



## Cheap modernism: expanding markets, publishers' series, and the avant-garde

Amy Hildreth Chen

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Cheap modernism: expanding markets, publishers' series, and the avant-garde**, by Lise Jaillant, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2017, 184 pp., GBP£75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 474417 24 2

*Cheap Modernism: Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series, and the Avant-Garde* depicts how modernism moved from 'highbrow movement into a mainstream phenomenon' owing to publishers' series; cheap reprints that flourished between the turn of the century and the 1930s. Along the way, author Lise Jaillant, a lecturer at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom, discusses how series editors designed their books to encourage collection and display. Jaillant's primary contribution is not expanding the pool of editions by canonical authors that modernist studies should consider – which she does do, and well – but rather how effectively she reveals the aspirations of the readers to whom these books are marketed: those 'eager to acquire the signs of cultural capital' (p. 87) as long as they did not have to spend 'too much money' (p. 126). In this sense, *Cheap Modernism's* contribution is a continuation of the interests Jaillant set out in her previous book.<sup>1</sup>

Each chapter of *Cheap Modernism* is devoted to one publishers' series and a few authors in order to make the argument in each case that reprint editions shaped the careers of writers such as Virginia Woolf. Jaillant's representation of the tension between 'distinctive authors and uniform series' (p. 75) places *Cheap Modernism* squarely in conversation with critics such as Faye Hammill and Loren Glass.

Jaillant models why modernists should consider the editions, not just the titles, they found in their subjects' libraries. She notes the 'fifty Tauchnitz reprints' (p. 97) found in James Joyce's library at the Harry Ransom Center in Texas in order to make the point that even major authors consumed mass-market volumes, even if they may have felt less than enthusiastic about their inclusion in these projects.<sup>2</sup>

Archivists and librarians will find Jaillant's most important reflection in her echo of Michael F. Suarez's admonishment against degressive bibliographies,<sup>3</sup> in which less attention is paid to later editions.<sup>4</sup> Suarez believes and Jaillant agrees that this practice confers lower status to these editions. Both early and late editions should be seen as valuable, for each makes a different contribution.

Valuing a work's entire publication history would change many institutions' collecting policies. Many repositories need to limit the amount of materials they acquire. As a result, they often choose to accept only the first edition of a book. This decision prevents patrons from viewing later editions that contain significant research value even if they are less common. Considering that degressive bibliographies are not much discussed even in the classic work on bibliography,<sup>5</sup> Suarez's and Jaillant's point is a critique of widespread collecting practices. Archivists and librarians could use Jaillant's book to advocate for the value of seeking or retaining later editions.

However, Jaillant's book offers the most to those interested in cultural studies. *Cheap Modernism* traces how autodidacts – readers keen to better educate themselves – created a market for reprint series alongside other educational multivolume sets like anthologies, encyclopedias and collected editions. Significantly, autodidacts did not just want to learn more, but also to let others know what they learned. Publishers responded by choosing designs that made their texts stand out on home bookshelves. By doing so, publishers were able to compete against for-profit circulating libraries and public libraries that offered readers books, but not the opportunity to display what they learned.<sup>6</sup>

Jaillant is sensitive to these publishers' paternalism to working- and middle-class readers. For example, the Traveller's Library advertised their wares as part of a healthy reading diet, while

Oxford World Classics created expunged editions to protect the innocence of their presumably young audience. Yet Jaillant intervenes in this narrative when she observes that censorship often occurred as a result of financial, rather than ethical, motivations. After all, publishers needed to sustain profitable businesses. Legal battles over artistic integrity, and the controversy that would ensue, did not factor into an ideal market-driven strategy.

Jaillant concludes her study on her reflection that a reader's desire to signal his or her upmarket taste is also what led to the demise of publishers' series as a genre. In the end, 'the hardback series were too much associated with the pre-war period, a time when the mere fact of buying books signaled taste and education' (p. 146). Yet such an observation is just as relevant today. As more readers opt for eBooks, major booksellers find themselves in competition with Internet retailers such as Amazon. But maybe today's publishers should remember what they have to offer: readers need something to read, but they also want others to know what they are reading. A Kindle does not advertise to your fellow commuter your upmarket taste in literature like a handy hardback does.

### Endnotes

1. Lisa Jaillant, *Modernism, Middlebrow, and the Literary Canon: The Modern Library Series, 1917–1955*, Pickering and Chatto, London, 2014.
2. On authors' libraries see Amanda Golden's *Annotating Modernism: Marginalia and Pedagogy from Virginia Woolf to the Confessional Poets*, Routledge, London, 2017.
3. Michael F. Suarez, S.J., 'Book History from Descriptive Bibliographies', in Leslie Howsam (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 211–12; as cited in Lise Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism: Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series, and the Avant-Garde*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2017, p. 4.
4. F Madan, EG Duff and S Gibson, 'Standard Descriptions of Printed Books', in *Proceedings and Papers of the Oxford Bibliographical Society*, part 1, 1922–23, pp. 55–64.
5. Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Oak Knoll Press, New York, 1995.
6. 'Middlebrow' literary consumption habits are discussed in Jay Satterfield, *The World's Best Books: Taste, Culture and the Modern Library*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2010, and Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1992.

Amy Hildreth Chen  
University of Iowa

 amy-chen@uiowa.edu

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**Rogue archives: digital cultural memory and media fandom**, by Abigail De Kosnik, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016, x + 430 pp., USD\$45.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 262034 66 1

It's like opening the door of the Tardis: the inside is bigger, wilder and more full of stories than you would have thought. Abigail De Kosnik's *Rogue Archives* cracks into a fascinating and richly complex world, alive with creativity and strongly bound by an abiding sense of community. The 'community of affinity' considered within *Rogue Archives* are the writers of fan-fiction, whose realms are the wide open spaces of the digital rather than the site-bound structures of the past, and whose inhabitants are more likely to be users and producers rather than consumers. A