



HAL
open science

Lise Jaillant, Cheap Modernism. Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde

Christine Reynier

► **To cite this version:**

Christine Reynier. Lise Jaillant, Cheap Modernism. Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde. *Études britanniques contemporaines - Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines*, 2019, 56, 10.4000/ebc.7073 . hal-04450366

HAL Id: hal-04450366

<https://hal.science/hal-04450366>

Submitted on 10 Feb 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Études britanniques contemporaines

Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines

56 | 2019
"Revolutions"
Comptes rendus

Lise Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism. Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde*

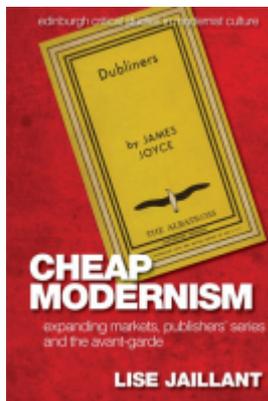
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 184 p.

CHRISTINE REYNIER
<https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.7073>

Référence(s) :

Lise Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism. Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 184 p. ISBN: 9781474417242

Texte intégral



Afficher l'image

- 1 Taking her cue from such scholars as Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, Patrick Collier or Ann Ardis who claims that modernism emerged 'in a publishing ecosystem that was far richer, and far more complexly diversified, than the first several generations of bibliographic scholarship on modernism recognized', Lise Jaillant



explores the publishing context of modernist texts, focusing on reprint series. She thus aims at remapping the landscape of early twentieth-century print culture, which has so far referred exclusively to periodicals. By focusing on cheap reprint editions, which have not always been archived by libraries, she means to understand better how they helped to enlarge the audience of major modernist writers whose works were unavailable to the many in their first limited and/or expensive editions. Cheap series with a uniform physical format had developed throughout the nineteenth century in Britain as well as in France (with Hachette) and Germany (with Tauchnitz); they reached a large audience, sold 'highbrow' and 'middlebrow' books, and helped readers abroad discover books in English. Studying their role and impact in the early twentieth century, as Jaillant does, may definitely blur the boundary between modernism and 'popular' literature.

- 2 This book comes as a follow-up on her first one, *Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon*, which deals with The Modern Library, a cheap series created in New York in 1917 that reprinted, for example, *Dubliners* and *Mrs Dalloway*, and contributed in the mid- to late 1920s to making modernist works available in cheap form in the USA, Canada, South America, Europe and the Far East. *Cheap Modernism* is based on archival work: Jaillant examines *urtexts*, letters from writers to their publishers, advertisements for the books discussed; she investigates the life and work of publishers, the role they played in the diffusion of modernism in Britain and abroad. With her, we look behind the scenes and discover how cheap series turned the 'highbrow' movement modernism initially was into a mainstream phenomenon.
- 3 Chapter one offers a history of the World's Classics series; created in 1901 by Grant Richards, it met with immediate success, not so much because of its Victorian title list as because of the material aspect of its books. When it went bankrupt in 1905, it was bought by Oxford University Press and run by Henry Frowde whose marketing strategy consisted in emphasizing the accuracy of the text and commissioning introductions by eminent writers who brought new prestige to old books, as well as distinguished scholars who consecrated the series. World's Classics produced various formats at different prices (with the first pocket editions meant for travellers and bound ones for private libraries). Humphrey Milford added more popular texts to the series—ghost stories and detective fiction by E.A. Poe, Conan Doyle, G.K. Chesterton or Wilkie Collins—an unusual move for a cheap series of classics; they also came with modern(ist) illustrations that positioned the series in between tradition and modernity. In January 1927, Milford asked T.S. Eliot to write an introduction to *The Moonstone*; Eliot, who had praised the novel in the *New Criterion*, now wrote that it was 'the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels', thus attracting readers to the book and ensuring that it resurfaced as a canonical detective novel. Milford renewed the experience with Virginia Woolf, asking her to write an introduction to Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, a book and a writer she had already praised in her essays. Woolf's introduction, like Eliot's, contributed to highlight the modernity of the novel introduced and increase the World's Classics series' sales while it also boosted her own reputation among 'common readers' as a canonical writer comparable to Sterne. Such introductions have ensured the enduring success of reprints of classics.
- 4 In 1926, Jonathan Cape launched The Travellers' Library and Martin Secker, The New Adelphi Library while the 'Indicent Books' debate was raging in Britain, a debate traced in detail in chapter two. They used the subversive reputation of James Joyce (whose novel *Ulysses* had been banned in Britain) and D.H. Lawrence (whose novel *The Rainbow* had been censored for obscenity) to promote their series and reach a wider reading public. While in the 1920's, few—even in the middle-classes—could afford to buy recent books and borrowed them from circulating libraries, the launch of the three-and-six penny libraries contributed to expanding the book-buying public. Cape's series, unlike World's Classics or Everyman's Library, specialized in reprints of modern texts but through sophisticate binding, gave them the status of classics and the small format made it easy for travellers to pack them in a suitcase; Cape sold The Travellers' Library worldwide. Cape knew how to trade on writers' celebrity while avoiding censorship

(even if he failed in the case of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*). Joyce's *Dubliners* and D.H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy*, uncontroversial works, were selected in 1926 to introduce the two modernist writers to a public aware of their reputation yet forbidden access to their banned novels *Ulysses* and *The Rainbow*; Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* followed in 1930 and sold well. As for Martin Secker, who had published D.H. Lawrence's *Poems* and *Women in Love*, he launched The New Adelphi Library in 1925 with 'The Captain's Doll' among the first volumes of his cheap series; nine other works of fiction and non-fiction of Lawrence would follow in this elegant format. Even if Cape and Secker helped to promote subversive modernist writers, they were much more cautious than their American counterpart, The Modern Library, which clearly positioned itself against censorship. Both Secker's and Cape's cheap series suffered from the competition of paperbacks—namely, Penguin—in the 1930s and folded in 1935 for the first, and during World War Two for the second. But they had shown that Joyce and Lawrence could be read by ordinary readers and that cheap books and series did not mean 'cheap literature'.

5 Chapter Three is devoted to Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* and the role the Phoenix Library played in relation to it. First published in 1918 for 'a publique d'élite' (*sic*), in Lewis's own words, *Tarr* was reprinted in 1928 by the Phoenix Library, a distinguished series created by Chatto & Windus, presented at length here. Jaillant, who reconstructs the genesis of this satirical novel and the history of its publication, argues that the Phoenix Library played a major role: by offering Lewis to reprint his novel in a cheap edition that would reach a large public worldwide, it led him to rewrite for the ordinary reader a book that had been deemed 'unreadable' by many and Arnold Bennett in particular, thus steering it away from its initial experimental and uncompromising form. The Phoenix Library also reprinted and promoted many other modernist texts, from Clive Bell's and Roger Fry's art criticism to Richard Aldington's daring *Death of a Hero*.

6 In the next chapter, Jaillant focuses on Tauchnitz and Albatross, German publishers that offered access to contemporary British literature in English at affordable prices to a wide audience in Europe, among them expatriates like Joyce. From the late 1920s onwards, Tauchnitz reprinted classics but also novels by Joyce, Woolf or Wyndham Lewis. Founded in 1930, Albatross published only detective fiction and modernist texts, subversive ones (just as the Pegasus Press had published *The Well of Loneliness* in Paris in 1928 when it was banned in Britain) and adopted a modern design for its books in keeping with the modernity of its list. Both managers-in-chief, Christian Wegner and John Holroyd-Reece, did a lot to promote modernism, its cosmopolitanism and its 'controversial' writings (they marketed unbowlerized editions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Ulysses*). In 1934, Albatross bought the long-established firm, Tauchnitz, and went on turning modernist literature into a mass market.

7 Chapter Five deals with the Hogarth Press, often represented as a hobby for Woolf or a 'highbrow' publishing house. In the wake of critics such as E.W. Gordon or Helen Southworth who have pointed out that the Press also published 'low' and 'middlebrow' texts, Jaillant shows that the Hogarth Press created in 1929 a uniform edition at five shillings a volume. Woolf had her work collected in the Uniform edition attractive, high-quality small-size volumes; she thus made her work available to the ordinary reader at a reasonable price while branding it as 'collectable', that is, canonical. By 1929, the Hogarth Press was flourishing; it could afford to publish *A Room of One's Own* in the Uniform edition and sell it at five shillings, like her previous books. This marketing strategy ensured the success of the essay, which two months after its first publication was already in its third edition. By bringing to the fore the Uniform edition, Jaillant deconstructs the myth of the Hogarth Press and Woolf herself as elitist and highbrow—a myth initially constructed as far as Woolf is concerned by Q.D. Leavis. She also posits the Hogarth Press as a major publishing house, with an aggressive commercial strategy: with the Uniform edition it could use bestsellers, such as *A Room of One's Own* or *Flush*, to attract readers to other more difficult works by Woolf; it also gave a new life to books like *The Voyage Out* which had gone out of print, or turned *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* and above all, *A Room of One's Own*, into commercial successes; it

further encouraged Harcourt to publish Woolf's work in a cheap edition in the United States.

- 8 The cheap series knew their heydays in Britain in the mid-1930s. While the Modern Library was still thriving in the 1950s in the United States, Albatross, Tauchnitz, the Phoenix Library and the Traveller's Library faced difficulties in the late 1930s and 1940s, because of the war, the shortage of paper and the difficulties in distribution but mainly because of the competition of the Penguin paperbacks created in 1935—and the series which survived, like Oxford World's Classics did so because they became quality paperbacks. Attempts to relaunch the series after the Second World War were thwarted by rising production costs and changing reading tastes. However, Jaillant resurrects them for our greatest pleasure.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Christine Reynier, « Lise Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism. Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde* », *Études britanniques contemporaines* [En ligne], 56 | 2019, mis en ligne le 01 mars 2019, consulté le 10 février 2024. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/7073> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.7073>

Auteur

Christine Reynier

Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, EMMA EA741

Articles du même auteur

Catherine Bernard commente *Mrs Dalloway de Virginia Woolf* [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 31 | 2006

Image as Text in Leonard Woolf's 'Quack, Quack in Politics' [Texte intégral]

L'image comme texte dans 'Quack, Quack in Politics' (1935) de Leonard Woolf

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 31 | 2006

Shirley BRICOUT, « Le Texte biblique et la réflexion politique dans *Aaron's Rod, Kangaroo* et *The Plumed Serpent* de D. H. Lawrence » [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 32 | 2007

Virginia Woolf's Dischronic Art of Fiction in her Essays [Texte intégral]

Les Essais de Virginia Woolf: un art dischronique de la fiction.

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 33 | 2008

Winifred HOLTBY, *Virginia Woolf. A Critical Memoir (1932)* [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 33 | 2008

ROSENBAUM S.P. (edited and introduced by), *Virginia Woolf. The Platform of Time* [Texte intégral]

Paru dans *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 33 | 2008

Tous les textes...

Droits d'auteur



Le texte seul est utilisable sous licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Les autres éléments (illustrations, fichiers annexes importés) sont « Tous droits réservés », sauf mention contraire.