaching a market and creating a market, or building a market, as Laughlin phrased it. However “avid” the public was for good books, it could only get “access” to them if some authority existed to guide it. “As things now stand,” Laughlin complained, “the intermixture of high and low culture in the book world creates a market confusion which prevents the buying power of the existing elite from being channeled undividedly to the support of the best writers.”\textsuperscript{86} The potential members of the literary elite must be welded somehow into a “unified public . . . for serious writing” such as existed in France or Great Britain, where smaller populations supported

\textsuperscript{84} James Laughlin, “Editorial Notes,” Spearhead, 12.
\textsuperscript{85} James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 9 1946, xvi, xviii.
\textsuperscript{86} James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 10 1948, 22.
more good literature. If the United States could convert one percent of the population to the cause, Laughlin believed, it would be “enough, economically, to support as many really first-rate writers as we are likely to produce at any one time.”

Laughlin’s anti-commercial rhetoric appealed to a highbrow conception of art, but it coexisted with Laughlin’s own belief that a business could profitably cater to the needs of what Laughlin described as both a “literary elite” and, less narrowly, a “unified public.” Through business methods, Laughlin hoped to increase the size and importance of a group of readers who, through their own efforts and through the guidance of allied publishers and critics, would create a growing market for modernism. Laughlin imagined that literature was endangered by commercialization, but for him the threat was not intrinsic in commodity form, but depended upon the intentions of the people doing the commodifying. As Laughlin made allowances for Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., to

87 James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 9 1946, xviii.
88 James Laughlin, “Editor’s Notes,” ND 10 1948, 22.
publish non-literary texts, he also set standards which allowed for the commercial handling of literary texts without betraying literary values.

Laughlin’s formulation of the problem created a rule of ultimate intent: literary publishers’ motives were ultimately either commercial or literary; some were damned and some were saved. Such a rule excluded the possibility of seeing both motives as valid, or questioning the validity of the distinction, and placed anyone remotely involved in commercial activities, including publishers like Laughlin, under suspicion. New Directions authors were not slow to take advantage of Laughlin’s need to place himself in the literary camp while also promoting his books commercially.

No author exploited the ambiguities of the anti-commercial rhetoric more fully than William Carlos Williams during the 1930s and 1940s. Between 1938 and 1941, Laughlin published Williams’ Complete Collected Poems, reprinted his essays In the American Grain, brought out In the Money, the sequel to White Mule,
and included Williams in the Poets of the Year series with the pamphlet *The Broken Span*. Although the relations between author and publisher were friendly through these years, Williams quickly recovered from his initial excitement at having a regular, paying publisher and began to believe that New Directions was not tapping the commercial potential of his works. He was never satisfied that Laughlin distributed his books widely enough, exerted sales pressure on their behalf, or kept stores consistently stocked with the individual titles. He first broached the subject of “approach[ing] a regular commercial publisher” less than six months after *White Mule* was published, and in 1941 he suggested they “bring the knife down” on the publishing arrangement that had put five of his books into print, so that he would be “free to make a better connection.”

Williams had particularly high hopes for a biography of his mother which he had been at

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89 W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, November 19, 1937; W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, June 16, 1941; W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, September 3, 1941, in Witemeyer, 12, 63-65.
work on for several years, and he reported to Laughlin that Simon and Schuster were considering it.90

Williams’ ambitions were not fulfilled during the war years, and the biography itself would not be published for more than a decade. In the meantime, Williams found himself with several texts of a decidedly uncommercial nature which he wished Laughlin to publish: a sheaf of uncollected old poems, some “improvisations” from twenty years earlier, and a handful of new poems, to which he wanted to add some of the poems recently published in the pamphlet-size *Broken Span*; also, the poems of Marcia Nardi, a self-educated New Jersey poet whom Williams befriended and championed. Laughlin, hoping instead for the manuscript of Williams’ long poem *Patterson*, was unenthusiastic about these projects, especially given the war-time restrictions on paper.91 Williams met this rejection by criticizing Laughlin for “trying to

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90 W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, February 6, 1942, in Witemeyer, 69.
91 James Laughlin to W.C. Williams, January 25, [1943]. Witemeyer, 85. Even Williams recognized Nardi’s shortcomings: “I think she’s got a very small percentage of metal in her ore but it is valuable metal.” W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, July 21, 1942, in Witemeyer 78.
make a success of the publishing business." “You
can’t make money and make the right sort of reputation
as a publisher at the same time,” Williams advised.92

When Williams again considered publishing a major
work with another publisher, this time his
autobiography with Viking, he reversed his position a
second time, reacting to Laughlin’s fears of losing
money thus: “I tell you frankly you’ve published a lot
of unsaleable crap in my opinion,” although in the
same letter Williams lamented Laughlin’s refusal to
publish his translation, in collaboration with his
mother, of the seventeenth-century Spanish playwright
Francisco Quevedo’s The Dog and the Fever.93 From
Williams’ own perspective he was not being
inconsistent; he believed that Laughlin should use
better judgment in choosing among other people’s
manuscripts but, in Williams’ case, should publish

92 W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, February 21, 1943, in
Witemeyer, 86.
93 W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, September 16, 1948, in
Witemeyer, 161–162. Williams even defended this text as “far more
‘modern’ than ever Hemingway or even Gertie [Stein] ever thought
of being. . . . You could use it with a clear modern conscience.”
W.C. Williams to James Laughlin, July [no day], 1945, in
Witemeyer, 116.
everything submitted to him and do his utmost to promote and sell it. His own work, Williams promised, would secure New Directions’ reputation and, in the long term, would make money as well. The author, like the publisher, thought he could distinguish between commercial and literary values within the context of commercial activity, though his judgments were different.

In the years following 1949, Laughlin’s publishing practice and anti-commercial rhetoric would confront rapid changes in the American culture industries, as publishers’ commercial options expanded in unimagined ways, giving a new scope to even the most determinedly literary house. The permanent innovative press, of which New Directions was the prototype, would flourish during the two following decades. As Laughlin expanded his business from the service of a few under-published authors, Pound, Williams, and Miller, to commissioning critical work, introducing new authors, and reprinting the “New Classics” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,
New Directions set the pattern for a devotion to literature that could take a commercial form, that was not limited to the support of the author. Distancing himself from the ideological fervor of the 1930s, Laughlin also set the pattern for a literary discourse that pointedly distinguished between aesthetic and political concerns. Within this discourse, the literature of modernism would be exalted as a guide to the study of the human condition; the permanent innovative press would bring this literature to American readers, at once guarding and trading on its status.
From its founding in 1954, George Braziller Inc. followed in the path of New Directions, using commercial methods but adhering to values recognized as ends in themselves. The two publishing houses could not have arisen out of more different backgrounds. The first was born at Harvard, the beneficiary of inherited wealth; the second sprang out of the radical political movements of New York City and out of the remainder warehouse. George Braziller made his role as a publisher into his own education, and, in doing so, he developed a dedication to literature and art and also gained the insight that allowed him to address a broader public. George Braziller Inc. went beyond New Directions in exploring the expanding commercial possibilities of publishing after World War II.

George Braziller Inc. championed values sanctioned by the arbiters of and audiences for literature, the arts, and scholarship. Occasionally,
it published books in the service of contemporary social or political concerns. The publisher followed post-war intellectuals in the high modern exaltation of innovative literature and drew inspiration from academic research and university curricula. Braziller issued successful publications promoting the visions of Western Civilization, American Studies, and world history outside of academia.

As a business, Braziller sought the middle ground between its vision of a better culture and the interests of its potential customers, as it perceived them. Publishers like New Directions and Braziller read the society from which they drew their audience and made choices about selection, presentation, and promotion based on their reading. Though Braziller exercised discipline in its selection of books to publish, its promotion played upon a wide range of familiar appeals already available in American culture, some shared with more frankly commercial culture, others drawn from the middlebrow culture that for decades had popularized values sanctioned by
cultural elites. New literary and academic discourse became familiar to book buyers through Braziller’s activity. The challenging ideas of American anthropology were celebrated in the comfortably triumphal *Golden Age of American Anthropology*; a French *nouveau roman* became a guide to a successful dinner party. For the reading public, the new ideas had no pure form prior to their mediation by the publisher but entered American culture as a mixture of the new with the commonplace.

George Braziller Inc. pursued its goals in a spirit of principled compromise necessary to its survival. By the standards of the publicly-traded corporate publishers growing up around Braziller, the house was under-capitalized and so lacked the resources to pursue or retain proven authors. Braziller relied on the success of its own discoveries, several of which ascended to bestsellerdom, though the circumstances of its greatest coup, publication of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Words*, were unrepeatable. Braziller’s book series,
conceived by George Braziller and his top editors, were less spectacular but more valuable, providing income from sales and from the sale of subsidiary rights to book clubs, paperback houses, and foreign publishers. Innovative fiction could not keep the publisher afloat, but neither could Braziller’s other products completely subsidize it. The books of Nathalie Sarraute or Janet Frame, which merely repaid Braziller’s investment with modest sales, acted as a drag on the publisher’s profitability rather than a threat to its solvency, and, with no outside pressure to maximize profit, Braziller was free to sacrifice profits as long as other titles earned income.

George Braziller began his career steeped in neither business or literature. Before he entered the book business, he committed himself to radical politics. His early career closely followed the model of the “plebian intellectual” of mid-century, the second-generation immigrant inducted into a career in
the culture industries through the Popular Front.\textsuperscript{1}

Although he followed in a distinguished line of Jewish publishers from New York City, beginning in the 1900s and 1910s with Benjamin Huebsch and Alfred Knopf, he took a tortuous path to the respectability they exuded by the 1940s. Like Huebsch, Braziller did not complete high school; unlike Huebsch, Braziller lacked even a family connection to the book trades. Most unusually for a person without means or formal education, Braziller never held any position in book publishing except that of publisher. He underwent his apprenticeship in publishing as the founder of a successful book club. The club set the pattern for the publishing house that followed it by serving values from outside the business world.

Born in 1916 to a recently widowed mother of seven, George Braziller grew up in Brooklyn and, for five years, in Huntington, Long Island. Though Braziller experienced anti-Semitism in Huntington, he also enjoyed academic and athletic success, pursued a

\textsuperscript{1} Michael Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century} (London: Verso, 1996), xv.
romance (eventually frustrated by her parents’ objections) with a Lutheran girl, and worked idyllic summers picking peas and tomatoes on Long Island farms. Following the death of his step-father, his family returned to Brooklyn around 1932, where he could neither continue in high school nor find a job. It was a crushing experience, “the lowest point in my life,” he later recalled. 2 Sharing the hard times of the big city, Braziller also shared in the excitement of its life. He admired the paintings of Van Gogh at the fledgling Museum of Modern Art and he was drawn into political protests. At one such meeting, Braziller remembered, “suddenly reading material was put in my hands.” 3 For the first time, the future publisher became a reader; the radical left became his school and provided his mentors. Moving with the current of the times, Braziller joined the Young Communist League and devoted himself to supporting the Spanish Republic in its struggle against fascism. He

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3 Reminiscences, 14.
even tried unsuccessfully to join the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He took government relief work, laboring with a pick and shovel, like the figures that attracted him to one of MOMA’s Van Goghs.  

The lures of domesticity and the perils of war eventually drew Braziller away from the life of relief, meetings, and leafleting. He met Marsha Nash through his political involvement, but to win his radical-left bride he had to demonstrate to her parents some promise of bourgeois achievement, and so he found a job as a shipping clerk at the Remainder Book Company at fifteen dollars a week, on which salary he and Marsha married in 1940. On the job Braziller observed that a book remaindered for five to ten cents would be sold for twenty-five or thirty cents to a bookseller and would then retail between fifty cents and a dollar. A book club, he reasoned, could make an easy profit by buying remainders and selling them directly to its membership. In his

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inexperience, Braziller did not consider the other expenses involved. Braziller borrowed twenty-five dollars from his new wife, talked ten friends and family members into joining his club, and went into business with the Book Find Club in 1942.

The club’s early selections reflected Braziller’s involvement with the Popular Front and its advocacy of the world-wide struggle against fascism. The first selection, John Hyde Preston’s 1938 novel The Liberals, was an allegory of political commitment about a group of Milquetoast Connecticut liberals whose principles were put to the test by a labor strike. Most selections from 1942 until the early fall of 1943, when George Braziller enlisted in the Army, had equally clear political connotations. They examined the Spanish Civil War, the lives of refugees who fled to Paris from the Nazis, the Slovakian resistance to the German invasion, the Soviet and British war efforts, the siege and fall of Sevastopol, the Communist regime in Yugoslavia, and the Chinese

\(^5\) Reminiscences, 50.
Communist struggle against Japan. Although the club chose titles from major publishers with no pronounced political sympathies, including Knopf, Random House, Viking, and Duell, Sloan and Pearce, it assembled a list with an unmistakable ideological bent.

The belated Popular Front quality of the club’s selections also expressed itself in the choice of works about African-Americans in the United States. Such books, selected more frequently during the years of Braziller’s military service, included a laudatory biography of George Washington Carver; a novel about the underground railroad; Freedom Road, the club’s second novel by the popular radical writer Howard Fast, about a black politician during Reconstruction; and Lillian Smith’s novel about lynching, Strange Fruit, which borrowed its title from the Popular Front cabaret blues song made famous by Billie Holiday. The Brazillers collaborated in selecting these titles in late 1943 and early 1944 while George was training at Camp Edwards in Massachusetts. After his anti-aircraft

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6 see Denning, 323-324.
artillery unit shipped out for England, Marsha took charge of the selections as well as the management of the rapidly growing club. While George’s unit progressed through France and Germany into Austria, the club thrived, following the program established by its early selections and buoyed by a few particular successes, such as John Roy Carlson’s *Under Cover*, a report on counterintelligence among fascist groups in the U.S.

From the New York intellectuals of the forties and fifties to the cultural historians of the present, observers have commented on the connection between middlebrow culture and the Popular Front. The book club was one of the paradigmatic middlebrow forms, offering not only books but modeling good taste by its assistance selecting them and giving its selections an added aura of importance and currency, all within the context of the consuming experience. A Popular Front book club substituted political commitment for genteel appreciation, but it still promised timely information, education, and improvement. In Great
Britain, Victor Gollancz founded the best-known of the breed, the Left Book Club, in 1936. The newsletter that reached the club’s 50,000 members, the Left Book Club News, was so popular that it took on an independent life as the Left News.7

With the disintegration of the Popular Front, its middlebrow products fell out of favor; the forces that gave birth to Braziller’s club could not sustain it. The Book Find Club made the transition from the Popular Front to the post-war middlebrow while the Left Book Club and others fell by the wayside. Most simply, its name did not associate it with the left, so the club could change its character without a change of identity. “Book Find” suggests an expert culling of good titles out of the promiscuous harvest of new books, but does not specify the values by which they are culled. Braziller may have purposefully avoided a political name. Though at the time he selected only books acceptable according to the ideology of the Popular Front, the first members of

the club in 1942 were family and friends who may not have been comfortable with an explicitly radical club. Braziller’s first promotions of the club were made by personal appearances not only to what Braziller later called “progressive liberal” groups, but also to teachers’ groups that might have been more mixed politically.\textsuperscript{8} Even the selection of the Stalin-Prize-winning \textit{The Rainbow} by no means indicated a remarkable bias in 1944; Simon and Schuster published Wanda Wasilewska’s novel in the U.S. and advertised it in the \textit{New York Times}. Even if politically moderate club members noted the tenor of the Book Find Club, they may still have welcomed the opportunity to receive informative books on current affairs at bargain prices. Furthermore, just as all the club’s members may not have identified themselves as radicals, the club lacked any institutional ties to the left. The Book Find Club stood on its own as a small business.

Beginning with Braziller’s release from the Army in January 1946, the Book Find Club began gradually to

\textsuperscript{8} Reminiscences, 25.
vary its selections, until they covered a broad range of general-interest topics. The club chose titles in psychoanalysis, literature and belles lettres, Judaism and anti-Semitism, science beginning in 1950, religion from 1951, and a few titles in anthropology and economics. Selections like these diluted the radical aura around the selection of books about war-era resistance or biographies of left heroes like John Peter Altgeld, Frederick Douglass, or Eugene V. Debs. The shift away from the Popular Front reflected the decline of the movement in the aftermath of the war as well as the causes of that decline operating directly on George Braziller. In his early twenties before the war, he was unaffected by criticism of the Soviet Union, probably like many young radicals dismissing it as fascist or capitalist propaganda. The Soviets’ callous abandonment of the Polish Home Army in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 gave Braziller what he called “the biggest shock in my life,” at least politically. Earlier that year, he also lost his mentor in radical politics, a man Braziller later declined to identify
by name, who, after enlisting at the same time as
Braziller, was killed at Anzio in Italy.\(^9\) The gradual
change in Braziller’s personal beliefs and priorities
coincided with the club’s diversification. Changing
public interest likely played a role as well, although
the rapidity of the club’s growth suggested that most
of its selections appealed to consumers.

The Book Find Club enjoyed remarkable success
during the period of its transformation in the late
forties. When Braziller returned after the war, he
was overwhelmed to find Marsha running a club with
more than sixty employees and 60,000 members.\(^{10}\) The
club’s demand for books had exceeded its ability to
distribute remainders, probably as early as 1943;
Braziller obtained a paper quota from the War Board in
Washington and the club began to print its own
editions from rented plates. Braziller added to the
membership by personally travelling to six Midwestern
states in March 1946 to speak with authors and reading

\(^9\) Reminiscences, 74, 32.
\(^{10}\) Reminiscences, 36.
clubs. Soon mention of the club, and Braziller’s unlikely success story, graced the pages of Time magazine, along with news that membership had climbed to 70,000. At the same time that Book Find Club made such strides, the book club business was struggling to adapt to the post-war revival of the consumer-products industries that provided many alternatives to cheap books. The Book-of-the-Month Club, for example, suffered an unprecedented decline in membership in 1947.

An important addition to the Book Find Club’s staff in 1947 presaged both the scaling of greater heights in the short term and the difficulties that would knock the club back into the second rank of book clubs. Edwin Seaver had served as the publicity manager for the Book-of-the-Month Club for a decade in 1947 when he was asked to resign because of his past associations with the Communist Party. Seaver had briefly edited the party’s magazine Soviet Russia

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Today in the early thirties and written reviews for the *Daily Worker*. Not regarding Seaver as tainted by his past, Braziller hired him as publicity manager for his club, and soon *Publishers Weekly* announced a membership drive in which bookstores or department stores could sell Book Find Club memberships, take credit for the resulting book sales, and pass out free books as “premiums.”\(^{14}\) Perhaps through such schemes, and assuredly through good club selections, like Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*, membership climbed in 1948 to a peak of 100,000. Not yet in the same range as the Literary Guild or BOMC, each hovering around a million members, for Braziller the heights occupied by the People’s Book Club (a joint effort of Simon and Schuster and Sears with 300,000 members) were coming into view. The Book Find Club’s accomplishment is more remarkable since it lacked a distribution apparatus as powerful as Sears’ mail-order service.

Inexorably, the anti-communist crusaders that made Seaver’s talents available to the Book Find Club eventually sniffed out the club’s radical past as well. As early as 1948, the California Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities listed the club as one of the front organizations “in the recording field” that arose after the July 1946 Moscow Conference. Although Book Find Club predated 1946 by four years and was unconnected to music recording, the California report was cited in 1951 when the House Un-American Activities Committee included the club in its Guide to Subversive Organizations. Though no one asked Braziller to testify or tried to obtain membership lists, the committee’s attention persuaded half the club’s membership to withdraw within a year. Braziller recalled receiving “the most tragic letters, people writing in and saying, ‘Will you remove my name? Will you just destroy anything that deals with my membership?’” The club readily complied. Although Braziller remembers being “very cautious” in selecting titles at the time, the club continued to select the
occasional work of political criticism; in any event, by 1950 it had already made the transition from left politics to general interest.¹⁵ As the threat of investigation subsided, the club even selected works critical of McCarthyism, including Henry Steele Commager’s Freedom, Loyalty, and Dissent in May 1954, Richard Hofstadter’s Age of Reform, and J. Robert Oppenheimer’s The Open Mind, both in early 1956.

The transformation and survival of the Book Find Club reflected the intellectual journey of its founder, who accreted new interests and approaches without decisively abandoning older ones. In the early fifties, Braziller chose titles for the Book Find Club that reflected a secular humanism: books that still hoped for progress resulting from human powers and viewed religion, like crime, as a puzzle best solved by psychoanalysis. In the same years, Braziller began supplying an increased demand for

books on art by forming the Seven Arts Book Society in 1950. The new club offered discounts on expensive art books to a clientele, mostly architects at first, attracted through advertisements in art magazines.\textsuperscript{16} The mix of materials found in Braziller’s two clubs characterized the books that Braziller began to reissue in 1954 with the creation of a publishing house, George Braziller Inc.

The turn to publishing was a logical step for Braziller. The Book Find Club had been printing its own books from rented plates for ten years when Braziller decided to reissue books that had been allowed to fall out of print. Hardback reprinting allowed a publisher to begin with modest capital, given that the books reprinted were not in high demand. If the advance required by the rights holder, usually the original publisher, was not large, then a title could be sold profitably in print-runs of a few thousand. In contrast to paperback reprinting, which depended on economies of scale, hardback reprinting

\textsuperscript{16} Reminiscences, 62.
was an attractive point of entry into the publishing world, especially if a publisher wanted to reach a more specialized audience.\(^\text{17}\)

Reprint publishing, compared to operating a book club, required Braziller to handle the value of texts differently. The book club forwarded to its members the latest and most worthwhile books. In its advertising, Book Find Club emphasized low prices, the rules of club membership, and the variety of choices available to club members. The titles offered were considered self-recommending, requiring only a brief descriptive blurb. In contrast to the book club, the reprinter sacrificed the excitement of currency and the approval of the established publishers in the field; the reprinter chose works that were, by definition, out of date. Furthermore, the primary audience changed from club members, consumers

\(^{17}\) The “trade” or “quality” paperback business exemplified by Anchor Books, launched in 1953, shared higher prices and smaller printings with hardback reprinting, to an extent, but was a new field in 1954 and 1955. Braziller was aware of the potential of paperback books when serving in the Army, but, as he explained, “The hardback thing of course fascinated me, and it was something I knew, whereas the paperback field I did not know.” Reminiscences, 44, 79.
themselves, to booksellers, who had to stock George Braziller Inc. titles before readers could purchase them. The first recourse of the publisher, and the most simple, was to invoke the name of the author as a guarantee of a text’s enduring value. Braziller’s first list advertisements, targeting booksellers in the pages of Publishers Weekly, relied on this strategy, featuring four well-known figures in the first list: Leonardo da Vinci, Feodor Dostoevsky, Henry James, and the Irish dramatist Sean O’Casey. In the case of James’s and da Vinci’s unassumingly entitled “notebooks,” the ads assured the bookseller that these were, respectively, “an important literary document” and “a superb record.” O’Casey’s Selected Plays required no additional comment, but for the miscellany The Green Crow the list advertisement added that O’Casey was “a truly great writer.” Early lists included such familiar names as George Santayana, Kenneth Burke, Josiah Royce, Graham Wallas, and Joseph Wood Krutch.18

The new publishing house reached into a mixed bag of techniques to generate excitement about titles by less celebrated authors. Some titles on the list claimed official recognition: one heralded as a Pulitzer prize winner, another described merely as “prize-winning.” Braziller also resorted to the invocation of “classic” status, declaring Andrew D. White’s *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* “a classic in American thought.” The remaining titles relied solely on subject matter, with the occasional suggestion that a work was still timely enough to “shed new light” on “the modern search for . . . values.” Art books presumably needed the least enthusiastic help; the blurb for a book about the seventeenth-century French artist Jacques Callot assured the bookseller dryly that it was the “most comprehensive Callot monograph in English.”


19 see n.18 and Advertisement, *Publishers Weekly* 168 (September 17, 1955): 1051.
George Braziller Inc., in the first years of its existence, lacked a strong identity as a publishing house, and a bookseller might have scrutinized its lists in vain for a clear rationale for its publishing program. Braziller’s formula of a secularizing regard for science and a humanistic regard for art, with a dash of political critique, worked at least well enough to keep the house afloat while it searched for the titles that would secure its future. Titles from Great Britain, new to the United States, had the interest of novelty, although Braziller’s position limited it to more obscure titles. Braziller found a partial solution in *The Fathers Without Theology* (1958), early Christian writings selected by Marjorie Strachey, not a sought-after author herself but known for her famous brother Lytton. Publishing British books held other practical advantages. When Braziller purchased British books in unbound printed sheets, it benefited from lower printing costs in Europe and avoided investing in an entire print run, both especially important considerations with expensive art
books, such as Ronald Searle and Kaye Webb’s *Paris Sketchbook*, which were also attractive because book club rights could be sold to the Seven Arts Book Society for subsidiary income.

George Braziller did not intend the publishing firm merely to feed the clubs. As Braziller later recalled, his initial vision as a publisher was to reprint neglected books, taking advantage of the surplus of out-of-print titles. After a short apprenticeship in reprinting during 1955 and 1956, however, George Braziller Inc. began to consider original manuscripts and to publish original books that could strengthen the identity of the new house. The first original titles were nonfiction, and George Braziller Inc. invested in a distinctive nonfiction list in the late fifties and early sixties that evolved naturally out of the interests evident in Book Find Club selections. The most frequently published and ambitiously promoted authors wrote in the fields of world affairs, psychoanalysis, cultural criticism, and religion.
In 1956, Braziller personally solicited from journalist Herbert Matthews a manuscript based on his *New York Times* reports on Franco’s Spain. The connection with Matthews was especially meaningful for Braziller, who remembered reading Matthews’ dispatches from Spain during the 1930s. Matthews had published with Harcourt, Brace and Bobbs, Merrill, but he accepted Braziller’s proposal for a book on Spain. Matthews’s second Braziller book followed in 1961, *The Cuban Story*, on the Cuban revolution.

Another original manuscript came through channels created by the book clubs, from Theodor Reik, a Viennese psychoanalyst and pupil of Sigmund Freud. The immigrant Reik published with Farrar and Reinhart and then with Farrar, Straus in the forties and early fifties, and two of his books were selected by the Book Find Club. Braziller published three Reik books between 1957 and 1961, during a hiatus in Reik’s association with Farrar, Straus, and placed them prominently in advertisements.

The work of Matthews, Reik, Kahler, and Vahanian set the tone for George Braziller Inc.’s nonfiction, establishing the publisher as a contributor of original work that attracted critical attention. By 1960, reprints had disappeared from Braziller’s list.

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20 *Reminiscences*, 76-78, 83-86, 80.
While the edges of the list were populated by art books and nonfiction on a broad range of topics, including many titles of British origin, Braziller also began to pursue the most risky and potentially prestigious area of publishing, original fiction. Early in 1959, Braziller published first novels by two Americans authors, Lillian Halegua, under the pseudonym Lillian Hale, and Alfred Grossman. Advertising for the books poked fun at the contemporary popularity of writers of the “Fabulous Twenties”: “It was a great decade. It gave us many of the best writers of our time. But that decade ended thirty years ago.” At Braziller, the ad exclaimed, “We’re looking for the New Writers . . . of the Sixties!” Such bravado was perhaps justified, considering the risks of first novels: a large investment and a low rate of success.

George Braziller later expressed some regret that the house had rushed to develop its fiction list and chosen authors who did not develop into major novelists, but in hindsight its first selections do
not appear entirely negligible. Alfred Grossman’s *Acrobat Admits* was reprinted in paper by Avon in 1966, and three more novels followed from Doubleday. Lillian Halegua published two more novels and her first, *The Pearl Bastard*, was reprinted by different publishers three times from the seventies to the nineties. A first novelist of 1960, Teo Savory, published a second novel with Braziller and then a string of poetry and fiction books with the small Unicorn Press, which also reprinted her second novel. The only author to publish no further novels was not a first novelist; Braziller promoted Alan Kapelner’s *All the Naked Heroes* heavily, touting the author as Maxwell Perkins’ last discovery. Scribner’s had brought out Kapelner’s *Lonely Boy Blues* as long ago as 1944. Certainly none of these books enjoyed the kind of success that sustains a publisher, and they must have put an additional strain on Braziller’s growing overhead. At the end of 1959 and beginning of 1960, the publisher moved to larger offices on Park Avenue and added staff, including Edwin Seaver, who left the
Book Find Club around 1950 but despaired of advancing at Little, Brown after ten years. Having failed to make any of the discoveries for which first novels are published, Braziller curtailed, then temporarily abandoned, this risky publishing. Braziller published only five novels by American authors, four of them first novels, from 1961 to 1965, none from 1966 to 1970.  

Publishing first novelists was a perilous route out of the humdrum of reprinting. The publication of foreign works new to the United States presented a smoother path to literary identity and critical acclaim, a path that earlier publishers had followed. Alfred A. Knopf, in particular, had gained inestimable distinction for his list in the twenties and thirties by introducing the right foreign authors to American readers. By the mid-fifties, the practice had again become rewarding enough to encourage small publishers to invest in authors and manuscripts that the large

houses passed over. Since the war, publishers had never caught up with the glut of untranslated European writing; worthy manuscripts were available to a willing American publisher. When he was finally able to obtain a passport again, probably in the summer of 1957, George Braziller began to explore the possibilities.\textsuperscript{22}

Visiting Paris, Braziller met Maria Jolas, the American widow of Eugene Jolas, editor in the 1920s and 1930s of \textit{transition}, the little magazine famous for promoting experimental writing. Jolas “casually mentioned” to Braziller that she was unable to find a publisher for her English translation of Nathalie Sarraute’s first novel, \textit{Portrait d’un inconnu}. Braziller agreed to publish the translation before leaving Paris, and soon established a reputation abroad as a point of entry into American publishing.\textsuperscript{23}

Braziller’s career publishing innovative foreign fiction began at a fortuitous moment, especially with regard to French work. The belated 1956 translation

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] \textit{Reminiscences}, 28, 90-91.
\item[23] \textit{Reminiscences}, 91-92.
\end{footnotes}
of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* marked the “second chance” for French existentialism in the United States and coincided with an interest in new French fiction, by writers a generation younger than the famous existentialists. Soon after World Publishing Co. brought out Walter Kaufmann’s *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956) and Doubleday introduced William Barrett’s *Irrational Man* (1958), Simon and Schuster took a chance on Michel Butor’s *A Change of Heart*, and *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet appeared from Grove Press (both 1959). In the three years from 1959 to 1961, George Braziller published, in translation from the French, novels by Sarraute, Claude Simon, Julien Gracq, Eduoard Glissant, Claude Mauriac, Genevieve Dormann, Kateb Yacine, and Rene Huguenin. By the end of those years, Sarraute, Simon, and Mauriac had emerged as the winners of literary prestige and journalistic attention, buoyed by the excitement over the French “New Wave.”24

By a quirk of international distribution, the "New Wave" French cinema of the late 1950s arrived in the United States at the same time as the experimental writing of the early fifties. The films made a more immediate impression on American audiences and were more quickly accorded a catchy moniker. When the New York Times first reviewed François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* in November 1959, the reviewer began by placing the film at the crest of the "'new wave' of young French directors." Days later, the phrase "new novel" appeared in a book review. The *Times* literary correspondent from France, none other than Braziller-author Claude Mauriac, began discussing the innovations in French fiction in 1958, but first used the term "new novel" only in 1960.

In France, the movement began in 1953 with the landmarks of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes* and Nathalie Sarraute's *Martereau* and, the following year,
with the appearance of Roland Barthes’ *Critique* essay “Littérature Objective,” championing Robbe-Grillet. Among other candidates, such as “anti-novel” and “novel of the future,” the term “nouveau roman” came into use in 1957 and 1958. The new novel embodied a critique of the bourgeois novel of Balzac, the politically engaged novel of Gide or Malraux, and the existential novel of Camus or Sartre. Its apologists rejected the formal components of the novel as previously understood, especially character and plot, and they demanded that the requirements of art take priority over ideological commitments. In agreement on these negative propositions, the new novelists proceeded differently, Robbe-Grillet with his “objective” style, placing an emphasis on visual description, and Sarraute with a description of perceptions and reactions that precede or underlie rational thought and even individual character. The new novelists abandoned the settled conventions of the present to leap into the future, convinced that

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fidelity to their understanding of the novelist’s art would guide them.

Literary journalists played the leading role in explaining innovative writing to American readers. When they sought to explain the new literature’s quirks by analogies to other arts, comparison to the fashionable New Wave cinema came readily to the pen.²⁷ Few connected the new novel to the avant-garde French theater of the early 1950s, although it had been a contemporary artistic movement, was more familiar to New York audiences, and even shared the figure of Samuel Beckett. In the New York Times Book Review, Robert Gessner discussed Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, and Claude Mauriac in a long meditation springing from the observation of E.M. Forster that as the arts “develop . . . they depend on each other for definition.” Gessner traced the influence of the cinema both directly on authors and as transmitted to them through the writings of James Joyce. Although Sarraute’s style cannot be called visual, Gessner quoted her

comparing the attempt to represent consciousness in writing to the ability of film to play images in slow motion. Other writers demonstrating “cinematic techniques,” such as “the sharper visualization of description . . . at surface levels” and “increased manipulation of time and space” were Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner, and Camus. Mauriac himself reported that Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet thought cinema was the “the most modern of the arts” and “one of the sources of the modern novel.”

Marguerite Duras, also identified as a new novelist, and Robbe-Grillet enjoyed the exposure that personal involvement with film brought, most famously at the time through their collaborations with new wave director Alain Resnais, for whom Duras provided the screenplay for *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, Robbe-Grillet the scenario for *Last Year at Marienbad*. The films opened in the United States in 1960 and 1962 respectively. Whatever the value of the analogies made between the different arts, novels

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benefited from the repeated association, which conferred some of the glamour and accessibility of film on the book.

Journalists linked the new novel with innovations in film, but they also subscribed to the high modern belief in the value of literary innovation and the expectation of evolution in literary form. Literary journalists created genealogies to place new authors into the evolutionary story. Moderns Proust, Joyce, Mann, Kafka, and Faulkner were cited as predecessors; the list reached back to Goethe and Dostoevsky, and forward to Gide and Beckett. Canon-making became explicit in Mauriac’s December 1959 report from France, when he imagined some sort of literary trophy or monument: “After Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner, let us inscribe the name of Nathalie Sarraute.” Another French critic, Dominique Aury, approached the game more playfully; discussing Butor’s Renaudot Prize, Aury suggested that innovative writers deserved credit for their work, even if the influence of earlier writers was strongly evident. “You, sir, who wanted
literature" she wrote, echoing Butor’s use of the second person, “here you have it. Here is a new form, a strange romantic tone, an accent you have never heard before. Has Michel Butor read Joyce? So have you, but you have not written ‘La Modification.’”

Henri Peyre traced a transatlantic ancestry for “this new wave in the novel” back to unnamed “American novelists whom Sartre and especially Camus . . . began by imitating.” No doubt Peyre meant Hemingway and probably some combination of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Erskine Caldwell, or John Steinbeck. Whatever the value of Peyre’s insight, the books would be given a more respectful hearing if they were considered the products of high modernism rather than the realism of Caldwell or Steinbeck.

George Braziller Inc., as the publisher of Sarraute, Simon, and Mauriac, joined journalists and

30 Peyre, 32; George Cotkin, Existential America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 120-121.
academic critics in defining the new novel for an American audience. The publisher sought to point beyond the novelty of the French writing to establish a claim for its lasting value, again using genteel ideas of literary greatness. Sometimes, taking the opposite approach, Braziller appealed to non-literary interests, calling upon received ideas about French life to give a book an air of sophisticated fun or intrigue. Unlike the journalists, Braziller first conjured the literary heritage of modernism rather than the vogue for French film.

The campaign for Braziller’s French authors began by invoking canonical modernists. Early advertising for Sarraute’s novels placed her in the tradition of great modernist novelists while also proclaiming that her originality moved her beyond her forebears. Sarraute’s first novel, Portrait of a Man Unknown, was released in August 1958 with Claude Mauriac’s bold assertion: “The first to do so since Proust, she has introduced something new.” The quotation so pleased the people at Braziller that they placed it at the top
of the ad for Sarraute’s *Martereau* in 1959 and used it again that year in a Christmas ad. The *Portrait* ad also quoted at length from Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface, which made the portentous claim that Sarraute “has achieved a technique which makes it possible to attain . . . human reality in its very existence.” Not only did the famous Sartre approve, but he evidently thought Sarraute’s art of the greatest complexity and importance.

In promoting Claude Simon, George Braziller Inc. again relied on citing critics’ made-up lineages, but in Simon’s case, Braziller’s publicity did not progress to making a case for Simon on his own terms. From the first ad for *The Wind* in April 1959, Braziller drew attention to the *Saturday Review*’s comparison of Simon to Dostoevsky, Faulkner, and Ferdinand Céline. Simon, according to Jerrold Lanes, produced the “violent climaxes” of the first two and matched the “intensity” of the latter. Aptly, in making a claim for Simon, Lanes settled on calling him

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“the most powerful talent to have appeared since the war.” Braziller returned to Lanes’ review in an ad in 1960 and again when they advertised The Flanders Road in 1961.\textsuperscript{32} Interestingly, in the context of the post-war exaltation of modernism, Braziller did not make more use of the frequent comparisons of Simon with Faulkner but sacrificed the more prestigious connection for the comparison to Céline based upon power and intensity. The persistence of the genealogical game into the advertising for Simon’s third novel may have indicated the publisher’s suspicion that Simon’s identity among American readers was weak.

For Sarraute, by contrast, comparisons to earlier masters disappeared after the second novel, Martereau. Sarraute’s advertising increasingly stressed her literary excellence without regard to innovation or fashion. As early as the advertising for Martereau, Braziller ads began to distinguish Sarraute from the new novelists as a group. Below Mauriac’s “Proust”

quote, one French critic declared Sarraute “the most brilliant novelist of this generation,” and another French critic found her work “one of the most coherent” among “current attempts to break new ground for the novel.” The American Janet Flanner, who wrote for the New Yorker from Paris under the pen name Genêt, observed that Sarraute “seems the only one among the New Novel experimenters . . . to have struck her own style.”\(^{33}\) Simply being numbered among the modernists or new novelists was not enough; Sarraute had to stake a claim to the longer tradition of the novel, without qualification.

In June 1960, with ten French works-in-translation to its credit, by six different authors, Braziller took the unusual step of placing a full-page advertisement in the New York Times Book Review. Under the heading, “The novel is dead . . . long live the novel!” appeared a signed statement by George Braziller and blurbs on novels by Sarraute, Mauriac, and Simon, with portraits of each. The immediate

\(^{33}\) Advertisement, New York Times, November 6, 1959, 27.
occasion for the ad was the success of Mauriac’s *The Dinner Party*, which had become a best-seller in France and won the Prix Medicis, but the message, as Braziller put it, was that “there’s nothing wrong with the novel a good novelist can’t cure.” Without specifying who believed the novel was dead or even what exactly had killed it, Braziller heralded “a whole new wave of extraordinary novelists,” a “phenomenal group of dedicated authors who are revitalizing the novel and restoring the great tradition.” Braziller steered away from the suggestion of iconoclasm or coterie labeling; he wrote only of “new French novelists,” and, in almost 600 words of copy in the entire advertisement, the term “new novel” appears only once.34

Though Braziller did not invoke the school, he magnanimously included Robbe-Grillet and Butor in his “new wave” pantheon, and thus slyly demonstrated that the movement was not one publisher’s invention. The lack of specificity also allowed Braziller to mention

French authors from his list who were not usually considered new novelists: Julien Gracq, Genevieve Dormann, and Kateb Yacine. Even at the moment of the greatest excitement around the new novel, the preeminent American publisher of the school did not embrace the idea for marketing purposes. Readers wanted novels, French novels, revitalized novels, restored novels, novels in the great tradition, not anti-novels, not new departures into the unknown.

In 1973, when the new novel was upstaged by the arrival of the "New New Novel," Braziller’s strategy remained the same; the advertisement for Sarraute’s Do You Hear Them? informed readers that the book “exhibits the values of the age-old novel and brings to it indispensable qualities of the age-old novelist.” If it seems odd for the book to bear the “qualities” of a novelist, that is because the Braziller staff, condensing a passage from the New York Times Book Review, garbled the sentence while eliminating a reference to the new novel, mistakenly making the novel the grammatical subject. The
original had claimed that “though she [Sarraute] writes the New Novel, she exhibits through it the values of the age-old novel and brings to it indispensable qualities of the age-old novelist.” George Braziller Inc. actively eliminated references to the new novel, while emphasizing the age-old tradition.³⁵

If Sarraute’s advertising moved from invoking more modern to more traditional models of the novel, the advertising for Claude Mauriac demonstrated a less literary approach. Eschewing references to style and technique, Braziller introduced Mauriac’s books as windows into French life. Mauriac’s share of the “long live the novel” ad noted the critical and sales success of the novel in France, then placed the reader, the “seventh guest,” in the scene of the novel, a Parisian dinner party in “an elegant apartment on the Île Saint-Louis.” The reader is promised a revealing look at his or her fellow guests,

“especially what one critic has called their ‘amatory history.’” An earlier ad gave brief descriptions of the novel’s characters, also emphasizing “amatory history.” Neither ad mentioned that the novel itself provided no such clear cut introductions but “require[d] intense concentration” on the part of the reader to solve “a literary puzzle,” in the words of the unconvinced critic Orville Prescott. Indeed, the publisher provided a “seating arrangement card” with the book, as a clue to the puzzle. Would the reader expect avant-garde formal innovation from a novel advertised under the headline “Before Your Next Dinner Party be sure to read The Dinner Party by Claude Mauriac”? Given the novel’s exposé of “petty vanities and sexual obsessions,” its readers might be discouraged from throwing such parties at all.

As Life magazine in the forties had turned the existentialist writers into cigarette-smoking, café-lounging celebrities, not entirely without their collaboration, so Braziller sought to sell Mauriac by an appeal to a particular American stereotype of
France. This France was defined, at once patronizingly and enviously, in contrast to a similarly ideal American society; it was the world of Parisian society: fashionable, impractical, intellectual, artistic, pretentious, leisurely, hedonistic, a place where promiscuity and even adultery were tolerated. George Braziller Inc. invited American readers into this world through Mauriac’s novels. “I forgot I was reading a book,” wrote Gilbert Highet, as quoted in Braziller’s 1962 ad for The Marquise Went Out at Five:

I felt as though I were standing on a balcony above the Carrefour de Buci, sharing for an hour the life of those gay, harassed, volatile, intelligent, sensual, xenophobic people of Paris.

Though the ad mentions a similarity to Ulysses, the reader is promised amusement in “deciphering” the modernist literary techniques; in the words of William Barrett, it is “like a game played at a Paris sidewalk café.” In 1964 advertising for Mauriac’s All Women Are Fatal, the brief copy described the philandering protagonist’s affairs and his conclusion

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36 see Cotkin, 92-93.
that women are “interchangeable.” George Braziller Inc. was frank about stirring up controversy; the ad read, “We imagine that M. Mauriac’s feminine readers will have their own thoughts about this.” The sexual themes of the novel attracted reviews in *Time* and *Newsweek*, publications only intermittently interested in new French writing.\(^{37}\)

Braziller’s hope to participate in the marketing of the popular vision of France shaped its campaign for a less well-established French writer, Geneviève Dormann. Dormann published a first novel in France in 1959, *La Fanfaronne*, a title which might be rendered in English as “The Woman Braggart.” Offering the book instead as *The Seasons of Love* in 1960, Braziller positioned the novel more clearly for the American reader as an account of amorous French life.

Braziller’s publicity director in 1960, Mavis Clark, had recently left Conde Nast, where she worked on *Vogue*, and she contacted *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*,

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hoping they would give the book valuable exposure. Clark compared Dormann to Françoise Sagan, the most popular purveyor of books on Paris love life, who, Clark believed, shared readers with Mademoiselle. Advertising for the book promoted Dormann as a “sophisticated young Parisienne,” included a smiling photo of the blonde author, and suggested parallels between her life and that of the unfaithful heroine of her novel. Readers tantalized by sexually liberated Parisiennes were promised a near brush with the real thing. Hoping that the excitement around French life could be applied to Braziller’s other French publications, Clark asked her contact at Vogue to consider a story on French writing for its “Paris” issue. Clark dispatched a whole “French Kit,” including several novels; Mauriac’s book of critical essays, The New Literature, “just for background atmosphere”; and a copy of the “long live the novel” ad as an introduction.38

38 Mavis Clark to Tracy Brigdon, Mademoiselle, June 10, 1960; Unsigned [Mavis Clark] to Carol Phillips, June 14, 1960, Box 8, Folder 9 (“Dormann, Genevieve: The Seasons of Love”), Archives of George Braziller Inc., Princeton University Library Department of
Braziller’s commitment to innovative fiction was not limited to French authors, but extended to a handful of Spanish and Italian authors and also to Janet Frame, on whose behalf Braziller was forced to greater promotional exertions than on behalf of its French authors. In 1959 George Braziller was busy creating an identity for his young press. He had initiated his first book series, introduced first novels, and begun an ambitious effort on behalf of current French literature, when, that May, a battered novel arrived at his office. The book was printed by the Pegasus Press of New Zealand and had been rejected by some twenty American publishers who had seen it already. Its author was an unknown New Zealander whom her literary agents wrongly believed to be living in a mental hospital in London. After Braziller initially set the book aside, something prompted him to take it home and read it, and he decided immediately to

Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton, N.J. (hereafter referred to as AGB); Advertisement, New York Times, August 23, 1960, 27.
Over more than thirty years, George Braziller Inc. published eighteen titles by Frame and played a more crucial role in her career than it had in those of its leading French authors. The mechanisms that operated around French authors, the dense literary networks of Paris, the well-established publishing houses, the annual round of prizes, the buzz of literary journalism, did not apply to a New Zealand writer. To launch Frame’s American career, Braziller had to improvise different strategies of publicity.

After Frame’s first novel, *Owls Do Cry*, earned favorable reviews in the United States, Braziller began to run large advertisements in the *New York Times*. Unlike the ads for the new novelists, they featured longer company-written texts and fewer excerpts from reviews. For *Faces in the Water*, in 1962, Braziller chose the appeal of the confessional book, suggesting that Frame based her novel on

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personal experience, but was unwilling to make its case openly. The first ad, released ahead of publication, speculated, somewhat coyly, that “this first novel would seem to be in some measure autobiographical, for how else could one write . . . with such passionate identification?” After reviews had appeared, Braziller was still unwilling to make the connection on its own authority. “The world of the mentally deranged—how could she write so truthfully about it?” an ad asked and promptly answered, “Time says that this talented young author from New Zealand has been a ‘voluntary patient in several mental hospitals.’” As in the case of Geneviève Dormann’s presumed extramarital affairs, Frame’s putative mental illness was used to authenticate her novel. Since Mary Jane Ward’s 1946 bestseller, The Snake Pit, confessional novels or autobiographies about women’s mental illness had become successful minor genres. George Braziller Inc. had its own bestseller in the field in the spring of 1961 with the pseudonymous Joyce MacIver’s The Frog
Frame’s biographer later suspected that Frame’s agent or publisher had supplied *Time* with the details of her personal life in the first place. Frame, who was upset by *Time’s* invasion of her privacy, abhorred the fixation on her mental health, which she believed denigrated her skill as a writer. She may never have seen Braziller’s ad.⁴⁰

George Braziller Inc. did seek to establish its author as a skilled writer, as well as someone who wrote from experience, and took the usual step of comparing Frame to her literary predecessors. At first Braziller repeated the “mantra” of publishers and journalists who declared her “the most talented writer to have come out of New Zealand since Katherine Mansfield.” Braziller included this claim in ads and publicity material for seven of Frame’s first eight books, usually mentioning her antipodean origins only in this context. New Zealand, apparently, was not thought to hold any special mystique. Comparisons more germane to Frame’s writing were made to Joyce and

Woolf, but without specific reference to formal innovation. Without the pretension of reviving or remaking the novel, Frame’s publicity fell back on assertions of her genius. Braziller apparently did not value the qualities that reviewers commented upon most consistently, the nearness of her prose to poetry and its suffusion with metaphor. Like the actual volume of poetry Frame published with Braziller, these qualities went unheralded in Frame’s publicity.41

American critics welcomed Janet Frame, as they welcomed the new French writers, not without reservation, but with appreciation for her ability and curiosity about the innovations she attempted. Critics and publisher shared an idea of literature indebted to the academic and critical exaltation of modernism, a discourse which valued virtuosity with language and experimentation with literary forms and discounted the fulfillment of readers’ expectations. Book review periodicals and publishers alike

understood that work fulfilling the innovative model of literature would rarely attract popular interest on the largest scale, but, as long as such work maintained its prestige, it was important to review and publish it, along with books of wider appeal. Although the unpopularity of innovative literature is sometimes asserted as a basis of its prestige, for the United States in the twentieth century, it is a mistake to posit an opposition between economic and cultural capital in which sales damage prestige.

Publishers tested the market by publication, understanding that their ability to predict sales was limited. From a group of titles none of which could be confidently expected to sell, a publisher nonetheless expected some titles to sell well, without knowing which in advance. As Catherine Turner has shown for the period between world wars, writers and their publishers collaborated to find an audience for innovative fiction and poetry, drawing simultaneously on the resources of literary prestige and new methods
of commercial promotion. Though writers and even publishers employed anti-commercial rhetoric, they did so to distinguish their own products from those with insufficient literary value. If their claims of artistic seriousness could be validated, then publicity, popularity, and sales would not be understood as proof to the contrary. In the 1960s, George Braziller Inc. similarly sought to combine literary publishing with sales and profits. If publishing Janet Frame or Nathalie Sarraute was its own reward, from the standpoint of serving the cause of literature and of giving the house an identity, Braziller did not merely seek to convert the revenue from other books to cultural capital by bringing out unsaleable literature. Sarraute and Frame, difficult and relatively unfamiliar, make perfect test cases, and closer examination shows that Braziller promoted and publicized both authors over decades and hoped that each of their titles would pay its own way.

Braziller published more books by Sarraute and Frame over a longer span of time than any other authors. Their associations with Braziller began in 1958 and 1960, respectively, and lasted through their lifetimes. Sarraute’s and Frame’s careers with Braziller even intersected in 1967 when they made simultaneous visits to the United States. For the occasion, Braziller moved up the publication dates of their new books to take advantage of “the publicity their appearances here will stir up.” The two authors enjoyed a dinner together at which Frame demonstrated her knowledge of Sarraute’s novel *The Planetarium*, and Sarraute complimented her insight. Sarraute was about to embark on a tour of lectures, interviews, and public events arranged by George Braziller Inc. Braziller had even considered paperbacks “for the college market” to coincide with the author’s arrival. The publisher embraced the job of publicizing and selling its literary authors, belying any suggestion
that it accepted financial loss as necessary to the
accumulation of cultural capital.43

Braziller’s success in the endeavor was mixed. Sales figures for Sarraute’s books show that only one of her first ten titles failed to recoup Braziller’s outlays for manufacturing and royalty payments. Published in 1969 and selling fewer than 1400 copies, Between Life and Death, a novel describing the writing process, fell short by only $25. Publishers incurred many expenses besides manufacturing and royalties, of course, including marketing expenses, mostly for purchasing advertising, and the overhead needed to run the business day-to-day. Neither of these expenses was calculated title by title in the 1978 ledger of Sarraute’s books; one is tempted to assume that such a calculation was impossible because they were not billed to specific titles. A 1982 document shows a post-facto attempt to calculate the contribution to overhead made by Sarraute’s later titles. In addition

43 Bertie Hoover to Barbara Bannon (Publishers Weekly), January 24, 1967, Box 43, Folder 1 (Sarraute, Nathalie: You Don’t Love Yourself + Tropics [sic]), AGB; King, 315-316; Bertie Hoover to Nathalie Sarraute, January 13, 1967; Bertie Hoover to George Braziller, January 9, 1967, Box 43, Folder 1 (see above).
to expenses for royalties and manufacturing, Keith Goldsmith, a long-time Braziller employee, calculated that 49% of each title’s sales income should be deducted to cover overhead. Making this deduction, in addition to manufacturing and royalty costs, placed all the titles considered by Goldsmith into the red except the paperback edition of Tropisms.44

Adopting Braziller’s own method would give an unnecessarily bleak idea of the profitability of publishing Sarraute, though it underscores the unlikelihood that the publisher made any money by its efforts on her behalf. If, for books appearing in small print runs of three or four thousand, 49% of sales is subtracted to cover overhead, selling the entire printing would about break even. This was probably accurate and was likely the case for Sarraute’s titles. A book that sells well, however, may sell ten times its original printing or more. As the number of copies sold rises, manufacturing costs

44 No author, chart, January 31, 1979, Box 42, Folder 5 (Sarraute, Nathalie: Five Plays); Keith [Goldsmith] to George [Braziller], Mary, and Deborah, August 30, 1982, Box 41, Folder 19 (Sarraute, Nathalie: Childhood), AGB.
per unit fall and overhead per unit falls even more dramatically. If overhead expenses are always calculated at 49% of sales, then overhead expenses are considered to rise in direct proportion to quantity sold. Advertising expenses may have been included in the overhead calculation, and did tend to rise as sales increased, but in a given case they might not rise at all or might not rise in direct proportion to sales. Calculating overhead as a fixed portion of sales is not accurate if the goal is to judge the profitability of individual titles.45

The purpose of Braziller’s use of the overhead calculation is revealed when Keith Goldsmith considered the feasibility of reprinting Ronald Glasser’s *365 Days* in 1982. “No net profit would be realized” if 50% of sales revenue were deducted for overhead, Goldsmith wrote, “though its [the reprint’s] contribution to overhead would be substantial for

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45 On an unrelated 1973 memorandum, Braziller’s production manager used 50% of sales to calculate “advertising and overhead.” Herman [Figatner] to Ginger [Curwen], June 21, 1973, typed on Ginger to Herman, June 21, 1973, Box 1, Folder 4 (American Culture [special promotion and ideas / comments]), AGB.
minimal effort." 46 The overhead expense referred to is the publisher’s total overhead, not the overhead on this particular title; otherwise, the title’s “contribution to overhead” would only cover the expenses generated by the reprint itself and so be no incentive to reprint. In other words, Braziller believed the book would make a profit in relation to its own expenses and would cover the costs from other titles. The “minimal effort” of producing the reprint would cost something in terms of overhead, but it would be a small, fixed amount, not a percentage of sales. Since Braziller apparently did not track overhead and advertising expenses by title, copies sold and gross income are probably the best indicators of whether titles paid for themselves.

In the case of Sarraute’s biggest-selling Braziller title, Tropisms, considered in both hardcover and paperback since the two editions would have shared many overhead expenses from type-setting to publicity, the books sold a combined 8565 copies by

46 Keith [Goldsmith] to George [Braziller], Mary, and Deborah, September 2, 1982, Box 39, Folder 4 (Reprints), AGB.
1978, with income exceeding costs by $5684. The book was not heavily advertised, probably because the original French edition was published in 1939; even if we generously estimated $3000 in advertising, more than $2500 would be left to cover the book’s share of editing, warehousing, and smaller overhead debits. This one title seems highly likely to have made a small profit, though it could have paid little of the overhead on other titles that struggled to break even.

The next largest gross income was on *The Golden Fruits*, with $3025 on 3631 copies sold by 1978. Since the novel was highly publicized, it is likely that advertising ate up most of that gross profit, and other overhead considerations absorbed any remainder. Taken as a group, Sarraute’s Braziller titles represented a small but steady drain on overhead, but not an absolute loss.

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47 Unfortunately, without detailed sales records showing the year of each sale, it is impossible to convert income to 2004 dollars. The value in 2004 dollars of the $1.95 retail price for the paperback fell from $11 in 1967 to $5.70 in 1978, so early sales were more valuable. Usually most sales of a title occur in the first year.
Lacking such comprehensive figures for Janet Frame’s books, an estimate of her contribution to Braziller’s bottom line proves more speculative, but it appears that she contributed slightly more without rising out of the same pattern of earning back calculable expenses but making the publisher no profit. The best figures available stem from the 1966 publication of her novel *State of Siege*, which sold 3324 copies domestically before going out of print in 1976. *State of Siege*’s sales accord with Braziller’s estimate that Frame’s titles sold on average between three and four thousand copies. Assuming an average discount of 45% off the retail price of $5.00, gross income would equal $9141, the 10% royalty equaling $1662. Manufacturing costs for the 5000 copy print run would absorb some amount of the remaining $7479; anything less than $1.50 per unit would break even. Sarraute’s 1967 *Tropisms* hardback cost $0.84 per unit and *The Golden Fruits* cost $1.10 in 1964, so *State of Siege* probably made enough income to cover some advertising costs as well. Add a small amount for 388
foreign sales and 900 remaindered copies, and the title may have exceeded its own overhead expenses enough to help meet a small amount of the general overhead.48

Janet Frame’s publishing career with Braziller may have been helped by early success that held out the promise of better sales in the future. After *Owls Do Cry* sold only 800 copies, Frame’s second novel, *Faces in the Water*, sold 5000 between its publication in 1961 and 1964 and won attention in the popular press, including *Time*. Braziller’s sales manager sent an announcement of *Time*’s praise to booksellers with the suggestion that they replenish their stocks. The Book Find Club combined the two books into a dual offer for $4.95 [[$32]].49 The title continued to sell

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48 Tish [Letitia Burns O’Connor] to George Braziller, April 15, 1980, Box 10, Folder 21 (Janet Frame [Miscellaneous]); Agreement between Janet Frame c/o Brandt & Brandt and George Braziller Inc., January 14, 1966, Box 11, Folder 7 (Frame, Janet: A State of Siege), AGB; Reminiscences, 136.

49 Prices in brackets represent 2005 dollars, using the conversion factors in Robert C. Sahr, “Inflation Conversion Factors for Years 1665 to estimated 2016,” revised March 10, 2006, <www.oregonstate.edu/ dept/pol_sci/fac/ sahr/sahr.htm>. Figures obtained are rounded to two or three significant digits to avoid an exaggerated appearance of precision. For amounts less than $20 (2004), significant amounts less than one dollar are rounded to the nearest fifty cents.
well enough to entice Avon Books to publish a paperback in 1969, though Peter Mayer of Avon later reported that the paperback “didn’t sell,” at least by Avon’s standards. The potential shown by *Faces in the Water* may have encouraged Braziller to ensure the good favor of the author; Frame’s advances consistently outpaced Sarraute’s. Frame received $1500 [$9040] in 1966 for *State of Siege* and $3000 [$14,000] in 1972 for *Daughter Buffalo*, while Sarraute received $500 [$2660] in 1969 for *Between Life and Death*, and was at first offered the same for *Do You Hear Them?* in 1972. Renee Spodheim, working on behalf of Sarraute’s publisher Gallimard, lobbied for a $1000 advance, arguing that “while she has not sold very well, Nathalie Sarraute sells nevertheless steadily and you could not get an American writer of her stature for a comparable advance.” Braziller increased its offer to $750 [$3500] only because it wanted paperback rights added to the deal, not because it agreed with Spodheim’s definition of steady sales. In 1977, despite high inflation rates, Sarraute received $750
[$2400] again for *Fools Say*; meanwhile her early Braziller titles were falling out of print.\(^50\)

Before the 1980s, when Frame launched her multi-volume autobiography, none of her works realized the potential shown by *Faces in the Water*, but not because author or publisher easily accepted the idea that her work could not sell well. Advertising in the *New York Times* was not a given, especially for a book with limited sales expectations. In one case in which a complete publicity budget is available for a Braziller title, Edita Morris’s 1971 memoir *Life, Wonderful Life!* *Times* advertising accounted for 60% of the advertising budget, and all advertising accounted for 75% of the publicity budget, meaning that *Times* ads

\(^50\) No author, press release for *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, no date [1964], Box 11, Folder 6 (Frame, Janet: Scented Gardens for the Blind; Two Sheep; and Snowman, Snowman); Julien D. McKee, announcement, January 8, 1962, Box 11, Folder 8 (Frame, Janet: Stories and Fables); George Brantl to Herman Figatner, November 30, 1961, Box 11, Folder 3 (Frame, Janet: Faces in the Water); Peter Mayer to George Braziller, September 2, 1980, Box 10, Folder 21 (see n.48); Agreement, January 14, 1966 (see n.48); Agreement between Janet Frame and George Braziller Inc., January 7, 1972, Box 11, Folder 5 (Frame, Janet: Pocket Mirror); No author, memorandum, no date [1980], Box 42, Folder 13 (Sarraute, Nathalie: The Use of Speech); Renee Spodheim to Victoria de Ramel, January 13 and 21, 1972; Victoria de Ramel to Renee Spodheim, January 14, 1972, Box 42, Folder 6 (Sarraute, Natalie [sic]: Pools Say [folder 1]), AGB.
alone cost 45% of the total publicity budget. Advertising a Frame book in the New York Times may have added as much to Braziller’s investment in a title as advances and royalty obligations. Despite the expense, Braziller consistently advertised and promoted Frame. In the one case in which I have been unable to locate a Times ad for a Frame title, Owls Do Cry in 1960, Braziller sent out over 200 review copies, along with “pix” of the author and review “slips,” to twenty-five national magazines, newspapers in forty-three states, paperback publishers, book clubs, and publishing trade journals.51

The 1963 publication of Janet Frame’s short story collections illustrates George Braziller Inc.’s determination to sell Frame. The previous year, Braziller agreed to participate in a scheme hatched by Frame’s British publisher W.H. Allen to help her write. Since 1958, Frame had been in and out of Maudsley Hospital in London, receiving National

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Assistance, and living in unsuitable accommodations in London, Cornwall, and Suffolk. Mark Goulden of W.H. Allen, hoping that Frame would yet write a bestseller, raised money for her to live hassle-free for a year in a quiet flat in Kensington. The money included a $2000 [$12,900] advance from Braziller for *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, two books of short stories, and a second novel, as yet unnamed and unwritten. Though the short stories were accepted in the context of charitably nurturing an author in need, George Braziller Inc. decided to throw its resources into the publication.

The stories filled 364 printed pages, but Braziller decided to bring them out in a two-volume set in a slip-case, as *The Reservoir: Stories and Sketches* and *Snowman Snowman: Fables and Fantasies*. After setting an initial publicity budget of $2040, including $1540 for ads in the *New York Times*, George Braziller wrote by hand on the typed budget.

52 King, 235. Agreement between Janet Frame and George Braziller Inc., September 14, 1962, Box 11, Folder 6 (see n.50).
“overspend” and increased the total to $5500. In Publishers Weekly the publisher made its case:

A two-volume boxed set . . . by an author who has not yet become a monument is, we admit, an unusual undertaking, but then we like to do the unusual—when it is warranted.

The advertising copy summed up the combination of qualities that made Frame “absolutely unique,” and the unusual format of the books reflected Frame’s singularity at the same time that it declared the publication of Frame’s stories a literary event. The publisher’s commitment impressed the New York Times enough to prompt a special notice, echoing Braziller’s publicity materials, that Frame would “achieve the unusual distinction of a two-volume boxed edition of her short works.” The advertisement in the New York Times featured a photograph of the books, spines emerging from the slip-case, giving the image equal space with text citing Frame’s critical success and repeating the claims for her uniqueness. The “handsomely designed” set was priced at $7 [$45], less than the art books or the American Epochs series books
with which it shared the fall list. Braziller’s contemporary novels sold for $4 or $4.50.\textsuperscript{53}

In addition to the slip-case packaging and the advertising, Braziller also undertook a letter-writing campaign hoping to interest some literary eminence in Frame’s cause. The publicity budget called for a hundred “reading” copies, to be covered by a personal letter from George Braziller, in addition to the 300 review copies to be sent out. At least sixty of the letters were written, addressed to critics and writers including Edmund Wilson, Saul Bellow, Carson McCullers, Robert Penn Warren, J.D. Salinger, Lionel Trilling, Eudora Welty, and John Updike. “If you are not already familiar with Janet Frame’s work,” read Braziller’s letter, “I think you may enjoy ‘discovering’ her in these stories and tales.” Could a handsome binding lure the reclusive Salinger out of hiding? It did prompt a tart Marianne Moore to exclaim her “deep” admiration for George Braziller

Inc.’s loyalty to its author. “You are chivalry itself,” she wrote and praised the books as “beautifully done,” though she found herself unable to compliment Frame beyond agreeing that she was “unusual.”

Braziller’s campaign attracted reviews from *Time*, *Harper’s*, and the *Saturday Review*, as well as weekday and *Book Review* coverage in the *New York Times*. The format attracted attention as well as the content. Orville Prescott, in the weekday *Times*, even tried to expose Braziller’s gambit. According to Prescott, publishers “flinch and worry” when authors present them with short stories instead of more saleable novels. George Braziller, “a courageous publisher,” Prescott wrote, “has thought of a new approach to the problem,” to overwhelm the reading public with an attractive presentation. The publisher wanted the public to conclude that “surely so impressive a package must be deserved!” *Time*, with a keen eye for

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54 George Braziller to Edmund Wilson, July 19, 1963; Marianne Moore to George Braziller, August 5, 1963, Box 11, Folder 8 (see n.50).
flimflam, counseled, "It is a fairly good rule of thumb to avoid books that come in cardboard slipcases." At least some in the public were impressed; thirty years later, editor and literary agent Tim Curnow remembered admiring Braziller's editions of Frame, and the story collections in particular, as a bookstore manager in Auckland.55

Despite packaging and publicity, the stories sold no better than other Frame titles. George Braziller Inc.'s daring flight in the face of the low expectations that might have attached to short fiction by a little-known foreign author ended in disappointment. A memo to Braziller staff about the promotion of Frame's next novel, Scented Gardens for the Blind, took a distinctly downbeat tone about sales potential: "We don’t expect that the lines will form in front of bookstores at eight in the morning to get this book," the memo read. By virtue of Frame’s "sheer writing genius," the novel would rightfully

“fascinate some readers and perhaps many,” but the burden of publicizing the novel fell on Braziller’s staff. “It’s up to us to put a book like this across,” because, though Frame would receive “important review treatment,” the usual review treatment could accomplish little. Perhaps remembering the letter-writing campaign on behalf of the stories, the author of the memo lamented that Frame “awaits only the coming of a commensurate critic to herald her fame to the many.”

If Frame were to sell, some stimulus would have to come from outside the circuit of publicity that the publisher could engineer. Although the publisher nowhere blames book buyers and readers for their cool response to Frame, the experience with the story collection taught the publisher the limits of its ability to win popular acceptance for Frame’s work.

Braziller remained the model of a loyal publisher in many ways, investing in expensive Times advertising, keeping Frame’s titles in print after

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56 No author, press release for Scented Gardens for the Blind, no date [1964], Box 11, Folder 6 (see n.50).
their sales had fallen off, and never refusing a manuscript or insisting on changes. In 1967, despite Frame’s doubts about its quality, Braziller published her volume of poems, *The Pocket Mirror*, though there was little prospect of breaking even. In 1969, when Frame decided to change the title of her new novel from *The Rainbirds* to *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room*, her publishers in New Zealand and Great Britain protested, partly on the grounds that customers would be confused by the new title; only Braziller accepted Frame’s wishes.

Frame, however, was not unwavering in her gratitude; like her publisher, she was not content merely to see her books appear in print, but wanted them to fulfill whatever sales potential they had. On the advice of her agent, who convinced her that Braziller was neglecting her books, she asked George Braziller to let her seek another publisher in 1969. An emotional Braziller, as she later recalled, convinced her to stay with him, and the following year she dropped her agent instead. Frame recognized that
she shared some of the blame for her disappointing
sales though she believed that her writing could be
marketed in a way that would earn more. She wrote to
a friend, “I don’t earn any money from his
[Braziller’s] way of marketing and my way of writing,”
but “the personal touch [is] worth all the financial
earnings I don’t get.” Ironically, at that moment in
1979, Frame could not find a publisher willing to take
her latest novel in Great Britain or in New Zealand
itself. Moreover, the acutely shy Frame habitually
refused to participate in her own publicity. When
Yellow Flowers appeared in the United States, she was
in New York City in lodgings arranged by George
Braziller but chose not to give interviews or make
public appearances. She would not allow Owls Do Cry
to be adapted for film in 1978, cutting off the royal
road to large-scale marketing. Only with the
publication of her autobiography, in which she greatly
relaxed the demands she placed on the readers of her
novels, and with its subsequent adaptation as a mini-
series by film director Jane Campion, did Frame
finally enjoy outstanding sales. It is doubtful that anything Braziller could have done, at the risk of incurring an additional loss to himself, would have made Janet Frame a popular author before 1982.⁵⁷

Despite George Braziller Inc.’s efforts, innovative foreign literary titles could not pay the publisher’s expenses. By 1966 and 1967, aside from Sarraute and Simon, Braziller’s French program, and its smaller Italian and Spanish ventures were exhausted. In those years, Braziller brought out a second and last novel by Geneviève Dormann and another second and last by Pierre Gascar, a former winner of the Prix Goncourt, from whose pen Little, Brown had published four novels in the United States before giving up in 1964. After another second and last novel, Spaniard Xavier Domingo’s *The Dreams of Reason* in 1966, Braziller tried novels by the Italian Silvano Ceccherini and the Dutch Jan Wolkers in 1967, and then introduced no new foreign-language authors. For six

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⁵⁷ King, 311-312, 331, 342, 423, 428, 337. It should be noted that Frame learned in 1969 that if a British publisher handled her American rights she could avoid paying income tax to both the U.S. and New Zealand.
years, Braziller introduced no fiction writers from outside the United States, and when it again reached beyond the border it was to authors who wrote in English.

Though Braziller’s identity was linked closely to the new novelists and Janet Frame, the house never abandoned other interests and, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, presented a diversified list that bore the same Braziller signature detectable in the selections of the Book Find Club and the Seven Arts Book Society. In rough order of the number of titles, the fields in which Braziller published might be grouped as: biography, memoir, and belles letters; architecture and urban design; painting, photography, drawing, and design art; psychology; science; politics, social thought, and world affairs; and religion. Biographies most frequently featured artists or politicians. Braziller’s diversity was that of the permanent innovative press; its titles remained within the elevated categories related to scholarship and humane learning. Self-help and how-
to, games and puzzles, hobbies and cookery, jokes and cartoons: none of these lucrative fields found a place. George Braziller Inc. publicized few of its individual non-fiction titles. The efforts of the Braziller staff instead revolved around its series books in art, architecture, American culture, religion, and anthropology.

George Braziller Inc. launched the Great American Artists book series in 1959, the first of nine series the firm would introduce over the following four years. With these series, the house made its signal contribution to the middlebrow culture of the early sixties. As a group, the series reveal the possibilities of the latter-day middlebrow culture they exemplify and also further illuminate George Braziller Inc.’s negotiation of changing values and business opportunities. The series were created, as Braziller later recalled, for use by the book clubs.58 The new publishing house took advantage of an existing outlet and the clubs could use the series to attract

58 Reminiscences, 152.
serial purchases or offer the books in boxed sets as premiums.

Manifest in the series was the middlebrow’s democratic, aspirational approach to a culture of promised excellence brought to its audience through commercial media. Carrying on many of the specifically middlebrow formulae of presentation and valuation, Braziller’s middlebrow nonetheless reflected its period in the definition of the high cultural subject material, demonstrating its greater distance from the genteel culture that spawned the middlebrow. Originally, middlebrow culture had borne an implicit critique of academic specialization. The makers of the middlebrow, as Joan Shelley Rubin has shown, wanted to make the high culture of arts and letters available to the general reader. Middlebrow products presented culture both intellectually, by introducing, explaining, summarizing, and judging it, and physically, by offering texts and reproductions in the form of commodities. They sought a position between the vibrant world of American business, the
white-collar society in which their sought-after audience lived, and the world of cultural excellence represented by the genteel tradition. While they stood in ambiguous relations to the poles of commodification and the exaltation of the genteel canon, they more clearly rejected both the academic professionalization of humane knowledge and radical innovation in the arts, trends which seemed themselves to reject the general reader.

At the height of the middlebrow moment, however, a countertrend appeared that steadily brought middlebrow and academic culture together. As higher education expanded and student choice and electives multiplied, the need for less specialized curricular materials grew. Universities themselves increasingly embraced the middlebrow critique of specialization. The Great Books movement had begun as a critique of academic specialization and in the work of John Erskine and Mortimer Adler had entered the commercial middlebrow out of academic contexts. The curricular systemization of the Great Books idea, as pioneered by
Adler, was a model not only of liberal general education, but also of the systematization of knowledge that facilitated both college teaching and middlebrow marketing. The celebrity of Adler, the University of Chicago program, and Robert Maynard Hutchins placed a marketable authority behind the timeless great books; first the technique of reading was marketed in Adler’s *How to Read a Book* (1940), then a collection of complete texts was offered as the *Great Books of the Western World* (1952), complete with a “syntopicon” that provided a thematic index to guide users.  

The specification of the “Western” world in the title of the book series connects the later Great Book movement to another idea that served as a basis of general education: Western Civilization. In the years after the First World War, publishers and educators alike seized on a distinctly American reinterpretation of the European past, effectively formulated by James Harvey Robinson and the New Historians of the 1900s.

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and 1910s. In addition to politics and economics, Robinson’s history retained the content of the genteel vision of cultural history: landmarks of European or, if extended in time and space back to the ancient Mediterranean or forward to modern North America, “Western” thought and art. But Robinson’s New Historical view valued cultural landmarks less for intrinsic, ahistorical, aesthetic considerations than for evidence of the evolution of the Western mind toward its twentieth-century manifestation. By this distinction, professional historians separated themselves from their belles-lettres predecessors who might have subscribed to a notion of timeless art. Undergraduate students and general readers may easily have overlooked this difference in their embrace of the idea of a Western tradition. The vision of a single Western tradition proved attractive in the United States, where it allowed Americans who felt that they lacked a tradition to claim the cultural legacy that, in Europe, lay divided by nationalism.60

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60 Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western
The New History served educators and publishers much as the Great Books idea served them, by providing a framework that allowed diverse materials to be taught or packaged together. The narrative of the New History justified inclusion of materials in a curriculum or book on the basis of evolutionary significance, not on genteel judgments of quality. To the extent that the development of the Western mind could be viewed as a single coherent process, its study could unify the elements of a liberal education. The ideal Western Civ student, like the ideal Great Books student, recapitulated the intellectual journey of Western Man, though by a different route. As Western Civ courses spread throughout the colleges and universities in the 1920s and 1930s, they helped define what liberal learning meant to the growing population of college graduates. Publishers were quick to promote middlebrow products by connecting them to the Western Civ idea. The popular “outlines” of the twenties and thirties reflected the influence

of Robinson’s belief that the Western tradition could be understood systematically. One of the most successful outline writers, Will Durant, was indebted to the New History and the Western Civ movement; Durant adopted the term “civilization,” and the sense in which Western Civ employed it, for the title of his popular series, The Story of Civilization.61

George Braziller Inc.’s book series similarly played upon the middlebrow nexus between academia and the general reader, different series taking their cues from different academic specialties. The series were variously indebted to Western Civ, American Studies, the world history movement, anthropology, and art history. Even in the case of an academically-inspired series, George Braziller Inc. combined the appeal of current scholarship with strategies that publishers had used to hype genteel culture since nineteenth-century campaigns for “treasury” and “library” books.

Western Civilization provided the most enduring source of inspiration for book series. The utility of

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the structuring concept of Western Civ was chiefly
that it strung together works in different artistic
periods: the reader was never expected to specialize
too deeply, but a wide-ranging series of books could
be presented together. Braziller used this device for
the first time in 1961 with the Great Ages of World
Architecture (GAWA) series. The books were released
in three groups of four; the first eight covered the
classical Mediterranean world, medieval Europe, and
modern Europe, encompassing the usual Western Civ
ambit. The series promised “to provide the general
reader with an insight into cultural periods as seen
through their architecture.” The accompanying 14,000-
word texts were written by scholars. By design or
chance, some of the authors were expert educators and
popularizers, like Bates Lowry on the Italian
Renaissance and the young Vincent Scully on modernism.
Scully had already dipped into the world of
popularization, providing the text of Frank Lloyd
Wright (1960) for Braziller’s Masters of World
Architecture series. In addition to original texts,
the volumes boasted over 100 illustrations, representing a major editorial project. The illustrations were laid out in slender 7 1/4” x 10” books, the format of Braziller’s early art and architecture series. The price was set at $4.95 [$32]. GAWA was cleverly positioned to attract both a broader Western Civ audience and a more specialized architectural audience. In advertising, Braziller suggested an additional audience with a more immediate application for their knowledge, tourists; the series could “provide high-level ‘travel books’ for Americans visiting abroad.”62 These different possible audiences may have been less important than the academic audience. With the 1965 release of the series in paperback, at $2.95 [$18.00], advertising stressed the demand from “teachers and students.”63

The series Cultures of Mankind took a similar course to the GAWA series through a broader range of cultural expressions. Introduced in 1965, the series began, chronologically, with volumes on Greece and

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Rome and continued with six volumes on Europe from the Medieval period to the twentieth century. However, the later series represented a retreat from the enterprise of GAWA in several ways. In place of authoritative texts, the books were comprised of edited selections from the "works of [each period’s] greatest creative spirits" along with sixty illustrations per volume.64 The editors were personal friends of George Braziller, such as Isidor Schneider (who also edited a free-standing collection of documents, The World of Love [1964]), and friends of the press such as Robert Phelps, erstwhile co-founder of Grove Press, who became an editor in 1966.65 Although Braziller paid $1000 [$6200] advances to the authors of the Cultures series, the money covered editing expenses; in the case of GAWA, the press bore editing expenses in addition to a $1000 author’s royalty per title. The Cultures books ran to 350 pages in heavy 6” x 12” books selling for $6.95 [$43].

65 Phelps was also responsible for bringing Ned Rorem to George Braziller Inc. Reminiscences, 41, 201.
They represented a considerable investment but also, at the time, a good value.

A final chapter in the story of Braziller’s Western Civ series is the lavish Arts of Mankind volumes. With this series, the audience and purpose of the series differed markedly from the previous series. Braziller in fact reprinted the series, already published in the United Kingdom and France, and available in the United States in the early sixties from the Golden Press and its subsidiary Odyssey Press. Instead of accessible, inexpensive, slender volumes in series of eight or twelve volumes, the new series was comprised of a promised forty volumes of 400 pages each, boasting three or four hundred illustrations, at a price of $30 [*$160*]. While individual volumes would undoubtedly make handsome decorative volumes, along the lines of art coffee-table books, the books cost too much to find many takers for the whole set. In the Arts of Mankind series, Braziller’s series presentation retreated into art-book publication, abandoning the promise that the
consumer could personally possess books encompassing culture in the broadest scope, though the books still covered an organized body of knowledge as a series.  

Given the needs of the Seven Arts Book Society and George Braziller’s personal interest in the visual arts, George Braziller Inc. tended to create hybrid series that fell between the true middlebrow form and the art book. The art book, as a form, bore several middlebrow characteristics: it packaged culture for a middle-class audience that aspired to higher culture; it presented itself as a display object; and it depended on cultural authority, constituted by the perceived value of the subject matter, the expertise of art critics and historians, and the prestige of the institutions, usually the major art museums, that placed their imprimatur on the books. In the 1960s and 1970s, art museums brought out lavishly illustrated volumes in increasing numbers, making arrangements for distribution or even production with major publishing houses such as Knopf and Simon and

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Schuster. But art books also diverged from the older idea of middlebrow culture and exemplified a drift toward niche marketing evident in higher prices for individual volumes, the placement of their subjects in the narrow context of art appreciation rather than a unifying understanding of culture or civilization, and the usually narrow focus of individual volumes on a particular artist, style, or period. These features would allow art books to thrive as other middlebrow publications lost their cultural impact and slowly gave place to more explicitly educational materials.

In the course of George Braziller’s series publications, the pull of the art-book model provided a third tension in the transition between the old middlebrow and the new academic middlebrow.

Braziller’s first series, the Great American Artists, balanced these tensions. Art books on the most superficial level, the volumes in the series were tied to the old middlebrow and also inaugurated Braziller’s mediation of academic American Studies.

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Tebbel, v.4, 536.
The choice of artists ranged from well-established figures Albert Ryder, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Eakins, to the more recent Stuart Davis, to the still controversial Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. These artists shared in common the neglect of commercial popularization, which had been lavished on European masterpieces and, recently, French impressionism and post-impressionism. Braziller embraced the features expected in a series: uniform size and design, from dust jackets to type faces. The six identically slim volumes included sixteen color reproductions and black-and-white illustrations on eighty of 128 pages. Braziller offered the books for $3.95 [$27] and arranged for Pocket Books to distribute paperbacks selling for only $1.50 [$13].

The uniform packaging of the Great American Artist series assured bookseller and consumer of its middlebrow quality. No doubt by the 1950s, after three decades of exposure to middlebrow products, many consumers would expect to find high culture in a comfortably mediated format. These consumer
expectations shifted some of the authority to name high culture to the mediators and middlebrow packagers, who were thus allowed to name the “great” artists. By showcasing American art, Braziller intervened in the middlebrow discourse about high art on behalf of the culture of the United States. Braziller’s choice of American art suggests the way that middlebrow culture thrived not by always retracing the same revered ground, but by expanding the notion of what constitutes high culture. In publicizing American art, particularly more recent artists, Braziller’s series promised to help consumers get a grasp on a relatively unfamiliar area. Within this area, Braziller began with an appeal to the authority of the artistic community by selecting well-established artists. Braziller conferred some of that authority on more controversial artists by including them in the series; the fact of its uniformity declared that Jackson Pollock completed a series that began with Thomas Eakins.
In order to confirm the status of American artists not already widely accepted as great masters in the tradition of Europe, Braziller was required to approach them seriously within the context of popularizations. The Great American Artist series situated itself high in the middlebrow spectrum; Braziller provided the books with texts by prominent museum curators, whose 7500-word profiles of the artists steered away from the middlebrow tendency to celebrate personality at the expense of more specialized knowledge. The expert authors were “allowed to write about art instead of having to turn out a movie-script ‘life,’” wrote New York Times art critic Aline Saarinen. The risks of such seriousness, however, were diminished within the genre of the art book, in which text was secondary to image. Art books, in a sense, constitute an elite class of picture books, and, as such, rely primarily on “lavish illustrations” and “superb color,” exactly the features that Braziller promised to booksellers in

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The Great American Artists series drew upon the world of the art museum curator for its approach and textual content, but it also inaugurated George Braziller Inc.’s series publishing in a broader field of the history and culture of the United States. The exploration of this field brought Braziller into the orbit of the growing American Studies movement. The four series that followed Great American Artists showed a progression, within the framework of American Studies, away from a middlebrow approach and toward the production of texts for a more limited educational audience.

69 Advertisement, Publishers Weekly 175 (June 15, 1959): 81-84.
The Golden Age series, begun in the same year as the Great American Artists, likewise elevated American cultural production while continuing to address a general reader. Issued in 1959 and 1960, the Golden Age series anthologized American writings on literature, history, philosophy, and anthropology. A volume on law followed belatedly in 1965. Beginning with *The Golden Age of American Literature*, Braziller successfully recruited prominent scholars to edit and introduce each anthology: Perry Miller on literature, Frank Freidel on history, Charles Frankel on philosophy, and Margaret Mead, with Ruth Bunzel, on anthropology. The anthology format allowed Braziller to recruit “big name” editors because the option clauses in their existing contracts did not extend to mere editing.\(^7^0\) The editors surveyed each field with an appreciation of American accomplishments indebted to American Studies, but, if the series claimed academic authority, it clearly addressed the general reader in its format. The phrase “golden age”

\(^7^0\) Reminiscences, 138-139.
suggested middlebrow promotion rather than scholarly judgment. The New York Times reviewer, David Dempsey, praised the first Golden Age books as “serious-minded” but reassured readers that the introductions fell into “the best tradition of non-pedantic scholarship.” Recognizing their orientation toward a general reader, Dempsey classed the two volumes among fourteen new anthologies for the 1959 Christmas season “attractively produced, expensive, filled with the stuff that anthologies are made of, and radiating a semantic glow (‘fireside book,’ ‘golden age,’ ‘armchair reader,’ ‘treasury’) sure to warm the cockles of the reader’s heart and even brighten his shelves.” To help fulfill the latter function, as George Braziller Inc. tersely informed booksellers, the books were “also available in boxed set beautifully designed for Christmas gift.”71 The Golden Age series bore all the hallmarks of the old middlebrow culture: serious intent, mediating

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expertise, approachability, and even decorative display.

With the introduction of the American Epochs series in 1962, George Braziller Inc. began to edge away from the middlebrow and toward educational publishing. The Epochs books presented American history in six chronological volumes given topical foci, such as *The Colonial Image* and *The American Enlightenment*. Like the Golden Age series, the contents of each anthology were selected by a scholar who also provided an introduction, though the scholars this time were not as well known to the general public as the stars of the earlier series. Again the volumes began at $7.50 [$48], the price of the large gift anthology, in this case closer to octavo size than quarto, at 6 1/2” x 9 1/2”, but suitably fat, at around 500 pages. A paperback was offered at $3.95 [$23] in 1967. Price, format, and the mildly archaic term “epoch” falsely suggested a comfortable mythologizing rather than scholarly rigor. In fact, the volumes may have represented a move within
American Studies pedagogy from a “Great Books” approach to the consideration of a wider variety of sources. Nonetheless, the series’ address to the general reader was rewarded with reviews in the New York Times Book Review, the New York Herald-Tribune’s Books, Harper’s, and the New Republic.

During the years in which the weighty American Epochs series came slowly to completion, Braziller launched a series explicitly created by “specialists in American studies” and intended to give “an orientation program on what every informed American needs to know about the essentials” of government, economy, foreign policy, and society. The American Image series, Braziller informed booksellers, arose from a State Department educational exchange program at Harvard. The faculty created anthologies for Brazilian students when they discovered that no suitable materials existed in any language. “The need had to be filled,” ran Braziller’s advertisement,

“obviously as much for American students as for foreign.” Out of this admittedly academic setting, came books that promised any reader “the basic documents all of us must be acquainted with if we are to understand the organic growth” of modern America.73 The individual volumes, priced at $5.00 [$32], were also available in a boxed set, promising some display value, but the conception and promotion of the series suggest that sales to the non-educational audience would be a welcome bonus rather than an essential aim of the series.74 The United States Information Agency was another possible customer; the agency at least considered purchasing translation rights for the series in four Eastern European and twenty-five Asian languages. Only Japanese was struck from a draft version of the contract, presumably because the publisher hoped to sell those rights more profitably.75

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74 For example, the series was not advertised in the New York Times, though it was given a brief mention in the “Books and Authors” column, which repeated Braziller’s PW advertising copy. “Books and Authors,” New York Times, April 4, 1963, 44.
75 Untitled document, no date, Box 23, Folder 3 (“Lynn, Kenneth S. American Image Vol. II American Society”), AGB.
The last series of Americana from George Braziller Inc. scored a success, but, despite an accessible format, the success was confined to the academic market. The American Culture series, begun in 1970 and incorporating the new academic keyword "culture" into its title, employed as editors young historians who had recently published outstanding first books when Braziller approached them: John Demos, Gordon Wood, Alan Trachtenberg, Roderick Nash, David Grimsted, and Robert Sklar. Warren Susman edited the final volume, bringing the series up to World War II. The format resembled that of the American Epochs books; an anthology of historical source material followed a scholarly introduction. The new series differed by including illustrations, grouped at the end of a shorter and smaller book of around 350 pages, 6" x 9". Though the prices were identical to those of the older series, $7.50 [$38] hardback and $3.95 [$20] paper, adjusting for nine years' inflation the new series cost less. The smaller size may reflect a narrower focus on the
academic market, in which impressive display counted for less than classroom usability. Probably the series was aimed at reclaiming the audience for the increasingly out-of-date Epochs series among college history and American Studies faculty; in any event, the new books failed to attract the interest the general press had accorded to the older set.

A final source of academic inspiration for Braziller book series came from the movement toward world history of the early and mid-sixties. Academic world history was genealogically related to American Studies as an outgrowth of "area studies." After American Studies had pioneered the idea of interdisciplinary approaches to culture, area studies applied it to other national and regional cultures, particularly those outside the West. Area studies had attracted federal interest and money after World War II to train foreign affairs experts. The knowledge generated by area studies scholars needed curricular rationalization by the early sixties, and the first world history textbooks to draw on their work began to
appear with Leften Stavrianos’ *A Global History of Man* in 1962.\(^76\)

At almost the same moment, the greater availability for popularization of scholarship on non-Western history and culture became evident in middlebrow publication. In 1961, George Braziller Inc. inaugurated *Great Religions of Modern Man*, the first of its series to treat the non-Western world extensively. Included with Judaism and a volume each for Protestant and Catholic Christianity were volumes on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. In each book, an editor selected writings from the religious tradition under examination and provided commentary throughout. The texts ranged from ancient scriptures to the reflections of contemporary religious authorities. The brevity of the commentaries indicates that readers were expected to draw conclusions for themselves, though they were not entirely without guidance. The *Great Religions* books were attractive, with a

different embossed design on each front cover, but small in scale at only 5 1/8” x 8 1/4”. Though reasonably priced at $4 [$26], at roughly octavo size and without illustrations, the books eschewed the more accessible levels of the middlebrow. Braziller’s investment was represented instead by the willingness to pay for rights; Arthur Hertzberg’s Judaism, for example, acknowledged permissions from thirteen different sources to quote from seventeen copyrighted texts. Great Religions of Modern Man, on a living-room bookshelf, would demonstrate a sober interest in comparative religion. To read or even browse the series would be to confront sometimes ancient, often difficult texts with a minimum of mediating guidance.

In the spring of 1963, Braziller brought out a final installment of the Great Ages of World Architecture, for the first time expanding its coverage outside of Europe. The four new volumes covered Western Islamic, Chinese and Indian, Japanese, and Pre-Columbian architecture in a format identical to that of the earlier volumes. By adding these
volumes to a series so far conforming to the large scheme of the Western Civ idea, Braziller recognized non-Western cultures as apt material for middlebrow presentation.

Braziller’s Patterns of Myth series, begun in 1963, forms a footnote to its series in world history. Under the general editorship of Alan Watts, the American authority on Buddhism, the books took a synthetic, anthropological approach to mythologies from many cultures. The series was advertised as a sequel to the Great Religions of Modern Man, in this case, embracing non-modern peoples as well. The books took the form of anthologies with commentary interspersed, on the model of the earlier series. Compared to the earlier volumes, less of the material anthologized was in the public domain. For Alan Watts’ *The Two Hands of God*, Braziller acknowledged thirty sources for thirty-nine different texts. The publisher also added illustrations, thirty-two black and white half-tones per volume. The price rose accordingly to $6 [$38]. Perhaps a mark of the
ambition and difficulty of the series, two of the six projected volumes never materialized.

As George Braziller Inc. moved away from the curricular movements, Western Civ, American Studies, and world history, it left behind what remained of the broad, synthetic vision of the older middlebrow. Its series books, in particular, continued to address the general reader and promised to mediate high culture, but the subjects became the high culture of academic study on one hand and of art history narrowly defined. Braziller followed the path toward academic specialties set by Patterns of Myth in the creation of a series launched in 1967, Man, Nature and Society. The books sprang out of the natural or social sciences; the four volumes anthologized scholarly writing on sociology and anthropology, psychology, physics, and biology. The editors supplied an introduction to assist the reader, but the series claimed no other unifying principle except the status of the subjects as “the modern sciences,” which the
series promised to “[interpret] for the layman.” By gathering these disparate subjects of inquiry into a compact set of books, Braziller retained a vestige at least of the middlebrow promise to see the fragmented world of knowledge whole, though not the world of arts and culture.

The remainder of George Braziller Inc.’s series offerings, almost all concerned with art, made no promise of synthesis but frankly specialized. If Braziller made a vocation of publishing in any particular field, it was architecture. Only Great Ages of World Architecture reached beyond the confines of the field to lead, through art, to a knowledge of civilizations. Masters of World Architecture and Makers of Modern Architecture, begun in 1960 and 1962, featured an international cast of leading architects. The New Directions in Architecture series scanned the contemporary scene nation by nation, beginning in 1968. A series on urban development, Planning and Cities, alternated between prominent individuals of

recent centuries, such as Frederick Law Olmsted, and volumes on primitive, ancient, or medieval village and city design. The style and pricing of these series were consistent over the decade in which they were created; the size shrank slightly from 7 1/4” x 10” to 6 1/2” x 9 1/2”, the number of illustrations rose from 80 to 100, and the price rose roughly 25% after the first series then leveled off, from $3.95 in 1960 [$26], to $4.95 in 1962 [$32], to $5.95 in 1968 [$33].

The format of these series, modified slightly, was the format Braziller introduced for the Great American Artists series and also used in the Great Ages of World Architecture. It retained its attraction for George Braziller Inc. for about ten years, accommodating subject matter parsed by historical and cultural period or merely by “masters” and “makers” in a particular field. The series were created for the Seven Arts Book Society, which Braziller sold, along with the Book Find Club, to Time Inc. in 1969. Without the impetus of book clubs’ needs or the assurance of club publicity and marketing, the
attraction of series publication diminished. One final art series appeared in 1970 and 1971, The Great Draughtsmen, in four volumes at $7.95 [$40]; by 1974 only two series remained underway, both unlike any of the earlier series.

The Library of Illuminated Manuscripts and the Braziller Poetry Series bore the marks of niche publishing, and in the latter series the marks of middlebrow culture disappeared. When George Braziller published *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* in 1966, he did not plan on a series of any kind; the project was daringly original: to bring a quality facsimile of a medieval book to the trade market in the United States. As Braziller remembered, his approaches were received enthusiastically at the Morgan Library, where the curators were unused to attention from publishers.\(^78\) The expenses were daunting; the venture risky enough that Braziller negotiated, or attempted to negotiate, that royalty payments would begin only

\(^{78}\) *Reminiscences*, 190.
after the publishers’ expenses had been met.\textsuperscript{79} The attraction of the book was undoubtedly the painstaking reproduction of the medieval artwork and the allure of owning a unique, handcrafted, and historically significant book, if only in facsimile. Nonetheless, the book also offered mediating accoutrements in the form of a scholarly introduction by John Plummer of the Morgan Library and, in place of the Latin prayers, commentary by Plummer facing each illustration. These lingering middlebrow features made the book a hybrid between facsimile and art book.

When the experiment of \textit{The Hours of Catherine of Cleves} proved a success, Braziller began to plan more medieval facsimiles, though their publication involved so many complications that \textit{Old Testament Miniatures} and \textit{The Tres Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry} did not follow until 1969. Not until the seventh such volume, \textit{The Visconti Hours} in 1972, did Braziller’s advertising identify the books as part of a series,

\textsuperscript{79} Agreement between the Pierpont Morgan Library and George Braziller Inc., December 1, 1965, Box 16, Folder 32 (Hours of Catherine of Cleves), AGB. Two cancelled contracts are filed along with the above and it is not certain that the above was the final version.
The Library of Illuminated Manuscripts; reviewers helpfully announced *The Rohan Master* as the eighth book in the series in 1973. Though the expense of producing the books required from the beginning that they be saleable, the variety of price and format betrayed the belated gathering of the books into a series; prices varied from $20 to $50, no two volumes were the same size, and two of the first five lacked hard slipcases. Prefaces, introductions, and commentaries on each plate graced all the volumes of the series, following the example of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves.*

The Library of Illuminated Manuscripts was a library of art books, a genre that shared with the middlebrow the yearning for higher culture but sought to satisfy it without the promise that high culture was unified in content or values. Each consumer might please himself or herself by exploring and collecting in his or her preferred niche. Although the books

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continued to be presented in an accessible format, George Braziller Inc., in the production of the library, did not position itself as a provider of general education, but as a press specializing narrowly, developing expertise in the production of medieval facsimile volumes. Braziller followed the Library of Illuminated Manuscripts with eight books collecting illuminations and paintings previously hidden in manuscripts from the ancient Mediterranean, medieval Europe, Safavid Persia, and Mughal India.

In 1970, George Braziller decided to pursue another narrow specialty, contemporary poetry. The Braziller Poetry Series was Braziller’s last series of the seventies and the least middlebrow. The presence of a general editor for the series and the inclusion of brief introductory notes assured the consumer of a minimum of expert guidance. On the other hand, the Braziller Poetry Series parted company with middlebrow series most decisively in its refusal to claim canonical status. The poetry included in the series was distinguished as contemporary poetry, not
necessarily great poetry or representative poetry of any movement, nation, or era. Nor did the series promise to present a coherent or comprehensive guide to the state of the art. No prearranged plan dictated the selections for the series; new volumes were to appear twice a year, each devoted to a single poet. The audience would be made up of those interested in the rarefied art of contemporary poetry, a small enough niche that the series general editor, Richard Howard, privately called it the “(possible) public” for poetry.81

Braziller reached out to that possible public, simultaneously creating and serving an audience, carving up the larger audience of the general reader. The format of the poetry books suggested a popular product, but despite this cost-cutting measure the price betrayed the limited audience. Charles Simic’s Dismantling the Silence was available only in a slim paperback, giving it the appearance of a popular reprint, but the small print run required Braziller to

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81 Richard Howard to George Braziller, no date, Box 48, Folder 5 ("Simic, Charles: Dismantling the Silence"), AGB.
set a steep price of $3.95 [$19] in 1971. With the third volume in 1972, Braziller added a hardback for $5.95 [$28], rising to $6.95 [$28] with the eighth in 1974, while the paperback remained $3.95 [$16]. Small, expensive, containing difficult poetry by contemporary poets, many of whom had not been previously published in book form, the Braziller Poetry Series completed the shift in Braziller’s series away from the middlebrow, both traditional and academic, toward niche marketing. The series also continued a long tradition at Braziller of prestige literary publishing. As Braziller moved away from book clubs and the middlebrow, literary publishing continued without the support of general appeal series books.

The success of Braziller’s participation in middlebrow culture is manifest in the support the middlebrow series books lent to Braziller’s literary publishing ventures between 1959 and 1972. While literary books created unpaid overhead, series books were calculated to create profit through sales and
subsidiary income from paperbacks, foreign editions, and book club adoptions. In the case of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Braziller staff took care before publication to position the book for the market, taking orders from over fifty booksellers in ten big cities and contacting others. They asked the art buyer for Kroch and Brentano’s in Chicago to vet the book thoroughly and recorded her comments on the appearance of the book and its slipcase, the price, the probability of front-page reviews, and the potential for sales at Christmastime, Easter, and graduation in the spring. They issued a press release suggesting that the history of the book’s publication could make an interesting story in itself; *Publishers Weekly* took them up on the suggestion. The *New York Times* had already run a story on the clandestine transport of the original manuscript to the Netherlands by Morgan Library curator John Plummer, accompanied by George Braziller himself and a monumental insurance policy from Lloyd’s of London, so the Dutch printers could check the colors of the
reproduction. The search for buyers of series books ran outside the usual circuit of bookstore customers and newspaper readers as well; promotion manager Martha Hart encouraged businesses to consider *The Hours of Etienne Chevalier* as a “corporate gift.”

Individually, the volumes of the Library of Illuminated Manuscripts might receive more attention, but similar promotional efforts were made for entire series.

Many of the series books found additional readers in the paperback market, beginning with Braziller’s own paperback *Great American Artists*, distributed by Pocket Books simultaneously with the Braziller hardbacks. When the paperbacks outsold the hardbacks 20,000 to 4000, Braziller altered its “trade plan” for

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83 Martha Hart to William F. Karnbach (Management Guild), no date [1971], Box 10, Folder 18 (Fouquet, Jean: The Hours of Etienne Chevalier), AGB.
the Masters of World Architecture series, delaying the paperback for six months. For the second installment of Masters books, Braziller sold the rights to the paperback outright to Pocket Books, which promised to print 125,000 books. If the royalty were between 5% and 7% of Pocket’s $1.95 cover price, Pocket Books’ purchase was the equivalent of an advance of between $2440 and $3400 per title. Washington Square Press bought the rights to Great Religions of Modern Man for $27,000 [$180,000] in 1960, when $4500 would make a very respectable advance for a single book. Contracting for all six books at once gave Braziller a considerable influx of capital. Not every series found a buyer for its paperback rights, and beginning in 1965 Braziller began to issue and distribute its own paperback editions of series books.84

Series books also attracted foreign publishers from around Europe and from Mexico and Brazil.

Occasionally, Braziller received an advance on royalties, $3000 [$19,400] for a Spanish edition of the six Great Religions books, $6600 [$42,000] for the eleven Makers of World Architecture, also in Spanish. Again, the series format allowed Braziller to contract for several titles at once. Instead of paying an advance, foreign publishers more commonly purchased printed sheets with illustrations, to which they would add translated texts, at prices that included an unspecified royalty. According to the standard Braziller contract, royalty payments from foreign editions were shared evenly between publisher and author, but Braziller benefited from foreign sales even when its share of royalties was modest. By paying for sets of sheets, even at cost, foreign publishers allowed Braziller to order larger printings, lowering the cost per unit of otherwise expensive illustrated books, and consequently increasing the profit on domestic sales. The total amounts involved could be substantial for the largest series; the gross revenues from foreign sales of Great
Ages of World Architecture, for example, amounted to at least $63,920 [$542,000].

Book club selections provided a final and most significant source of income for series books. The first series books were the product of the collaboration between George Braziller's book clubs and his new publishing house. The publisher commissioned a book with the certainty that the clubs would select it, and club sales might be as important as retail sales to the success of the book. For example, the Seven Arts Book Society and the Book Find Club both offered the second four Great Ages of World Architecture books; together the clubs purchased 6000 sets, 24,000 books, for $36,000 [$235,000] to sell at $14.95 [$96], $5 below the retail price. An undated document showed 6937 copies sold of one of these

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85 Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Plaza y Janes S.A., April 9, 1962, Box 16, Folder 13 (see n.84); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Editorial Bruguera S.A., May 15, 1963, Box 16, Folder 36 (Huxtable, Ada: Pier Luigi Nervi); Agreements between George Braziller Inc. and Prentice-Hall International Inc., March 21, 1961; Rizzoli Editore S.P.A., June 5, 1961; Otto Maier Verlag, November 22, 1961; Editions des Deux-Mondes, January 3, 1962, Box 23, Folder 2 (Lowry, Bates: Renaissance Architecture); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Studio Vista Ltd., September 19, 1967, Box 14, Folder 4 (Great Ages of World Architecture), AGB.
volumes, the clothbound Renaissance Architecture, scarcely more than the clubs’ purchase, though the paperback sold twice as well.86

The pattern of a major commitment by the in-house book clubs was repeated with other series. The Book Find Club paid an advance of $5000 [32,000] for the first three Patterns of Myth books in 1963 against a royalty of $1 per set, indicating that the book club hoped to sell at least 5000 sets. In 1966, the club took the second four Cultures of Mankind books for $8000 [48,000] against a $1.10 royalty per set, setting expected sales just above 7200. Although Braziller owned both publishing house and clubs, as a publisher he still accepted lower royalties on the club books and the potential of competition with the club’s discounted books. Book Find Club offered the second four Cultures of Mankind books, for example, at a deep discount of $10.95 [66], compared to $27.80 [167] retail. As in any book club deal, the

86 George Brantl to George Braziller, December 20, 1961; Undated ledger sheet, Box 23, Folder 2 (see n.85).
publisher trusted that the club’s customers would overlap little with booksellers’.\(^{87}\)

When selling book club rights to clubs outside Braziller’s control, George Braziller Inc. betrayed more anxiety about competition with discounted club editions. Contracts with the Book-of-the-Month Club and even the small Professional and Technical Programs Inc. Book Club specified that these clubs were to refrain from “newspaper or magazine promotion” in the former case or from advertising altogether in the latter. The Professional and Technical Programs Inc. club selected Patterns of Myth and Cultures of Mankind, contracting for 500 and 400 sets respectively, an agreeable boost to the series, but not indispensable to its success.\(^{88}\)

A Book-of-the-Month Club selection might be another matter, depending upon the club’s expectations

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\(^{87}\) Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and the Book Find Club, July 26, 1963, Box 16, Folder 10 (Henderson, Joseph L. and Oakes, Maud: Patterns of Myth); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and the Book Find Club, January 27, 1966, Box 36, Folder 12 (Phelps, Robert: The 20\textsuperscript{th} Century), AGB.

\(^{88}\) Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and the Book-of-the-Month Club, January 2, 1962, Box 16, Folder 13 (see n.84); William Mishkin (vice-president, Professional and Technical Programs Inc.) to George Braziller, February 10, 1966, Box 36, Folder 12 (see n.87).
for the book. For the Great Religions of Modern Man, Book-of-the-Month Club paid only a $1000 [$6450] “guarantee” to cover royalties and the rental of the plates, enough to cover the sale of fewer than 900 sets at the $1.095 royalty specified in the contract. If the books sold poorly, the club was not deeply committed; if the books sold well, the club would arrange for further rental and royalty payments “on an approximately monthly basis.” An arrangement so favorable to the club demonstrated the powerful place of the large clubs in the publishing market. For the most attractive titles, Book-of-the-Month Club made more generous arrangements, taking 25,000 copies of The Hours of Catherine of Cleves and 10,000 of the special leather-bound edition of The Master of Mary of Burgundy. A publisher’s plans for a book hinged upon such decisions; in the sales meeting for Catherine of Cleves, Braziller’s decisions on buying space in the fall book catalogs and investing in direct mail appeals were postponed until the club handed down its decision. Braziller later recalled that the sales of
Cleves in the first year reached 25,000, matching the Book-of-the-Month Club commitment. 89

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves was an outstanding sales success by the standards of George Braziller Inc., especially considering its high price of $17.50 [$105] before Christmas 1966, rising to $20.00 [$120] afterwards. The ability of the Book-of-the-Month Club to double its first-year sales shows the potential of book club selection. As we have seen, the Braziller book clubs achieved roughly the same result with the Renaissance volume of Great Ages of World Architecture. Though book club revenue was usually shared evenly with the author, the publisher also benefited from ordering larger print runs, in order to sell copies to clubs, or from renting plates to clubs that printed for themselves. Taken together, book club selections, foreign editions, and paperback editions provided Braziller’s series books with

89 Agreement, January 2, 1962, Box 16, Folder 13 (see n.84); “Sales Meeting,” March 23, 1966, Box 37, Folder 2 (see n.82); Oscar Ogg (Book-of-the-Month Club) to George Braziller, February 1, 1971, Box 25, Folder 10 (Master of Mary of Burgundy); Notes on meeting, December 29, no year [1966?], Box 16, Folder 32 (see n.79); Reminiscences, 192.
important opportunities for income that Braziller’s fiction rarely enjoyed. Since a book’s expenses were deducted from its income from regular sales, a higher proportion of subsidiary income could be put in the books as profit. For the first half of the 1960s, George Braziller Inc. relied upon series books to pay the overhead expenses that literary fiction rarely did.

Individual titles contributed to the publisher’s business success, but much less reliably than series books. After the sale of the book clubs in 1968, Braziller placed greater expectations on individual titles. George Braziller Inc., as we have seen with even the most literary authors, promoted sales as much as its staff believed it could afford to. In a few cases in the 1960s and 1970s, Braziller published books with more than usual sales potential and capitalized by selling subsidiary rights. Successful individual titles made money by the same means as series books, the differences were in their unpredictability and the difficulty of building on a
success. Outside of series books and genre fiction, an author’s name is the most powerful way of linking different books and making the sales of future titles predictable on the basis of past sales. Series books, which were conceived of and commissioned by the publisher, would never leave Braziller’s list; the creators of fiction were repeatedly tempted to publish with the large publishers who could spend more on publicity and, regardless of ultimate success, pay a larger advance.

For independent publishers, a minor bestseller or even a near bestseller represents a significant success. None of George Braziller’s bestsellers was a blockbuster like John F. Kennedy’s Profiles in Courage, Mary McCarthy’s The Group, John Le Carre’s The Spy that Came in from the Cold, the pseudonymous Adam Smith’s The Money Game, or Arthur Hailey’s Hotel or Airport, books that lingered on the bestseller lists for a year or longer. Nor did Braziller ever publish an Ian Fleming or a James A. Michener, who could produce a bestseller reliably every year or
every third year. Henri Alleg’s *The Question*, Joyce MacIver’s *The Frog Pond*, Richard E. Kim’s *The Martyred*, and Sartre’s *The Words* spent, respectively, 3, 11, 16, and 17 weeks at most on either the *Publishers Weekly* or the *New York Times* list. Ronald J. Glasser’s *365 Days* made the bestseller list in its Bantam paperback edition, appearing once on the *New York Times*’ monthly paperback list. Along with other briskly selling titles, such as Ned Rorem’s *Paris Diary*, Chadwick Hansen’s *Witchcraft at Salem*, Josiah Bunting’s *The Lionheads*, and Glasser’s *Ward 402*, Braziller’s modest bestsellers marked commercial highpoints in the publisher’s career through the 1970s, along with the successful series and art books. The potential for retail sales was higher for individual titles, reaching perhaps as much as 50,000 for *The Words*, and 35,000 for *365 Days* and *The Martyred*.90

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Like the series books, bestsellers and near bestsellers earned subsidiary income from paperbacks, foreign editions, and book club selections. European publishers paid a few hundred for non-English rights, up to £5,500 [$62,000] for English-language rights. Book clubs paid from one to six thousand to offer books to their clubs; the same book might win several club adoptions. Paperback publishers paid the most, beginning with Bantam’s $25,000 [$164,000] deal for *The Frog Pond* and climbing to Pocket Books’ $27,000 [$170,000] for *The Martyred*, Bantam’s $105,000 [$483,000] for *365 Days*, and Pocket Books’ $137,500 [$606,000] for *Ward 402*. Braziller benefited from the growth of paperback advances, but expansion of publishing markets and the influx of capital from other industries intensified competition for successful authors.\(^{91}\)

\(^{91}\) Conversion of Sterling to U.S. dollars based upon an exchange rate of $2.5585 published in the New York Times, July 9, 1973, 62, yielding $14,072, and converted to 2005 dollars. Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Bantam Books, February 8, 1961, Box 23, Folder 13 (MacIver, Joyce: The Frog Pond); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Pocket Books, January 27, 1964, Box 18, Folder 14 (Kim, Richard E.: The Martyred); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Bantam Books, September 27,
The circumstances around Braziller’s greatest bestseller illustrate the difficulty of Braziller’s situation. Its success with Sartre’s *The Words* depended upon several layers of happy coincidence. If Sartre had begun by offering the autobiography, a larger publisher would undoubtedly have snapped it up, but Braziller began with a less attractive title. As George Braziller later recalled, Sartre’s *Saint Genet: Comédien et Martyr* had been widely rejected when he bought the rights. It was a strange work, difficult to classify, in the words of Alex Szogyi in the *New York Times*, it “exceed[ed] the bounds of the form in which it [was] conceived.” Sartre set out to write a brief introduction to a book about Jean Genet; when this ran more than three times over the expected length and was no longer suitable to its purpose, Sartre, freed from constraint, composed a philosophical meditation of well over 500 pages.92

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92 *Reminiscences*, 110; Alex Szogyi, “The Art of the Philosopher and the Thief,” review of *Our Lady of the Flowers* by Jean Genet
Understandably, publishers did not know what to make of the book, and its first English-language publisher faced the additional burden of having it translated. In September 1961, nine years after publication in France, Braziller agreed to take Sartre’s mammoth work for a $500 [$3300] advance against royalties and agreed to pay Bernard Frechtman $3600 [$23,500] for an English translation.93

Aside from the strange format and sheer size of the book, Sartre’s subject, Jean Genet, had not yet achieved great fame or notoriety in the United States in 1961. Though well-known off-Broadway, Genet had only three books in print, paperback plays published by Grove Press. More importantly, the success of Grove Press and other publishers defending themselves against obscenity charges was clearing the path for Genet’s first novel, Our Lady of the Flowers, to be published in the United States. The combination of

93 Agreement between Librarie Gallimard and George Braziller Inc., September 8, 1961; Agreement between Bernard Frechtman and George Braziller Inc., September 22, 1961, Box 43, Folder 3 (Sartre, Jean-Paul: Saint Genet [folder 2]), AGB.
excitement over Genet’s novel and Sartre’s fame overcame the indifference of the American market to St. Genet. Advance publicity to booksellers recounted Genet’s theatrical success, mentioning the approach of his first “on-Broadway” production, and his status as an “underground” novelist about to surface on the right side of the law. The New York Times collaborated in connecting Sartre’s study with Genet’s novel by reviewing them together.94

By the time Braziller’s edition appeared in September 1963, St. Genet had transformed into an attractive commodity. Its obscure subject had stepped into the bright lights of Broadway, and Braziller treated even its unwieldy size as an asset. In a large advertisement, Braziller displayed the book to maximize its volume, thick spine toward the viewer, covers open more than ninety degrees to display the front and the back cover. On the front cover, to the left of the title and author’s name, ran a column of regular-sized text as a decorative element, as if the

giant text were spilling out of the book. The remainder of the ad excerpted reviews, displaying an enviable wealth of superlatives: amazing, astonishing, dazzling, enthralling, magnificent, monumental, remarkable, staggering, and stunning. As a gentlemanly touch, the ad also reminded readers that Genet’s novel was available from Grove Press.95

Sartre’s study of Genet quickly became an outstanding seller by Braziller’s standards. By the end of 1963 St. Genet sold almost 7000 copies in hardback at $8.50 and generated $15,500 [$99,000] in subsidiary income, $13,500 from sale of the paperback rights to New American Library, the remainder from adoption by the Book Find Club. Despite the legal wrangling over Sartre’s American royalties, by early 1964 Braziller felt it could no longer sit on a check due Gallimard for almost $12,000 [$75,000], an amount that made the cautious advance look absurd. The title became a steady seller in paperback; New American

95 In fact, the text on the dust jacket, though illegible in the ad, is composed of encomia to Jean Genet by Sartre, Jean Cocteau, Richard Wright, Janet Flanner, and the Times Literary Supplement. Advertisement, The New York Times, October 22, 1963, 35. The ad was run again November 8 with minor changes.
Library sold 79,000 over the first seven years the paperback was available and reprinted in 1974, keeping its edition in print until 1981.\(^96\)

Building on the success of *St. Genet* and taking the saleable form of autobiography, *The Words* appeared in a first edition of 25,000 in 1964 and by the following year Braziller reported that 70,000 copies were in print. In the book's first four years, the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Book Find Club together reported selling over 27,000 copies while the Literary Guild had manufactured over 41,000, though they had not sold enough to earn out the advance. Fawcett brought out the paperback, which, by the end of 1967, had sold 105,000 copies.\(^97\)

With two Sartre titles in print and a book of essays, *Situations*, in preparation, Braziller enjoyed the unusual distinction in October 1964 of having its

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\(^{96}\) Royalty statement, December 31, 1963; George Braziller to Rosica Colins, March 17, 1964; Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and New American Library, June 27, 1963, Box 43, Folder 3 (see n.18); No author to George [Braziller], October 26, 1982, Box 43, Folder 2 (Sartre, Jean-Paul: Saint Genet [folder 1]), AGB.

author awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, followed by the even more sensational publicity coup of having the author turn down the prize. *The Words* reached the *New York Times* bestseller list the next month, climbed as high as number three among non-fiction books by February, and remained on the list seventeen weeks in all, more than five times longer than Sartre’s previous best. George Braziller Inc. responded by mounting an aggressive publicity campaign for *Situations*, promising a $10,000 ad blitz to coincide with publication and a visit by Sartre to the United States. Braziller negotiated assistance with the advertising expense from Fawcett, which bought the paperback rights. In addition to an advance of $13,500, to be split between Braziller and Gallimard, Fawcett was also to pay $2500 to Braziller, to be matched with an equal amount from the Braziller budget, for use promoting *The Words* and *Situations*. In spite of these arrangements, sales of the book of essays did not match the earlier titles. At the end of 1967, Fawcett’s paperback had sold 22,000 copies,
having earned probably less than a quarter of the advance, and by early 1968 Braziller planned to remainder 6500 copies of its edition.98 Braziller brought out its last two Sartre titles in 1968, both collections of essays on politics, without fanfare and to few reviews. The circumstances that had made The Words both a Braziller title and a bestseller did not pertain to the later titles.

Of Braziller’s top-selling books, only The Words came from an established author. Braziller had made the connection with Sartre by gambling on the behemoth St. Genet first; in every other case, Braziller discovered its authors. Georgette Scott, a journalist, wrote her first book, a fictionalized autobiography, under the pseudonym Joyce MacIver. Richard Kim’s manuscript had made the rounds in New York; a mutual friend asked George to read Ronald

Glasser’s manuscript after it had been rejected by Harper and Row; and George proposed the idea of writing a book to Josiah Bunting after Bunting published an article in the New York Times. Ned Rorem was already a renown composer when Braziller began publishing Rorem’s private journals and musical essays at the recommendation of freelance editor Robert Phelps. The closest Braziller ever came to stealing an author was when it welcomed Swedish immigrant and former bestselling author Edita Morris from Viking and published her novel Seeds of Hiroshima for a modest $1000 advance. A $5000 advance for Dear Me, a book of childhood reminiscences, suggested that Morris’s sales and Braziller’s expectations were above average, but, though Braziller promoted Life, Wonderful Life! a reworking of Morris’s autobiographical bestseller of 1943 My Darling from the Lions, Morris’s bestselling days were over.99

99 Reminiscences, 168, 174, 179, 201; Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Edita Morris, September 29, 1965; Edwin Seaver to Richard Kluger, March 1, 1966, Box 30, Folder 8 (Morris, Edita: Seeds of Hiroshima); Agreement between George Braziller Inc. and Edita Morris, April 18, 1967, Box 30, Folder 5 (Morris, Edita: Dear Me); AGB.
Publishing unfamiliar authors limited George Braziller Inc.’s publicity options. The Braziller staff set publicity budgets based on anticipated sales and, during the 1960s, their estimates for untested authors were low. Braziller’s confident promotion of *The Frog Pond* in 1961 contrasted strongly with the publisher’s usual practice before 1970. Braziller ran three *New York Times* advertisements over the three weeks before reviews appeared and, even after favorable treatment, ran two more ads that failed to cite any reviews. More commonly, Braziller awaited the reviews before beginning a campaign, even in the case of books for which it clearly had higher than usual expectations, such as Rorem’s 1966 *Paris Diary*. As a result, Braziller advertised more surprising sellers, *The Martyred* in 1964 and *Witchcraft at Salem* in 1969, at least as many times in the *New York Times* as it did the *Paris Diary*. Whether Braziller predicted a large sale or not, its cautious approach relied upon favorable reviews to launch books as much as publicity.
The publisher began to try a more aggressive strategy around 1970, under the direction of a new promotion manager, Martha Hart, who worked closely with Edwin Seaver. Hart’s campaign for James Fritzhand’s *Son of the Great American Novel* exemplified her approach. Fritzhand’s book was a precocious satire of American publishing that took the form of a hallucinatory picaresque novel in a style similar to that of John Barth or Thomas Pynchon. Hart placed television publicity at the center of her efforts, in agreement with Fritzhand’s advice in his “author’s questionnaire,” on which he wrote, “T.V. appearances sell books and lots of them.” Hart dispatched a press release to more than twenty television programs that promised a “new and interesting personality,” stressed Fritzhand’s youth, and listed his novel’s qualifications for the bestseller list. Hart followed up with more personal letters to producers and hosts. She tried to get the attention of host David Frost by reminding him that he had seen her one evening during the American
Booksellers Convention the previous June dancing in “white hip-hugger pants and white top with big organdy sleeves and open midriff.” She shared with Frost her previous night’s dream in which she and Fritzhand appeared on Frost’s show and the three of them parodied the publicity appearance, in the spirit of Fritzhand’s book: “When I awoke, it was getting absolutely ridiculous, but on the other hand, it might not be a bad idea.” After the attempt to capture television publicity, Braziller ran a modest print campaign, taking out two ads in the New York Times too small to fit a photograph of the author or samples of critical praise.100

Braziller did not show the same reluctance to spend on two other 1971 campaigns, for Morris’s Life, Wonderful Life! and Glasser’s 365 Days. Braziller committed more resources to these titles after receiving feedback from a variety of other “readers” within the publishing industry. Morris’s book gained

100 “Author’s Questionnaire,” December 23, 1970; Press release, no date [January 1971]; Martha Hart to David Frost, January 6, 1971, Box 12, Folder 1 (Fritzhand, James: Son of the Great American Novel [folder 1]), AGB.
national publicity when the McCall Publishing Co. bought serial rights for Redbook magazine. Braziller allocated $10,000 for publicity materials, Christmas catalog listings, and national advertising. Glasser’s book received an initial budget of $11,000, in anticipation of sales of 20,000 copies, but before the publication date Braziller made deals for the paperback, book club, and foreign rights, and for serialization in four national magazines and six newspapers. The budget was raised to $30,000. To avoid casting Glasser as just another critic of the Vietnam War, Edwin Seaver advised Martha Hart to “sell” the pediatrician Glasser to “the TV and radio people” with “the sanctified MD approach.” Hart had more success with Glasser than with Fritzhand: Glasser appeared on four television programs and was featured on radio by NPR and the CBC. Braziller could not resist an attempt to build upon its success in 1971.

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101 Publicity budget, no date [1971]; Publicity budget, October 6, 1971; “Summary of 365 Days,” November 5, 1971; E.S. [Edwin Seaver] to M.H. [Martha Hart], May 13, 1971, Box 12, Folder 23 (Glasser, Ronald J. 365 Days [folder 1]), AGB.
but neither could it afford to ignore the cues from other publishing industry readers.

As George Braziller Inc. turned away from middlebrow series books after the sale of the book clubs and became more dependent on bookstore sales, the staff began to think about building the house’s brand name in the minds of booksellers. The editor reporting on the manuscript of Josiah Bunting’s *The Lionheads* wanted to find a “bookstore book” for the spring 1972 list and thought Bunting’s Vietnam novel “could reinforce the good bookstore impression we have made by Dr. Glasser’s book.” Writing a month before publication of Glasser’s book, the editor was concerned about making an impression on booksellers, not bookstore customers. Again, Braziller was encouraged by positive feedback within the industry. Although Edwin Seaver could not find anyone in Hollywood ready to produce a movie about Vietnam, Book-of-the-Month Club selected Bunting’s novel as an alternate, Harper’s magazine offered the book to its readers by direct-mail, and Braziller
uncharacteristically took out three large New York Times ads ahead of publication. Although the book sold well and Braziller overspent the advertising budget, the book never reached the bestseller list. Also in 1972, Braziller promoted George Keithley’s verse epic The Donner Party optimistically with the announcement of a 20,000-copy first printing and $15,000 publicity budget. This flight in the face of publishing’s received wisdom met surprising success; excerpts from Keithley’s poem were serialized in two magazines, and Book-of-the-Month Club again selected Braziller’s offering. Braziller reported sales of 15,000 copies, outstanding for a book of verse but probably significantly fewer than they hoped in setting a publicity budget of $15,000. The results of Braziller’s bid for a marketable identity in the bookstore fell short not because it promoted inferior books or because they failed to sell, but because the goal was so ambitious.102

102 “Editorial Report,” August 19, 1971; Frank McCarthy to Edwin Seaver, November 24, 1971; Memorandum, November 22, 1972, Box 4, Folder 1 (Bunting, Josiah: The Lionheads), AGB; Advertisement, Publishers Weekly 201 (January 10, 1972): 46-47; Ginger Curwen to
By 1970, the big publishers could produce so many more titles and promote them so much more heavily that George Braziller Inc. needed an almost perfect record of success to compete. Instead, Braziller found that the wealth of corporate publishing made its biggest successes the most difficult to build upon. In the summer of 1967, Braziller heard from Richard Kim’s agents that the manuscript of his second novel was complete but that, contrary to the option clause in Kim’s contract with Braziller, it had been shown to Houghton Mifflin already, who had offered a $50,000 [$292,000] advance. Aghast at the prospect of losing an acclaimed and bestselling American author whom he had discovered, George Braziller decided to make a counteroffer of $55,000, though the house could not realistically afford it. When Houghton Mifflin raised its offer to $60,000, Braziller decided to pursue legal action. Eventually, Braziller released Kim for a $7500 [$42,000] settlement; he later recalled that

Barbara Moro (Chicago Public Library), March 7, 1974, Box 18, Folder 5 (Keithley, George: Song in a Strange Land [folder 1]), AGB.
he “accepted it reluctantly because I thought I was trying to be a man of principle, and if I accepted the money it would be a business transaction.” Braziller was able to let Josiah Bunting leave for Time, Inc.-owned Little, Brown without as great a struggle of conscience, partly because he believed the manuscript needed more improvement than the other bidders were asking for. Ronald Glasser stayed with Braziller for a second title, but when Ronald Glasser’s lawyer appeared in Braziller’s office in 1975, asking that Glasser be released to publish his third book with Random House, Braziller, in the words of an in-house memorandum, “orally released” Glasser from his contract: Braziller tore the contract in half, handed the pieces to the lawyer, and told him Glasser was free to go. None of the books George Braziller Inc. lost through this attrition was as successful as the authors’ Braziller titles, but their loss nonetheless underscores the limits on Braziller’s ability to
compete for successful authors, even its own discoveries. As George Braziller Inc. approached the mid-1970s, its list featured neither successful new book series or bestselling authors. After twenty years of publishing, the house backlist provided some support, but older titles by its most prized writers sold too poorly to be kept in print. Bringing out twenty-five to thirty-five titles a year, Braziller relied upon diversification within self-imposed cultural constraints. The publisher’s lists from 1973 to 1976 give an impression of optimism and experimentation. A continuing commitment to poetry demonstrated Braziller’s fearless dedication to non-commercial values. In addition to the Braziller Poetry Series and George Keithley’s historical epics, Braziller added a collection of Stanley Burnshaw and two books by the young Andrei Codrescu, published under the imprint of Venture Books, directed by George

103 Reminiscences, 169-171, 180, 176; Bernie [Bernard Furman] to Herman Figatner, January 25, 1968, Box 18, Folder 14 (see n.91); Sam Kleinberg to staff, March 26, 1975, Box 13, Folder 2 (Glasser, Ronald J.: The Body is the Hero), AGB.
Braziller’s son Michael and carrying on the name of the children’s book imprint formerly directed by Marsha Braziller.

Though several of Braziller’s most well-publicized titles dealt with the Vietnam war, including *365 Days* and *The Lionheads*, Braziller did not publish books directly reflecting the domestic unrest of the Nixon years. A handful of titles that reflected the mood of the contemporary youth culture did receive generous publicity. Jonathan Bishop’s *Something Else* (1972), a book of literary essays dealing with Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau, was disguised as a hip reflection on life and art. Martha Hart explained to potential reviewers that the book “deals with that which the young seem to be searching for—often through the use of drugs, macrobiotic food, zen, etc.” Braziller staff understood that the primary market would be academic, but also hoped to sell the book to “intellectual youth.” Douglas Anderson’s prose wanderings were summed up in his title: *The One Real Poem Is Life* (1973). The closely-
observed fatal illness of another young writer, Ted Rosenthal, provided his meditations, *How Could I Not Be Among You* (1973), based on a film about his confrontation with mortality. The books had in common that Braziller published nothing further from their authors and that they were poorly received by critics, who did not spare even the posthumous Rosenthal. Although Braziller had received a $6100 grant to publish Bishop’s book, an editor explained to Bishop that his book had sold so poorly that Braziller would do him an “injustice” if it published his next manuscript. No remainder house would even make a bid on the large surplus inventory. Rosenthal’s book garnered a modest paperback contract with Avon Books, and the nationwide broadcast of the related film on PBS in 1974 sent the Braziller staff scrambling to put books on the shelves in big PBS markets and to alert the media. The publicity director astutely suggested to the New York station that it use the book as a fund-drive premium to reward contributors. Despite
its efforts, Braziller abandoned the “intellectual youth” market.104

When Braziller published *Son of the Great American Novel* and *The Lionheads* in 1971 and 1972, it brought out its first novels by untested English-language authors since *The Martyred* in 1963 and Henry V.M. Richardson’s *Not All Our Pride* in 1965. Over the following five years, Braziller introduced a dozen authors new to authorship, to the novel, or to the United States. Most were unsuccessful, particularly the young Americans, even when well-received critically, as in the case of Jonathan Rubin, a Vietnam veteran who based *The Barking Deer* on his personal experience. Authors from Great Britain or the Commonwealth, following in the footsteps of Janet Frame, performed as badly, with important exceptions. Beryl Bainbridge became an immediate success with

104 Martha Hart to Phoebe-Lou Adams (Atlantic Monthly), October 6, 1971; “Jonathan Bishop,” typed page, no date; Sam [Kleinberg] to Victoria [Newhouse], September 4, 1974; Victoria Newhouse to Jonathan Bishop, September 17, 1974, Box 3, Folder 5 (Bishop, Jonathan: Something Else); GC [Ginger Curwen] to GB [George Braziller], MB [Michael Braziller], HD [Helen Dressner], July 8, 1974; Ginger Curwen to Carl Bloom (WNET), June 24, 1974, Box 40, Folder 11 (Rosenthal, Ted: How Could I Not Be Among You [folder 1]), AGB.
Harriet Said in 1973 and produced a book each year to the end of the decade. The Nigerian emigrant to England, Buchi Emecheta, began a series of novels with *Second-Class Citizen* in 1975 that made her one of Braziller’s distinctive authors of the late seventies. Braziller also introduced some critically acclaimed Australian authors in the United States, publishing three titles by David Malouf before he left for Knopf and David Ireland’s *A Woman of the Future*.

By 1975, George Braziller Inc. relied primarily on diversification to ensure its survival. Absent were projects requiring large investments, whether whole programs of literary publication, series books in simultaneously issued sets, or heavily promoted individual titles. Non-commercial values still set bounds on Braziller’s diversity; even the lone cookbook had a higher purpose: to educate readers about medieval life. The character of the house was set by the art books, the Commonwealth literature, and the poetry series, but these areas were not prominent
in contemporary cultural discourse, as the new novel and the sixties middlebrow had been.

The program that sustained Braziller from the late 1950s until the early 1970s was inherited from the inter-war middlebrow culture, from the new academic emphasis on general education and curricular coherence, and from the high modern commitment to innovative literature. Braziller selected or commissioned manuscripts in these areas, and promoted them according to its understanding of their cultural appeal. Though Braziller chose its program according to its cultural vision, it was able to survive as a business in a difficult field that demanded continuous introduction of new products and adjustment to consumer demand. Even economic constraints, especially the small independent publisher’s inability to compete for established authors, enforced innovation. In years in which cultural critics feared the homogenizing influence of the corporate leaders of the culture industries, businesses like George Braziller Inc. continued to explore new cultural
terrain, even splintering the book market increasingly into niches, and forcing corporate publishers to imitate the experimentation and editorial independence of the permanent innovative press.
Chapter 4

Grove Press: Cosmopolitanism and Publicity

James Laughlin understood that so many worthwhile titles languished out of print in 1949 that no single publisher could revive them all, and so he welcomed Grove Press. When Robert Phelps founded it in 1949 as reprinter of neglected literary works, Laughlin graciously praised Grove’s new edition of Melville’s *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. Robert Phelps and his partner John Balcomb brought out only two other titles in 1949 and 1950, *The Verse in English of Richard Crashaw* and *Selected Writings of the Ingenious Mrs. Aphra Behn*. Phelps aimed the books at professors of English and planned to survey them about their needs for course texts. Accordingly, Grove’s first books bore scholarly introductions and textual notes to suit this audience, though as early as 1950 Phelps saw the need to shed some of Grove’s academic fustiness. He complained that the scholarly introduction to the Crashaw volume had been “timorous, indifferent, and pallid” and asked Louis Peck, editor
of Grove’s edition of *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis, to avoid excessive annotation, agreeing with Peck that Lewis’ gothic romance was not, after all, *The Divine Comedy*. Even Peck’s introduction was supplanted at the last moment by the poet John Berryman’s, when the book was finally published in 1952. By that time John Balcomb and a new partner, Barney Rosset, were handling the title. *The Monk*, a scandalous, gender-twisting gothic romance of the eighteenth century, married respectful literary republishing and the iconoclasm that characterized Rosset’s direction of the press.¹

Barnet Lee Rosset, Jr., was the son of a Jewish Chicago banker and his Irish Catholic wife. Rosset consistently claimed that the formative experience of his life was his junior and senior high school education at Chicago’s Francis W. Parker School. At this experimental school, a legacy of Chicago progressivism, the students were encouraged to think

¹ Robert Phelps to Louis F. Peck, May 29, 1949 and March 10, 1950, Box 160A (Folder: Lewis The Monk), Grove Press Records, Syracuse University Library Special Collections Research Center [hereafter referred to as GPR].
for themselves. Rosset and his fellow students published a newspaper they entitled the “Anti-Everything,” and, in 1939, led protests against the racism they perceived in the motion picture Gone with the Wind. Coming of age at the time of the popular front, Rosset thought of communism as “personal freedom,” in particular the “freedom to make love.” He recalled, “Actually ‘free love’ was a huge slogan used against the Communists. I never heard the Communists use it themselves--but it was implicit in Communism.”

Following graduation from high school, Rosset drifted in search of a vocation for twelve years but maintained his commitment to “personal freedom.” Beginning college at Swarthmore, Rosset joined the American Student Union (ASU), an organization that opposed war and racism and supported organized labor and social programs. The ASU was also notable for its acceptance of Jewish students, who rose to national-level leadership positions at a time when many

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collegiate social organizations still excluded them. Rosset dropped out of Swarthmore and the University of Chicago and, despite his opposition to the war, left UCLA to enlist. He served in the Army Signal Corps in China, where he filmed captured Japanese equipment. Although a fellow soldier told Army counterintelligence that Rosset “disliked the present Russian regime,” Rosset’s hopes for communism survived his military service during the war and led him to join the Communist Party following his return to the University of Chicago. He maintained his membership by paying with his own money for the copies of the Daily Worker that he was required to sell each day on the South Side. Rosset next moved to New York and became a film maker. The fruit of his efforts, purchased with $250,000 [$2.2 to 2.5 million] of his

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family fortune, was a film made with Leo Hurwitz, entitled *Strange Victory*, that pointed out the irony of the persistence of racism in America after the defeat of Hitler’s Germany. Redolent of the popular front concern for racial equality, the movie played only a few weeks in New York and Chicago and lost Rosset his entire investment. After completing it, he followed his high-school friend Joan Mitchell, now his lover, to France, where she studied painting on a fellowship from the University of Chicago and where Rosset tried and failed to emulate Hemingway. In 1948, he personally took *Strange Victory* to Czechoslovakia to enter it in the Karolvy Vary Film Festival. Although the film won a prize there, Rosset later recalled that conditions in Czechoslovakia finally disillusioned him with communism. “You could see the regimentation everywhere,” he later recalled.

Rosset and Mitchell returned to New York City and

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7Rosset, “Art II,” 184.
Rosset at last completed his BA at the New School for Social Research in 1952. At the New School, Rosset enrolled in a course with Wallace Fowlie, an inspirational professor of French literature who was known to take time for his students and was open to new developments in French literature.

At Grove Press, Phelps and Balcomb had run out of money by 1951 and were trying to pay for the publication of *The Monk* by subscription. It appears that Rosset agreed to buy in once they had collected 110 orders; Rosset later remembered paying "a very tiny bit of money," perhaps $1000 ($7500) for Phelps's share. Soon he bought out Balcomb as well, and, in the spring of 1952, took a night course on publishing at Columbia University to learn how to be the publisher he had already become. Prominent figures from the publishing industry led each class session, including Random's famous editor Saxe Commins, and after class Rosset took other aspiring bookmen to Greenwich Village bars to argue and talk publishing. Among them was Donald Allen, who joined Rosset at
Grove the following summer. After running the press from his own apartment, Rosset moved into shared quarters with the new Noonday Press, whose publishers, Arthur Cohen and Cecil Hemley, met at one of Rosset’s former schools, the University of Chicago.⁸

Rosset revived Grove Press and quickly began issuing new titles after a lapse of more than a year. Rosset continued as a literary reprinter, but he took a different approach from the original owners. Phelps and Balcomb had created their own editions, commissioning introductions or even writing them, but Rosset used his greater financial resources to buy the rights to books published in Great Britain. Probably as early as February 1952, Rosset travelled to London in search of titles that would fit his vision of Grove. He selected a few more volumes of hundreds-of-years-old English literature, perhaps in consultation with his partner if the trip predated Balcomb’s departure from the press, as well as translations from

the French of Stendhal’s letters and a philosophical reflection by Emmanuel Mounier, founding editor of the French literary review *Esprit*. Wallace Fowlie may have suggested French titles to Rosset, though Mounier’s “personalism,” an inter-war French attempt to create an alternative ideology to communism, liberalism, and fascism, may have interested Rosset following his disillusionment with communism.

The young Rosset embraced communism as the path to personal freedom; he rejected communism on the Soviet model when he perceived that it abrogated that freedom instead of fostering it. Like many American intellectuals, his interests turned from politics to art after the war. As a publisher, Rosset embraced the promise of imaginative literature to liberate humankind intellectually, if not politically. Like New Directions and George Braziller, Grove Press drew on the discourse of high modernism that cast the innovative work of the interwar years as the culmination of European high culture and as the basis for ongoing artistic exploration. High modernism’s
embrace of artistic tradition, even if it was selective, proved congenial to publishers because it freed them from the narrow task of assisting worthy contemporary writers. Like the other exemplars of the permanent innovative press, Grove reached back to revive neglected texts, commissioned critical and educational material dealing with modernism and its precursors, and forged ahead with innovative work. The promotion of high modernism entailed a cosmopolitan outlook that rejected local standards and national perspectives and thus carried an implicit critique of Cold War intellectual conformity, but it also meshed with the efforts of intellectual Cold Warriors who sought to prove America’s cultural sophistication and freedom. More than other representatives of the permanent innovative press, Grove under Rosset was unflinching in its inclusion of works that offended political or sexual standards.

Grove Press showed the influence of the discourse of high modernism even before Rosset’s tenure. Phelps and Balcomb hoped to use no less a modernist than T.S.
Eliot to tie their publication of Richard Crashaw to the renewed interest in the Metaphysical Poets of the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, Eliot had previously determined to suppress his essay on Crashaw. Phelps and Balcomb’s one American title, Melville’s The Confidence-Man, presaged modernism in its theme of unstable identity and its static form, which resisted the linear development expected in a novel. During the 1920s, critics lionized Herman Melville as a literary ancestor to the new American authors, but no publisher issued a new edition of The Confidence-Man, which had not been republished as an individual volume in the United States since the original edition of 1857. The first book Rosset chose himself was a neglected novel by Henry James, considered an important contributor to the modernist style, especially in later works in which James made technical innovations, such as stream-of-consciousness, that exceeded the scope of realism. Notwithstanding the renewed critical attention to

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9 Elizabeth Maynard (Faber and Faber) to Robert Phelps, September 15, 1949, Box 176 (Folder: CRASHAW), GPR.

Grove Press brought out a stream of work by forward-looking European authors who published between the 1860s and 1910s, including Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Zola, Rimbaud, and the Italian naturalist Giovanni Verga. Grove took special pride in reintroducing American readers to Verga, publishing a new British translation of the novel *The House by the Medlar Tree* and D.H. Lawrence’s 1920s translations of *Little Novels of Sicily* and *Mastro-Don Gesualdo*. Verga’s work was less well-known than that of other great nineteenth-century novelists but critically accepted as exemplary of naturalism; *Time* quoted D.H. Lawrence’s opinion that Verga was “Italy’s Flaubert, and its Zola, too.” In the context of post-war

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Italian literature, naturalism was more than an outmoded precursor to experimental modernism; critic Mark Schorer, who devoted a long review in the *New Republic* to Grove’s first two Verga titles, placed Verga as the key literary ancestor of the Italian “neo-realists” whose literary work paralleled that of Italian filmmakers. According to Schorer, Verga not only anticipated the neo-realists’ style, but prepared them to accept the work of their more immediate models, Americans Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cauldwell, and Steinbeck. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Marc Slonim specifically credited Verga with preparing Italy for the novels and Hemingway translations of Elio Vittorini.\(^\text{11}\)

Cosmopolitanism permeated Grove’s lists in the early 1950s. Rosset’s reliance on British publishers for material gave a noticeably European flavor to Grove’s literary offerings, even to editions of

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American authors. Grove brought out John Lehmann Ltd.’s edition of Melville’s *White Jacket* with an introduction by William Plomer, an Englishman born in South Africa. Grove’s edition of Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* featured an introduction by the prominent English critic F.R. Leavis, an influential advocate for the idea that modernist authors were the successors to the high art tradition. *Pudd’nhead* came to Grove from the Zodiac Press, an English line of inexpensive reprints that Grove distributed in the United States as the Zodiac Library. When the Zodiac list, dominated by Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, and Anthony Trollope, extended to this darkly ironic work of the American Twain, Grove culled the title for its own imprint. In his introduction, also reprinted as an article in *Commentary*, Leavis argued that Twain was wrongly considered a frontier writer, but should be understood as working in the trans-Atlantic tradition of the novel. Leavis rejected the common reading of *Pudd’nhead* as a work that despaired equally of human nature and civilization, and found it
instead a complex assessment of both in a particular “historical community”: not a frontier outpost, but an extension of a civilization with roots in Europe. Leavis Europeanized Twain for inclusion with Austen and the Brontes, and Grove gave him scope to make his case against literary American exceptionalism.

Grove buttressed its list of nineteenth and early twentieth century literary works with critical and biographical works treating similar works and authors. From Faber and Faber, Grove took new biographies of Chekhov and Turgenev by translator and Chekhov authority David Magarshack, as well as Flaubert: A Biography by Philip Spencer. From Chatto and Windus, Grove took Marius Bewley’s, The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James, and Some Other American Writers, again featuring an introduction by F.R. Leavis. Bewley included Grove-authors Melville and James in his brief canon of “the greatest” American writers. Leavis, granted the unusual privilege of inserting comments and even disagreements between Bewley’s chapters, found space to make the same
argument about Mark Twain as in the *Pudd’nhead* introduction. The authors strongly agreed that American writers should be judged as part of the same tradition as European writers, not according to distinctly American standards. Grove quickly became a voice dissenting from American exceptionalism, at least in literature, partly as a function of printing work that originated in Great Britain, but in keeping with an orientation toward the European literary tradition that culminated in literary modernism.

Some of Grove’s signal accomplishments in literary publishing were made apart from the narrative of modernism and its precursors, but the spirit animating Grove’s selections was always compatible with the narrative. Grove’s publication of the Greek poet C.P. Cavafy and the French novelist Raymond Radiguet further promoted Grove’s cosmopolitan image because the authors enjoyed strong critical reputations abroad but were little known in the United States. Publication of Cavafy and Radiguet also suggested that Grove Press dared to violate social
norms; both were known to have had homosexual relationships. Just as Modernist authors, like the naturalists before them, boldly reexamined society’s received mores, so Rosset’s Grove demonstrated that it would tolerate controversy on moral issues in the interest of literary art.

It is unclear in Cavafy’s and Radiguet’s cases if the potential for controversy attracted Grove to these particular authors. Cavafy, who died in 1933, was regarded as one of the greatest Greek-language poets of the previous hundred years, and had an influential advocate in the English-speaking world in E.M. Forster. The *Times Literary Supplement* praised John Mavrogordato’s 1951 volume of translated verse, published by Hogarth Press, and argued for Cavafy’s relevance to the world shaped by World War II, asserting that Cavafy’s historical interest in the “deified dictators” of the Hellenistic Mediterranean yielded more insight into the twentieth century than the more popular subject of the Hellenic city-states. Rosset acquired American rights and published the book
to positive reviews in the New York Times and the Nation. Horace Gregory, author of the first of two lengthy reviews in Poetry, argued that the neglect of Cavafy revealed the shortcomings of contemporary academic criticism, which neglected the “historical imagination.” Though the reviewers noted Cavafy’s homosexuality and the eroticism of his verse, they indicated their own cosmopolitan ability to appreciate the poet’s genius despite “the perversity of his nature.” For at least one reviewer, homosexuality linked Cavafy to the Greek intellectual tradition: he was a pagan in the tradition of the ancient Greek world. To an attentive observer, Grove’s publication of Cavafy demonstrated the press’s literary taste, the relevance of its literary choices to current events, and its liberality in regard to sexuality.12

Raymond Radiguet boasted as much literary quality as Cavafy and a more prominent public reputation.

Radiguet’s neglect demonstrated even more starkly the low expectations for non-English-language authors in the American market. The 1949 release of a French movie adaptation of Radiguet’s novel *The Devil in the Flesh* attracted praise from critics and the National Board of Review, censure from the National Legion of Decency, and in Canada, government censorship. Unlike Cavafy’s poetry, Radiguet’s novels did not deal with homosexuality, and reviewers dwelt instead on the autobiographical dimension of *Devil*, the story of an affair between a teenage boy and the young wife of a soldier away at the front during World War I. Youthful adultery was the sort of scandal that sold books, not merely a perversion that a discriminating reader could forgive in the interest of literature.

The combination of acclaim and notoriety prompted New American Library to revive Kay Boyle’s 1932 Black Sun translation, creating the first mass-market edition of Radiguet in the U.S. No publisher gambled at the time that interest in *Devil* would pave the way for more works by Radiguet.
Grove won national critical attention when it became the publisher to continue the Radiguet revival. In 1952, the British Harvill Press brought out a new translation of Radiguet’s second novel under the title *Count d’Orgel Opens the Ball*, superseding Malcolm Cowley’s 1929 Norton translation. Learning of the new edition, Rosset asked the opinion of Wallace Fowlie, who replied that he considered the novel a favorite.\(^\text{13}\)

Grove’s decision to publish was simplified when the translator, Violet Schiff, waived her fee for the American edition, although, when Grove ordered a thousand sets of sheets, Harvill had only 987 sets on hand. Despite the modest circumstances of its publication, national magazines from the *Atlantic* to *Time* reviewed *Count d’Orgel* favorably, declared it a classic of the twentieth century, and often included in their reviews an account of Radiguet’s amazing precocity and early death in 1923. Though four years had passed since the release of the sensational movie, reviewers helpfully identified Radiguet as the author

\(^\text{13}\) Wallace [Fowlie] to Barney Rosset, September 5, [1952], Box 202A (Folder: Radiguet COUNT D’ORGEL), GPR.
of The Devil in the Flesh. Before the reviews even appeared, Grove arranged a new printing by photo-offset and began unsuccessful efforts to sell the paperback rights. Though the larger presses' calculations were proven correct regarding the commercial possibilities of Count d'Orgel, the publication brought Grove Press invaluable critical attention.14

Grove's publication of Radiguet and Cavafy, along with Giovanni Verga, began to establish Grove as a publisher of serious and important literature in translation, a publisher willing to reach beyond well-established titles to bring American readers neglected work. The average bookstore patron might have little sense as yet of Grove's identity, but in the smaller world of the book business, Grove demanded attention. Critics understood the commercial difficulties in Grove's path and the literary benefits to American readers; their respect for Grove's literary endeavors had many implications for business. As Grove built up

a reputation, it became more attractive to foreign publishers, authors, and agents looking for a buyer for American rights; Grove could better court American authors, editors, or designers; and salesmen could convince skeptical booksellers to take Grove Press seriously. A bestseller would have accomplished these tasks more swiftly and effectively, but the nature of Grove’s list made a bestseller highly unlikely. Critical approval helped Grove to build a reputation prior to its publication of any work remarkable for sales, artistic novelty, or even notoriety.

In only two years, Rosset established an identity for Grove Press and caught the attention of literary critics and book reviewers. In the middle 1950s, Rosset oversaw the creative expansion of Grove’s list, beginning as early as 1953, with the addition of a specialty in books about Asia, either Asian literature in translation or non-fiction work about the arts in Asia. Grove’s Asia list not only fit Grove’s function of providing literature in translation, but added another dimension to Grove’s cosmopolitanism,
expanding beyond the North Atlantic world. Again, Grove was able to make an impression on critics with a few well-chosen titles, thanks to its new editor and first employee Donald Allen. Allen’s long association with Grove Press began with a short term as editor in 1952 and 1953; in addition to handling the mundane office work, Allen introduced new interests to the Grove list that became hallmarks of the press, beginning with the Asia list. Allen’s service in the Navy during World War II included studying Japanese at Berkeley, which sparked an interest in Asian literature; Allen also met the talented translator Donald Keene during his Naval service. When Allen started at Grove, Keene had already seen his study *The Japanese Discovery of Europe* published in Great Britain, where it was followed in the next three years by three anthologies of Japanese literature. Grove took all four titles for the American market, where they earned positive reviews in national magazines. Reviewers praised both the selections and translations in the anthologies, stressing that the books were not
of merely educational interest, but enjoyable as literature.

Although Allen soon left Grove and Keene went on to publish with Knopf and New Directions, Rosset sustained the press’s commitment to Asian writing and made it central to the identity of the young press. Grove brought out a great variety of titles between 1954 and 1966, including anthologies, reprints, and first American editions. They included classic Chinese and Japanese novels; classic and modern poetry; drama and books about theater; and books about art, Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. In 1954, Grove held a competition for the best manuscript from India, offering $1000 [$7250] and the Grove Press Award. The Sikh novelist Khushwant Singh won for his first novel, and Grove went on to publish the first American editions of his first two novels. Grove published Asian titles as Evergreen Originals and in the Evergreen Encyclopedia series and became the American distributor for British publisher J. Murray’s Wisdom of the East series. The creation of the East
and West Book Club as a joint venture of Grove Press and the Asia Book Club in 1956 marked Grove’s first attempt to operate its own book club. Members chose each month between selected titles from “Asian and Western cultures”; Grove supplied the titles from both categories. Finally, Grove’s first literary erotica came from Asia; Grove first used the term “unexpurgated” when advertising its 1500-page, 4-volume edition of the Chinese novel The Golden Lotus, billing it as “China’s Decameron.”

The Asia list, like European literature in translation, did not promise large financial returns, but the business considerations and cultural significance of the Asia list differed from the European. In terms of the reputation of Grove Press, the Asian titles earned significant critical esteem and fulfilled the function of publishing work that was at once established and yet neglected by American publishing. Several of the literary titles received  

glowing national reviews, though they had the same low
celing on sales as other literature in translation.
The potentially scandalous *Golden Lotus* failed to
raise the eyebrows of the American press, which
ignored the new edition; in this case, condensation,
if not expurgation, might have boosted sales. Grove
abandoned its more ambitious ventures: the Grove Press
Award was discontinued and the East and West Book Club
quickly disappeared. The anthologies, by contrast,
sold well in Cold War America because they caught a
rising wave of interest in Asia at colleges and
universities.

The surge of American attention to Asia during
and after World War II was charged with conflicting
meanings. The brisk sales of Grove’s anthologies owed
much to the spread of Area Studies programs designed
to provide government and business with knowledge and
personnel for the Asian front in the Cold War. Even
as the intelligence agencies and philanthropic
foundations poured money into the study of Asia, the
FBI viewed many Asian specialists with suspicion.
Counter-intelligence agents feared that an interest in Asia, pursued outside the auspices of the new programs, might spring from positions contrary to American interests, such as sympathy for communist China. Grove did indeed receive outside help financing its Asia list, not from the government or the foundations, but from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which, Rosset recalled, “subsidized our start-up in this area.” The significance of UNESCO’s support in the Cold War context was ambiguous; UNESCO, around 1953, was beginning the transition from a heavily American-influenced organization to one that would become notorious for fostering criticism of the United States. Grove’s Asia list did not betray either sympathy with the Cold War’s demands for understanding and expertise in Asia or support for anti-colonial Asian nationalism or regionalism. Grove

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did not publish any books about politics or any that suggested ideological leanings; a book of Korean folk tales published in 1953 made no reference to the Korean War. Grove’s concentration on literary and artistic work, though apolitical, suggests a respect for Asian thought that is more than instrumental, and the structure of the East and West Book Club implied an equivalency between the two literary traditions. Grove benefitted from the Cold War attention to Asia but kept some distance from Cold War imperatives, continuing to develop itself as an agent of cosmopolitanism and an omnivorous cultural importer. Grove maintained its interest in the Asia list until the mid-1960s; the last significant publication was A Personal Matter by the Japanese novelist Kenzaburo Oe in 1968.

Grove made steps towards the creation of an Africa list also, again an activity fraught with political considerations as anti-colonial sentiment surged in Africa itself. In contrast to Grove’s Asia list, which posited an equivalency between the high
cultural traditions of East and West, its African
titles emphasized African folk culture and oral
tradition. Don Allen began to shape the list during
his brief tenure as editor, first selecting an unusual
novel by the Nigerian autodidact Amos Tutuola, The
Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in
the Dead’s Town. Faber and Faber published the novel
in Britain in 1952, and it caught the eye of George
Braziller, who may have seen Dylan Thomas’ “ecstatic”
review in the London Observer. Braziller decided to
find an American house to publish the book and in turn
grant book club rights to Braziller’s Book Find Club.
Despite this third-hand introduction, Don Allen and
later Barney Rosset personally corresponded with
Tutuola, one of their first living authors. Tutuola
sent manuscripts to New York and asked for a short-
wave radio and books; Grove Press wired him money and
sent him volumes of Ellison, Faulkner, McCullers, and
Huxley. Grove helped Tutuola place short stories in
the Atlantic and the Chicago Review and published two
more of his novels. Tutuola’s work, the rendering in
an African colloquial English of fantastic tales inspired by Yoruba oral literature, struck British and American readers as sharing a kinship with avant-garde literature, both in spurning realism and in almost reinventing the language. Tutuola could be read as having created a *Finnegan’s Wake* of the African bush. Many in the Nigerian literary community resented the praise for Tutuola, feeling that critics rewarded him for offering the primitivism that Europeans expected of Africans while overlooking more accomplished writers. Grove’s other African titles went further in elevating folk culture over fine art; they included anthropological studies of snake charmers, cultic figurines, and puberty rites, in what were then Tanganyika and Rhodesia. Curiously, decolonization did not inspire Grove to develop its Africa list; instead, after 1958, new African titles disappear from Grove’s output.20

Rosset, who quickly recruited Allen and began to shape a list and an image for Grove Press, was also quick to begin making changes in how the press approached the business of publishing. Rosset departed immediately from the path of the little press that lavished attention on a few closely related titles or patronized chosen authors. Instead, he made five distribution deals with British publishers; in addition to the Zodiac Press and J. Murray’s Wisdom of the East books, Grove became the American distributor for books from the National Gallery of London, Liverpool English Texts and Studies, and Routledge’s International Library social science series. Rosset also began to experiment with the format of Grove’s books. Restlessly manipulating his small initial stock of books, Rosset first bound them in cloth covers, but then rebound them as paperbacks. He scrapped the original designs, such as Cynthia Balcomb’s line drawings and hand-lettering for a volume of Aphra Behn, and replaced them with minimalist one-color-and-type combinations that Rosset
later remembered as a self-conscious imitation of New Directions’ design. These paperbound books lacked a series name and a separate price or catalog number from the hardcover books, and, when Grove began producing books regularly again, it returned to a hardcover format.\footnote{Rosset, “Combat Publishing,” 33.}

Rosset, meanwhile, continued to pursue ideas for paperback publication, ideas which led him into the vanguard of quality paperback publishing. In 1953, Doubleday introduced Anchor Books, a line of paperback reprints featuring prestigious authors and texts in larger formats and at much higher prices than existing Penguin and New American Library paperback reprints. Rosset, like Jason Epstein at Anchor, believed that high prices were limiting the number of readers of serious books and the number of books purchased by each reader. With a price lower than a hardcover reprint, the quality paperback could take advantage of economies of scale without having to sell the volume of a mass-market paperback. The most audacious part
of the quality paperback venture was cultural rather than economic: the gamble that book buyers could forget the association of the paperback format with the trivial and ephemeral. In the publishing industry, many feared that a low format could drag down high content, as Rosset learned for himself. In 1953, he convinced a reluctant Scribner’s to allow Grove to bind some of its edition of *The Sacred Fount* in paper; according to Rosset, Scribner’s only agreed because the copyright on the work expired in 1957. Encouraged by the sale of *The Sacred Fount*, Rosset asked to do the same with *The Golden Bowl*, but was rebuffed by Whitney Darrow of Scribner’s, who explained that Scribner’s frowned on the practice of “taking important titles and publishing them in paper.” Darrow thought Scribner’s would prefer to take a loss republishing in hardcover despite their own experience making money on Grove’s paper *Sacred Fount*. Rosset cast his lot with the quality paperback publishers, seeking a larger audience and a larger sale at the expense of maintaining the hierarchy of
bindings. By the end of 1954, Rosset was prepared to launch Grove into this new market. 22

Grove’s paperback line evolved in its first year to resemble other newly launched series. Rosset’s initial vision, described to Publishers Weekly in December 1954, was to eschew a “special series name” and to publish “exclusive Grove Press titles” in a format distinguished from the hardcover only by the binding. The trend, however, was to give quality paperback lines a new name, as had Doubleday with Anchor, Knopf with Vintage in 1954, and Noonday with Meridian in early 1955. When Grove’s books reached stores early in 1955, they had been christened Evergreen Books; only Random House bucked the trend, adding the Modern Library Paperbacks to its existing reprint line in 1955. By 1956, Evergreen ceased to publish Grove Press titles exclusively, adding Murder by Fourteen from the Merlin Press and Poems of Catullus, translated by Horace Gregory, from Thames

22 Barney Rosset to Whitney Darrow, May 10, 1954; Whitney Darrow to Barney Rosset, May 16, 1954; Barney Rosset to Eli Wilentz, March 19, 1956, Box 136 (Folder: Henry James The Golden Bowl), GPR.
and Hudson. Evergreen Books also matched their competitors in price; most volumes sold for $1.25 [$9] or $1.45 [$10.50]. While Signets cost as little as 35 cents [$2.50] and even “triple volumes” only 75 cents [$5.50], Anchor and Penguin Classics began at 85 cents [$6], and Vintage began at 95 cents [$7]; Anchor went up to $1.25, the standard price of Meridian, Beacon Books, and Viking Portables. The most expensive quality paperbacks were the priciest Dover Books and Evergreens at $1.90 and $1.95 [$14]. Publishers could price quality paperbacks in the range between the 25 cent mass-market paperback and the $3.50 hardback, overlapping in the upper part of its price range with the hardcover reprint, depending on the size of the book and the sales potential of the title. As early as 1955, surveyors of the publishing scene recognized the overwhelming success of the quality paperback format; Harvey Breit, who reviewed reprint publications for the New York Times Book Review, commented that only two years after the appearance of Anchor Books, “one is hard-pressed to find the hard-
cover reprints that compare at all favorably with their spineless brothers.”

Unlike rival publishers, Grove adopted a policy of simultaneously releasing its hardcover and paperback titles. Grove sought to increase the appeal of the paperbacks by making them more current, but the prominence on Grove’s list of reprints, new translations, and American editions of books published in Great Britain may have counteracted the effect. The Times’s Breit noted that Evergreens “have been printed by Grove as well, and are consequently available, anachronistically, in hardcovers.” Why should Breit single Grove out for continuing hardcover publication but not Doubleday or Knopf? Evidently, he thought of Grove as a reprint house, though most of its titles were original publications in the U.S. market.

Grove’s hardcover sales probably suffered little as a result of the simultaneous publication of the

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24 Breit, 31.
Evergreen paperbacks. The paperbacks clearly reached a new market, outselling the hardcovers ten to one or even fifty to one. Grove’s first sample of the selling-power of the quality paperback came from Verga’s *The House by the Medlar Tree*, licensed to Anchor and going on sale in 1955. The 1953 hardcover sold barely 200 copies in its first year; the Anchor edition sold over 14,000 copies by April 1956. Grove’s Evergreen Books, priced higher and lacking Anchor’s distribution system and marketing ability, achieved less dramatic but satisfactory results. Grove put Verga’s *Little Novels of Sicily* into an Evergreen edition in early 1955, immediately selling over 1500 copies of a title that sold fewer than 100 copies in its first year in hardcover. Though *Little Novels* was a better known work and boasted D.H. Lawrence as translator, Grove sold only about 7500 Evergreens, compared to an eventual total of 18,000 for Anchor’s *Medlar Tree*. At Anchor, however, Jason Epstein was not impressed with sales of *Medlar Tree*; superior distribution and marketing meant overhead and
overhead demanded sales volume. Even within the
category of the quality paperback, there was a
distinct place for Grove Press.25

The development of Evergreen Books was essential
to the survival and growth of Grove Press. The list
that Rosset and Allen began to develop would grow into
a strong back-list, and back-list sales at Grove were
paperback sales; almost all hardcover editions went
out of print within five years. Paperbacks not only
kept up sales of successful titles, they could turn
moribund titles into cash cows. In 1959, Grove got
around to issuing Rosset’s first title, The Monk, as
an Evergreen; the hardcover had sold about 1500 in its
first eighteen months and only a few hundred copies
since. The Evergreen sold 4282 in its first six
months, and sales grew throughout the 1960s, topping
3000 in 1969 and totaling more than 27,000 by 1970.
Similarly, Tutuola’s Palm Wine Drinkard sold 1400
copies in hardcover between 1953 and 1960. By 1955,

25 Royalty records, Box 241B (Folders: 26 The House by the Medlar Tree Arnoldo Mondadori Publishing Co. Inc.; E-14 Little Novels of Sicily Arnoldo Mondadori); Royalty records and Jason Epstein to Barney Rosset, August 6, 1958, Box 241B (Folder: The House by the Medlar Tree Doubleday & Co.), GPR.
Rosset realized he could not sell the 5000 sets he had printed unless he bound most of them as paperbacks, but George Braziller, who controlled the American rights, asked for a $150 advance on paperback royalties, which would have driven the total advance due Faber and Faber, Grove, and Braziller to $600 [$4400]. Rosset was dismayed that Braziller, whose book club never adopted the title, effectively blocked the paperback. The Evergreen *Palm Wine Drinkard* did not appear until 1962, but it then sold over 19,000 copies by the end of the decade. *The Monk* and *The Palm Wine Drinkard* exemplify Grove’s editorial daring, and the upward trend in the sales of these titles in the course of the sixties demonstrates that Grove anticipated popular taste, but the sales they enjoyed as Evergreen Books and the sustaining contribution they made to Grove’s business depended upon the quality paperback format.  

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26 Royalty records, Box 160A (Folders: Lewis The Monk; E-163 The Monk Matthew G. Lewis Louis F. Peck) and Box 238A (Folder: E-328 Palm Wine Drinkard); Barney Rosset to George Braziller, February 23, 1955; Barney Rosset to Peter du Sautoy (Faber and Faber), March 29, 1955, Box 283A (Folder: Tutuola, Amos The Brave African Huntress), GPR.
With the success of Evergreen Books, Grove Press began to adopt the practices of larger, more commercial publishers. Rosset hired Fred Jordan in 1956 as a business manager and added staff to help with sales and marketing; the enlarged staff set about establishing the Evergreen brand nationally, or at least outside of New York City. In 1958, Cody’s Books in Berkeley held a three-week publicity event for Evergreen Books, coordinated by Fred Jordan and the owner, Fred Cody. Publisher and bookseller collaborated on advertising in the student newspaper, the store windows were filled with Evergreen Books, and inside shoppers found more books, displays, author photos, and circulars. The event reached a climax with a panel discussion at an adjacent theater, led by Rosset and including Mark Schorer, on “Publishing New American Writing,” a topic that prompted the mention of many Evergreen titles. The following winter, Grove held “Evergreen Book Week” in Washington, D.C., involving eleven stores, coordinated newspaper advertising, and a brief radio appearance by Rosset
promoting the event and discussing the latest issue of the Evergreen Review. Although Grove would soon get more publicity from its battle against censorship than book-store publicity events could ever generate, the "book weeks" demonstrate that Rosset and Jordan were not averse to contemporary marketing techniques and believed that Grove's mission was compatible with the creation of publicity events.27

In the first years of Evergreen Books, an avenue opened for Grove Press to draw upon the large publishers for reprints, raising new commercial possibilities, but the avenue began to close around 1960, as consolidation and conglomeration accelerated in the publishing industry. The booksellers participating in Evergreen Book Week in Washington reported that the bestselling title of the event was not original to Grove Press, but was Caitlin Thomas' memoir of her late husband, Dylan Thomas, published in

hardcover by Little, Brown. One of Evergreen’s most successful authors was Theodor Reik, who had published a string of popular books about psychoanalysis with Farrar, Straus. In 1956, Evergreen published *Listening with the Third Ear*, the first of nine Reik titles licensed from Farrar, Straus. Rosset joked in 1958 that Grove had printed so many copies of Reik’s books that he would have to rename Grove “the Reik Press”, but in 1961, when sales of *Listening* exceeded 28,000, Roger Straus informed Rosset that he would be cancelling many licenses as soon as Grove was out of stock. Farrar, Straus bought Noonday in 1960 in order to have its own outlet for quality paperbacks, in Straus’s words, “to be the master of our own destiny.” The last Reik Evergreen appeared in 1962. The large publishers had become jealous of the revenue from quality paperbacks, and with infusions of cash from public investment and conglomeration, they bought or created their own quality paperback lines, narrowing the selection for smaller firms like Grove.28

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28 Autograph note on Roger W. Straus, Jr., to Barney Rosset,
Grove tried to build on the success of Evergreen Books in Great Britain by creating Evergreen Books Ltd. in 1960, in collaboration with the publisher John Calder, who shared many of Grove’s authors and interests, but the effort flagged after a few years. Since many of Grove’s hardcover titles originated in Great Britain, the increased competition for American reprints especially hurt Evergreen Books Ltd. Fortunately for the American Evergreen Books, Grove continued to enjoy success with its foreign titles, many of which, published in the 1950s, only gained in sales in the course of the 1960s. The most important source of original titles at Grove was the theater, which became for Grove an essential vehicle of publicity. The decline of American theater relative to the technologically more advanced entertainments of radio, motion pictures, and television can mask the expansion of theater after 1945 and theater’s continuing importance in American culture. Theater’s

December 15, 1958; Roger W. Straus, Jr., to Barney Rosset, February 28, 1961, Box 206D (Folder: Reik, Theodor Of Love and Lust [FS]), GPR.
audience was limited, compared to that of the electronic media, by the requirement of live performance, but theater took advantage of its position in the nation’s cultural capital. Theatrical events in New York City enjoyed publicity in local newspapers elsewhere and in national magazines like Time, Newsweek, and the New Republic. Broadway theaters set the theatrical style for the provinces, and many who never attended a Broadway performance kept abreast of the developments there. The 1940s and 1950s saw a revival of regional professional and amateur theater, especially in high schools and colleges, around the United States. The flourishing regional theater happily acknowledged New York’s leadership.  

Over the long term, the popularity of the movies and television eroded New York’s cultural leadership, along with the sense that culture emanated from any particular geographical location, but that process, never completed, had not advanced far in the 1950s.

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Hollywood had become a second source of cultural production, but television and even the movies retained ties to New York. Theater’s limited live audience included members of the cultural elite, including the creators and managers of other media, who expected theater to exercise its share of cultural leadership. The relatively small number and high cost of theatrical productions acted as a lens, concentrating attention on the works given space there.

Select theatrical productions also lived a second life through other media when they were reproduced in print, on radio, and later on television. Many successful Broadway plays were adapted for the movies, sometimes with directors and actors from the theater. The growth in provincial theater contributed to the demand for published scripts, and others who wanted the complete text of a play still typically used print, though sound recordings of many plays were available on record in the 1950s. The numbers of
theater-goers, then, does not reflect the reach and influence of theater in American culture in the 1950s.

Grove Press, a publisher with literary ambitions, was positioned to take an interest in the theater, and changes in theater served to attract the young press. As Broadway struggled with rising costs and smaller audiences, the big producers and Actors Equity, the theater workers’ union, formalized a second-class theater, Off-Broadway. New York’s alternative theater, strong in the 1920s but weakened during the depression, received official sanction, as management and labor on Broadway worked to enlarge their organizational reach. Several factors encouraged producers and directors Off-Broadway to innovate: lower costs, a more self-consciously experimental setting, older and more educated audiences who expected greater artistic and intellectual challenges, and the need to differentiate theater from movies and television.

The needs of Grove and Off-Broadway converged for a few years around the introduction to the United
States of the avant-garde theater of Paris. At the time that Off-Broadway became established in New York, small theaters flourished in Paris, where the experimental drama that came to be known as “Theatre of the Absurd” premiered in the late 1940s. The plays of Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett shared a rejection of conventional theater’s imitation of reality and of the reliance on dialogue to convey a play’s meaning. Instead, the dramatic situations and the characters’ speeches were calculated to frustrate the audience’s attempt to interpret the performance like a conventional play. The new theater emphasized the absurdity of the human predicament but also appeared absurd from the perspective of the contemporary theatrical style.

Theatre of the Absurd pushed the limits of Off-Broadway’s tolerance and helped to define the outer boundary of its experimentalism. Grove Press in fact acted to publish the new playwrights before their works reached the American stage at all, not only leading Off-Broadway producers, but also avoiding the
competition with other publishers that would inevitably follow successful or controversial performances. It was a financial risk, but Rosset learned from Beckett that, for the French publisher Editions de Minuit, the risk paid off when Beckett’s *En Attendant Godot* “appeared before, and sold after, performance.” Grove’s decision was vindicated when theater companies in the United States also chose to produce the new theater. For Off-Broadway, the new works from France brought novelty and simultaneously proved the seriousness of Off-Broadway’s artistic aspirations.

Grove’s first new playwright was Jean Genet, who became one of the most successful of the radical playwrights in the Off-Broadway scene. As early as 1952, Barney Rosset was considering translations of Genet’s novel *Notre Dame des Fleurs* and his fictionalized memoir *Journal du Voleur*. Rosset was particularly eager to keep the works out of the hands of rival publisher Samuel Roth. Roth had been in

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court several times on charges of publishing, distributing, or advertising obscene literature, and stood accused by fellow publishers of pirating works of Lawrence, Joyce, and others. He changed his imprint regularly to stay ahead of the censors; in 1952 he called his operation the Seven Sirens Press. Rosset warned Genet’s translator, Bernard Frechtman, that, if given permission to publish, Roth would expurgate and rewrite without approval. The novels were published only a decade later, following the court battles over censorship, in which Roth’s 1957 defeat at the Supreme Court paved the way for Grove’s later triumphs. In the meantime, Rosset pursued Genet’s writing for theater instead, and by early 1953 Rosset made arrangements to publish a volume containing the plays The Maids and Deathwatch, along with an essay on The Maids by Sartre that originally formed the appendix to St.Genet. The volume, published in hardcover in 1954, was used by Julie

31 Barney Rosset to Bernard Frechtman, September 8, 1952, Box 101, GPR.
Bovasso for the inaugural production of the Tempo Theatre Off-Broadway in 1955.\textsuperscript{32}

Grove’s first publication of Samuel Beckett followed later in 1954 with the appearance of the hardcover *Waiting for Godot*. The publication marked the beginning of Grove’s longest and most prestigious publishing relationship and exemplified Barney Rosset’s daring as a publisher; the play was not performed in London until the following year and not in New York until 1956. Rosset remembered that he read *En Attendant Godot* as first published by Editions de Minuit at about the time of its 1952 run in Paris. With the encouragement of Wallace Fowlie, his professor at the New School, Rosset decided to publish the play and immediately began to arrange translations of Beckett’s novels as well. The performance of Beckett in New York began with a Broadway production of *Waiting for Godot*, running for only 59

performances, but Beckett moved Off-Broadway for years afterwards.  

Also in 1954, Rosset began to consider American publication of the plays of Eugene Ionesco, at the recommendation of Don Allen, eventually signing a contract with Librairie Gallimard in 1956. Rosset asked Allen to translate four plays, which finally appeared in one volume in 1958. In this case, publication followed performance; the Tempo Theatre began to premiere Ionesco plays Off-Broadway in 1955. Despite the delays which plagued Grove’s arrangements to publish Ionesco, it handily maintained its lead in the field, winning the praise of Roger Straus, Jr., who wrote to inquire if Grove planned to publish Ionesco’s prose as well as his plays. Straus also conveyed his own doubts about the prospects for Ionesco in the U.S., commending Rosset on a “good publishing coup, at least prestige-wise.” 

By 1960, 

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34 see Barney Rosset to D. Mascolo (Librairie Gallimard), September 26, 1956; Roger W. Straus, Jr., to Barney Rosset,
Grove had three more volumes of Ionesco plays in print, including *Rhinoceros*, which had run successfully on Broadway in 1960.

Long before Martin Esslin grouped Beckett, Genet, and Ionesco, and labeled their work “theatre of the absurd,” American journalists and intellectuals took note of the challenge they presented, both philosophically and theatrically. The new theater arrived as a public provocation, whether on or Off-Broadway, at a time when new European fiction was not reaching American readers. Beckett’s French novel *Molloy*, for example, was published in France by Edition de Minuit in 1950, but was published in the United States after *Waiting for Godot* and only as a result of Rosset’s initial interest in the play. Other French writers, later identified as the new novelists, began publishing in the early 1950s, but were published in the U.S. after the contemporaneous new drama because the publicity around the theater catapulted the dramatic works into the public...
consciousness, first in Paris, then in London and New York.

Awareness of the Parisian avant-garde penetrated the United States gradually but surprisingly thoroughly. Between 1956 and 1969, amateur performances of *Waiting for Godot* were given in every state except Arkansas and Alaska. On average, during each of those years, the play was performed by North American amateurs in thirty-three cities spread across 18 states and one Canadian province. Performances were not limited to the largest metropolitan centers, but extended to three different cities in Montana, four in Idaho, five in Louisiana and West Virginia, seven in Tennessee, twelve in North Carolina, thirteen in Texas, and dozens in more populous states in the Midwest and on both coasts. Just in the western portion of New York state, for example, Beckett’s play was performed in Syracuse, Ithaca, Rochester, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, as well as Corning, Elmira, Lakemont, Geneva, Geneseo, Wellsville, Brockport, and East Aurora. No book tour could compare to widespread
performances which reached more than 400 different places over fifteen years and deeply involved at least a few local residents.\textsuperscript{35}

Small as most productions of Genet, Beckett, and Ionesco were, the publicity around a play’s performance hardly rocketed the published text onto the bestseller list, but the playwrights’ titles distinguished themselves as steady-sellers, and, as the fame and notoriety of their work rose over the course of more than a decade, these titles became lucrative backlist properties for Grove Press. The most common sales pattern for all types of titles was a sale in the first six months to a year of half to two-thirds of all the copies of that particular edition that would ever be sold. After that period, sales gradually declined toward zero, and the title was declared out of print. Even titles that went on to become bestsellers often experienced a temporary dip in sales while the market absorbed the initial

\textsuperscript{35} Amateur performance figures are derived from royalty statements from Dramatists Play Service Inc. to Grove Press found in Box 31 (Folder: E-33 Waiting for Godot S. Beckett Dramatists Play Service), GPR.
orders, after which sales rose sharply again. The steady seller, after the usual temporary dip, tended to rise again slowly and then to level off. This leveling off might occur at an apparently low number of sales per six-month royalty period, but the cumulative effect over ten years could still make a less well-known title an important financial success.

Grove’s decision to publish paperback editions was crucial to the success of its theatrical works, which fit the definition of a steady seller only in their paperback editions. The hardback editions of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Genet’s *The Maids* and *Deathwatch*, brought out a year and a half before the paperbacks, sold very modestly and declined continuously. When Grove published paper and hardcover editions simultaneously, hardcover sales dropped precipitously after the first six months: Ionesco’s *Four Plays* by seventy percent, Beckett’s *Endgame* by ninety percent in the second six-month period of sales. Nor did the sales of any hardcover recover significantly after the initial drop; *Four
Plays and Endgame went out of print after three years, Genet’s The Balcony even more quickly, and The Maids reported no sales in some periods during its five years in print. Waiting for Godot sold throughout its six years in print, but ended with a modest total of 562, fewer than Endgame’s 698. With or without competition from lower-priced paperbacks, Grove’s theater did not sell in hardcover.36

The paperbacks combined to sell well over a million copies over the course of the 1960s. Waiting for Godot stands apart as the highest selling of the theater titles, exceeding 10,000 copies a year in 1960; 38,000 in 1965; and 100,000 in 1969. Ionesco’s Four Plays sold over 10,000 copies a year beginning in 1962 and exceeded 47,000 in 1969. The Balcony, Endgame, and Rhinoceros occupied the next tier, sales of each rising to over 13,000 a year in 1967, and selling between 89,000 and 129,000 total copies by 1970. Even the slower-selling theater titles tallied

36 Sales figures for domestic sales are derived from royalty statements found in Boxes 23 (Endgame); 31 (Godot); 101 (Balcony); 101B (Maids); and Ionesco Box 1 (Four Plays), GPR. Figures for foreign sales tend to run ten percent or less of domestic sales.
good sales. *The Maids* peaked around 5,500 a year, totaling 50,000 by 1970; Ionesco’s *The Killer*, and the volume collecting his *Amedee, The New Tenant, and Victims of Duty* sold at most about 4000 copies per year and totaled about 30,000 by 1970. Taken together, Grove’s theater steady-sellers brought in a vital stream of income from what was a very unlikely source when Grove began to arrange for their translation and publication.37

The consumer preference for Grove’s theater in paperback proves only that the books were not selling to the collectors of handsome, gilt-edged editions; purchasers may have been attracted, regardless of price, to Evergreen Books precisely because they connoted the rejection of the classic and the standard. Journalist Gilbert Millstein, satirizing New York’s culturally au courant, employed the Evergreen Book as a symbol of their pretensions. The Off-Broadway theatergoer, according to Millstein,

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37 Sales figures derived from royalty statements as in n.36 above and in Boxes 101A (Blacks); Ionesco Box 1 (Killer, Amedee); and Ionesco Box 2 (Rhinoceros), GPR.
typically carried “a dollar and a quarter paperback containing a play by Jean Genet within and an abstract drawing without” to “an Anouilh revival . . . on the Lower East Side,” the book “bulging carefully” from a suit pocket. For New York sophisticates, the paperback fit in with the makeshift facilities of Off-Broadway theaters; venue and book alike suggested the commitment to an artistic avant-garde that ran ahead of the established and commercialized institutions of culture. The book, reaching a larger audience, could bear this meaning to the nation outside Manhattan.

Issued as Evergreen Books, Grove’s plays were priced and marketed as quality paperbacks, so they were sold in bookstores and cost up to three times what a mass market paperback cost. Between 1956 and 1958, Grove Press settled on a standard price, moving the books slightly up-market. Waiting for Godot and The Maids sold for $1 [$7] and $1.25 [$9], respectively, in their Evergreen editions in 1956, and Endgame, in early 1958, was priced at $1.25 [$8.50].

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Late in 1958, Grove set a higher price for *The Balcony*, *Four Plays*, and *Amedee* of $1.75 [$12], and adjusted the price of these titles to $1.95 [$13] in 1960. That year Grove introduced *The Blacks*, *The Killer*, and *Rhinoceros* at the same price. While not expensive, the Evergreens cost more than New American Library’s editions of Tennessee Williams or Bantam’s Arthur Miller, both priced under a dollar. Either Grove determined that mass-market editions would not sell enough to increase the income from these titles, or mass-market publishers would not contract for them. Grove did refrain from raising prices after 1961, perhaps in order to maintain the very large market for its theater titles; the value in 2005 dollars of the uniformly-priced $1.95 titles fell to $11.50 in 1967 and $10 in 1970.

The high and increasing sales of the Grove theater titles in the late 1960s owed much to the use of the books as undergraduate textbooks in drama and literature courses. In 1966, Judith Schmidt explained to Gallimard’s New York agent that Grove would not
allow *The Bald Soprano* to be placed in a Dodd, Mead anthology because it might hurt existing educational sales; Schmidt wrote, “Our sales in the college market are fantastically high.” Grove previously licensed Ionesco plays for theater anthologies by McGraw-Hill; Little, Brown; Random House; Houghton Mifflin; D.C. Heath; Appleton-Century-Crofts; Macmillan; and Harcourt, Brace. Payments rose from $175 to $350 per use. As higher education expanded after the war, the range of exemplary books taught, more recently thought of as the “canon,” expanded rapidly as well. As with the European exponents of existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd quickly joined the ranks of accepted innovation.39

Grove’s close connection to Off-Broadway theater gave Grove a publicity engine with national reach. As early as 1957, Grove’s accomplishments in publishing drama were establishing a reputation for the press that reached beyond reviewers and professional book

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buyers to a segment of the book-buying public. The notoriety of the theater titles further helped Grove to promote Evergreen Books, an effort that also led to the creation of an in-house publication, the Evergreen Review, which proved an invaluable instrument for the press. Don Allen conceived of a periodical paperback anthology of literature while editing just such a publication for New American Library (NAL) called New World Writing. The format was pioneered in Great Britain by Penguin Books’ Penguin New Writing (1940-1950) and imitated in the U.S. by New World Writing (published by NAL 1952-1959 and by Lippincott 1960-1964), Pocket Books’ discovery (1952-1955), and Doubleday’s Anchor Review (1955-1957). After Allen left Grove, he worked briefly for New Directions and continued to do freelance editorial work and some translating for Rosset. In 1956, he proposed “a little anthology of interesting reading . . . a showcase in which one could try out various writers and subjects and see what kind of reaction there might be.” Allen’s list of possible authors and selections
emphasized established literary writers rather than new authors: the Marquis de Sade, Nikolai Gogol, Alfred Jarry, Jean Cocteau, Ezra Pound, and Robert Lowell. Allen proposed devoting an issue to Antonin Artaud or Bertolt Brecht. Allen listed two non-literary topics, jazz and Zen Buddhism, and one little-known American author, Jack Kerouac, who had offered his novel *The Subterraneans*. Allen expected a smattering of new authors to come from among Grove’s own discoveries. Once the project was under way, New Directions offered the material rejected from the sixteenth New Directions annual.40

The paperback literary anthology was the descendent of the nineteenth-century publisher’s magazine, like *Scribner’s* or *Harper’s*, created to whet the reader’s appetite for books. *New World Writing* did so by cramming a small, cheap paperback with print. *Evergreen Review’s* style and tone owed more to the intellectual journals like *Partisan Review*, on

40 Gontarski, “Don Allen,” 133; Unsigned typescript, September 5, 1956; James Oliver Brown to Barney Rosset, December 19, 1956, Evergreen Review Box 1 (Folder: Editorial Files), GPR.
which Don Allen had also worked, and Hudson Review. Broader in their interests than more academically oriented reviews, these journals reflected the prestige and seriousness, the “mystique” as David Hollinger called it, of modern literature, by placing literary criticism at the heart of cultural criticism and alongside consideration of philosophy, ideology, and politics. The content and presentation of the early years of Evergreen Review differed a little by including more literature than literary criticism. A major essay or literary work by a leading modern or avant-garde intellectual formed the backbones of the early issues. Number 1 featured a story and poems by Beckett and a long reflection by Sartre on the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Number 3 ran an essay on capital punishment by Camus. An essay by Karl Jaspers and an excerpt from Artaud’s Theater and Its Double accompanied the first publication of Beckett’s short play Krapp’s Last Tape in the fifth number.41

Evergreen differed most from the intellectual journals in its freedom to extend high modern seriousness to forms outside of high culture. It proclaimed the extension of the aura of high modernism, concentrating on new voices and new arts, rather than on refining the canon or developing a school of criticism. From the first issue, Evergreen included essays about jazz, and became a regular venue for Martin Williams, founder of Jazz Review and a leader in the critical analysis of jazz; a characteristic Williams title is “Charlie Parker: The Burden of Innovation.” Drug addiction and drug-induced hallucination received literary treatment by the French “post-surrealist” Henri Michaux and the Scot Alexander Trocchi. Evergreen threatened to break out of the mold of the literary journal by its inclusion of photography, though its selections were sober and sufficiently highbrow: Han Namuth’s record of Jackson Pollock at work in his studio or Harry Redl’s portraits of West Coast writers looking well groomed in dark turtlenecks and scholarly tweed. Even
Allen Ginsberg was clean-cut behind thick-framed glasses. Through a series of subtle differences from its models, Evergreen Review emerged as an attractively fresh forum for the latest in literature and ideas.\footnote{Bruce King, “Evergreen Review, Grove Press, and Jazz,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 10, no. 3 (1990): 162-169.}

In addition to helping define the Evergreen brand, the publication of Evergreen Review provided the occasion for Grove Press to begin publishing new work by American authors. Don Allen, returning to Grove’s employ as a co-editor with Rosset, brought with him the publishing ideas gleaned from his time with New Directions and New World Writing, outfits more oriented to new American authors than Grove had been up to that time. Allen also maintained some connections to the writers of the so-called Berkeley Renaissance, whom he met during his Japanese studies after the war, including Robert Duncan, who by the mid-1950s was an important influence on poetry circles in San Francisco. At New American Writing, Allen first came across the writing of Jack Kerouac, who,
since the publication his first novel in 1950, was circulating at least five manuscripts among publishers without success. Malcolm Cowley, who served as an editor and literary advisor to Viking Press and informally as a mentor to Don Allen, praised Kerouac in the Saturday Review, but privately believed that Kerouac needed editorial help, which Kerouac notoriously refused. While Viking considered the longer novels, Allen wanted to take the short novel The Subterraneans, to include in Evergreen Review.

The same week that Don Allen wrote up his proposal for a periodical anthology, the New York Times Book Review ran a story by poet and critic Richard Eberhart on the growing poetry community in San Francisco, where a poetry reading could draw hundreds of young people. Barney Rosset, perhaps noting Eberhart’s remark that “most of the young poets have not yet published books,” asked Allen to investigate through his Bay Area connections. Soon, with the help of Kenneth Rexroth, at fifty-one the grand old man of the new San Francisco poetry, Allen
rounded up enough work by Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Mike McClure, Robert Duncan, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti to fill an entire issue of *Evergreen Review*, which appeared in mid-1957 as “The San Francisco Scene.” Unable to agree with Kerouac about cuts and editorial changes to *The Subterraneans*, Allen agreed to substitute a shorter Kerouac work, “October in the Railroad Earth.”

Although Rexroth and Henry Miller got top billing on the front cover, the “San Francisco Scene” is remembered for scooping the national press with regard to the Beat writers and disseminating Ginsberg’s “Howl.” Prepared against the backdrop of Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s arrest for its publication in San Francisco, the version of “Howl” printed in *Evergreen Review* was altered to avoid censorship, allowing Grove to take advantage of the publicity surrounding the trial. Proving the national reach of *Evergreen*, a young Larry McMurtry picked up the “San Francisco Scene” issue at a newsstand in Dallas and read “Howl”

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for the first time. In September, Viking finally published Kerouac’s *On the Road*, launching a storm of publicity around the “Beat Generation,” as *Time*, *Life*, and *Vogue* took turns profiling the young rebels.\(^{44}\)

The success of *On the Road* prompted Grove to make a new offer to publish *Subterraneans*, in Kerouac’s words, “on a new hard cover big-time basis” without cuts or editorial changes. About five years into Rosset’s tenure, Grove published its first new work by an American writer, making its debut in the field in early 1958 with the biggest literary celebrity of the moment. Despite critical reviews, the *Subterraneans* sold 12,000 copies in its first month, mostly in an Evergreen Original edition brought out simultaneously with the hardcover; a mass-market paperback followed from Avon in 1959. It was a modest coup for Grove and an auspicious beginning, but Grove’s subsequent relations with Kerouac reveal the limits on Grove’s abilities in a market in which the large publishers reigned. *The Subterraneans* did well riding the

\(^{44}\) Larry McMurtry, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 163.
coattails of *On the Road*, but Kerouac’s future sales were uncertain. Viking and Kerouac parted ways after *The Dharma Bums*, and Grove brought out the novel *Dr. Sax* but felt unable to gamble a large advance on future Kerouac novels. Kerouac left Grove’s offer of $1000 for *Desolation Angels* on the table and held out, despite running out of money, until finally accepting a contract with Coward-McCann at the end of 1964. Grove’s offer was even something of a joke to Kerouac, who at one point wrote to John Clellon Holmes that, if Farrar, Straus rejected *Angels*, “I can always sell it to Grove Press, hor, hor, hor.” Grove picked up the scraps that did not attract other publishers, like a book of poetry, *Mexico City Blues*.45

The “San Francisco Scene” issue of *Evergreen Review* also opened a door into the publishing of new poetry. Grove had experimented with selling poetry in 1954 and 1955, when it distributed a handful of volumes produced “in association” with the short-lived

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publisher Bonacio and Saul. Whether or not as a result of this experience, Rosset shared the fear that prompted James Laughlin to create the Five Young American Poets series in 1940: that a volume devoted to a single unknown poet would not entice book buyers. Grove did take a chance with a New York-based poet, Frank O’Hara, in 1957, and in addition to Kerouac, Grove published 100 Selected Poems by E.E. Cummings in a slim paperback and a radio play by English poet David Gascoyne that earned some publicity when it was successfully broadcast on the BBC. Through Evergreen Review, Grove had begun an association with a score of promising poets hungry for book contracts, but, to his frustration, Don Allen could not convince Rosset to publish West Coast poets Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen individually. Rosset suggested a volume combining several poets. Allen even asked Laughlin to consider publishing Snyder and Whalen at New Directions, but eventually Grove settled on the idea of a “contemporary American poetry anthology,” to be edited
by Allen, made up of poets who fell outside of what was considered the “academic” school.⁴⁶

Allen’s volume, The New American Poetry (TNAP), created a sensation, introducing a national audience to the more experimental and socially rebellious side of American poetry. Drawing readers in with the now-familiar Beats, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky, the anthology included the work of forty-four poets variously associated with San Francisco, New York, and the recently defunct Black Mountain College, as well as biographical information and fifteen letters or statements by the poets about their art. Publishers Weekly helped the cause by reporting that it was the first paperback original to be reviewed on the front page of a major Sunday book review. Marianne Moore’s review for the New York Herald Tribune was not entirely favorable, but helped boost orders by 3500 copies, according to PW. Grove may have used a little sleight-of-hand in generating

⁴⁶ Don Allen to James Laughlin, January 7, 1959, Item 33, New Directions Records, Houghton Library [hereafter NDR]; “Books under contract,” undated typed page, Box 3, Folder 7, Donald Allen Collection, Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego [hereafter DAC].
this publicity; like many of Grove’s Evergreen Originals, TNAP was published simultaneously in hardcover, and reviewers, of course, made no distinction between the two formats and reviewed both at once. TNAP attracted reviews in national and local media and usually received a mixed judgment. The anthology was not calculated to please the poets and poetry critics who reviewed it; they took issue with the “outrageous claims” of the preface, the quality of the poems, the method of selection, and the inevitable omissions. Proving again that, with publicity, quantity trumps quality, Grove sold almost 10,000 copies by the end of 1960, continued to sell the book steadily through the 1960s, and saw sales rise to new heights by 1968. Though critics found Allen’s admittedly heuristic talk of generations and schools incoherent, he succeeded in providing a guide to the confusing world of American poetry, lumping where others preferred to split. Also, Allen’s generalizations seemed more true at the time than critics’ careful distinctions; the youthful poets who
combined formal innovation and brashness fit the popular perception of a “strong third generation” of American poets capable of renewing the art. Because in 1958 Grove Press lacked the resources to publish poets in individual volumes, it found itself in 1960 with a reputation as a champion of living poets and a steady-selling anthology that would long be considered a literary landmark.47

Grove followed the success of The New American Poetry with volumes by Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, but did not create a poetry list and allowed Evergreen Review to serve as its only regular outlet for poetry. The addition to Grove’s publishing program of poetry and original fiction did not significantly change the press’s mission. Grove’s list continued to consist of plays, novels, and nonfiction previously published in Great Britain, in English or in translation, and some works from around the world in original English translations. A modest

proportion of the Evergreen list was occupied by reprints from other American publishers. The most important step in Grove’s career, a step Rosset planned from at least as early as 1954, was to publish literature censored on the grounds of obscenity. The works in question, like most of Grove’s publications, were first published abroad. In making previously proscribed works available publically, Grove followed its usual procedures, to some extent. Although banned books generated their own publicity, Grove’s approach was to pretend that they did not: that the appeal of Lady Chatterley’s Lover or Tropic of Cancer was no different from that of neglected novels by Matthew Lewis, Melville, Verga, or Radiguet. Grove’s publication of new American writing carried weight in the courts, but the project of battling censorship sprang out of Grove’s role as a cultural importer, a conduit for a cosmopolitanism to which American readers might aspire.

Rosset’s interest in banned books sprang naturally from his early political and social
radicalism. During his year at Swarthmore he visited the Gotham Book Mart in New York City and bought a bootleg edition of *Tropic of Cancer*, handed to him from under the counter by Francis Steloff, the legendary proprietor herself. Under Miller’s influence, Rosset first attempted to escape to Mexico, making it only as far as Jacksonville, Florida, where he was stymied by car trouble, and, in May 1941, submitted an essay entitled “Henry Miller versus Our Way of Life,” in which he agreed with many of Miller’s criticisms of the United States. He would later produce his essay in the Chicago trial of *Tropic of Cancer* to prove that his interest in the book was not merely commercial. In interviews since the early 1990s, Rosset averred that publishing Henry Miller was his ultimate goal when he launched his campaign against censorship, and that he began instead with D.H. Lawrence because Lawrence was the more respected writer and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* closer to a canonical masterpiece already.  

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Early in 1954, Rosset set in motion a complex plan to publish openly Lawrence’s underground classic. In addition to censorship laws and decency advocates, Rosset had to struggle against many who considered themselves stakeholders in Lawrence’s work and some in the publishing community who feared the young firebrand would provoke harsher restrictions on expression. The scholar Mark Schorer won Rosset an important ally when he made a favorable impression on Frida Lawrence Ravagli, Lawrence’s widow, who supported Grove’s plan, though she died before publication. In the summer of 1954 Rosset gathered statements from scholars and critics attesting to the literary merit of the book and provoked a ruling from Customs that the novel was obscene, giving Grove Press grounds for a legal challenge. Among publishers, Bennett Cerf disagreed with Rosset about the virtue of asserting the American reader’s right to buy

Chatterley openly; Cerf suggested instead that Rosset only wanted profits and publicity. The weightier opposition of Alfred Knopf put the brakes on Grove’s plan; Knopf warned Grove Press that, if they should win the legal right to publish, he would still consider himself the rightful publisher and, Knopf hinted, would introduce a competing edition. Rosset proposed that Knopf and Grove share the legal challenge and the publication, and even offered to give the project to Knopf entirely, but Knopf, more interested in stifling Grove than fighting in court, met the proposal with silence. Though Grove believed from the beginning that the work was in the public domain, the expectation of competition from a major publisher with a claim to being “authorized” forced Grove to shelve its plans. In the meantime, Grove published Zola’s Earth, unavailable in the U.S. except by subscription since 1889.49

By late 1958, Rosset decided that the legal climate was more favorable and it was time to take a chance despite possible competition. Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, considered unpublishable in 1955, became a number-one bestseller for G.P. Putnam’s Sons in fall 1958. Grove’s counsel, Ephraim London, was about to defend the film version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* before the U.S. Supreme Court and told Rosset that he was confident of victory. While Grove waited, the British publisher Heinemann had published an unexpurgated *Chatterley* in the Netherlands; in the U.S., Grove began to build its case with the public by publishing an essay on *Chatterley* by Mark Schorer in the *Evergreen Review*. Grove never came to terms with the Lawrence estate, whose agent, Laurence Pollinger, consistently opposed a Grove edition, even knowing that Frieda had approved. Rosset finally decided to forego authorization. Grove’s hardcover edition was banned from the mails days ahead of its publication in late April 1959; the first printing was already en

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route to bookstores. Grove Press, co-defendant with Reader’s Subscription Book Club, fought to lift the ban in a Post Office hearing and then in Federal District Court. Charles Rembar argued the case for Grove and, with Rosset’s agreement, relied on the Supreme Court’s 1957 Roth decision, which upheld the Comstock Law of 1873 and sent two publishers to jail. The Roth decision defined “material” as obscene if its “dominant theme,” “taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest” in the eyes of “the average person, applying contemporary community standards.” Drawing on a footnote in the Roth decision, Rembar succeeded in defining “prurient interest” as a morbid or shameful interest in sex, distinct from the community’s idea of a normal or healthy interest in sex. With this distinction in mind, Rembar argued that, by the standards of the moment, the dominant theme of Chatterley was not morbid or shameful. To show the book’s conformity to community standards, he drew on the evidence from the Post Office hearing that Grove’s advertising maintained a serious tone and
appeared in respectable publications; that the presentation, from the design of the book to the inclusion of Schorer’s introduction, was more scholarly than scabrous; and that the press welcomed the book as worthwhile literature. In July, Judge Frederick van Pelt Bryan ruled for Grove, lifting the postal ban and effectively ending any attempt to censor Lawrence’s novel.50

The publicity surrounding the Chatterley case gave Grove’s legal victory a reputation as a great blow against censorship, but publishers remained cautious. They remembered the limited value of the Ulysses decision of 1933 and understood the narrow grounds of Judge Bryan’s decision. Nonetheless, Rosset eagerly pressed his effort to publish Tropic of Cancer but met with skepticism from Henry Miller himself, who feared an outpouring of public wrath and refused Grove permission to publish even after James Laughlin agreed to give up his option on the Tropics.

books. Miller was right to expect a reaction to the Chatterley victory. Champions of decency rallied against Judge Bryan’s decision; at the grass roots, Citizens for Decent Literature worked to expand its network of private anti-obscenity organizations and to circulate information and coordinate action among them. Kathryn Granaham in the U.S. House and Estes Kefauver in the Senate introduced legislation to strengthen the Post Office’s legal position. Presidential hopeful Kefauver also sponsored a constitutional amendment excluding obscenity from First Amendment protection, using the language of the Roth decision, and twenty-four Senators joined in sponsoring a resolution calling on Eisenhower to convene a national anti-obscenity conference. The backlash reached as far as Great Britain, where Members of Parliament introduced an Obscene and Profane Words bill following Penguin Books’ defense of an unexpurgated Chatterley in Lawrence’s home country.51

51 E.R. Hutchison, Tropic of Cancer on Trial: A Case History of
As Rosset pursued the reluctant Miller, Grove Press carried on with distinguished literary publications by Beckett and Ionesco, and added two of the foremost proponents of the French new novel, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras. Editing Evergreen Review’s “Eye of Mexico” introduced Don Allen to the work of Octavio Paz, and Grove published The Labyrinth of Solitude in 1961, the first English translation of a book by Paz. Meanwhile anti-obscenity forces receded without accomplishing any of their ambitious goals. In early 1961, Rosset was finally able to persuade Miller to grant Grove Press permission to publish, not because Miller accepted the idea that American society was shaking off its repressive Puritanism, but because Rosset warned that another American publisher was preparing to publish Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn without Miller’s

permission, which would place the books definitively in the public domain. Rosset first described this possibility to Miller two years earlier, when Grove’s Chatterley faced four rival paperback editions without the benefit of copyright or authorization. Miller promptly signed for an advance of $10,000 [$65,000] for both Tropics in February, and by April Grove announced publication of another underground classic. By the end of June, both the U.S. Customs Service and the Post Office had rescinded their bans on Tropic of Cancer, a demonstration that the Chatterley decision inhibited federal censors. Grove’s hardback Tropic of Cancer, selling for $7.50 [$50], reached bestseller lists despite the refusal of important stores, like the Doubleday chain, to stock it, and of newspapers, like the Chicago Tribune, to list it as a bestseller. State officials in Massachusetts and local authorities in Dallas, Texas, moved to suppress the book, but a bigger problem arose in September, when unauthorized competition finally materialized in the form of an Envoy paperback edition from Universal Publishing and
Distributing Corporation. Grove made arrangements to rush a mass-market paperback of its own to market in its new Black Cat Books line, while also negotiating with Universal. With the moral force of a living author behind it, Grove persuaded Universal to abandon its edition in exchange for a pay-off of $30,000 and the purchase of the 400,000-copy Envoy print run. By reprinting the first 32 pages and using its own covers, Grove sold the Envoy books as its own to recoup some of the cost, but the appearance of a cheap paper *Tropic of Cancer* provoked a tidal wave of censorship that nearly destroyed Grove Press.52

Grove promised to pay the legal expenses of any bookseller facing obscenity charges for selling *Tropic of Cancer*; it made good on the offer sixty times over. Though the federal government declined to censor the book, state and local censors rose to the challenge. At the height of the backlash, the only major American cities where the book was on sale were New York,

Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Minneapolis. Often the “brushfire” censorship involved no formal legal proceedings; police visited or telephoned booksellers and distributors and informed them that the book was obscene, without any prior finding of obscenity in a local or state court. In some cases, local authorities seized the books themselves without a warrant or court order. Grove planned to bring a state case before the U.S. Supreme Court on constitutional grounds at the first opportunity. As with Chatterley, Grove gathered expert testimony and prepared to market the book in a tasteful and literary way, but Rembar doubted that he could convince the court that Tropic conveyed only a normal, healthy idea of sex and did not appeal to prurient interest. Instead, Rembar planned to rely on the argument that Roth protected any work containing “ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance,” even work appealing to prurient interest. Many lawyers and legal scholars believed, to the contrary, that Roth declared that, if a court judged a work, considered as
a whole, to be obscene, then the work forfeited any claim to social importance. The more liberal position made some inroads in the Howl trial and again in the 1959 trial of the little magazine Big Table, charged with obscenity in Illinois for printing excerpts from William Burroughs’ Naked Lunch. Judges Clayton W. Horn and Julius J. Hoffman, respectively, anticipated Rembar’s position, reading Roth to mean that a work that expressed ideas was protected, even if it was considered to appeal to prurient interest.53

Following similar reasoning in July 1962, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that Tropic was not obscene, but, disastrously for Grove, the Attorney General of Massachusetts did not appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. Grove’s legal nightmare dragged on. By the following summer, the highest courts in New York and Illinois had ruled against Tropic, while California joined Massachusetts in clearing the book. The situation posed a two-fold

threat to Grove’s cash flow: money was tied up in a stock of 2.5 million books that could not legally be sold in many markets, and the multitude of legal cases siphoned off much of Grove’s cash income. If Grove could not obtain a Supreme Court ruling and instead faced prosecution and fines across the country, it would go bankrupt. After three years, Grove had not yet maneuvered any of its state-court defeats to the U.S. Supreme Court, when, in June 1964, the Court surprised nearly everyone concerned by agreeing to hear a Florida case, *Grove Press v. Gerstein*. Four of the justices voted against considering the Florida case because they believed no constitutional issue had been invoked at the state level, but five justices agreed both to hear it and to clear *Tropic on the basis of a simultaneous decision in Jacobellis v. Ohio*, in which, of six justices voting to reverse obscenity convictions, no more than two could agree on a rationale or concur on an opinion. William J. Brennan, as author of the majority opinion in *Roth*, spoke with some authority when he confirmed that
Roth’s stipulation that obscenity was not protected, because it was “utterly without redeeming social importance,” meant that if such “social importance” could be established in even the smallest quantum, then the whole work was protected by the First Amendment. Brennan was ready to shift from considering the work as a whole to protecting anything remotely valuable; protection, he wrote, “does not turn on a ‘weighing’ of its [a work’s] social importance against its prurient appeal.” This interpretation did not receive the endorsement of a majority on the court until Rembar argued the case for Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, better known as “Fanny Hill,” in 1966, but it was enough to end Grove’s struggle to free Tropic of Cancer.\(^{54}\)

During the years of litigation, Grove Press’s existence was in doubt, but Rosset and Rembar never lost their confidence in ultimate victory in the courts, granted that the press could stay solvent long enough to see the cases through. Accordingly, Grove

\(^{54}\) Rembar, 204-207.
continued to test the limits of censorship power, even while awaiting a final settlement of the *Tropic* case. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was surrounded on Grove’s list by respected theater and literature titles, and Grove called character witnesses in court to testify to its respectability as a publisher, but by 1964 Grove’s list featured sexually-explicit literature prominently. Grove became the conduit to the American market for the world’s most iconoclastic English-language publisher, Olympia Press of France. In 1959, Rosset hired the editor Richard Seaver, who had been associated with Olympia almost from its founding in 1953. Seaver lived for several years in Paris, where he contributed to the English-language little magazine *Merlin*. An early fascination for Beckett’s French novels led Seaver to the discovery of Beckett’s unpublished English novel *Watt*, which *Merlin* and Olympia published jointly. In 1955, Grove collaborated with *Merlin* and Olympia on Patrick Bowles’ English translation of Beckett’s novel *Molloy*, but Seaver’s arrival at Grove marked an increase in
the number of Olympia titles on Grove’s list. Just months before publishing Chatterley, Grove introduced the American edition of The Black Diaries of Roger Casement, a controversial document with which the British government had discredited the Irish nationalist Casement before executing him for treason in 1916. The diaries contained, in part, a record of several years of Casement’s active homosexual sex-life; Casement’s supporters accused the British government of forging the diaries to tar Casement, who had been knighted for his advocacy of humanitarian treatment of Africans and South Americans. In a rare instance of expurgation, Grove’s edition omitted the diary for 1911, considered the most liable to censorship. Still, the book promised a potent combination of rebellion, conspiracy, and sex.\textsuperscript{55}

Two more Olympia titles, William Burrough’s Naked Lunch and Frank Harris’s long-suppressed My Life and

\textsuperscript{55} John de St Jorre, Venus Bound: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press and Its Writers (New York: Random House, 1994), 264-265; Grove’s connection to Olympia might even be seen to extend back to Jack Kahane, publisher of Obelisk Press, which first published Miller’s Tropics trilogy in France. Maurice Girodias, Olympia’s publisher, was Kahane’s son, and his earlier publishing concern, Éditions du Chêne, reissued Miller’s Obelisk books in the 1940s.
Loves, by contrast, were published complete, showing Grove’s confidence in the Chatterley precedent and the state-court victories of Cancer. Burroughs was an American expatriate, but only Olympia’s publisher, Maurice Girodias, had the intuition to encourage Burroughs, with the help of Allen Ginsburg, to work his “dilapidated” manuscript into publishable form. Rosset bought the rights to Naked Lunch late in 1959, but waited to publish until 1962 when the book was widely praised as a literary achievement. Nonetheless, Grove’s edition fell afoul of censors in Massachusetts, and the case dragged on until 1966. In 1963 and 1964, Grove introduced Jean Genet’s novel Our Lady of the Flowers and his fictionalized autobiography The Thief’s Journal in translations originally published by Olympia. Like the Casement and Burroughs works, Genet’s novels were frank about homosexuality, whereas the plays Grove published in the 1950s had criticized conventional sexuality. The Olympia Reader of 1965 summed up Grove’s close relation to Olympia, even as the French publisher
succumbed to renewed censorship and Maurice Girodias fled to New York. The Reader boasted names synonymous in the U.S. with Grove, such as Miller, Beckett, Genet, and Burroughs, though Olympia unabashedly emphasized erotic writing, unlike Grove before 1965.\textsuperscript{56}

No colloquial term fits the kind of literature Grove published after Chatterley. To call it “obscene” prejudges a legal issue; “erotica” suggests a promise of pleasure which was peripheral, at best, to the authors’ intentions; and “smutty” or “dirty” simply rob the work of any literary standing. The literature was “transgressive,” in that the authors consciously violated the standards of their time in the subjects they chose to depict and their manner of depicting them. The critical intention of the works set them apart from other erotica. Even as Grove served as a conduit for Olympia, the publishing of this transgressive literature opened Grove again to new authors and original publication. In the first instance, in 1962, Grove found itself importing into

\textsuperscript{56} de St Jorre, 238.
Robert Gover’s novel *The One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding* was published in Great Britain by Neville Spearman Ltd. after Gover despaired of finding an American publisher. Spearman peddled the U.S. rights to American publishers, including Grove, without success, until Henry Miller read the novel, an account of a young white man’s weekend of sex and conversation with an even younger black prostitute, and began writing excited letters on its behalf. By the time Grove decided to publish, Ballantine Books had already taken the American rights, but was willing to let Grove bring out the hardcover edition, leading to a situation in which Grove paid Ballantine a royalty of fifty cents for each hardcover copy sold and Ballantine paid Grove a royalty of one percent for each paperback. Gover meanwhile shared his American royalties with his European publisher, a situation with which authors from Janet Frame to Vladimir Nabokov could sympathize.  

57 Neville Armstrong (Neville Spearman Ltd.) to Barney Rosset,
At the same time, Grove began to look more closely at other new American writing that previously had been passed over as unpublishable and in the space of a few years discovered its most acclaimed new American authors. Two Americans influenced by Jean Genet, John Rechy and Hubert Selby, Jr., appeared on Grove’s list alongside that chronicler of the European underworld. John Rechy came to Grove’s attention when he submitted a short story to *Evergreen Review* in 1958. Rechy, weighing offers to appear in the New Directions annual or in *Evergreen*, chose not to wait a full year to appear in the annual. After this initial contact, Don Allen continued to offer Rechy encouragement, guided his choice of subjects, and suggested revisions; before the end of 1959, Rechy won critical attention for a story in *Big Table* and began receiving offers for a novel. Rosset agreed to publish Allen’s protégé and offered a $2000 [$13,500]
advance, outbidding Dial Press. Rechy’s *City of Night* finally appeared in 1963, unprecedentedly frank, though not sexually explicit, about homosexuality, transvestism, and male prostitution. Though *City of Night* received its share of highly critical reviews, James Baldwin heralded Rechy as a major new talent, and the book reached the bestseller list without the benefit of being banned or burned. Just as Bennet Cerf believed Grove published D.H. Lawrence for the sake of money rather than literature, some critics who disliked Rechy’s book accused Grove Press of inventing the author or manufacturing the text. Praise for Grove’s challenge to censorship began to mix with accusations that Grove was cashing in on sex.\(^{58}\)

The grim underside of urban life inspired Hubert Selby, Jr., as it did Rechy, and again Grove signed the controversial author after New Directions delayed. After dropping out of high school, serving in the merchant marine, and enduring almost ten years of severe complications from tuberculosis, Selby met

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Gilbert Sorrentino in a Brooklyn bar and joined a circle of writers involved in the little magazine *Neon*. Sorrentino, Robert Creeley, LeRoi Jones, and others educated Selby in the poetics of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, and Selby began to write. Creeley recommended Selby to Don Allen for inclusion in *Evergreen Review* in 1957, but Allen passed. In early 1959, James Laughlin wrote Selby to praise his story "Tralala," but he would not include it in the New Directions annual for fear of censorship. After the *Chatterley* decision, Laughlin published "Another Day Another Dollar" in the annual, but thought the only way a book could be published collecting Selby's gritty stories was for Olympia to do it in Paris. The next year, the *Provincetown Review* published "Tralala," and Massachusetts police arrested the editor, confirming Laughlin's fears. By 1961, the literary agent Sterling Lord, undaunted, or perhaps encouraged, by Selby's notoriety, circulated the manuscript to the large publishers. Robert MacGregor at New Directions thought Selby rejected Grove Press
and New Directions because they could not offer a large enough advance or promise enough promotion, but, when the big houses declined to gamble their resources on Selby, he signed with Grove in the spring of 1962 for a $1000 advance. *Last Exit to Brooklyn* struck many reviewers as reaching a final extreme in the literary depiction of violence and squalor; although Grove did not face a concerted effort at censorship, Selby and Grove benefitted from a dispute in the national magazines over the book’s status as art. *Time*, with its practiced cynicism concerning artistic innovation, charged Grove with calculated smut peddling, calling *Last Exit* Grove’s “extra special dirty book for fall” and placing *Naked Lunch* and *City of Night* in the same category. *Newsweek* and *Saturday Review* defended Selby and even ran interviews with him, perhaps, as Selby suspected, for the pleasure of contradicting *Time*.59

59 Robert Creeley to Donald Allen, August 28, 1957, Box 62, Folder 4, DAC; James Laughlin to Hubert Selby, January 12, 1959; James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, August 21, 1959; Bob [Robert MacGregor] to J [James Laughlin], October 4, 1961, Item 1523, NDR; Contract for *Last Exit to Brooklyn* [copy], May 21, 1962, Box 223A (Folder: Selby: The Room), GPR; "Borderline Psychotic,"
Grove Press faced its last serious legal challenge when police seized Evergreen Review no.32 at the printer’s in Hicksville, Long Island, in the summer of 1964. Now in a glossy magazine format, the new issue of Evergreen featured a cover and portfolio by American expatriate photographer Emil Cadoo depicting nude, intertwined male and female torsos. The image, less revealing than Greek statuary and beclouded by a wash of strange colors, probably attracted police attention because the male torso was black and the female white. A federal court ordered the magazines released because local authorities made the seizure without prior action against the magazine in court. Nassau County dropped the case and, though the Naked Lunch case in Massachusetts lasted another year, Grove’s censorship struggles became merely an annoyance rather than a threat, until Grove went into film distribution.

During the years that Grove Press established itself as a triumphant champion of the freedom of expression, it also restructured itself as a business by entering into distribution arrangements with industry giants and expanding into mass-market paperback publishing. The unprecedented publicity surrounding Grove’s banned books required that Grove make arrangements capable of meeting market demand, as Rosset realized even before the Post Office ban on Chatterley was lifted. Although Grove relied heavily on Railway Express, a private shipper, the hardcover immediately became a bestseller, and Rosset began to make arrangements for a mass-market paperback. After negotiations with Pocket Books broke down, Grove reached an agreement with Dell, but the lack of copyright became a serious problem for Grove’s sales. Pocket Books simply continued its preparations and published an unexpurgated paperback eight days after Judge Bryan’s decision; when the Dell edition reached stores only days later, declaring itself “the only unexpurgated version ever published in America,” Grove
was guilty of false advertising. Pyramid Books, like Pocket, produced an unexpurgated edition without apology, but New American Library accused Grove of infringing on its right to the paperback, touting their authorization to publish a “complete reprint” of the expurgated Knopf version, while preparing their own unexpurgated version and obtaining the estate’s now-irrelevant authorization. The flood of paperbacks soon flushed the hardcover off the bestseller list; after July 1959, Grove had more returns than sales of the hardcover. The net income from hardcover sales of about 136,000 copies was cancelled out by the $50,000 in court costs. To profit on Chatterley, Grove depended on Dell’s share of the paperback market, equaling close to 2 million copies by the end of the following year.60

The success of the collaboration with Dell suggested to Rosset a solution for several problems

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plaguing Grove. Despite the suspicions of disgruntled authors, Rosset’s personal assets were not adequate to keep Grove liquid, and even before the legal battle over Cancer, Grove had cash-flow problems, as Rosset lamented to Robert MacGregor at the time of the Chatterley case. Given the risk of censorship, the distributors and wholesalers who handled Chatterley demanded “long credit,” meaning they could wait longer before calculating payments due to Grove, and thus delay making payments. The printers, binders, and shippers, on the other hand, demanded timely payment. Nor did Grove’s difficulties stem entirely from the vicissitudes of censorship; the quality paperbacks on which Grove relied had narrower profit margins than hardcovers but the same inefficient distribution to small accounts, even individual bookstores. By the end of 1960, Rosset decided to enter a sales and distribution agreement with Dell by which Grove handed over responsibility to Dell for many of the functions that were already outside of the Grove office, like servicing local accounts, warehousing, and shipping,
and also moved some of its sales and promotion staff to the Dell payroll. Rosset stressed that Grove Press retained total editorial control, and he viewed the move as an alternative to the mergers that were sweeping away many small and medium-sized publishers.\(^6\)

As promising as the Dell arrangement appeared, it ended abruptly after only six months. Though Rosset later declined to blame the break up on Dell’s fear of distributing *Tropic of Cancer*, Dell wrote Grove in May 1961 specifically refusing to distribute the book, leaving Grove to find another publisher to handle that one title or else to resume its own sales and distribution, which it did. Grove absorbed some of the Dell staff that handled Grove promotion and sales, reconstituted its sales force, and made new arrangements for shipping. In June, Grove announced that it would offer its own mass-market paperbacks, Black Cat Books. Black Cats required a different kind of distribution from Grove’s other lines; the model

for mass-market books dictated that titles ship in large numbers to retail outlets with high traffic, like supermarkets and drugstores, where books sold quickly but stock also rotated quickly. Grove recruited the mass-market distributor Macfadden to handle the Black Cats, and Macfadden soon faced the difficult task of distributing the Black Cat edition of *Tropic of Cancer* in the face of brushfire censorship. Macfadden managed to sell almost 1.5 million copies while the court battle continued, but Rosset found their accounting inadequate and hired Price Waterhouse to audit their sales records. In the meantime, Grove and Dell mended their relations, and Dell resumed the distribution of the most promising Black Cat titles, simultaneously with Grove, beginning with Miller’s *Tropic of Capricorn* and continuing with *City of Night* and *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Other Black Cats Grove distributed itself, reaching a larger market than the quality paperback market, though sales were modest by mass-market standards. Samuel Beckett’s novels *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, for example,
sold between 20,000 and 25,000 as Evergreens; a Black Cat of the trilogy including both novels and The Unnameable sold over 60,000 in its first five years.62

In 1962, Grove made a final adjustment to its distribution practice, setting a minimum order size. The smallest accounts, usually independent bookstores, were required to raise orders to meet this minimum or obtain books through wholesalers, saving Grove the inefficiency of filling small orders or collecting from small accounts. Ironically, in the same year that the Walden Book Company opened its first retail outlets, Grove, as an independent medium-sized publisher, concluded that the smallest independent booksellers could not sell books in the volumes that the quality and mass-market paperback formats required to be profitable. Publishers commonly blame the decline of the mid-list book on the mall-based chains, which put a premium on shelf-space and sales volume, but Grove’s move suggests that publishers were already

62 “Grove Resumes Handling Its Own Distribution,” Publishers Weekly 179 (June 12, 1961): 108; Hutchison, 53-54; Barney Rosset to Henry [Miller] and Michael [Michel Hoffman], April 23, 1964, Box 175C (Folder: B-10 Tropic of Cancer Henry Miller); Royalty records, Box 27 (Folders: E-18 Molloy and E-39 Malone Dies, GPR.
pushing bookstores in that direction. Indeed, these stores may be seen as transferring into bookstores the kind of bookselling that had already taken hold in department stores and supermarkets.

Grove’s new distribution arrangements and new mass-market format enabled it to take advantage of the publicity surrounding its censorship battles and its transgressive fiction with a string of bestsellers, beginning with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. *Chatterley* and *Tropic of Cancer* each spent about half a year on the bestseller lists, for hardcover books only at this time, and sold approximately 2 million and 2.5 million, respectively, in their mass-market editions. After the difficulty of getting stores to report sales of *Tropic of Cancer*, Rosset took the offensive with Gover’s *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*. By mid-November 1962, orders topped 3000 a week, but the book had yet to appear on the bestseller lists, so Rosset wrote booksellers to remind them to report their sales. Beginning a few weeks later, the book began ten weeks on *Publishers Weekly*’s list. The Ballantine
edition sold over 500,000 in its first two years and remained a steady seller to the end of the decade. Rechy’s City of Night graced the lists for the second half of 1963, sharing the New York Times list for one week with Grove’s edition of the book that inspired Rechy years earlier, Genet’s Our Lady of the Flowers. The hardcover City of Night sold over 50,000 and the Black Cat, jointly distributed by Dell and Grove, sold almost 800,000 in its first year. Neither Selby’s Last Exit to Brooklyn or Harris’ My Life and Loves were official bestsellers, but both sold well. Last Exit sold over 30,000 in hardcover and over half a million in paperback in the first eighteen months, with steady sales afterwards. In hardcover, My Life and Loves, which unlike the others might justly be termed erotica, fell off quickly, but Dell sold more than 650,000 copies of the Black Cat edition in 1965 and 1966.63

63 For statistics on bestsellers, see Keith L. Justice, Bestseller Index: All Books, by Author, on the Lists of the Publisher’s Weekly and New York Times through 1990 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998). Barney Rosset to Lewis Meyer, November 21, 1962, Box 112 (Folder: Gover, Robert One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding); Royalty records, Box 112 (Folder: GP-292 $100
The level of success Grove enjoyed during these years did not approach that of a conventional publisher of the first rank, but because Grove’s bestsellers were all transgressive, they contributed to the public perception that the press was profiting from transgression, or, as the critics would have it, smut peddling. Leaving aside the complicated issues of values and motives that the charge raises, Grove Press, despite its literary success and its bestsellers, hovered close to bankruptcy from 1961 to 1963. In September 1961, when Grove was forced to prepare a paperback *Tropic of Cancer* while its hardcover remained a bestseller, rumors reached Robert MacGregor that Grove was overstocked on the hardcover and was uncharacteristically behind with payments to the designer Roy Kuhlman. A month later, Rosset relinquished the presidency of Grove Press to Charles Rembar, retaining for himself the titles of chairman.
and editor. Rembar later recalled that he was brought in to manage the business side of the house, to allow Rosset to concentrate on editing, though Publishers Weekly reported that Rembar continued to work at his law firm simultaneously. The details are unclear, but it seems likely that Rembar’s presidency was a form of compensation for legal bills that Grove lacked the cash to pay. According to Rembar, he and Rosset could not work together, and the peculiar arrangement ended.\(^{64}\)

A year later, Rosset approached James Laughlin about buying Grove Press and merging it with New Directions. Laughlin was strongly attracted to the idea, but he was leery of absorbing the whole house, especially because New Directions had just established a successful distribution arrangement with the family-owned J.B. Lippincott Co., which had dropped the distribution of Stein and Day because it perceived that publisher as exploiting sex. Laughlin did find a

potential buyer for Rosset in June Oppen Degnan, publisher of the *San Francisco Review* and soon to be a major backer of *Ramparts*. Advising Degnan on the matter, Robert MacGregor noted that Grove had received loans of over $250,000 from unnamed "officers," whom MacGregor suspected to be Rosset’s mother, and that an independent financial report by Dun and Bradstreet suggested that Grove had gone on to borrow from "factors," creditors in the garment industry known to charge upwards of 20% interest. The *Saturday Evening Post* later described Grove’s creditors as "money lenders." On the other hand, MacGregor noted that Grove’s situation had improved since the depth of the crisis over *Tropic* and that Grove would collect 15% if Miller sold the movie rights. He warned Degnan that he did not think Rosset truly wanted to sell, despite his difficulties. MacGregor and Laughlin hoped that, if Degnan did not buy, they could at least purchase part of Grove’s backlist. In the event, Grove remained intact, and by October 1963 Rosset denied rumors that the press was for sale, declaring in
Publishers Weekly that sales reached a new high in September. The end of the legal crisis, the restructuring of Grove’s distribution, and a series of bestsellers helped Grove avoid bankruptcy, but clearly Rosset had put all the family money he could into the press and still faced the possibility of losing it.\footnote{Robert MacGregor to June [Oppen Degnan], January 29, 1963, Item 2363, NDR; Mayer, 72; “Grove Press Denies Rumors of Merger,” Publishers Weekly 184 (October 7, 1963): 32.}

During the years of the censorship struggle, Grove Press also experimented with diversifying its list by moving into middlebrow publication. Without violating its reputation for the promotion of literature, art, and ideas, Grove sought a way to offer titles that might have a more predictable appeal than avant-garde theater and more sales potential than literary reprints. Grove’s middlebrow offerings differed from George Braziller Inc.’s in several practical ways: Grove adapted the series from foreign publications rather than commissioning them; Grove’s series were open-ended so they did not create larger sets that consumers might collect or display together;
and Grove lacked the book club apparatus to present the books of a series to potential customers as a set. Grove initiated five series of books between 1959 and 1961, the same years in which Braziller began its middlebrow series. The Evergreen Gallery Books were smaller and thinner than Braziller’s Great American Artists series books; the hardcover editions were priced identically at $3.95, the paperbacks slightly more at $1.95. Most focused on a single artist, though some treated several artists together and others took a topical approach. Rosset commissioned a few individual volumes on New York artists like Willem De Kooning and Stuart Davis, but most of the texts originated in France as publisher Georges Fall’s Musée de Poche. The Evergreen Encyclopedia series was a grab bag, ranging from J.C. Strobart’s *The Glory That Was Greece*, originally published in 1911, to a history of Russia just published in hardcover by Farrar, Straus. They were priced at $2.95 or $3.95 [$19 or $26]. The Gallery and Encyclopedia series ran to only about a dozen titles each. The Evergreen Target
series was not middlebrow, but concerned with current affairs, offering original texts priced as mass-market paperbacks at $0.75 [$5.00]. Only two Target titles appeared, journalist Dan Wakefield’s *Revolt in the South* in 1961, a report on the campaign against segregation, and Jules Roy’s *War in Algeria*, a translation from the French.

As its most successful series illustrate, Grove, like Braziller, made the transition from marketing to the general reader to serving a more academic market. In 1960, Grove announced its Evergreen Profile series with a *Publishers Weekly* spread unparalleled in Grove’s career, extending from the cover to the first two inside pages, proclaiming “the first really new idea in paperback publishing since the boom began.” Translated into English from an Editions du Seuil series, the Profile books were “literally crammed with photographs, paintings, etchings, drawings, maps, manuscripts, and documents.” Though smaller than Braziller’s books at only seven inches tall, they were certainly inexpensive at $1.35 [$9]. Grove touted the
books’ approachability; these were not egg-head paperbacks that warned “Hands off! Intellectuals only.” They sported “a brisk and popular style” without compromising scholarship. In the manner of the early *Evergreen Review*, Grove tried to update the middlebrow by extending its style of respectful popularization to newer, more hip topics. As a series the Profile books failed to present a vision of organized knowledge or assert editorial authority. Instead of promising a uniform library, Grove played up the eclecticism of the series in its pitch to booksellers, appealing to consumer choice and the excitement of variety. The advertisement text mentioned the book on jazz in the first sentence, and the accompanying photograph included *The Stars*, on celebrity movie stars, though these were the first of only five in the series on twentieth-century subjects. About half the books gave a brief, well-illustrated “life and works” account of classical composers; the bulk of the remaining titles ranged over subjects germane to the Great Books or Western Civ ideas, from
The Priests of Ancient Egypt and Homer, to Shakespeare and Goethe. Following up on the Evergreen Book Week forays into contemporary book marketing, Grove also offered booksellers a patented revolving display stand capable of holding sixty Profile books in one square foot of retail space. New books appeared in the series for two years, eventually totaling more than thirty titles.66

Grove’s middlebrow series moved decisively into the twentieth century with the Evergreen Pilot books beginning in 1961. Once again, the series originated abroad, this time with Edinburgh-based publisher Oliver and Boyd. Grove characterized the books as “inexpensive, comprehensible guide books to the masters of modern literature”; the phrase encapsulated the middlebrow formula of making cultural masterworks approachable. Like New Directions’ series Makers of Modern Literature, the Pilot series accepted modernists among the masters. The presentation of the books as a series, the brevity of the volumes (120

pages), and the low price, originally $1.25 [$8] but immediately lowered to $0.95 [$6], contributed to the middlebrow character of the books. The absence of illustrations, slipcases, or other amenities to attract bookshop browsers, combined with the scholarly attention to professional criticism and bibliography, suggests, however, that even more than the earlier New Directions series, the Pilot series set course for the college classroom, where modern literature was a firmly established subject. Grove brought out thirty-one titles in the series, but by the final year no longer included the Pilot books in its Publishers Weekly advertising, apparently despairing of trade sales. Most tellingly, Grove did not list Richard Coe’s volume on Grove’s most prized author, Samuel Beckett.67

Though Grove’s middlebrow book series faded away by 1965, Grove’s continued interest in middlebrow marketing devices led to the creation of a book club in 1966. As early as 1952, Rosset was interested in

the relationship of his press to the clubs. He asked Whitney Darrow of Scribner’s if club adoptions could boost trade sales and learned that only Book-of-the-Month Club adoption generated a perceptible increase. When Grove finally had a prospective bestseller in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, it made book club arrangements with Readers’ Subscription and gained an ally in its case against the post office. Arthur J. Rosenthal, publisher of Basic Books, had just purchased Readers’ Subscription from Gilman Kraft, whose judges, Lionel Trilling, Jacques Barzun, and W.H. Auden, left to select titles and write blurbs for a new club, Mid-Century Book Society. After facing down censorship with Grove, Readers’ Subscription selected other daring Grove titles, including Gover’s *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*, Burrough’s *Naked Lunch*, and Genet’s *Thief’s Journal*. When other clubs rejected Eric Berne’s *Games People Play*, Readers’ Subscription took the future bestseller on the basis of its relationship with Grove. The club even agreed to select the controversial tour de force of French
erotica, Pauline Reage’s The Story of O, but when the club got “cold feet,” Irving Kristol asked Richard Seaver to be released from the agreement.68

Two weeks later, Grove inaugurated its own Evergreen Club. Following the Book-of-the-Month Club model, the Evergreen Club offered a free book as a bonus to new members and then sent the Evergreen Club News and a negative-option postcard each month; members returned the card if they wished to refuse the selection. Instead of initiating membership with a purchase, members joined by subscribing to Evergreen Review. After operating the club for a year and attracting 50,000 members, Grove invested more heavily by purchasing the Mid-Century Book Society for $100,000. Trilling, Barzun, and Auden abandoned the

book club business in 1963 and Mid-Century flourished in its first year without them; membership climbed to almost 60,000 members but declined again by 1967 to about 30,000. Royalty records show that Mid-Century maintained a separate existence until at least the end of 1967, but Grove discontinued major national advertising for the club and eventually terminated the Mid-Century brand. In addition to enlarging its club holdings by merger, Grove sought to create a strong identity for the Evergreen Club and *Evergreen Review* by identifying these as “underground.” In the 1950s, underground literature usually meant officially proscribed literature that had to be published secretly or smuggled into the country; by 1966, the term had become a term of approbation for books, authors, or literary movements allied to political protest, recreational drug use, or the rejection of middleclass morality. In more narrow artistic terms, it also came to mean artists or works unaccepted by or unknown to the established publishers, record labels, or galleries. Grove promoted *Evergreen Review* and the
Evergreen Club as "underground" in newspapers, magazines, and with posters on the New York subways. On one poster, Allen Ginsberg sported an Uncle Sam costume over the legend, "Join the Underground Generation"; on another, a young woman adorned the message, "Join me in The Underground." In the New York Times, Grove asked, "Do you have what it takes to join The Underground?" For readers "adult, literate, and adventurous" enough to read on, the advertisement recounted Grove's censorship battles, its literary success, and the career of *Evergreen Review*. Like the old middlebrow clubs, the Evergreen Club promised to help its members keep up with the best new books, but if joining the underground meant being serious about literature, in the transgressive mode of the moment, it also included less lofty pleasures, such as *Evergreen Review's* spoof of *Playboy* and Grove's book of "adult" *Barbarella* comics. The more actively inclined could send Grove a dollar and receive a hundred "Join the Underground" stickers. The Underground campaign revealed a Grove Press reacting
to and taking part in a cultural revaluation in which the complexity and the refinement of art ceased to be the main markers of value. In short, the uncommodifiedibility of modernism, thoroughly debunked by 1965, ceased to define what was worthwhile in culture, and the doors were opened to popular and accessible cultural forms to claim serious attention.  

Grove’s biggest bestsellers of the mid-1960s were not literary or artistic at all, creating some dissonance with its public image as champion of underground literature. Although Grove’s bestsellers grew out of long-standing Grove interests, they represent the diversification of the press away from the narrower vision of the permanent innovative press, a diversification that gathered speed after 1966. Grove demonstrated a commitment to psychology, especially psychoanalysis, beginning in 1956 with

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Theodor Reik, discussed above, and also with Robert Lindner’s *Rebel Without a Cause*, less famously subtitled, *The Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath*. Within this subject area, Grove developed a prominent interest in psychoanalytic approaches to sexuality, evident as early as 1959 in paperback reprints by Wilhelm Stekel, an associate of Freud. Grove introduced reprints of Stekel’s studies of “psychosexual infantilism,” homosexuality, sadism, and masochism, written in the 1910s and 1920s and published in English translations in the U.S. by Liveright in the early 1950s. Grove’s psychological studies of sex paralleled Grove’s sexually explicit literature in seriousness of purpose. By 1963, Grove had published over twenty titles on psychology, including San Francisco-based psychiatrist Eric Berne’s *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* and a reprint of *A Layman’s Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*. When Berne’s latest manuscript arrived in 1962, Grove’s reader reported that it had all the “ingredients” to sell; it was entertaining,
non-technical, well-illustrated, and “a conversation piece.” Others at Grove were apparently less enthused, and Grove offered a modest advance of $750 [$4800] for Games People Play, expressing doubt that the book would warrant a mass-market edition. The best-selling book in Grove’s history could not have grown more organically out of its publishing program.70

At every step in its handling of Games, Grove was slow to realize the book’s potential. Grove delayed publication several times, citing budget problems. An increasingly exasperated Berne finally threatened, through his lawyer, to look for another publisher, but Rosset called his bluff, offering to release him and writing, “I have always felt that if for any reason an author is unsatisfied with a publisher then it would perhaps be better for him to seek another.” Rosset explained that a publisher had to balance money-making books with those, like Berne’s, that were published out of “conviction.” The book appeared in spring 1964

70 M. Schwebel to Harry Braverman, March 17, 1962, Box 40A (Folder: Berne Eric Games People Play); Marilynn Meeker to Eric Berne, March 22, 1962, Box 40A (Folder: Eric Berne Corres. Games People Play), GPR.
in an initial printing of 3000 copies, and, to Grove’s surprise, began to sell steadily. By spring 1965, Grove had printed 40,000 copies, and Seaver was peddling Grove’s “sleeper” to the book clubs, explaining that Grove was responding to the book’s success a year after publication with advertising and publicity appearances by the author. That summer Games reached the bestseller list; by the summer of 1966 Grove had printed 425,000 copies, and the book remained a hardcover bestseller for almost a year more. With Games, Grove enjoyed the benefits of publishing at the highest level: Dell’s paperback sold more than 2.5 million copies by 1970, Cosmopolitan serialized four chapters, and Grove sold foreign rights in at least thirteen foreign markets. The book attracted so much attention that Grove became concerned about shaping the public perception of its handling of the title. When McCall’s ran an article describing Grove’s initial failure to promote the book, Rosset countered that Grove had spent generously in response to the book’s early success. When Grove
arranged for advertising with Dell, Fred Jordan wanted Grove to insist that the Grove Press name appear on Dell’s ad; Jordan wrote, “We need to reinforce the image of Grove as a successful publisher of no-sex books as well.”

In the interest of publishing more successful “no-sex” books, Grove later made amends to Eric Berne, offering him $40,000 [$200,000] for his next book, shortly before his death in 1970. *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* was a minor bestseller in 1972, but, before that, Grove sought to reproduce *Games’* success with another book about an unconventional approach to psychology. In his reader’s report on William Schutz’s *Joy: Expanding Human Awareness*, Grove editor Harry Braverman noted that Schutz, like Berne, worked in the California climate of post-Freudian humanistic psychology. Braverman described Schutz’s

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71 Barney Rosset to Eric Berne, June 25, 1963, Box 40A (Folder: Eric Berne Corres. Games People Play); Barney Rosset to Malcolm S. Millard, September 20, 1963; Richard Seaver to Ed Fitzgerald (Literary Guild of America), April 20, 1965, Box 40A (Folder: Berne Eric Games People Play); Janet Smith, “Big Headlines, Small Profits,” *Dun’s Review* 96, no.5 (1970): 66; Barney Rosset to Walter Goodman, November 3, 1966, Box 40A (Folder: Berne Eric Games People Play); Fred Jordan to Barney Rosset, no date [1966 or 1967], Box 40A (Folder: Berne Games People Play Misc.), GPR.
Joy as "total popularization, on the very simplest of levels," but he felt strongly that Grove should accept the book because of its sales potential. Grove not only chose a similar topic, but took a similar approach, waiting to see how Joy sold before committing major publicity and advertising. After selling 25,000 copies in a few months in late 1967 and early 1968, Grove was convinced and alerted book clubs and book sellers to the book’s popularity and Grove’s plan for national advertising and a publicity tour by Schutz. To the booksellers, Grove offered a free copy for every ten ordered. Grove’s efforts were not enough to launch the hardcover onto the bestseller list, though it sold over 60,000 copies before buyers switched to Grove’s mass-market paperback. The Black Cat edition, in turn, sold over 295,000 in its first year, reaching the paperback bestseller list for four weeks.\(^\text{72}\)

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\(^{72}\) H.B. [Harry Braverman] reader’s report, no date, Box 221C, (Folder: Schutz, WM: Joy: Some Theory etc.); Advertisement, Publishers Weekly 193 (April 8, 1968): 37; Royalty records (Box 221C Folder: B-208 Joy William C Schutz), GPR.
Psychological bestsellers grew out of an established, if less well-known, interest at Grove, but another bestseller, Richard Ney’s *Wall Street Jungle*, fit Grove’s list mainly because of its iconoclasm. Grove had shown no interest in business or economics prior to 1968, but Ney’s fearless exposé of the stock exchange must have appealed to Grove’s love of controversy, and it promised big sales. One reader for the manuscript found Ney’s accusations “stale,” and Grove’s lawyers warned of potential libel suits, but Grove aligned Ney with the consumer advocacy movement, making him the “Ralph Nader of the securities industry.” The book appeared in June 1970 at the time of a sharp downturn in the stock market; Grove sought to capitalize on the coincidence.

Quoting Ney, Grove’s ads declared, “There is more sheer larceny on the New York Stock Exchange than any place else in the world.” The *New York Times*, which had stomached Grove’s most notoriously offensive titles, failed to review it, despite its clear interest for *Times’* readers. The *Wall Street Journal*
refused to carry advertising for the book but ran an article suggesting that Grove modeled the dust jacket on Adam Smith’s *The Money Game* (1968) and that book buyers would be disappointed if they were looking for Smith’s insight and wit. The book weathered these difficulties to enjoy nineteen weeks on the bestseller list in hardcover and another twelve in paperback. It seems fitting that one of Grove’s biggest bestsellers should be a corrosive critique of a central institution of American business.73

If Fred Jordan hoped that Grove would gain new respect for its success with “no-sex” bestsellers, others criticized Grove for hustling after sales in an unprincipled way. Some of the most vociferous critics were the very authors Grove made bestsellers. William Schutz accused Grove of publicizing his book formulaically, without attention to its contents. He

initially objected to the exaggerated and vague claims Grove made for his encounter-group techniques in its advertising for hardcover *Joy*, sarcastically expressing surprise that Grove did not promise that the book would heal “lumbago and fallen arches.” The ad hardly made light of Schutz’s book; on the contrary, it was dense with informative print, but Schutz was taken aback by the banner, “How to turn yourself on without drugs.” Schutz complained that Grove made too little of the scientific research behind the techniques described in *Joy*. Grove replaced the ad with one that described Schutz’s work at the Esalen Institute in more detail and gave Schutz’s academic pedigree, but Grove angered Schutz again with the cover of the Black Cat edition. Grove’s publicity staff tried to create a cover photograph of a young couple engaged in one of Schutz’s therapeutic poses, but Schutz was dismayed by the result. He found the image “artificial” and suggestive of a “lurid sex novel,” even as he recognized that the couple was performing an exercise
from another psychologist’s book. “It’s not even mine!” Schutz lamented. Schutz forwarded a letter he received from an Illinois office clerk who complained that she was teased by the men in her office for reading a “sex book” when they saw the paperback *Joy* on her desk. Again, Schutz felt that Grove was underplaying the professionalism of his work and underestimating the popular interest in Esalen and encounter group therapy.74

Curiously, Grove received a similar complaint from John Rechy, who demonstrated that even authors of transgressive literature kept a careful eye on the tone of their publicity. The heart of Rechy’s complaint, like Schutz’s, was that Grove embraced a mass-market formula without attention to Rechy’s text. When Rechy first saw Grove’s Black Cat edition of his novel *Numbers*, he was so surprised that he had not been consulted, and by the inappropriateness of the

nude male figure gracing the cover, that he assumed it was the work of another publisher. Rechy explained at length that he did not object to nudity, but to the difference between the model and the protagonist of his novel; no reader of the novel could imagine the character Johnny Rio with “those pouting lips” or “the cocked eyebrow” of the “wispy” model. Rechy’s suspicion that Grove took more commercial than artistic interest in his novel is borne out by the reader’s reports, which were unenthusiastic and found in the novel’s favor only that, given Rechy’s fame and the book’s emphasis on sex, “it would probably sell a lot of copies, especially in paper.” Although proud of his association with Grove, Rechy later regretted the persistence of the prejudice that, as a “Grove Press author,” his books were necessarily “dirty.” In the case of Numbers, Grove appears to have traded on that image.  

75 John Rechy to Dick [Seaver], September 17, 1968; H.B. [Harry Braverman], reader’s report, no date, Box 206 (Folder: Rechy, John: Numbers), GPR; see Rechy, “On Being a ‘Grove Press Author.’”
As sales mounted for Grove’s non-literary bestsellers and as Grove published more erotica, criticism of Grove for commercialism and for exploitation of sex spread in literary circles as well as mainstream publications like *Time*. After 1965, the composition of Grove’s list shifted decisively toward both erotica and political nonfiction, although Grove’s literary list continued to be extensive and distinguished, particularly in Grove’s continued efforts as a literary importer. Grove’s efforts for new American writing continued as well, but remained a small portion of Grove’s output. In 1964, Grove introduced Richard Brautigan’s first published novel, *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, though Brautigan withdrew later manuscripts when Grove was too slow in considering them, and his popularity peaked later, after Don Allen’s post-Grove publishing venture, the Four Seasons Foundation, published *Trout Fishing in America*. In 1965, Grove published the first novel by the poet and dramatist LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), *The System of Dante’s Hell*, as well as two
first novels by untested authors, *The Nightclerk* by Stephen Schneck and *Gumbo* by Mack Thomas. Grove compared the latter to James Agee’s *A Death in the Family* and devoted a considerable budget to its promotion; *Cosmopolitan* and the *Saturday Evening Post* serialized it, but sales were mediocre. In 1967, Grove published *Sheeper*, the first novel by the founder of *Big Table*, Irving Rosenthal, and a first novel by a Californian, based in part on the author’s experience in prison, *Tattoo the Wicked Cross* by Floyd Salas. Salas’s manuscript won a literary award, an agent, and a contract from Harper and Row, but, when Salas rejected changes requested by the publisher, he was released and found Grove. Again, Grove mounted an expensive publicity campaign and characterized Salas as “a scrapper . . . a boxer . . . as well as a serious writer,” but neglected to mention his education at Berkeley and San Francisco State. Salas’s book received favorable reviews and sold almost 6000 copies in hardcover and about 20,000 in a Black Cat edition. For a literary work and a first
novel, the sales were fair, but for a work with critical support and publicity, Grove hoped for much more. Grove’s success with Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, John Rechy, and Hubert Selby resulted from a combination of literary accomplishment and the daring transgression of social norms. By 1967, Grove and its authors were free from the restrictions that originally focused attention on their books. The later Grove novels by all these American writers were greeted like any other literary novels, and the ceiling on literary sales lowered over them.76

The same cultural shift affected foreign works, signified by Grove’s publication of Jean Genet’s Miracle of the Rose in its own Black Cat edition, after Bantam had issued his previous Grove titles for the mass market. Foreign imports were still attractive, though. Compared to publishing new American writing, sales expectations were lower for foreign work, but so were advances, and the texts came

76 Richard Seaver to Richard Brautigan, September 9, 1966, Box 22, Folder 12, DAC; Advertisement, Publishers Weekly 187 (February 1, 1965): 40-41; Morrie Goldfischer to Truman Capote, June 30, 1967, Box 217 (Folder: Tattoo the Wicked Cross Salas 1), GPR.
pre-approved by critics in their nations of origin. Between 1961 and 1970, Grove continued to publish French authors Robbe-Grillet, Duras, and Robert Pinget, but also added more than twenty authors from Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Iran, Japan, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico. Grove joined five European publishing houses in the creation of two new prizes to encourage literary innovation. The International Publishers’ Prize, with an award of $10,000 ($65,000), recognized an established author unjustly neglected by existing literary prizes; the Formentor Prize gave $10,000 for the best unpublished manuscript by a promising author and entailed a commitment to translate and publish the novel by each of the participating publishers. To Grove’s satisfaction, Samuel Beckett shared the first International Publishers’ Prize with Jorge Luis Borges, and Henry Miller received a special citation from the jury for literary achievement. In addition to publishing the Formentor-prize winners, beginning with Juan Garcia Hortelano’s Summer Storm, Grove
published the Publishers’-Prize winners whenever available, beginning with Borges’ *Fictions* and later including works by Uwe Johnson, Jorge Semprun, and Witold Gombrowicz. Two other winners, Carlo Emilia Gadda and Nathalie Sarraute, were already published in the U.S. by George Braziller; Saul Bellow was the only winner published exclusively by a large publisher. More prestigious prizes also began to fall to Grove authors of the 1960s; Beckett won the Nobel Prize in 1969, Pablo Neruda in 1971, and others have won more recently: Paz in 1990, Kenzaburo Oe in 1994, and Harold Pinter in 2005.77

Despite its variety and quality, Grove’s literary list was overshadowed by the growth and notoriety of its erotica. The term “pornography,” etymologically suggesting a visual depiction of sex, creates confusion in the context of the written depiction of sex, in which it usually becomes a designation of quality rather than a description of form or content.

77 Rosset considered wooing Gadda away from Braziller, but decided against it. “Damn decent, I must say,” Seaver wrote admiringly to Jordan. Dick [Seaver] to Fred [Jordan], May 21, 1963, Box 203A (Folder: Reage, Pauline The Story of “O”), GPR.
Erotica, as used here, designates sexually explicit writing; most erotica is further distinguished by an imaginative distance from realistic description, achieved either by an isolated setting, a rural chateau or boarding school, or by a thorough stereotyping of settings and characters that robs them of the illusion of reality. This latter quality applies even to the “erotic memoir,” which, though purportedly a faithful record, is usually repetitive and formulaic. One of the most influential writers of erotica, the Marquis de Sade, enjoyed a revival in France in the early 1950s; Grove carried a hint of that discourse to American culture with its 1953 publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Marquis de Sade: An Essay*, which included excerpts of Sade’s writing. At the same time, Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse translated Sade for Olympia Press in Paris, and, after joining Grove, Seaver watched for an opportunity to publish their translations in the U.S. The success of Frank Harris’s *My Life and Loves* encouraged Rosset to believe that “double” paperbacks worked in the erotica
market, and in 1965 a thick volume of Sade, including
*Justine* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom* appeared,
followed by a $1.75 [$10.50] mass-market paperback.
Despite widespread critical attention, hardcover sales
soon stalled, but the paperback sold over 240,000 in
two years. *One Hundred Days of Sodom* followed in 1966
and *Juliette* in 1968. The Sade revival also inspired
*The Story of O*, probably the erotic book that
generated the most publicity without benefit of
lawsuits. The prominent French editor Jean Paulhan
was a key proponent of Sade and the lover of the
writer Dominique Aury, who wrote *The Story of O*
privately for Paulhan. Paulhan arranged for its
publication under the pseudonym “Pauline Reage” in
1954, and Olympia immediately published an English
translation. Grove contracted to publish in the U.S.
in 1961, but delayed for years while awaiting a
suitable translation and preparing to defend the book
in court if necessary. Don Allen convinced Susan
Sontag to write an introduction, but it never
materialized. Hardcover sales began slowly but
exceeded 35,000 by the end of 1966, and the book made a popular bonus for Evergreen Club members; the mass-market edition, distributed jointly by Grove and Dell, sold over 450,000 by the end of 1969.78

As Grove completed the publication of Olympia’s most literary erotica, Rosset began to search for new sources. Grove did not publish the “dirty books” that Girodias had commissioned from writers of his acquaintance in Paris and published in the Traveler’s Companion series for informal export to Great Britain and the U.S. Instead, Rosset sought out work with standing among collectors of erotica, including the German collector and dealer Karl Leonhardt and the American psychologists Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen. Nearby in New York City, he discovered that the New York Book Store was willing to sell its entire clandestine erotica inventory to raise cash. In 1966, he obtained from Leonhardt a copy of My Secret Life, a Victorian erotic memoir brought to

78 Susan [Sontag] to Dick [Seaver], March 18, 1965, Box 203A (Folder: Reage, Pauline The Story of “O”); Royalty statements, Box 203B (Folder: B8297 Story of O Pauline Reage Borchardt [Pauvert]), GPR.
public attention by Dickens-scholar Steven Marcus' *The Other Victorians*. Working on a commission from the Institute of Sex Research in Indiana, Marcus showed that *My Secret Life* could be taken seriously as a cultural document, regardless of its veracity, morals, or taste. Aware of a rival publisher, Rosset rushed the book to press, following later with an "abridged but unexpurgated" paperback. Dell again agreed to distribute the paperback and purchased Grove's entire initial printing of 175,000 copies. In three years, sales reached nearly 750,000.\(^79\)

Grove pursued its erotic publishing with minimal legal interference in 1966 and 1967 as chaos enveloped national obscenity law. Despite the 1966 victory of *Fanny Hill* and the "social value" test in *Memoirs v. Massachusetts*, no consensus opinion on obscenity law emerged in the Supreme Court. Instead, in the case of

Redrup v. New York in May 1967, the anti-censorship majority on the court explained that they could not agree on the legal limits of censorship; therefore no justice specifically explained his reasons for voting to reverse the judgments in the cases at hand. Nothing in the decisions on Fanny Hill or its companion cases, Ginzburg v. United States or Mishkin v. New York, both defeats for the defendants, suggested that the Court promoted untrammeled freedom of expression, but in the course of 1967, the Supreme Court summarily reversed many obscenity cases on appeal, often simply citing the Redrup decision, itself a statement of the court's internal discord. No literary experts were called to defend books like Lust Job, which won the same freedom as Tropic of Cancer. The lucrative underground market in erotica became increasingly public; in the context of the industry, Grove's erotica appeared highly literary indeed, but Grove was freed to advertise on the basis of titillation rather than social value. As Rosset asked in 1969, “What’s wrong with exciting people?
Our whole society—television, movies, fashions—is built on exciting people.”  

Grove Press moved to package and promote its books in a more provocative way beginning in 1966 with the introduction of Zebra Books. A mass-market line parallel to the Black Cat Books in quality, size, and price, the Zebra covers drew attention to sexual content and used comic-book style illustrations on the covers to suggest approachability, though book buyers may have been surprised at the contents. The cover of the first title, Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues’ *The Motorcycle*, featured a drawing of a voluptuous woman in a black leather motorcycle suit, but the text employed techniques of the new novelists and was considered for French literary awards. Along with editions of Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac, Zebras included psychological works by Eric Berne and Robert Lindner, and, even more incongruously, Marcello Craveri’s controversial but scholarly *Life of Jesus*.

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In 1967, Grove introduced a line of hardcover erotica, the Black Circle Books, at first emphasizing classics like Aubrey Beardsley and limericks by Norman Douglas and soon becoming the outlet for the anonymous Victorian texts and manuscripts from Rosset’s, Leonhardt’s and the Kronhausens’ collections. The Evergreen Club offered the Black Circle books to its members at a discount; indeed, the promise of club sales may have inspired the creation of the series. Once hardcover sales declined, Grove reprinted the Black Circle titles as Zebras, adding titles to that line more rapidly in 1968. In 1969, Grove added another line of paperback erotica, the Venus Library; the old-fashioned “library” label comported with the Victorian and Edwardian fare offered. The Venus Library erotica was not noticeably different from the Zebra erotica, but, while the Zebra line intentionally mixed erotica with literary novels and nonfiction, the Venus books were exclusively erotica, separating them from the rest of Grove’s list. Grove instructed its printer to delete the Grove Press name from the covers.
and title pages of the books and never advertised the line to booksellers in Publishers Weekly. Since Grove continued to include erotica in the Zebra line, the creation of a more independent identity for Venus Library probably resulted from the belief that this would help market the series to buyers of erotica, not from any misgivings at Grove about the prominence of erotica on their list. Grove ordered 50,000 copies of Modern Eveline and Yvonne, suggesting an expectation of steady sales from the Venus Library.\textsuperscript{81}

Grove Press’s open embrace of erotica made it the most publically-known purveyor of what was still commonly called “smut” in national magazines. Though long-established specialists in the field, whose erotica sales dwarfed Grove’s, were able to operate more openly than previously, they made little use of regular book-selling channels and knew better than to seek publicity. Few commentators were inclined to credit Grove with preserving and disseminating the

\textsuperscript{81} Gontarski, “Modernism,” 5; Dick Seaver to Rusty [R.L.] Porter, June 30, 1969, Box 241B (Folder: Venus Books); R.L. Porter to Dick Seaver, October 20, 1970, Box 5A (Folder: Suckit, Mary), GPR.
sexual imagination of past eras or to applaud Grove’s higher standards of production relative to its rivals. Grove had done more than make a calculated gamble that it could boost its cash-flow without compromising its credentials as a literary press; Grove sought to stay at the crest of sexual liberation and radical political critique. In Grove’s view, the imaginative freedom of innovative literature that the cultural Cold Warriors supported in the 1950s would contribute to social and economic justice; freedom of publication was vital to any positive change.

Grove Press in the fifties and early sixties, attacking Puritanism and Comstockery in the name of freedom of expression, offered no direct challenge to the Cold War consensus. As we have seen, Grove’s publications on African and Asian subjects in the late 1950s were concerned with folk or art culture but avoided politics and ideology. The most political book Grove published at the time was Voices of Dissent in 1959, an anthology of articles from the New York City anti-communist left. Whether or not Rosset was
in sympathy with the contributors to Dissent, his earlier rejection of Soviet communism appears to have been decisive; if Rosset conformed to the Cold War formulation of the cultural struggle, he seemed determined to hold the non-communist West to its purported ideals of individual and social freedom. Grove’s anti-censorship campaign was aided by the sensitivity about freedom of expression and the role it played in national self-definition during the Cold War. As early as the Roth decision, the Supreme Court underlined the argument against censorship, asserting that “the fundamental freedoms of speech and press have contributed greatly to the development and wellbeing of our free society.” Judge Samuel B. Epstein, presiding over a Tropic of Cancer trial in Illinois, pronounced, “Let not the government or the courts dictate the reading matter of a free people.”

The first sign that Rosset was willing to move Grove Press into Cold War international affairs and domestic politics was a Black Cat reprint of Edgar Snow’s Red Star Over China, the influential 1930s
account of the Chinese communist resistance to Japanese invasion, a book Rosset remembered fondly from his youth. In 1961, the reprint might still be taken as a sign of sympathy for Mao. Also in 1961 were the Target Books on the war in Algeria and the civil rights movement. *Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*, by Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer, followed in 1963. Zeitlin and Scheer did not approve of the Castro regime in Cuba, but the tragedy, in their view, was that the U.S. pushed Cuba into the Soviet sphere of influence. Several more prominent titles appeared in 1965: *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*, by Hal Draper; *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon; and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Alex Haley wrote the *Autobiography* on the basis of interviews with Malcolm X and received a contract from Doubleday, but the black Muslim leader was assassinated shortly before publication, and Doubleday withdrew out of fear that retaliation would be directed against its chain bookstores. Grove Press, with characteristic lack of fear, published the book
in hardcover and paperback. The Autobiography, describing Malcolm X’s struggles in a racist America, and Fanon’s seminal study of the psychological damage inflicted on Algerians by the French colonial regime were influential texts in the formation of black nationalist thought. Grove developed a modest list in this field, including more Fanon: Black Skins, White Masks (1967) and a Black Cat reprint of Toward the African Revolution (1969). LeRoi Jones’s Tales (1967) traced the movement of that author’s thought away from liberal integrationism in a series of interconnected short stories. Black Cat reprints continued in this area in 1969 with Wulf Sach’s Black Anger, a 1946 psychological study of a black South African, and Julius Lester’s Look Out, Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama, an explanation and history of the Black Power movement by a leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Lester’s Revolutionary Notes followed in 1970, alongside Watts: The Aftermath, a collection of reflections on the 1965 riots by Watts residents. Publication in the field did not place

Black nationalism was not the only ideology to connect racial oppression in the United States with colonialism around the world, and Grove Press traced this development with books on revolutionary movements in Latin America and criticism of the American war in Vietnam. In *Evergreen Review*, journalist Nat Hentoff compared the actions of U.S. forces in Vietnam to the crimes of Nazi Germany in “Waiting for Nuremberg,” and Grove became heavily involved in promoting a theatrical satire comparing Lyndon Johnson to Shakespeare’s MacBeth, penned by an anti-Vietnam activist. Shortly after Grove agreed to publish Barbara Garson’s *MacBird!* the usual printer of Off-Broadway programs, Showcard, refused to be involved in the production, prompting Grove to launch its own line of theatrical programs and then to purchase Showcard, changing the name to Evergreen Showcard. Grove met further resistance when its own regular printer balked
at printing the book, but despite these difficulties, MacBird! became a paperback bestseller, with sales over 250,000 in 1967, and Grove marketed an original-cast recording on two vinyl LPs. The play was even adopted as a textbook at universities from Florida to Idaho.\(^8^2\)

Grove moved into the field of Latin American revolutionary movements shortly before the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia attracted popular attention and adulation to Guevara. Grove gained the inside track through its connection to its former editor Harry Braverman, a committed advocate of socialism who edited The American Socialist before his tenure at Grove. Braverman left Grove in 1967 for the more political Monthly Review Press (MR), and that year Grove began to reprint MR titles with Régis Debray’s Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America. In 1968 Grove

\(^8^2\) Newspaper clipping, New York Post, January 12, 1967, 28, in Box 99 (Folder: Mac Bird Garson [1]); Louis Calta, “Grove Press Buys Stage Programs,” New York Times, August 12, 1967, 15; Richard Seaver to Lynn Nesbit, March 9, 1967, Box 99 (Folder: Garson, Barbara. MacBird); Royalty records, Box 99 (Folder: B-132 Macbird etc.); No author to Barbara Bannon (Publishers Weekly), no date, Box 99 (Folder Mac Bird Garson [1]), GPR.
distributed the *MR* edition of Guevara’s own *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* and published the paperback. From Merit Publishers, Grove added a reprint of George Lavan’s collection *Che Speaks*. Grove joined a general scramble among publishers to acquire Guevara’s Bolivian diaries, again demonstrating that Grove was not isolated in its interests, as the market for political dissent was perceived to boom. Rosset first sent a friend and then travelled himself to La Paz with Fred Jordan to compete with McGraw-Hill and Stein and Day to wrest the diaries from Bolivian generals. *Evergreen Review* no.51 contained a few of Che’s writings and tributes by Fidel Castro and others and bore on its cover Paul Davis’s romanticized portrait of Che. The issue angered a group of anti-Castro “commandos” calling themselves the Movimento Nacional de Coalicion Cubano (MNCC), who carried out a string of bombings in New York City, in spring and summer 1968, against the offices of nations that traded with Cuba. At 2:50 AM July 26, members of the group threw a U.S. army
grenade through the second-floor window of the Grove Press offices at 80 University Place, blowing out several windows. The afternoon of the same day, Grove had to clear the office after receiving a bomb threat. Not to be dissuaded, Grove ran excerpts from Che’s Bolivian diary in *Evergreen Review* number 57 and went ahead in 1969 and 1970 with *The Great Rebel: Che in Bolivia; My Friend Che; Castro Speaks;* and *Cuba: Socialism and Development.* Rosset, who suspected the CIA of involvement with the MNCC, thought another Grove publication may have led to the targeting of Grove: *My Secret War,* Harold “Kim” Philby’s memoir of his years as a Soviet double-agent in the British intelligence service, a book approved of by the Soviet Union, to which Philby had defected, but embarrassing to the CIA and FBI as well as the British. The Rockefeller Commission report confirmed that the CIA opened a file on Grove Press after publication of Philby’s book and gathered information on the company.\(^{83}\)

\(^{83}\) Gontarks, “Modernism,” 8–14, 23; Tom Buckley, “Bomb Explodes
Grove’s development as a political publisher did not open the press to charges of exploitation as its publishing of erotica did. Although the erotica sprang more naturally from the long-established interests of the press in transgressive literature and the psychology of sex, the publication of political books was generally assumed to spring from conviction, the sales potential of politics was not so obvious, and political interests are free from the shame that makes a business catering to them shameful as well. Rosset’s own past in radical politics vouched for his political interests, just as his youthful interest in Henry Miller testified to his acceptance of the coexistence of literary value with explicit sexual description. Rosset stressed both points in major interviews with the New York Times Magazine, the Saturday Evening Post, and Life in 1968 and 1969, thus helping to confirm that Grove Press published out of conviction rather than economic calculation. The presence on Grove’s list of titles published purely

for profit would compromise Grove’s reputation as a disinterested cultural agent; similarly, the expansion of Grove into new areas of business could also call into question the character of the press. In this respect, Grove did exceed the restrictions on the permanent innovative press, as defined here, although, in its non-publishing activities, Grove was clearly animated by the same cultural vision that inspired its publishing.

In 1957, Grove threatened to diversify as a publisher when Rosset bought the book division of *Yachting* magazine and arranged to publish nautical books under the imprint Sailing Book Services. Rosset’s partner in the venture was the independent publisher John de Graff, whose house, like Grove at the time, depended on publishing British titles in the U.S., though de Graff specialized in wine, classical music, botany, and aviation. Rosset’s next enthusiasm was developing real estate in East Hampton, Long Island, where he had old barns, carriage houses, and school houses renovated into homes on adjacent
properties. In summer 1960, Rosset held a small music festival at Hampton Waters, as he called it, in a renovated church building that he christened the Evergreen Theatre, the first of several times he would use variations on the name, suggesting Rosset’s calling to the career of theater impresario. Rosset promised a summer season of drama for 1961, which may have been derailed by *Tropic of Cancer*. In 1963, Rosset created a motion picture production branch, Evergreen Theater Inc., and signed contracts for original scripts with Grove authors Beckett, Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and New Wave script-writing veterans Duras and Robbe-Grillet. The venture resulted in a film each from Beckett and Norman Mailer as well as *Foot Steps in the Snow*, featuring Veronica Lake in her penultimate performance. Rosset made a second effort in motion pictures with the 1966 purchase of Amos and Marcia Vogel’s collection of experimental films, the foundation of the Vogels’ Cinema 16 film society. Grove loaned the films mostly for showings at universities. Rosset planned to join theatrical and
cinematic interests when he purchased the Renata Theater, almost across the street from Grove’s offices, renaming it the Evergreen Theater. After Michael McClure’s The Beard enjoyed a scandalous run on stage in the fall of 1967, Rosset converted the theater for film only and opened the Black Circle Bar in the same building. Grove acquired more films to show at its theater and to distribute, including Frederick Wiseman’s documentary Titicut Follies, an exposé of conditions at Massachusetts’ Bridgewater mental hospital. Grove found itself back in court when Massachusetts tried to suppress the film.84

Grove’s film distribution career followed the path of its publishing career when Rosset bought U.S. rights to a controversial Swedish film for $160,000. Vilgot Sjoman’s I Am Curious (Yellow) caused a stir in Sweden for nudity and simulated sex; in the U.S. some

saw it as an exploration of contemporary mores, others as “hard-core pornography.” Just to get the film through customs took almost a year and required an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. When Grove finally cleared the film for exhibition, it caused a sensation, earning a reputation as the most explicit movie yet to be publically released. The film does not bear comparison with the underground product, but several years would elapse before films like Deep Throat and The Devil in Miss Jones were given wide public distribution. The Evergreen Theater and Cinema Rendezvous in New York City and the twenty other locations where the availability of prints would allow the film to be shown were sold out continuously for months. Despite censorship problems in Massachusetts and Maryland, Curious approximately doubled Grove’s gross income in 1969, adding $6 or 7 million to a $14 million total. The film grossed another $1.7 million for Grove in 1970 as ticket sales declined. Rosset plowed much of the film revenue back into film, purchasing more films and a movie theater in
Minneapolis, hiring Amos Vogel as a film consultant, and, with Vogel’s expertise, organizing the twelve-film Grove Press International Film Festival in 1970. In the area of film, however, the censor finally caught up with Grove, which suffered its first defeat in the Supreme Court in 1971 when it lost its appeal in the Curious obscenity case from Maryland. Ironically, Grove’s surest ally on the court, William O. Douglas, recused himself because Grove had published an excerpt from Douglas’s book Points of Rebellion in Evergreen Review; the remaining justices split four to four, upholding the lower-court decision against Grove. Even before this defeat, Rosset began to think about how to liberate film from the necessity for public viewing that made it more vulnerable to censorship than print; in 1969, Rosset told Life about his plan to reach television viewers with video cassette technology still in the prototype stage. Rosset understood the process of cultural
dissemination too well to be discouraged by CBS’s plan to control both the format and content of videotape.\footnote{Rosset, “Combat Publishing,” 27; Albert Goldman, “The Old Smut Peddler,” Life, August 29, 1969, 52.}

The windfall from Curious marked the high point in a dramatic escalation of Grove’s revenues and stock value. As Grove recovered from the economic crisis around Tropic of Cancer, its profits tripled between 1963 and 1965. In 1966 and early 1967, Grove flexed its growing financial muscle, both in major acquisitions, like Mid-Century Book Society and the Cinema 16 collection, and in increased advertising and publicity. Rosset made a public offering of Grove stock in 1967, issuing new shares and selling some of his and his mother’s existing shares, but keeping a majority of shares off the market. Income rose substantially in 1967 and slightly in 1968, but profits rose little the first year and then flagged dramatically; toward the end of 1968, Grove’s stock sank to about half its value a year before. A month after Curious was cleared to pass through customs, the stock had rebounded. The huge increase in income in
1969 was accompanied by only a slight increase in profits. In addition to $375,000 in legal expenses associated with *Curious*, Grove wrote off $725,000 in unrecoverable advances and film acquisitions, and also began the lavish renovation of a building at 214 Mercer Street for new offices, the cost of which reached $2 million. As the *Curious* income dried up in 1970, Grove wrote off more of its film inventory and the cost of the film festival, taking a $2 million loss for the year. Grove sold its Minneapolis theater at a loss in 1971 and unloaded the Mercer Street building in 1972, forfeiting its investment in the renovation. By 1973, Grove's stock value had declined to a few cents a share. Evergreen Club was sold in 1972 and in 1973 *Evergreen Review* was discontinued and Grove published only a handful of new titles. The company was moribund.  

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Grove’s wild fluctuation showed both the opportunities and dangers of diversifying outside of publishing. The high potential earning from film was inseparable from the high cost of investing and the need to absorb huge losses, which Grove could not do. The real estate investment indicated an excess of optimism about the upside of a business buoyed by experimental and foreign film, erotica, and the peak of interest in radical politics. The rapid gains before 1970 also encouraged Rosset’s recklessness; in 1969, after the Saturday Evening Post ran an unflattering cover illustration of Rosset crawling out of a sewer, he offered to take over the struggling magazine, taunting the owners with the charge that they had “no moral right to allow an American institution to die,” never mind that, as industry observers noted without exaggeration, the Post “loses more money in a month than Grove earns in a year.”

Finally, Grove faced a contentious unionization dispute in 1970, first firing nine employees and then suffering a picket and the occupation of Rosset’s office by feminist activists. Robin Morgan, a member of the group New York Radical Women and author of the landmark essay “Goodbye to All That,” was one of those fired and returned to occupy the office. Grove submitted to arbitration and easily won a vote on unionization, but the conflict also revealed ideological fissures between Grove’s vision of sexual liberation and a feminism that questioned the economic justice of explicit photographs and films and even the consequences of written erotica for relations between the sexes. Several editors of *Evergreen Review* resigned out of sympathy with feminist criticisms of Grove. An aggravating factor in the dispute was the perceived wealth of Grove Press, symbolized by the Mercer Street office into which the press had just moved.88

Without theater, cinema division, magazine, or book club, Grove Press was a shadow of its former self in the early 1970s. The publisher almost could not afford to publish new titles; the list for 1974 featured only four. To survive, Grove entered into a distribution arrangement with Random House in 1971, but the partnership was a difficult adjustment for Rosset. By the end of 1972, he filed a lawsuit against Random House, asking to be released from the distribution contract and for $1 million in damages. Rosset charged that Random House was not trying in good faith to sell Grove’s books, that, in fact, it had pulped valuable Grove stock without reason or consultation. According to former Grove editor Kent Carroll, Rosset believed that Random House had entered the agreement as a ruse to drive Grove Press out of business and claim its backlist. Lawsuit notwithstanding, the arrangement endured until 1978 and probably kept Grove Press from bankruptcy.89

The dramatic arc of Grove’s career was complete, but the backlist remained. The backlist, by its nature, presented an edited memorial to the press; it exalted the work of the best-known literary authors and the texts freed from censorship in celebrated legal victories. The anti-war books and the books on black nationalism disappeared; the middlebrow Profiles and Encyclopedias vanished; the reprinted titles reverted to the backlists of other publishers. Grove Press under Barney Rosset was characterized by a tremendous expansive energy that embraced many kinds of books and experimented readily with publicity techniques, formats, book clubs, literary awards. Yet, at least until the mid-1960s, Grove was clearly guided by a vision of cultural values that excluded many profitable publishing avenues. Only in its increasing reliance on erotica did Grove begin to diversify out of areas recognized as culturally valuable. Unlike George Braziller and New Directions,

<tls.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25360_1929023,00.html> (February 21, 2006).
Grove prepared to abandon the self-imposed restrictions of the permanent innovative press.
Chapter 5

New Directions: Strategies for Survival

The expansive energies that propelled Grove Press contrast strongly with New Directions’ drive to develop the potential of a contracting list after 1949. James Laughlin disavowed any interest in politics in 1941, and U.S. entry into the war did not change his mind. When his interest in helping shape world affairs revived in the 1950s, Laughlin kept it separate from his publishing house, channeling his activities into a separate nonprofit publishing organization. At the end of the 1940s, Laughlin decided to pare the New Directions list, to specialize in the work of its signature authors, and to maintain the backlist. By restricting the list, Laughlin augmented New Directions’ reputation for a pure devotion to literature, but Laughlin’s artistic decision also proved to be a business decision, dictating New Directions’ approach to paperback publishing, which in turn determined distribution
arrangements and shaped New Directions' subsequent career.

As Laughlin’s social credit sympathies left him out of step with many creative writers in the era of the Popular Front, his retreat from all ideologies in the cause of art and the pursuit of sensual pleasure, as the United States plunged into World War II, alienated him from Ezra Pound on one side and the mass of his fellow Americans on the other. Laughlin wrote Pound months before the attack on Pearl Harbor claiming to have “retired” from politics and economics. Laughlin’s claim of neutrality in the European conflict was his declaration to Pound that he did not sympathize with Mussolini’s fascism, although it did not require Laughlin to reverse his own criticism of American society. He described his attitude as “nego-passive.” Laughlin purchased property in Alta, Utah, where he set up a ski resort. He lived in the outskirts of Salt Lake City, skied, worked on the resort, and married a local, Margaret Keyser. He later remembered that he hoped to
subsidize his publishing with profits from the ski resort, but the immediate effect of the publisher’s prolonged absences was frustration on the part of authors and staff alike.¹

Some of Laughlin’s associates took issue with his mission more than his absenteeism; the designer Alvin Lustig deplored what he perceived as Laughlin’s passive relation to society. Lustig did not believe that artists should be sheltered from the larger society, even in the name of artistic innovation. He wanted instead to marry modernist art with industrial production, to create a popular culture that was at once human and democratic. Laughlin was sufficiently impressed with Lustig’s convictions to describe them in a profile for Publishers Weekly promoting an exhibit of Lustig’s design work. Laughlin cited Lustig’s belief that the artist could “integrate what the machine has brought us with the spiritual and cultural value of our human heritage.”

Lustig shared this goal at least to the extent that most of Lustig’s design work for New Directions was on titles aimed at a broader public: the New Classics and Modern Readers series and the plays of Tennessee Williams. Laughlin’s admiration for Lustig did not, however, lead him to hope or expect a truly democratic audience for New Directions’ books. At the time he employed Lustig, he wrote Thomas Merton that the “basic premise” of the business was “that a non-commercial channel should be kept open for the writers who wish to create literature regardless of its appeal to debased public taste.” If Lustig’s desire to shape popular culture involved any compromise on taste, Laughlin was not interested.²

Given Laughlin’s desire to keep his list pure from non-literary titles, the drive of New Directions toward a popular market could only take place on Laughlin’s terms. Since Laughlin refused to seek big

sellers, he adopted a strategy of keeping overhead and capital outlays low, which meant keeping the New Directions list small with a high proportion of titles by well-established literary authors. In 1949, Laughlin found himself publishing almost forty titles a year, “to my horror,” as he reported to his cousin Henry Laughlin at Houghton Mifflin; he immediately began to scale back. Laughlin thought that the self-consciously limited, non-expansionary press was the ideal for the literary sector of the publishing industry. The limits he placed on New Directions allowed him to be generous with competitors, like the fledgling Grove Press, and to pass up some publishing opportunities. When Bernard Frechtman suggested that Laughlin publish Antonin Artaud in the U.S., years before Grove Press eventually did, Laughlin responded that New Directions did not want to “hog all of the good French authors.” American culture, Laughlin suggested, was better served if several publishers and
magazines together fostered “inter-change of international culture.”

Limiting the introduction of new authors and the size of the list did not preclude making money or producing bestsellers, even in addition to the demand for artistic purity. As we have seen, Laughlin thought that the danger of commercialism was its power to make authors and publishers compromise their artistic values. “Non-commercial channels,” like New Directions, by insisting on artistic values, protected authors who were, in turn, free to work without compromise. With these safeguards for the purity of the creative process, commercial success could only help to elevate public taste. Laughlin could admit that he at least considered commercial possibilities when selecting work to publish. When he chose not to publish Vladimir Nabokov’s verse after Nabokov began publishing his novels elsewhere, he explained that he wanted the novels because he considered them Nabokov’s

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3 James Laughlin to Henry A. Laughlin, August 31, 1949, Item 976 Folder 2; James Laughlin to Bernard Prechtman, December 15, 1948, Item 604, NDR.
most important work, “not simply because of their sales possibilities.” This explanation acknowledged the commercial attractions of novels over poetry, though it denied the primacy of commercial motivation.4

Laughlin promoted the few titles he thought had commercial potential. In 1948 he professed to believe that only the occasional big title kept New Directions in business. Laughlin told the poet Kenneth Rexroth, whom he acknowledged as an important literary advisor, that the survival of the press depended on Giuseppe Berto’s novel The Sky is Red, especially since Laughlin had low expectations for Tennessee Williams’ new play, Summer and Smoke. Laughlin made a deal with Book Find Club for club rights and contemplated promoting Berto, who had been held as a P.O.W. in Texas, by spreading the story to newspapers that Berto was searching for his blonde American prison nurse.5

Laughlin’s promotional activities were rewarded with two minor bestsellers in 1950, Paul Bowles’ The

4 James Laughlin to Vladimir Nabokov, December 17, 1948, Item 1205 Folder 5, NDR.
Sheltering Sky and Tennessee Williams’ The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. The next year New Directions introduced the first English translation of Hermann Hesse’s novel Siddhartha, which became a steady seller and eventually outsold all other New Directions titles. Henry Miller had begun encouraging Laughlin to read Siddhartha in 1947; when Laughlin finally did, he decided to publish the “impressive” and “profoundly moving” work, though he noted to Miller that academic “Semanticists” would object to “the confusion of philosophical terminology,” and “our sophisticated friends over at the Partisan Review would consider the book very corny and sentimental.” Notably, Laughlin accepted the book, despite his reservations, without reference to perceived sales’ potential.⁶

Laughlin’s rationale could in theory have justified sensational advertising, but in practice New Directions consistently presented a mild public face. In the case of Sartre’s 1948 book of short stories, 

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The Wall, Laughlin avoided sensation because he feared censorship; New Directions presented a limited edition of The Wall at $7.50, following a well-established formula for avoiding the notice of the smut hounds. In the case of the bestseller The Sheltering Sky, which culminated with the experience of an American woman in a North African harem, advertisements only went so far as to exclaim, “People will talk!” After Time magazine exposed his plan for a quiet edition of Tropic of Cancer (see Chapter 2), Laughlin consistently accepted practical limits on expression, even though he lamented them. He rejected Kenneth Rexroth’s advice to publish Lady Chatterley’s Lover in 1948, turned down Lolita, released Miller’s Tropics, and stood by as Grove Press signed Hubert Selby, Jr., placating first his family and later his family-operated distributor, J.B. Lippincott.7

Laughlin’s disregard for the profit motive, a little too freely expressed, antagonized those authors who overcame their gratitude for merely being

7 Advertisement, New York Times, December 13, 1949, 33; see Bartlett, 94-100.
published. Writing to William Carlos Williams, who regularly expressed his dissatisfaction with Laughlin’s lack of aggression in matters of publicity, Laughlin explained that the promising sales and promotion manager David McDowell left New Directions with Laughlin’s blessing because he had a growing family and needed the money Random House could pay him. “Now and then we have a bit of luck, like this Bowles book,” Laughlin wrote, “but by and large the kind of things that I like to do are pretty thin pickings from the profit angle.” To Williams, who hoped to retire from his medical practice and support himself by writing, this was too much; he decided to contact McDowell at Random House. Laughlin was personally hurt and sarcastically urged Williams to “let them slobber their dirt all over your decency and your purity.” But Laughlin also believed that Random House would not benefit Williams in the long run because they would not keep his book in print, patiently waiting, as Laughlin did, for popular acceptance. Williams believed he owed it to himself
to try to make some immediate income and signed a three-book deal, including his autobiography, for $5000 [$41,000]. Shortly afterwards, Paul Bowles left for Random House as well.8

When Henry Miller also became restless with what he perceived to be meager royalties, New Directions’ editor-in-chief, Robert M. MacGregor, made a forceful argument for the publisher’s business acumen. MacGregor cited good sales for Tennessee Williams, Dylan Thomas, Thomas Merton, and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Crack-Up*. He suggested that Bowles and W.C. Williams had suffered as a result of their defection to Random House, stating baldly that Bowles had “certainly cheapened his writing and standards to their demand.” Finally, MacGregor noted that New Directions relied on its successful books to cover the losses on titles that did not sell well, including some of Miller’s own. Laughlin wrote personally to Miller to second MacGregor’s argument, to blame

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reviewers for hurting Miller’s domestic sales, and to promise a special effort to find new reviewers for Miller’s next book. Although Miller thought he would have to break with New Directions to make money, having no expectation in 1955 of seeing the Tropics published in the U.S. in his lifetime, he acknowledged his moral debt to the publisher and decided not to ask to be released to publish his next book elsewhere.9

The tenuousness of even New Directions’ longest-standing author-publisher relationships underscored the importance to the publisher of improving the sales of titles by less well-known authors. In the 1940s, the New Classics and the Makers of Modern Literature series helped New Directions diversify out of original literature and aimed at college sales. In 1949, New Directions formalized its emphasis on academic marketing with the creation of a College Department. Laughlin welcomed a new partner in the college venture, Richard T. Smyth, who had been at Harvard with Laughlin and had worked for Oxford University.

Press. The College Department published a few books specifically designed as textbooks, with student exercises included along with the texts of short stories or novels. Mostly the new division promoted other New Directions titles that might be appropriate for textbook use, especially literary anthologies.10

Looking to sales outside the college market, Laughlin turned his attention to his distribution mechanism. He experimented briefly with the idea of using selected booksellers as regional “depositories” for New Directions. The depository stores would stock every New Directions title in print, receiving in exchange a larger discount on the older titles. If the scheme had worked it would have eased the anxieties of authors, who were frequently dismayed at visiting bookstores and not finding their books available. By 1950, Laughlin was ready to consider entering a distribution arrangement with a larger publisher, but he was advised to speak with Robert MacGregor, the publisher of Theatre Arts Books, who

had just laboriously extracted his house from such an arrangement. Laughlin hired MacGregor as a consultant to assist New Directions as it instead entered a simpler arrangement with Paragon Mailing Service, which took over shipping and billing, but not marketing and sales. MacGregor made such a favorable impression on Laughlin that he hired him onto New Directions’ staff.¹¹

After taking a greater interest in New Directions and putting it on a firmer business footing, Laughlin’s attention was distracted again, this time by the opportunity to take part in the national effort to improve America’s image abroad. Through one of his authors, novelist Maude Hutchins, Laughlin was acquainted with Robert Maynard Hutchins, the former president of the University of Chicago. In 1951, Laughlin and Hutchins, an associate director at the Ford Foundation, discussed a plan to promote American high culture in Europe. Laughlin later recalled that

he already wanted to reacquaint Europeans, cut off by war and the difficult recovery, with advances in American literature, but found that New Directions lacked the resources.\(^\text{12}\)

Laughlin and Hutchins' initial plan for a non-profit foundation, to be known as Intercultural Publications Inc., included subsidizing translations of American writing for European publishers and providing European libraries with subscriptions to American periodicals. Laughlin proposed a literary journal, *Perspectives*, to be published by Intercultural simultaneously in four languages in England, Germany, France, Italy, and, for copyright purposes, the United States. The Ford Foundation, which began making international grants only in 1950, agreed to Laughlin's proposal, and made *Perspectives* its first major effort to promote American culture in Europe. Laughlin assembled a board of directors composed of bankers and businessmen with only one link to publishing, Alfred Knopf; for advice on content, he

\(^{12}\) James Laughlin to William Stingone, January 18, 1996, Item 592, Folder 5, NDR.
created a separate advisory committee. Each issue of Perspectives featured a prominent literary critic as guest editor, often a member of the advisory committee, including Lionel Trilling, Jacques Barzun, Malcolm Cowley, and H.P. Blackmur. The fiction and criticism in Perspectives was selected to display the highest cultural attainments of the United States. The journal was distributed in more than forty countries worldwide; although it could have been given away, Intercultural decided to charge twenty-five cents, to disguise its subsidization.\textsuperscript{13}

The Ford Foundation’s interest in Perspectives sprang from a growing commitment to the Cold War competition. In a variety of new international programs, the Foundation was building on the experience of the U.S. government in administering occupied West Germany and the Marshall Plan, making former Plan administrator Paul Hoffman president in 1950 and placing former High Commissioner for Germany

\textsuperscript{13} Laughlin to Stingone (see n.12); Gregory Barnhisel, “Perspectives USA and the Cultural Cold War: Modernism in Service of the State,” \textit{Modernism/Modernity} 14 (2007): 739, 738.
John J. McCloy on its board of trustees in 1953.

Another institution deeply interested in America’s image in Europe was the Central Intelligence Agency, which also shared personnel with the Marshall Plan and the High Commission for Germany. The State Department was not an ideal conduit for covert CIA funds and operations, because the CIA naturally wished to keep its projects from the taint of propaganda. In Germany, the statutes governing the occupation forbade government interference in culture, adding the risk of legal consequences to the embarrassment of bad publicity should the CIA’s role be uncovered. Frank Wisner, head of the CIA’s Office of Policy Coordination, was one of many at the CIA who saw non-profit foundations as a source of funds and an ideal conduit for CIA funding for cultural initiatives in Europe. Wisner and others began to pressure the Ford Foundation to cooperate with the CIA as early as 1951, though many Foundation personnel feared that CIA involvement would compromise the Foundation’s image. After an initial rebuff, the Foundation made a grant
to a CIA front, the National Committee for a Free Europe, in 1952.14

In the course of 1953, two schools of thought formed within the Ford Foundation on international affairs. The first, represented by Hutchins, sought to make culture a common ground on which the U.S. could make a case for itself outside of the ideological and political conflict. The second, favored by the CIA, emphasized the conflict between the Western democracies’ liberty in cultural matters and the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. Laughlin’s guidance of Perspectives clearly placed it in the former camp, and Foundation officials Charles Wyzanski and Shepard Stone criticized the journal for focusing too narrowly on the arts and neglecting current political issues. The criticism was not purely ideological; Foundation officials believed attention to current events would appeal more to

14 see Frances Stonor Saunders, The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters (New York: New Press, 1999), 139. Saunders mistakenly refers to McCloy as the President of the Ford Foundation in 1953 (p.141), the year he was named to the Board of Trustees. McCloy began as a consultant to the Foundation in 1952 and was Chairman of the Board from 1958 to 1965.
European readers and improve circulation. Some outside the Foundation objected to Perspectives much more strongly; one reader, an American living in the Philippines, wrote directly to Henry Ford II to ask if the Foundation was “supporting a subversive publication.” She wrote, “From all I can gather it is another ‘Amerasia’ but worse!” recalling the 1945 case in which the staff of Amerasia magazine, several of whose members had close ties to the Communist Party of the United States, were found in possession of classified documents. The letters’ casual equation of cultural criticism and avant-garde poetry with subversion and possible espionage illustrates the pressures on the Foundation from the forces of McCarthyism.15

In early 1954, Laughlin carried on a spirited defense of his approach within the Foundation. He

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15 Volker R. Berghahn, America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 173-174; Margaret Worthington Gary to Henry Ford II, March 25, 1953, Item 592 Folder 4, NDR. Robert Hutchins left the Ford Foundation for the Fund for the Republic, also funded by the Foundation, which was organized to defend democratic institutions against the threat of McCarthyism.
argued that Perspectives' circulation numbers, though perhaps lackluster in Europe, were more impressive worldwide. He maintained that America needed the Ford Foundation to promote high culture, because business and government lacked the will to sustain the arts. Laughlin may have had a vision of the Foundation acting as a New Directions writ large. He complained privately that all the Foundation's cultural efforts should not fall under the heading of "Peace," but that a "Humanities Division" was needed to support literary writers and scholars. Finally, he questioned the trend toward making the Foundation's "cultural program a weapon in the Cold War." In particular, he thought the Foundation should not support the journals and magazines spawned by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, such as Encounter, Preuves, and Forum, which Laughlin found too "militant." Laughlin thought the Foundation should support his and Hutchins' approach, trying not "to defeat the leftists in dialectical combat," but "to lure them . . . by aesthetic and rational persuasion," in the interests of future
“rapprochement.” Laughlin forthrightly stated his support for coexistence with the communist powers; the only alternative he saw was nuclear war. Privately he expressed other views antithetical to the Cold War ethos; he suggested to Thomas Merton, for example, that the U.S. might have defused tensions over middle-eastern oil by willingly ceding to the Soviets control over half the supply.16

Laughlin and the Foundation soon reached an impasse. The Foundation had no formal control over Laughlin’s Intercultural Publications Inc. so, when Laughlin defended his chosen course, the Foundation could only try persuasion. When Laughlin refused to change Perspectives, the Foundation gave Intercultural a generous terminal grant and severed ties in 1954. In the same year, the Foundation created a formal structure for covert cooperation with the CIA, creating a special committee, composed of the

President, Chairman, and John McCloy, which could introduce Agency projects within the Foundation without revealing their origins. The Foundation began funding the German-language publication Der Monat, originally funded by the High Commission for Germany, and by 1956 began to support the journals sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (itself a beneficiary of CIA funding). It is worth noting that Intercultural, although funded by the Ford Foundation, did not receive CIA money. Frances Saunders, whose Cultural Cold War is now a standard reference on the covert manipulation of foundations and cultural organs, portrays the cancellation of funding for Intercultural as merely a response to its failure to attract attention, but it was a consequence of the change in approach at the Foundation, a change that accompanied the creation of a covert relationship with the CIA.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) Berghahn, 224; Kai Bird, The Chairman: John J. McCloy, the Making of the American Establishment (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 428; Saunders, 140; Also see Barnhisel, 748, on the additional pressure brought to bear on the Ford Foundation by the Reece Commission of the U.S. House of Representatives, which
Perspectives carried on until 1956, and Laughlin, though demoted in the hierarchy of the cultural Cold War, continued to steer Intercultural on a parallel course with other American efforts. Beginning in 1952, Intercultural facilitated a Books for India program in southern India, to counteract similar programs sponsored by the Indian Communist Party, and Laughlin used his expertise to help the Ford Foundation establish the Southern Languages Book Trust in 1955. To fulfill Intercultural’s promise of international cultural exchange, Laughlin oversaw the creation of a series of profiles of the political and cultural life of foreign countries for the benefit of American readers, beginning in 1954 with Perspective of India. These profiles were published until 1958 as supplements in Atlantic Monthly and eventually covered more Asian than European nations. The last installment, Perspective of Burma, which Laughlin edited himself, fit nicely with concurrent Ford Foundation efforts to foster Burmese cultural

specifically cited Intercultural for publishing the work of former communists.
nationalism as an antidote to the “foreign” communist ideology, an effort that ultimately failed when the military installed a socialist regime.¹⁸

Laughlin’s efforts to influence America’s cultural exports were almost entirely contained by his non-profit work, insulating New Directions from the ideological struggles of the day. His experiences, particularly in Asia, did influence some of his publishing decisions. Laughlin thought about transferring the idea behind the Atlantic supplements to the New Directions annuals: he considered producing two shorter anthologies each year, one of them devoted to translations from Europe and Asia. Laughlin’s work in India also led to ideas for New Directions’ list. He met two authors he eventually published in the U.S.: the South Indian English-language novelist Raja Rao and Alain Danielou, a French convert to Hinduism. Even earlier, New Directions began to demonstrate a greater interest in literature from Asia, publishing the first of several Japanese novels, The Setting Sun

¹⁸ McCarthy, 97-98, 100, 113.
by Osamu Dazai, in 1956 and introducing an anthology of Bengali short stories in 1959. Latin American authors appeared next, although confusion about the rights to Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones*, which Laughlin believed he had acquired, cost New Directions another chance to beat Grove Press to a literary find. Instead New Directions published *Labyrinths*, a collection of Borges' short fiction and essays, in 1962 and a book of Octavio Paz poems, *Sun Stone*, the same year.¹⁹

If New Directions was insulated from the Cold War, it was also deprived of the close attention of its publisher during *Perspectives*’ four-year run. Robert MacGregor’s competent management of the house allowed Laughlin to name him editor-in-chief and leave most day-to-day operations to him. MacGregor was an experienced publishing executive and he also had the literary taste to direct New Directions with minimal assistance from Laughlin. MacGregor prized his

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position with New Directions because it allowed him to make a living without giving up his own Theatre Arts Books.

The first important change in the publishing industry that MacGregor and Laughlin faced together was the advent of the quality paperback. New Directions got an early taste of the power of the new format in 1953, when Doubleday brought out an edition of Alain-Fournier’s *The Wanderer* as the fourteenth Anchor book, and sales of the hardcover New Classics edition stopped cold after eight years in print. The 1945 contract gave New Directions exclusive reprint rights, at a time when few would have anticipated the demand for a paperback edition of an almost twenty-year-old translation of Fournier’s even older novel. But the quality paperback had changed the rules since 1945: hardcover and paperback reprint rights had come to be sold separately. Houghton Mifflin interpreted its contract with New Directions to cover only
hardcover rights, authorizing itself to take advantage of the renewed opportunity for sales.\textsuperscript{20}

The lesson was not lost on Laughlin, who contacted Knopf to ask if he was prepared to “modify your long held principles” about putting backlist titles into paperback and to propose that Knopf collaborate with New Directions on a line of quality paperbacks. Laughlin feared that his backlist was not large enough to sustain such a venture and felt unable to compete with Anchor’s Jason Epstein in leasing other publishers’ titles. After Knopf created Vintage Books, without help from New Directions, Laughlin hoped Vintage would distribute his anthologies as paperbacks. By 1955, New Directions Paperbooks appeared; the first Paperbook Original followed in 1957. The heart of the new line was the reissue of titles formerly printed in the New Classics series; Alvin Lustig’s distinctive black and white jacket designs were revived for the covers. Titles from another lapsed series, the Makers of Modern

\textsuperscript{20} James Laughlin to Henry A. Laughlin, August 5, 1953, Item 976 Folder 2, NDR.
Literature, reappeared as Paperbooks beginning in 1961. The first Paperbook title, Federico García Lorca’s *Three Tragedies* immediately demonstrated the benefits of the new format: its sales rose from 450 a year in hardcover to 10,000 in paper.\(^{21}\)

Adoption as course textbooks accounted for most sales; indeed, a report on the industry estimated that 60 to 90 percent of quality paperback sales were made in “college communities.” The new format had a dramatic effect away from campus as well, as MacGregor’s informal assessments of bookstore sales showed. In 1959, Kroch and Brentano’s reported that New Directions paperback sales doubled over the previous year. Their competitor, Evergreen Books, sold almost three times as many titles as New Directions, but, MacGregor noted, had an unmanageable 140 titles in print. Despite Laughlin’s initial fear of running short of titles, New Directions quickly

\(^{21}\) James Laughlin to Alfred Knopf, December 23, 1953, and September 2, 1954, Item 930 Folder 4, NDR; Corbett, Typescript, Item 6 Folder 2, WCA.
converted its backlist to paperback and by 1959 showed a profit as a result of the higher sales volume.\textsuperscript{22}

The quality paperback business boosted the bottom line, but also forced changes at New Directions. The demands of marketing paperbacks made it “absolutely essential” that books be designed in a standard size because bookstores, trying to cope with larger inventories, balked at displaying anything unusual, with “disastrous” sales results. Larger production-runs placed new demands on the length of books as well; books needed to be printed in “even forms,” meaning that the book was entirely composed of some combination of folded signatures of 64 or 32 pages. Any special handling required at the “big presses” was prohibitively expensive. As the press devoted its energies to paperbacks, the selection of titles changed as well. Turning down a translation of Schiller’s \textit{William Tell}, Laughlin explained that paperback titles had to combine “stature with appeal”;

\textsuperscript{22} Alan C. Gillespie (Book Report Service) to paperback publishers, [no date], Item 4690 Folder 2; [Illegible] to James Laughlin, January 14, 1960, Item 4690 Folder 1, NDR; Corbett, Typescript, Item 6 Folder 2, WCA.
the latter quality was comprised of potential for college use. Only titles expected to sell more than a thousand copies each year could be profitably printed in paper covers.23

The years in which New Directions developed its paperback line were years of modest success and modest experimentation for New Directions. The posthumous celebrity of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas helped sales of his poetry and, in response, New Directions packaged some of Thomas’s prose from the 1930s, an unfinished novel and short stories, many of which had been published by New Directions as early as 1939. The book, Adventures in the Skin Trade was a minor bestseller in 1955. The attention surrounding the Beats led to other successes in poetry publishing. Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s A Coney Island of the Mind (1958), became a steady seller, in part due to Ferlinghetti’s association with the Beats. New

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23 First four quotations taken from a later explanation of the demands of the paperback form, James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, March 1, 1971, Box 338, Jargon Society Records, SUNY Buffalo (hereafter JSR); James Laughlin to Ronald Mitchell, August 21, 1959, Item 4635, NDR; James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, March 21, 1974, Box 339, JSR.
Directions published Beat poet Gregory Corso’s *The Happy Birthday of Death* in 1960. Efforts to introduce new authors were concentrated in the annual anthologies, though 1956 saw the publication of *Playbook*, in which Tennessee Williams introduced a collection of five plays by young playwrights, and a 1957 collection, *Fifteen by Three*, gathered short stories by three new authors.

New Directions also benefitted from the liberalization in censorship by reissuing work by controversial authors. Following the success of *Lolita*, New Directions issued new editions of Nabokov’s study of Gogol and his novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. By the end of 1961, the year of *Tropic of Cancer*, New Directions had eleven Henry Miller books in print. Following the *Fanny Hill* decision, New Directions even advertised an “unexpurgated” book of its own, a new translation of Louis-Ferdinand Celine’s *Journey to the End of the Night*. New Directions did not intend to pay for the risks taken by others, however; when *Evergreen Review*
was confiscated in Hicksville, the publicity director, Ned Erbe, assured Laughlin that they would not pay for their ads unless the issue was released. At the same time, Erbe recommended that they place an ad in the following issue, since the censorship “may stimulate their circulation when they publish again.” As the thrilling sense of liberation dissipated in 1971, Laughlin reflected with some satisfaction that New Directions had not entered fully into the sexual or political upheavals of the times. Noting that sales of the New Directions Annual drooped year by year, he suspected that “we weren’t political enough, or lubricious enough.”

The victories against censorship had only temporarily solved a deeper problem for literary publishing: concentrating the attention of the reading public. Laughlin founded New Directions to provide an avenue to publication for authors of superior literary ability neglected by a commercially-minded press. The

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proliferation of little magazines and presses since World War II changed the situation; by 1960, in Laughlin’s view, bookstores and libraries could not keep up with the variety of offerings. Superior writing, though not neglected, was lost in the overwhelming variety. As Laughlin explained to Reed Whittemore, literary magazines and publishers needed higher standards and more self-restraint, so good writers could claim public attention. The other side of the equation was the failure in the mainstream press to review “serious writing.” As Laughlin later recalled, newspapers outside New York City carried too few book reviews because publishers did little truly national advertising. He thought the Times Literary Supplement provided a model superior to the New York Times because it ran more short reviews, up to sixty in a single issue. Nor could the publisher rely on the book clubs to solve the problem of too many titles and too little guidance for the public. New Directions’ 1967 “basic press list” for publicity campaigns included only three book clubs, Book-of-the-
Month Club, Readers' Subscription, and the already doomed Mid-Century Book Society. Irving Kristol at the Readers' Subscription had long lamented even that club's members as "a pseudo-literary lot," too concerned with literary fashion to be steered to the best writing. The colleges and universities, where New Directions sold so many of its books, had become the models for propagating high literary standards.25

The readers concentrated in classrooms and college towns bought New Directions' books in unprecedented numbers, but supplying them with inexpensive books placed continual pressure on the publisher and the entire distribution network to increase sales volume. The jobbers, middlemen who supplied retail outlets with paperbacks, demanded higher discounts in exchange for their large orders. The usual bookstore discount was 40% of the cover price; jobbers had customarily received 46%, but in 1960, A&A Distributors of Boston, which controlled

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25 James Laughlin to Reed Whittemore, August 29, 1961, Item 1767, NDR; Laughlin, "Art (Part 2)," 140; "Basic Press List," [1967], Item 3089 Folder 2; Irving Kristol to James Laughlin, December 21, 1961, Item 4708 Folder 3, NDR.
paperback distribution to Jordan Marsh Co. insisted on a 50% discount, and even New Directions could not afford to lose their business. MacGregor negotiated a minimum order of 400 books a month and 150 copies of each new title, a deal that became a template for arrangements with other paperback distributors: American News, Baker and Taylor, Magna, and smaller regional jobbers. New Directions still paid its own regional salesmen a commission on books sold through the jobbers, but cut the rate as the jobbers squeezed the publisher. Everyone depended on volume to make up for smaller profit margins per unit.26

Booksellers, faced with making space for a growing variety of titles and number of books, also looked to publishers for help in the form of “rack allowance,” usually a credit to help the bookseller pay for book display racks. Robert MacGregor resisted this trend when he could. Wary of requests for rack allowance from new stores, which might not prove to be

26 Robert MacGregor to Aaron Rabinovitz (A&A Distributors) [includes handwritten note from MacGregor to Laughlin], January 20, 1960; Robert MacGregor to Fred Harper, June 8, 1960, and October 2, 1961, Item 4690 Folder 1; Robert MacGregor to Carl J. Smalley, June 20, 1960, Item 4719 Folder 3, NDR.
good outlets for New Directions, MacGregor contacted the American Book Publishing Council to ask if it would potentially be an illegal restraint of trade to share information with other publishers on their rack allowance policies. When A&A Distributors asked for rack allowance on behalf of Jordan Marsh Co., MacGregor drew the line, declaring that “paperback publishers feel that these requests . . . are something of a hold-up.” If New Directions paid rack allowance in addition to higher discounts and salesmen’s commissions it would lose money on each book Jordan Marsh sold. MacGregor agreed to other requests for help with racks, including one from an Indiana college bookstore that ordered directly from New Directions.  

In addition to helping with display, bookstores also depended increasingly on jobbers or publishers’ representatives to help manage their stock, and New Directions’ small sales force struggled to keep up.

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27 Robert MacGregor to John J. Peters (American Book Publishing Council), January 25, 1960; Robert MacGregor to Aaron Rabinovitz, June 20, 1960; Robert MacGregor to David R. Stipp (Curry’s Campus Bookstores Inc.), November 11, 1960, Item 4690 Folder 1, NDR.
One bookstore manager told MacGregor that Evergreen sales doubled in 1960 while New Directions increased only 30% because Evergreen had someone check the store’s stock weekly.²⁸

New Directions, like other quality paperback publishers, met demands from other vital business partners: college bookstores, libraries, and even warehouses. College bookstores faced rising overhead and began to demand a full 40% trade discount on course-adoptions, which had customarily received a reduced discount. James Laughlin consulted some publishing colleagues who advised him that, in this case also, New Directions must accede to the demand and should try to get concessions in return.

MacGregor asked college stores to limit their returns and, when they refused, complained that the stores did not deserve a trade discount if they would not invest in their stock. Similarly, established library wholesalers asked to be given the same high discounts as the jobbers, who were undercutting the wholesalers’

²⁸ Robert MacGregor to George Stewart, January 17, 1961, Item 4690 Folder 1, NDR.
business with libraries. MacGregor refused on the grounds that the jobbers received their discount only because of the large volume they handled. If paperbacks meant higher volume to bookstores and jobbers, from the perspective of the warehouse they could spell reduced turnover. New Directions’ warehouse in New Jersey informed them that their paperback inventory had grown faster than shipments, thus their books occupied more warehouse space. The warehouse was forced to raise its rates.29

All of these pressures drove James Laughlin to pursue a business alliance with a larger publisher. The decisive factor, related like the others to the quality paperback, was the impossibility of tracking orders and sales with a small staff. New Directions could not solve the problem by hiring more staff and raising overhead, nor did New Directions’ business justify the investment in a computer system. With the

29 James Laughlin to Robert MacGregor, August 5, 1959; Robert MacGregor to Russell Reynolds (National Association of College Stores Inc.), October 20, 1959 and January 6, 1960, Item 4635; Robert MacGregor to George Dieter, June 13, 1960, Item 4690 Folder 1; Philip Owens (Wilmor Warehouse and Shipping Company Inc.), April 7, 1961, Item 848 Folder 1, NDR.
help of Robert MacGregor, who once steered Laughlin away from an entangling alliance with a larger publisher, Laughlin arranged for J.B. Lippincott Co. of Philadelphia to take over sales, warehousing, inventory, shipping, billing, accounting, and cost records for New Directions. Laughlin emphasized to business associates, including the director of New Directions' advertising firm, that the arrangement was not a merger and that editorial selection, production, advertising, and some promotion remained in New Directions' hands. Laughlin hoped the arrangement would do more than relieve the most immediate problems plaguing the publisher. He entered the arrangement with high expectations of Lippincott's large sales force, which specialized in college and library sales. Although Laughlin insisted on retaining control over book design, he was willing to use Lippincott's standard sizes if it allowed New Directions to produce its books with Lippincott's printers. Laughlin
believed printers often delayed New Directions' small orders in favor of larger accounts. 30

Laughlin betrayed no fear that he was losing anything essential with the loss of some of his independence as a publisher, nor did he ever complain afterward, even when fear of the Lippincott family's opinion influenced his publishing decisions, as it did in his consideration of purchasing Grove Press (see Chapter 4). For years, Laughlin had reminded authors that his reliance on loans from his own family placed certain restrictions on his publishing; his decision to depend on Lippincott signaled his acceptance of those restrictions. The arrangement preserved what Laughlin considered essential, control over artistic choices. The choices that might have threatened the arrangement, particularly publishing books that might be charged with obscenity, were choices that Laughlin did not expect to make, and by 1970 Lippincott itself

30 James Laughlin, News release, November 1, 1961, Item 848 Folder 1; James Laughlin to Mort Junger, November 2, 1961, Item 4535 Folder 2; James Laughlin to June Degnan, November 1, 1961, Item 3018 Folder 1; James Laughlin to Mr. [C.W.] Petersen (J.B. Lippincott), July 13, 1961, Item 848 Folder 1, NDR.
would be applying its standards in a less restrictive climate.

Laughlin and MacGregor were disappointed that Lippincott could not free them from the constant demands of "house keeping." Laughlin lamented that Lippincott's requirements kept them almost as busy as their independent arrangements had. The more efficient large publisher insisted that New Directions schedule its publications accurately, control its stock more rigorously, and coordinate promotional efforts with Lippincott. As Lippincott increased sales of each title, Laughlin found himself reducing the number of titles so that New Directions could keep up with Lippincott's demands. Turning down a manuscript by poet Jonathan Williams, Laughlin explained that New Directions was reduced to the six or eight "writers whom we have done in a major way." Laughlin may have exaggerated to soften the blow for Williams, but two years later Laughlin promised again to be "ruthless" in cutting New Directions' list down to its "core program." This time Laughlin addressed
his publicity director, who was frustrated with the delays that continued to plague production. Laughlin explained that the demand for reprinting the existing paperbacks filled the production schedule, crowding out the new titles.\(^{31}\)

Although Laughlin sought freedom from housekeeping, he did not try to use the Lippincott arrangement to escape from all the less artistic demands of his business. The shrinking of New Directions’ front list allowed more attention to be placed on the commercial presentation of those authors that constituted the “core program,” and Laughlin threw himself into the task. To welcome William Carlos Williams back into the fold in 1961, New Directions planned a publicity campaign for *The Farmers’ Daughters*, a collection of short stories springing from Williams’ experience as a doctor. Laughlin went to Lippincott, which published medical books, for their publicity mailing list for doctors.

\(^{31}\) James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, August 29, 1962, Box 337, JSR; James Laughlin to Ned Erbe, February 15, 1964, Item 531 Folder 2, NDR.
For Henry Miller’s *Books in My Life*, his autobiography as a reader, Laughlin thought of marketing to aspiring writers after seeing an article on the “would-be writer industry.” He asked his advertising firm to investigate how to reach the “sad sacks who want to be writers,” who “apparently exist in vast numbers.” Laughlin did not blanch at allying himself with vanity presses and predatory mail-order editors. Another purely commercial task that fell to Laughlin was the organization of the house as a corporation in 1964. To attract a little capital at last, Laughlin sold fifty percent of the stock; he, MacGregor, and Smyth retained the rest. The company was never valuable enough to have its stock listed, and the capitalization had little measurable effect.\(^{32}\)

As New Directions passed its thirtieth anniversary in 1966, it was much more closely tied to other institutions than it had been ten years earlier. It was linked to the higher education market and

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\(^{32}\) James Laughlin to Mort Junger, November 2, 1961, Item 4535 Folder 2; James Laughlin to Mort Junger, October 21, 1963, Item 4596 Folder 1, NDR.
existed in symbiosis with a large publishing house. Laughlin’s pride at violating the principles of for-profit business mingled with his satisfaction at his long career as a businessman. When an editor at Lippincott asked for advice on publishing poetry, Laughlin seemed to relish his description of the difficulty of poetry as a business proposition. Only a small percentage of poets would ever make a publisher any money, Laughlin explained, and the publisher could expect to wait ten or twenty years before those poets would be recognized. Anthology fees would begin to repay the investment, and only when paperback editions could be sold to the college market would the publisher see a significant return. Later, after Laughlin was named to the board of directors at J.B. Lippincott in 1973, modestly protesting that he had “no head for business,” Laughlin answered another inquiry about introducing poetry at Lippincott by saying that, though he supported it in principle, as a director of the corporation he had to “shake my head sadly” because
his own inside knowledge indicated that it was the
wrong field for a publisher, such as Lippincott, with
normal expectations about profitability. 33

Though Laughlin positively discouraged commercial
publishers from undertaking the literary publishing he
once so vehemently called them to, he further softened
his stance on the ability of the literary author to
seek financial reward, even authorizing celebrity
endorsements by writers. Jonathan Williams may well
have been surprised that Laughlin defended Marianne
Moore when she appeared alongside Mickey Spillane in
one of Braniff Airlines’ “odd couple” television
commercials. “I think she certainly has the right to
exploit her personality for profit,” Laughlin wrote,
“as long as she doesn’t let it touch her work.”
Laughlin, who thought Random House would dirty William
Carlos Williams, had now redrawn the line around the
artist’s sacrosanct creative work, further enlarging
his or her freedom to act in the marketplace. Perhaps

33 James Laughlin to Edward L. Burlingame (J.B. Lippincott),
November 12, 1970, Item 848 Folder 4; James Laughlin to Joseph M.
Lippincott, Jr., May 21, 1973, Item 848 Folder 6; James Laughlin
to Edward Burlingame, June 17, 1975, Item 848 Folder 8, NDR.
opportunities like endorsements came to poets or New Directions authors so seldom that Laughlin did not foresee a serious risk to artistic integrity. He feared the ubiquitous pressure to turn from poetry to the novel rather than the blandishments of celebrity culture. Laughlin was far from criticizing Henry Miller’s obvious temptation when Grove Press courted him with a $50,000 advance for the Tropics, though Miller had previously given many reasons why the books should not be published. Laughlin praised Grove’s terms and urged Miller to take their “stupendous” offer. Grove’s aggressiveness also relieved New Directions of the embarrassment of controlling the rights to books it appeared too timid to publish.34

Literary writers and publishers, Laughlin believed, must rely on the support of the foundations, the universities, and the federal government. He saw little hope that the commercial publishing industry could sustain the literary life of the United States.

Laughlin does not seem to have made a clear distinction between the work he wanted the non-profit foundations and the government to do and the private subsidy he gave New Directions; the difference was in the giant scale of the foundations’ and government’s resources. From the time of his work with the Ford Foundation, Laughlin consistently expressed his belief in funding literature from outside the market. He advised Whittemore in 1961 that only the foundations could save the worthy little magazines, and that they should use their largess to enforce high literary standards and limit literary overproduction. When book publishers faced rapid inflation in production costs in the early 1970s, Laughlin came to believe that only the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) could sustain literary publishing. New Directions investigated computers that automated the costly composition process, but found that the results required labor-intensive corrections. As Laughlin wrote to Donald Allen, the only alternative to NEA help would be for poets to learn to prepare their own
texts using the IBM Composer. Laughlin actively assisted writers in the search for university largess, directing Edward Dahlberg and Kenneth Patchen to the University of Texas at Austin, where the Humanities Research Center dominated the literary manuscript market. As Laughlin explained to Jonathan Williams, Dahlberg hoped to receive an regular annual salary as payment for his collection, similar to New Directions' royalty payments to Henry Miller.35

New Directions' adaptations did not make it immune from business difficulties or ensure profitability. The government cut support for libraries in the 1970s, making the publisher more dependent on sales to students. Accordingly, books had to be kept short so they could be priced low. The shift in academic priorities away from the humanities also affected New Directions' college business. In 1974, J.B. Lippincott announced that its Higher

35 James Laughlin to Reed Whittemore, August 29, 1961, Item 1767, NDR; James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, October 15, 1973, Box 338, JSR; James Laughlin to Donald Allen, August 21, 1974, Item 33 Folder 3, NDR; James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, August 29, 1962, Box 337; James Laughlin to Jonathan Williams, March 28, 1966, Box 338, JSR.
Education Division, responsible for 23% of all New Directions sales, would no longer handle humanities books. New Directions' college sales became the province of salesmen from the Trade Division, who had to build up relationships with campus stores and faculty. Four years later, New Directions replaced Lippincott as its distribution partner with a giant in the smaller world of academic humanities and social science publishing, W.W. Norton and Co.\(^\text{36}\)

Despite these setbacks, New Directions showed signs of renewed strength after 1975, finally reversing the contractions that had diminished its role in literary innovation. In 1976, New Directions initiated the first new series since the Paperbooks, the Wisdom series, which originated with the Sheldon Press of Great Britain, an imprint of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. Brief anthologies of religious texts with explanatory introductions, the Wisdom books ranged in topic over

\(^{36}\) Corporate records show that New Directions showed a profit only sporadically in the 1960s, see Items 4797-4802; James Laughlin to Donald Allen, August 21, 1974, Item 33 Folder 3; Fred Martin to James Laughlin, August 27, 1974, Item 848 Folder 7, NDR.
traditions of mysticism from Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The decision to publish the series may reflect Laughlin’s continuing interest in religious topics, a legacy from his association with Thomas Merton and from his travels in India and Burma for Intercultural Publications. When Merton died accidentally in 1968, Laughlin personally undertook the editing of his Asian Journal, which involved Laughlin in two years of work with Hindu and Buddhist religious writings.

New Directions also returned to the publication of first novels in 1976 and 1977, a species rare on its lists for decades. These included The Life of Jesus by Toby Olson, a well-established poet, Eelgrass by Joe Ashby Porter, and The Hospital Ship by Martin Bax, an English doctor. Olson went on to publish two more novels with New Directions and later published with Random House and Simon and Schuster. Other authors recently established at New Directions, Frederick Busch and Walter Abish, brought out new books as well. New Directions even took a chance on a
new kind of experimental poetry, publishing the improvisatory “talk poet” David Antin’s *Talking at the Boundaries*. Antin, known for composing poems before a live audience, seems an unlikely choice for the formally demanding Laughlin, but it shows a determination to support new voices and techniques.

New Directions’ mid-1970s efflorescence contrasts again with Grove Press’s struggle to survive. If New Directions risked calcification during its many periods of contraction, its dedication to its chosen fields and authors was unparalleled. The continuing experimentation suggests that the bouts of retrenchment did not result from fatigue or disillusionment, but with the sober need to husband resources and maintain the business without overexpansion. If anyone was in a good position to prove that innovative literary publishing could support a publishing house, it was Laughlin, who devoted himself to building a sound business. Laughlin, however, believed his experience proved that even with a powerful distribution mechanism delivering
paperbacks to the college market, New Directions could not be consistently profitable.
Conclusion

The members of the permanent innovative press followed different trajectories, but all clearly show the decline of the discourses that brought them to cultural prominence. The pervasive questioning and challenging of cultural hierarchy that characterized the last thirty years has vitiated both middlebrow culture and the aura of the literary publisher. New Directions continues in the path Laughlin established in the 1960s, mixing occasional new literary titles with a backlist enjoying strong college sales. Since James Laughlin’s death in 1997, the house has operated under the guidance of trustees.

George Braziller Inc. continued its work in niche markets for art books and artistic facsimiles, such as the remarkable facsimile of Henri Matisse’s Jazz. Braziller continues to add gradually to its backlist and has enjoyed a resurgence of interest in Janet Frame. George Braziller still exercises his independence with occasional acts of daring; in 1994, he published a book of essays in support of the
embattled Salman Rushdie when other publishers declined.

Barney Rosset sold Grove Press in 1985 and was forced out by the new owner, Ann Getty, and her partner, George Weidenfeld. The combined house of Grove Weidenfeld was almost sold to Simon and Schuster or Penguin Group in 1990, but instead it merged in 1993 with the Atlantic Monthly Press under the leadership of Morgan Entrekin. Though the backlist has continued to be the strength of Grove’s descendants, the imprint has always been used for new titles as well.

These venerable houses are no longer the centers of publishing energy or cultural excitement that they once were. In part, their role, imposed on them by the impossibility of competing for recognized authors, has been studied and adopted by the large corporate presses. When Random House bought Alfred A. Knopf in 1960, and was bought in turn by R.C.A. five years later, it was taken as a portent by some that creative publishing was falling under grey-flannel corporate
management. In part, however, American corporations were learning from the success of institutions like Knopf and the permanent innovative press that embraced experimentation and idiosyncrasy in product selection. The late 1960s saw the popularization of the editor imprint pioneered by Helen and Kurt Wolff at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1961. The arrangement allowed a top editor to run his or her imprint almost independently, especially with regard to manuscript selection. Grove editor Richard Seaver left for an imprint at Viking in 1971; his colleague Fred Jordan went to Grosset and Dunlap in 1978.

Taking Random House’s Pantheon Books as a model, large publishers have continued to create new imprints, often used for prestigious literary publishing. For example, Putnam Berkley, now part of Penguin Group, created Riverhead Books in 1994 to publish hardcover and quality paperback books under the star editor Susan Petersen Kennedy. Riverhead’s offerings are mixed, combining the novels of Afghanistan-born Khaled Hosseini, reprints of Jack
Kerouac, and books by financial guru Suze Orman. Riverhead solved the problem of lacking a backlist by diversifying immediately, in the tradition of the corporate publisher. The independence of prestige imprints means they are not subsidized by the other divisions of their parent publisher.

At the same time that large publishers have sought to be more creative by giving editors more individual control, small publishers have learned to make arrangements for sales and distribution that allow them to reach a larger audience. The New Press, for example, founded in 1990 as a non-profit with funds from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, is distributed, like New Directions, by W.W. Norton. Over one hundred other small presses, including City Lights Publishers, Seven Stories, Copper Canyon Press, and Turtle Point Press, have joined in Consortium Book Sales and Distribution to pool resources. Some of these publishers occupy a position in the industry similar to that of the permanent innovative press.
Finally, new opportunities are arising for self-publishing and self-marketing that are beginning to be felt among established publishers. Teenage homeschooler Christopher Paolini began by self-publishing and embarked on a book tour with his parents; after Knopf published his fantasy adventure Eragon it became a bestseller and big-budget motion picture. Brunonia Barry’s self-published mystery novel The Lace Reader began as a popular selection with local New England reading clubs before it was eventually published by William Morrow. These successes suggest that large publishers may be able to reduce their investment in untested manuscripts by scouting self-published books. Other writers are abandoning conventional publishing in favor of on-line publishing. Successful on-line texts also seem destined to be issued as traditional books by the large publishers.

Despite the unprecedented volume of publishing activity, cultural critics who remember or study the 1950s and 1960s agree that the cultural importance of
literary innovation has faded. In 1970, Alfred Kazin already detected that intellectuals assigned less importance to literature and literary criticism. Morris Dickstein later reflected that after the 1960s, the “rituals of the avant-garde” continued, but no new group of literary radicals replaced Beckett or the Beats in the popular imagination. Before the sixties were over, Dickstein wrote, “Literature had ceased to be a main ingredient in the cultural mix.”¹

The proliferation of new media have indeed changed “the mix,” and few literary events still seem to affect everyone, Oprah and Harry Potter notwithstanding, but the sense of loss is corrected by the recognition that the general reader was a goal rather than an achieved reality. The fame of Grove Press today, for example, rests preeminently on its legal victories, which truly did affect the shared culture. In historically specific terms, the permanent innovative press presided over the end of

the lengthy dissipation of the genteel vision of an authoritative, coherent high culture that addressed society as a whole. The expectation of a socially shared response to cultural innovation depended on a background of consensus that is now lacking. The flourishing of Grove Press, New Directions, and George Braziller Inc., however, can be seen as the survival in an inhospitable time of the idea of shared values and a shared cultural project.
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Within a footnote, if consecutive citations of manuscript sources contain identical information (box, folder, or archive location), it is included only in the last citation.

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