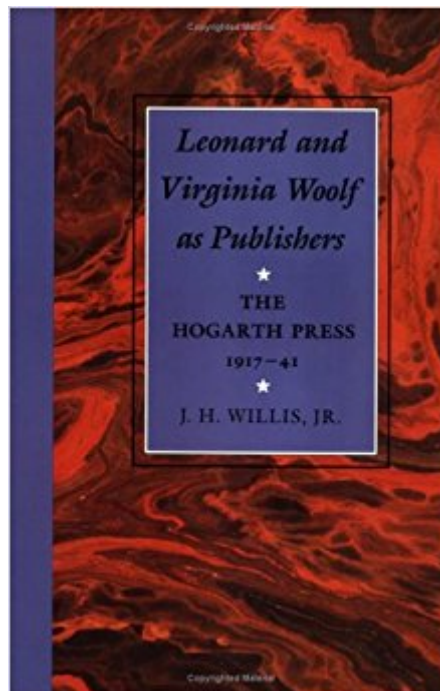




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Leonard And Virginia Woolf As Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-1941



Synopsis

Has any couple in twentieth-century intellectual life so captured and held attention as have Leonard and Virginia Woolf? They have proved endlessly interesting as individuals, partners, writers, modernists, and as the central players in the absorbing drama of Bloomsbury. Yet surprisingly scant attention has been paid to their remarkable achievements as publishers. Now J.H. Willis, Jr., combines wide-ranging literary knowledge with more than ten years of research to enhance forever our appreciation of Leonard and Virginia Woolf as publishers.

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Customer Reviews

In this exemplary work of scholarship, Willis, an English professor at the College of William and Mary, traces the history of Hogarth Press, Leonard and Virginia Woolf's publishing enterprise, from its beginnings as a hand press in their drawing room to its later success as a small, profitable commercial printing press, run in partnership with the poet John Lehmann. In the early years, the Woolfs limited Hogarth Press to literary works, such as short stories by Katherine Mansfield or T. S. Eliot's poetry, but they later published books of political, historical and social importance by such pioneers as Sigmund Freud and John Maynard Keynes. Initially conceived by Leonard Woolf as a diversion for himself and his wife from the demands of their work, Hogarth became the vehicle through which Virginia Woolf was able to publish her writing free from the constraints of editors. A readable and carefully researched addition to Bloomsbury studies. Illustrations not seen by PW.

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Working with records he discovered himself, Willis (English/College of William and Mary) constructs a comprehensive and methodical history of Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press and of its literary and intellectual significance. From its founding with a recreational handpress in 1917 to Virginia's suicide in 1941, the Hogarth Press produced--in pamphlets, series, or in volumes with artistic illustrations and unusual bindings--474 titles constituting a history of modern letters, including poetry, fiction, history, social and political commentary, and a library of psychoanalytic writing. Though demanding, "the dear old Press," as Virginia called it, was for her "life on tap"--a source of energy, therapy, and creative freedom, a freedom she extended by publishing works by her friends in the Bloomsbury group and by their friends: Vita Sackville-West, Katherine Mansfield, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, Robert Graves, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, Laura Riding, and John Crowe Ransom, to name a few. Between the wars, the Woolfs helped to disseminate European culture with translations, some by Virginia herself, of Rilke, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gorki, Dostoyevsky, and, of course--in the International Psychoanalytic Library--Freud and his followers. Politically, the publishers gave voice to women and to such liberal political writers as H.G. Wells and John Maynard Keynes. In an age when major commercial publishers complained of a decline in readership and increase in costs of production, the Woolfs, through their personal supervision, devoted assistants, cautious selection (they rejected *Ulysses*), and good business sense, produced bestsellers while their own creative lives flourished. Always a part of their domestic lives, the press survived the Blitz, economic depression, Virginia's mental collapses, political unrest, and the various demands of temperamental authors. Lucid, unbiased, tactful, Willis offers fresh perspective on English cultural life between the wars--and insight into the perennial lure of the printing press for creative writers. -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

This book is a history of Hogarth Press launched by Leonard and Virginia Woolfe from its founding in 1917 until 1941. It is an interesting and important volume for several reasons. For those interested in these two "Bloomberries," you can see them in an entirely new light as important publishers. Previously, I had read only a bit about Virginia and nothing about Leonard Woolf. I found that Leonard was just a fascinating individual of many talents. A second helpful perspective is the reader gets some intimate glimpses of the creative process engaged in by Virginia as a novelist. Since most of her important works were published by Hogarth, the author (an emeritus professor of English at William & Mary) has been able to cast some new light on Virginia the novelist and her

creative struggles. Third, the Woolfs were at the center of the Bloomsbury group of fascinating individuals, and so they enter the story at various points. We are talking about Keynes, Duncan Grant, Virginia Bell, Vita Sackville-West, and Christopher Isherwood to mention just a few. Fourth, the book comes close to being an intellectual history of the interwar period given that more than 400 important books published by Hogarth. Poetry, novels, Freud's books, Russian translations and much more all emerged from Hogarth and helped define the intellectual currents of this period. Finally, I found the process of publishing itself to be interesting: which books were accepted and which rejected; interaction with authors; competition in the marketplace; these and other topics proved very interesting. Finally, it is just a fun book to read, though long at 438 pages including notes and bibliography, with some very essential illustrations. The author just writes beautifully. This makes for a combination hard to beat.

Prompt (early even) delivery (rushed) and lovely condition at a great price.

For anyone interested in a detailed history of Hogarth Press (Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf), I heartily recommend "Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917 - 1941," by J. H. Willis, Jr., c. 1992. Before reading this book, however, I would read a biography or two of Virginia Woolf, as well as at least one of her unexpurgated diaries, and maybe one or two of her novels, to get a feeling of Leonard and Virginia Woolf. I picked this book up on a whim, expecting it be a rather boring listing of their publications. In fact, Willis provides an outstanding look at the personalities of all involved, including the tension between authors, printers, and publishers. There are so many take-aways from this book. The first take-away is a reminder that success in life is predicated on passion for one's avocation. Leonard and Virginia really had no idea what they were getting into when they decided to buy a printing press but it soon became so much part of their lives, they could not give it up. Some have said (maybe it was Willis himself; I forget where I read it) that the press was the child they never had. The second take-away is the huge effect that one or two individuals can have on history. It is absolutely incredible the number and names of the poets and novelists that were part of the small Bloomsbury group or encouraged by that group. I don't think the group was ever more than a dozen at any one time and yet the influence of the Bloomsbury group was phenomenal. Sure, the modernist period would have happened without the Bloomsbury group but I think one could argue that the group was the catalyst that moved it along much more quickly. The third take-away was the degree to which optimism plays a part despite the adversity. Look at the years the Hogarth Press covered by the Willis book: 1917 to 1941. Both years were

associated with horrendous wars, and worse, at a time when the wars looked their most bleak. In addition, personal tragedies affected both Woolfs during the period they operated their press, but they pressed on (no pun intended). If you are a Virginia Woolf devotee, this book is a must for your library.

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