

Calder & Boyars

By Adam Guy

The list of the London-based publisher Calder & Boyars images a cross-section of the postwar period, representing a significant proportion of the major authors and publishing categories that emerged after 1945. Reflecting the political upheavals of the time, the firm published significant works of feminism (Simone de Beauvoir), black nationalism (Amiri Baraka, Alphaeus Hunton), and anti-imperialism (Henri Alleg). The social changes embodied in the so-called ‘permissive society’ were channelled through works by William Burroughs and Alexander Trocchi. The firm was thoroughgoing, too, in its support of recent aesthetic revolutions. International movements in the theatre (Eugène Ionesco), the novel (Heinrich Böll, Alain Robbe-Grillet), music (John Cage), and the cinema (Ingmar Bergman, Alejandro Jodorowsky) all found prominent place on Calder & Boyars’s list. Closer to home, the firm was invested (in many senses of the word) in an emerging avant-garde in the British novel, publishing new works by writers like Alan Burns, Ann Quin, and Eva Tucker.

None of the names listed above would necessarily evoke modernism in the first instance. Calder & Boyars’s publication of novels by Wyndham Lewis and Samuel Beckett maintained a link to the later developments of modernism in the 1930s, but otherwise the firm’s list points to trends and tendencies of the middle of the twentieth century that exceed or escape modernism’s traditional aesthetic and sociological descriptions. However, through both the authors and texts it published, and the manner in which it presented these authors and texts, Calder & Boyars captured a transitional moment in modernism’s history. This chapter contributes to the still on-going work of what Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz call the temporal ‘expansion’ of the New Modernist Studies.¹ The chapter considers modernism’s status in the 1950s–60s not just as a legacy and an archive with which readers and publishers were coming to terms, but also as an on-going concern that survived beyond the personnel, the times, and the places that characterised its signature articulations. Ultimately, in the context of a dominant culture that

seemed to have rejected modernism, Calder & Boyars embodied modernism's transformations and persistence in the British literary field after the Second World War.

The Modern Movement

John Calder started a publishing company under his own name in 1949. In later years, he described this enterprise as a 'hobby' that coincided with the fact that 'at that point I was a poet'.² Such informality of purpose defined the early years of Calder's publishing activity: Calder published books sporadically, and in a range of genres. Alongside translated works of the nineteenth century by Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, and Gottfried Keller, Calder published historical surveys like Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais's *A History of the American Labour Movement* (1956), and reference works like Harry Felix Swartz's *The Layman's Medical Dictionary* (1955), Jane Koster and Margaret Murray's *New Crochet and Hairpin Work* (1955), and David Ewen's *Encyclopedia of the Opera* (1956). Publications of more recent literary material ranged from a 1955 dual-language collection of poems by the Italian writer Antonia Pozzi, to novels by Martha Dodd (*The Searching Light*, 1956) and Albert Maltz (*A Long Day in a Short Life*, 1957). By publishing both literary texts in translation and literary texts that represented broader struggles for freedom of speech and political belief (Dodd and Maltz were both McCarthyite targets in the US), Calder had established in embryo two of the major concerns of his later publishing company.

Calder began working full-time as a publisher in 1957.³ Marion Boyars (then Lobbenberg) joined the firm in 1958; two years later she purchased fifty per cent of the business.⁴ By the early 1960s, the firm's identity and commitments had been refined, and both John Calder and Marion Boyars used their substantial cultural and financial capital to publish and promote the work of innovative and transgressive writers. In this sense, as a publisher, Calder & Boyars represented to some extent a formalised and institutionalised version of the networks of patronage that were central to the development of interwar modernism. Educated in England and Zürich, Calder was the scion of a Scottish/Canadian family of brewers and timber merchants. In his first eight years as a publisher, he had supplemented his activities by working as

a director at the timber company owned by his great uncle, Sir James Calder.⁵ The archives of Calder & Boyars, held at Indiana University Bloomington, show a number of instances where, in its early years, the publisher was supported – materially and otherwise – by Calder’s ‘uncle Jim’. Marion Boyars was born in Germany and educated in Switzerland. Her father, Johannes Asmus, was also a successful publisher. As her mother was Jewish, Boyars was sent to New York with her sister in 1938 to escape persecution. She studied at New York University, and subsequently attended Keele University when living in the UK with her first husband, the clothing manufacturer George Lobbenberg. Calder has claimed that it was the alimony from Boyars’s divorce from Lobbenberg that enabled her to buy a stake in the publishing company.⁶

It is clear from their various interviews and mission statements that John Calder and Marion Boyars had a shared set of principles that undergirded their practice as publishers. These principles marked – in all but name – a complex relation to modernism. Both publishers put the emblematic names of high modernism into the service of their own self-justifications. Writing a letter to *The Times* in 1961, for example, Calder insisted that the ‘James Joyces and Virginia Woolfs of the future are hardly likely to be encouraged by the large publishing corporations’.⁷ In Calder’s view, in a time of rapid expansion in the publishing industry, it was the role of small publishers like Calder & Boyars to continue to sponsor innovative writing. In an interview of 1967, Marion Boyars explained on similar terms her rationale for publishing the lengthy novel *Milkbottle H* (1967) by the American writer Gil Orlovitz:

It’s Joycean, a very difficult book. We don’t expect it to be a financial success, but it’s an impossible book, and I wanted to do it. The involvement I get out of publishing is that all these writers are doing something that is important, really important.⁸

In conferring importance onto a novel because of both its aesthetic difficulty and its lack of commercial success, Boyars accords with Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of the ‘anti-“economic” economy of pure art’. For Bourdieu, this economy can ‘acknowledge no other demand than one it can generate itself’ and is ‘oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital’, a ‘veritable credit,

and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, “economic” profit’.⁹ As in Calder’s letter, in her assessment of Orlovitz’s novel, Boyars shows that high modernism provided the measure of the value of this symbolic capital. Calder & Boyars’s publicity materials make the same judgement, with contemporary writers legitimated by way of reference to a roll-call of prominent high modernists: the back cover of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel* states that ‘[i]f one accepts Kafka, Proust and Joyce as the greatest innovators of the first part of the century, then Robbe-Grillet is the man who has done as much as anyone to extend our awareness of the meaning of contemporary reality after them’.¹⁰

Calder & Boyars’s relationship to modernism is exemplified in ‘The Crisis of Communication’, an article Calder wrote for the Scottish periodical, *New Saltire*, in 1964. At the centre of the article is a long explanation of the history of what Calder names ‘the modern movement’. Calder’s example is that of painting, as painters ‘tend to be rather ahead of writers and musicians and it is perhaps painting that first manages to communicate itself to the public’. Calder’s account centres on Impressionism, which he sees as dominating artistic sensibilities in Britain from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. Calder then argues that parallel developments in music and literature never took hold of the public mind in the way those in the visual arts did: ‘Joyce’s *Ulysses*, perhaps the first really great novel written in English in this century, is virtually unknown except to specialists’. Further, though Impressionism ‘opened doors to later movements’ in the visual arts, it did so to little avail in terms of public perception: regarding new frontiers in abstraction, for example, Calder states that ‘even the public that tries to be up to date and admires the work of Mondrian, Klee, Arp and more recent abstract artists, often does so for the wrong reasons’. Ultimately, for Calder, the public sees contemporary art as no more than ‘decoration, as patterns in which there is perhaps no meaning at all, or else a very obscure and unintelligible one’.¹¹

In particular, two elements of Calder’s definition of ‘the modern movement’ illuminate Calder & Boyars’s relationship to modernism. Firstly, though in ‘The Crisis of Communication’ Calder presents a familiar, broad-stroked genealogy of European modernism in the visual arts, his

surrounding theorisation offers a more profound and nuanced attempt to define modernism as a whole:

The modern movement consists essentially of disbelief in the reality that the eye sees and a desire to examine the components that make up apparent reality. The findings of science support this attitude of suspiciousness. The modern arts consist of a research to re-examine apparent reality and the painter therefore assumes that the landscape in front of him consists of much more than appears evident at first glance.¹²

Boyers expresses a similar idea in a 1970 article, where she portrays the contemporary British writers Alan Burns, B. S. Johnson, Ann Quin, Eva Figes, and J. G. Ballard as ‘creating an avant-garde’ who by virtue of their innovations in the form of the novel ‘will ultimately reflect in literature the changing world we live in’.¹³ A Calder & Boyars advertisement in the *New Statesman* makes the same point more succinctly about a new generation of British novelists ‘who have something definite to say about contemporary life in a contemporary way’.¹⁴ For Calder & Boyars, writers who seemed solely committed to aesthetic innovation in fact married aesthetic form to historical content; by contrast, many conservative writers continued to reflect ‘apparent reality’ uncritically, blindly inhabiting the exhausted forms of the past.

Such ideas are also restatements of the defence of modernism first developed in German aesthetics in the 1930s, as in Ernst Bloch’s provocative series of questions about György Lukács’s critique of Expressionism: ‘what if Lukács’s reality – a coherent, infinitely mediated reality – is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity?’.¹⁵ But the same notions were also being articulated anew inside the pages of Calder & Boyars’s own publications. Calder’s approval of an ‘attitude of suspiciousness’ marshalled against ‘apparent reality’ is perhaps an echo of Nathalie Sarraute’s *The Age of Suspicion*, a book published by Calder & Boyars the year before ‘The Crisis of Communication’. For Sarraute, the true ‘realist’ writer ‘works unceasingly to rid what he sees of the matrix of preconceived ideas and ready-made images’ that ‘encase’ a given

perception of reality; the result is to attain something in writing 'that is thus far unknown, which it seems to him he is the first to have ever seen'.¹⁶ The same analysis was central to the theory of the novel expressed by Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute's fellow exponents of the *nouveau roman*, and also features of the Calder & Boyars list. Like these writers, as Calder & Boyars sought to express the novelty of its commitments and its commitments to novelty, it was indebted to the debates and discourses that emerged out of modernism.

The second notable feature of Calder's definition of 'the modern movement' concerns his attention to modernism's publics. Alongside the account in 'The Crisis of Communication' of those who appreciate but misunderstand the work of 'Mondrian, Klee, Arp and more recent abstract artists', Calder also provides a more general literary example: '[p]eople who are able to deal with problems and technicalities of great complexity during working hours will not go to the bother of using similar concentration on a book or a play during their leisure'.¹⁷ Here, as with Boyars's judgement on Orlovitz, aesthetic complexity is a modernist *sine qua non*. But Calder's article goes further. By subsequently offering the example of Samuel Beckett, Calder concludes optimistically, and with a clear sense of mission:

Relatively unsophisticated people have found a personal message and excitement in [Beckett's] writings which has become one of the greatest things in their lives. Because no really supreme artist is ever that difficult to grapple once the mental blocks are removed.¹⁸

As with Boyars's view of Orlovitz, Calder sees Beckett's value as irreproachable. In fact, for Calder, this value constitutes a transcendent quality that can surmount the limits of any conventional understanding. The logical extension of this notion is clear to see in 'The Crisis of Communication' and across Calder & Boyars's publishing activity: complex and innovative writing was not a minority concern, but instead something for which a mass public was, under the right conditions, a future possibility and a desirable aim. Modernist difficulty posed not so much an aesthetic problem for Calder & Boyars as it did a problem of reception: as Calder

suggests in 'The Crisis of Communication', '[t]he arts today are like an exploding universe: the number of new forms is growing, and the rate of development is growing too. Only the public lags behind'.¹⁹

Calder's recommended solution to this problem, of course, centres on the work of those who mediate modern art to its publics; accordingly, Calder & Boyars's central aim was to make up the lag that separated new and experimental writing from its potential audience. Peter D. McDonald captures Calder's character in this respect: a 'modernist with an Arnoldian sense of public vocation, a liberal committed to state patronage, an anti-moralist who defended the *avant-garde* on moral grounds, a democrat who believed passionately in the guardianship of the elite, Calder was driven by a range of contradictory energies'.²⁰ All of these contradictory energies are present in 'The Crisis of Communication', especially as Calder describes his engagement 'in promoting contemporary literature' – something that involves trying 'to bring the concept of aesthetics into the lives of more people, admittedly in self-interest, but also in the public good'. In order to achieve such aims, Calder admits, '[o]ne must promote a willingness to concentrate in the receiver' while also acknowledging '*a willingness to explain* on the other side of the fence'. In broader view, though, for Calder, the disconnect between the writing he published and a potential mass audience derived from macroeconomic issues: '[i]t depends ultimately on the willingness of a few men at the top to put the quality of living on the same level as the quantity, and to rank education alongside housing and economic welfare when it comes to priority'.²¹

Wyndham Lewis

Though never quite delivered in the way he wanted, Calder's wish for greater state patronage of the arts was granted. As McDonald notes, from the late 1960s through to the middle of the 1980s, Calder's various publishing enterprises were beneficiaries of increasing and generous funding from the British Arts Council.²² But in its earlier years, Calder & Boyars directed significant efforts on its own accord to mediating its 'modern movement' to a wider public. As a

consequence, the firm brought to the fore the tensions that inhered within modernism's historical status at this point in time – particularly regarding whether in the postwar period modernism was a living tradition or a discrete, past phenomenon that the public had yet to catch up with. The latter tension was particularly in evidence in Calder & Boyars's presentation of two of its most prominent writers, Wyndham Lewis and Samuel Beckett.

Between 1965 and 1968, Calder & Boyars issued new editions of five books by Wyndham Lewis. In 1965–6, the firm published the trilogy of novels *The Human Age* in separate volumes – namely, *The Childermass* (1928), *Monstre Gai* (1955), and *Malign Fiesta* (1955). In 1967, it published the memoir *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), and in 1968, Lewis's seminal modernist novel *Tarr* (1918), serialised originally in the *Egoist*, although reprinted by Calder & Boyars in Lewis's preferred, less formally radical 1928 version. These publications index the fact that Lewis's legacy and reputation were still being negotiated in the decades following his death in 1957. In the 1960s alone, alongside Calder & Boyars, Methuen, Penguin, and Thames and Hudson were also reissuing Lewis's work. One way Calder & Boyars sought to distinguish its publications by Lewis was to consecrate his writing through completist and quasi-scholarly presentation. The Calder & Boyars *Blasting and Bombardiering*, for example, includes a new preface from Lewis's widow, Anne, as well as three previously unpublished chapters. The firm's *Malign Fiesta*, meanwhile, included an appendix containing Lewis's draft opening to *The Trial of Man*, the projected final volume of *The Human Age*, plus an explanatory essay by Hugh Kenner.

When sourcing and producing *Malign Fiesta*'s new appendix, Calder & Boyars engaged with the emerging representation of Lewis in the scholarly and curatorial worlds. The firm consulted with Kenner, C. J. Fox, and Walter Michel – three of Lewis's main postwar supporters and mediators.²³ Fox and Michel were Lewis specialists: collectors and scholars of Lewis's work, they edited *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings, 1913–1956* (1969), as well as producing a number of other edited volumes and monographs separately; both were also involved with the Wyndham Lewis Society and its newsletter.²⁴ Kenner had published a monograph on Lewis in 1954 with Methuen, Lewis's main publisher; he first met Lewis two years later in London as part of the early stages of the research that would lead to his 1971 masterwork, *The Pound Era*.²⁵ In its

panoptic view of high modernist literary culture, as well as its part-successful attempt at rehabilitating contentious figures like Lewis and Ezra Pound, *The Pound Era* represented a major event in the historicisation of modernism. But even when Calder & Boyars published Kenner's essay as part of its edition of *Malign Fiesta*, Kenner had already published extensively on Pound, Joyce, and T. S. Eliot, establishing himself at the forefront of a new generation of academic writers keen to define modernism's relevance and importance. In this sense, Calder & Boyars's version of Lewis participates actively and pointedly in a wider scholarly conversation about modernism. Other publications by the firm show a similar impetus, from Marvin Magalaner and Richard M. Kain's *Joyce: The Man, the Work, the Reputation* (1956) and Rayner Heppenstall's *Raymond Roussel: A Critical Guide* (1966), to essays on figures like T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens in its short-lived *International Literary Annual* of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Calder & Boyars's scholarly presentation of modernism was not narrowly literary either: the firm displayed particular interests in music, publishing translated monographs on modernism's two totemic composers, Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, as well as works on Anton Webern and Edgar Varèse, two composers who expanded the modernist musical idiom in different directions.

While rightly rejecting the charge that modernism was solely a phenomenon retrospectively formulated in the postwar period, Andrzej Gąsiorek nevertheless notes that 'in any discussion of modernism, we need to acknowledge that the various writings that get labelled "modernist" depend for this attribution on critical acts that have complex institutional and theoretical histories'.²⁶ Calder & Boyars's publication and presentation of Lewis constitute just such a critical act, drawing on and contributing towards modernism's unfolding institutional and theoretical constitution in the 1960s. But while a collective cultural understanding of modernism was still in the process of formation in the postwar period, Lewis exemplifies the fact that, for many at this time, the object of such knowledge had ceased to exist. Even in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis had claimed, as Gąsiorek puts it, that modernism was 'finished as a significant movement'.²⁷ In this respect, Calder & Boyars's publication of Lewis looks much like Kenner's demarcation of a 'Pound era', and can be read accordingly as an attempt to secure a link to a heroic modernist past, a means for the firm of incorporating into its list an emblematic

figure from the age of the *Egoist* and Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company. But to do so in Britain in the twenty-five years following the Second World War was to appear to be part of a rearguard action. For the dominant position in the British literary field after 1945 was, as Rubin Rabinovitz had it, a 'reaction against experiment'.²⁸ Though not representing the totality of opinion of the time, famous critiques of modernism from 1950s–60s Britain – such as Kingsley's Amis's summation of the formal innovations of Joyce and Virginia Woolf as mere 'obtruded oddity', or Philip Larkin's dismissal of the Eliotian/Yeatsian 'common myth-kitty' – stand as a set of performative utterances that will into being modernism's obsolescence.²⁹

Lewis was invoked in one of the more incendiary – if not untypical – claims about modernism made in Britain after 1945. In 'The Two Cultures', his famous Rede Lecture of 1959, C. P. Snow reports the question of a colleague: 'Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time – weren't they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn't the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?'.³⁰ Accordingly, in publishing Lewis, Calder & Boyars was careful to explain and nuance Lewis's political positions. Though Anne Wyndham Lewis remained resistant to general charges against her husband's character and world-view, in preparing the Calder & Boyars edition of *Blasting and Bombardiering*, she at least conceded the very real political wickedness of Wyndham Lewis's phraseology and deleted certain elements accordingly.³¹ In one representative instance, Lewis's comment in the book's introduction about Hitler having 'popped up in Germany, and sent all the Jews flying' loses its final clause in the 1967 edition.³² More publicly, Calder & Boyars framed its publications of Lewis's work with careful explanations. The blurb of the Calder & Boyars *Childermass*, for example, suggests that 'it is possible because his political sympathies remained to the right of fashion during the leftish thirties and forties that his contemporary reputation is not higher'.³³

Though the blurb of *The Childermass* further hints at Lewis's politics by venturing a comparison 'perhaps to Céline as a writer', otherwise, any unwelcome associations are offset with reference to Lewis's aesthetic singularity. In this respect, Calder & Boyars's approach to the regrettable politics of a modernist writer was not unique: for example, Gergory Barnhisel has

shown how, as Ezra Pound's fascism came to dominate his public image, James Laughlin's New Directions Press 'remade' Pound's writing by presenting it on purely aesthetic terms.³⁴ Calder & Boyars's particular remaking of Lewis portrays an author who is 'one of the most unusual literary figures of this or any century': although his 'literary reputation has suffered in recent years from his fame as a painter' he is 'undoubtedly one of the most important English writers of this century'. The blurb to *The Childermass* concludes that the 'force of Wyndham's Lewis's imagination in his descriptions of the personalities and places that lie beyond death makes this one of the most extraordinary fantastic novels of the century'.³⁵

Calder & Boyars supported its superlatives about Lewis's literary powers with various high modernist reference-points. It is worth noting the irony here of Lewis's new publisher using high modernist aesthetics as a means of downplaying his politics: as Tyrus Miller notes, Lewis's own negative relation to high modernism derived from an analysis of how high modernist writing's 'emphasis on form and style was implicitly political in nature and that its aesthetic way of viewing and practicing politics had become increasingly unviable'.³⁶ Referring to Lewis as 'one of the most powerful and polemical propagandists of the modern movement in all the arts', the blurb to *The Childermass* ignores such dimensions of Lewis's writing, focusing instead on his modernist credentials:

In 1914 he founded the famous magazine BLAST to which all the principal painters, poets and musicians of the Great War contributed. Many of the most brilliant of them were killed, Wyndham Lewis remaining the central figure among the survivors, many of whom became the best-known artists of the twenties and thirties, although the movement that he founded, *Vorticism*, never achieved the popularity of its French counterpart, *Cubism*, as established by Braque and Picasso.³⁷

At best, then, in its portrayal of Lewis, Calder & Boyars demonstrates its own – rather than Lewis's – multifarious commitments to modernism. With its references to the 'best-known artists of the twenties and thirties', to Cubism and Braque and Picasso, the blurb to *The Childermass* is

consistent with Boyars's description of a new novel by a little-known contemporary author as 'Joycean'. Both Lewis and Orlovitz were, for Calder & Boyars, legitimated with reference to a more recognisable modernist canon. At root, the act of assuming the value of this canon in a British literary field that sought to denigrate it constituted a clear position-taking on the part of the firm; but equally, by sponsoring Lewis, Calder & Boyars sought to expand this canon in the process.

Samuel Beckett

Prior to publishing Lewis, Calder & Boyars's profile had risen considerably with its publication of the work of another significant high-modernist writer. In early 1963, the firm made it known that it intended to publish Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), which had previously been banned in the UK on the grounds of obscenity. Following the *Chatterley* trial and the recent publication in the US of Miller's novel by Grove Press – with whom Calder & Boyars shared numerous authors – John Calder claimed in an interview that 'the climate of public opinion' was now in favour of publishing a book that contained 'some frank talk, frank sex scenes, but not perversion'.³⁸

Forewarned about Calder & Boyars's intention, and despite a complaint from a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party, in April 1963, the British Attorney General instructed the Director of Public Prosecutions *not* to pursue the firm.³⁹ The publication was a significant success for Calder & Boyars, completely selling out its weekly print-runs of ten thousand copies in the first few months following publication, reaching the *Sunday Times* bestseller list, and helping to keep the firm solvent for many years to come.⁴⁰

After *Tropic of Cancer*, Calder & Boyars issued further tests to the prevailing culture of British censorship, publishing William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* (1959) in 1964, Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (1960) in 1963, and Hubert Selby Jr's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964) in 1966. The latter two were both taken to trial and judged to be obscene, although Calder & Boyars had the judgement on *Last Exit* overturned on appeal. Like Grove (see previous chapter), Calder &

Boyars defined itself in terms of a particular notion of freedom of expression: in evangelising for literature that pushed both the bounds of aesthetic and moral acceptability, the firm sought to express a link between the two. At the same time, the way Calder & Boyars presented its publications suggests that it imagined that individual literary works were only able to inhabit one of these poles. A comparison between the firm's framing of Wyndham Lewis and Henry Miller brings this into relief. As the example of Lewis shows, in many ways, modernism set the template for Calder & Boyars's notion of aesthetic innovation. But despite *Tropic of Cancer's* restless play with novelistic form and its setting in the modernist milieu of 1920s–30s Paris, in promoting Miller's novel, Calder & Boyars focused on its more transgressive content. An advertisement at the time of Calder & Boyars's publication of *Tropic of Cancer* celebrates the fact that the novel is '[p]ast the censors at last after 29 years of waiting', and that it is 'the fastest selling book since *Lady Chatterley*'. Here, everything in the novel is reduced to a cipher for Calder & Boyars's victories against state censorship and superannuated Victorian morality: 'Shocking but salutary, it sweeps hypocrisy aside in a racy, gripping narrative of the bohemian Paris of thirty years ago, a paean of praise to the city of freedom'.⁴¹ Alongside era-defining texts like Joyce's *Ulysses* and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Henry Miller's writing exemplifies the entanglement with censorship that characterised the emergence of modernism.⁴² But Calder & Boyars's account of modernism elided this fact.

It was on surprisingly similar terms to those of Miller that Calder & Boyars began publishing the single author who cemented its reputation. Following the theatrical success of *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Faber had attained British rights for Samuel Beckett's drama. But as John Calder later related, Faber declined to take up Beckett's prose writings for fear that they would provoke censure on the grounds of obscenity.⁴³ Consequently, Calder & Boyars acquired the British option on Beckett's prose in the late 1950s on the same grounds that it did the works of writers like Miller, Burroughs, Trocchi, and Selby Jr. However, the firm's presentation of Beckett mostly ignored this fact. *Prima Facie*, the UK premiere of Beckett's *Come and Go* (1967) – a text dedicated to John Calder – seems to be an exception. The performance was put on in support of Calder's newly-founded Defence of Literature and the Arts Society (DLAS), a campaigning

organisation brought into being following the success of Calder & Boyars's appeal against the prosecution of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. But if, as Stephen John Dilks notes, *Come and Go* 'gave Calder a showpiece' that assisted in 'elevating the status' of the DLAS, it did so by trading in Beckett's prestige as an exemplary proponent of contemporary artistic innovation – something Calder & Boyars had helped to establish outside the domain of debates around censorship and obscenity.⁴⁴ In all, by side-lining the politics involved in publishing Beckett, Calder & Boyars represents part of what Pascale Casanova calls the 'route by which [Beckett] achieved formal and stylistic freedom', a route that must be 'retrace[d]' in order to 'understand the very "purity" of Beckett's work, his progressive detachment from all definition, his almost absolute autonomy'.⁴⁵

The notion of artistic autonomy, of course, is itself associated in the work of theorists as diverse as Casanova, Bourdieu, and Theodor Adorno with the development of modernism, and as a key part of its dialectical articulation. But paradoxically, Calder & Boyars often formulated Beckett's artistic autonomy by way of his detachment from a high modernist tradition. For example, throughout the three paragraphs of small-type text on its back cover, the 1966 Calder & Boyars edition of *Molloy* (1950) oscillates between different terms for conveying Beckett's novelty: though *Molloy* is 'the most important novel since *Ulysses*', the blurb concludes more stridently that Beckett's text is ultimately 'one of the most thought provoking works of creative fiction of the twentieth century' and that '[n]othing written since the war can claim to have a more immediate impact on the senses or more relevance to the age which produced it' – Beckett is an 'innovator of the first importance in both the modern theatre and the modern novel [...] considered to be the outstanding writer of the present day'.⁴⁶ A similar dual literary-historical temporality is in evidence in a large *Times Literary Supplement* advertisement titled 'Censorship and the Avant-Garde'. Here, again, Beckett's originary force is inscribed simultaneously alongside his place in a modernist lineage: he is on the one hand 'the father of both the modern theatre and the modern novel', while on the other his own novels 'undoubtedly constitute the most important literary achievement since Joyce'.⁴⁷

Elsewhere Calder & Boyars's promotion of Beckett stresses his aesthetic autonomy more absolutely. Advertising the publication of Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), the firm

praises ‘a frightening explosion which shatters the frontiers of literature’, a ‘highly condensed masterpiece’ and ‘the shortest complete work of fiction ever published’ representing ‘a number of years’ work from one of today’s most serious and original writers’.⁴⁸ But Calder & Boyars’s reissue of Beckett’s early critical study *Proust* (1931) best demonstrates the rhetorical effort involved in inscribing Beckett’s singularity. In both its subject-matter and its publication date, *Proust*’s primary associations are with modernism of the 1910s–20s. Yet republished in 1965, it is described in a Calder & Boyars advertisement as ‘one of the most astringent pieces of critical writing of *our time*’ (emphasis added). Calder & Boyars also included Beckett’s later ‘Three Dialogues’ with Georges Duthuit (1949) in its edition of *Proust*. In the same advertisement, this work serves to compound a sense of the contemporary relevance of Beckett’s critical work: ‘Beckett vehemently states his own violently personal and controversial position to all art, provoking a new approach to aesthetics’.⁴⁹

More so than with Lewis, Calder & Boyars’s presentation of Beckett often better captured the fine grain of his relation to modernism. For Tyrus Miller, it is through ‘demonstrating how Beckett came to call high modernist poetics in question and to evolve a late modernist approach to fiction’ that the work can be done of ‘fleshing out’ the claim that ‘the concept of late modernism helps us to situate and understand the majority of Beckett’s works’.⁵⁰ This view of Beckett resonates with the one pursued by Calder & Boyars. In the process of portraying Beckett’s urgent contemporaneity in terms of his aesthetic autonomy, Calder & Boyars inscribed his distance from high modernism while simultaneously determining it as a context for his innovations. Elsewhere on Calder & Boyars’s list, the same process was in operation: the firm put significant energy into creating a critical context around its publication of Beckett’s work, in 1967 publishing both *Beckett at 60: A Festschrift* and *A Samuel Beckett Reader*. Prior to these publications in 1962, Calder & Boyars published Hugh Kenner’s *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*, which was first published in the US by Grove the year before. Calder & Boyars’s support for Kenner’s work on both Lewis and Beckett embodies the twofold version of modernism – as either a past or a present phenomenon – that is in evidence in the firm’s activities in the 1950s–60s.

Alongside Beckett, who was born in 1906 and died in 1989, Calder & Boyars published the work of a number of other writers who began publishing in the late 1920s and the 1930s, but whose reputations were mainly established after 1945. Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), Witold Gombrowicz (1904–69), Raymond Queneau (1903–76), and Nathalie Sarraute (1900–99), like Beckett, were transitional figures who were born too late to have participated in modernism’s first flourishing, but who wrote in dialogue with it, and shared its aesthetic commitments. The fact that Calder & Boyars was central to – and in many cases instigated – the Anglophone reception of such writers offers one explanation for the tensions manifested in its presentation of Beckett. By the 1950s–60s, even modernism’s immediate legatees were becoming historical, and were at the stage, in some quarters, of providing a model for emerging writers either to draw upon or write against. Calder & Boyars’s list provides a snapshot of such an unfolding literary history.

Modernism Plural

Both of the blurbs quoted above – from Lewis’s *The Childermass* and Beckett’s *Molloy* – come from books published in Calder & Boyars’s ‘Jupiter’ series. Launched in 1963, this series embodied the dual aims that John Calder expressed in ‘The Crisis of Communication’, reprinting the works of Calder & Boyars’s ‘modern movement’ in a format that the firm saw as accessible to a larger public than its regular list. Jupiter books sold at a relatively low price – in the 1960s, usually below 10 shillings – while still maintaining the element of distinction that distinguished their selection in the first place:

The Jupiter series intends to become the outstanding popularly priced paperback series for the important literature of the twentieth century and all books are produced with better printing and paper than is common to paperbacks on the assumption that readers will want to keep them permanently and return to them in the future.⁵¹

Prior to the advent of Jupiter, Calder & Boyars had launched its 'Calderbooks' series – large-format trade paperback reissues of books the firm had previously published in hardback. Calder latterly noted that Calderbooks resembled the slightly earlier innovation of Barney Rosset at Grove, who had sought to 'introduce new authors and bridge the gap between general and academic publishing with his Evergreen "egghead" paperbacks'.⁵² The subsequent introduction of the Jupiter series further extended Calder & Boyars's attempts to build bridges to a 'general' audience by entering the mass-market paperback end of the market.

In one sense, the writers that Calder & Boyars published as part of the Jupiter series convey the fluidity and openness of its 'modern movement', ranging from high modernists like Wyndham Lewis, through to transitional late modernists like Samuel Beckett and Jorge Luis Borges, to writers representative of contemporary literary tendencies and groupings such as Heinrich Böll, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Alexander Trocchi. Like many other aspects of Calder & Boyars's promotional work, the Jupiter series imagined an emerging twentieth-century canon of innovative and transgressive literature that was contiguous with modernism in a historical sense, and described on modernism's theoretical terms. It is worth considering Calder & Boyars within the ambit of modernism's publishing history for this reason. But to end on a qualifier, it should also be noted that though the version of modernism expressed by Calder & Boyars was expansive in a temporal sense, in a geographical sense it was less so. Borges's presence on the firm's list – as well as that of the preeminent work of Persian-language modernism, Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* (1936) – is ultimately an exception for a publisher that presented modernism mainly as an Anglophone and Francophone phenomenon, and one expressed from within those languages' metropolitan centres (even the reputations of Borges and Hedayat depend to a great extent on Paris's importance as what Casanova calls 'the capital of the literary world').⁵³ As Susan Stanford Friedman says, 'Multiple modernities create multiple modernisms. Multiple modernisms require respatializing and thus reperiodizing modernism'.⁵⁴ If Western modernist studies is still opening itself up to such requirements, then it

does so to redress a historical process of institutionalisation – in which publishers like Calder & Boyars played a part – that conceived of modernism on more narrowly exclusive terms.

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¹ Mao and Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, p. 737.

² Firchow, ‘John Mackenzie Calder’, p. 63; Famler, ‘Life’, p. 25.

³ See Famler, ‘Life’, p. 26.

⁴ See Calder, ‘Boyars [née Asmus]’, and Bateman, ‘The Book’s the Thing’, p. 28. Up until 1964, the firm’s name was ‘John Calder (Publishers) Ltd.’ – Marion Boyars’s name did not begin appearing in the firm’s publications until after she had taken the name of her second husband, the poet Arthur Boyars. However anachronistically, I refer to the publisher throughout its lifespan as ‘Calder & Boyars’, both to acknowledge Boyars’s central role, and so as to make for a clear distinction between John Calder the individual and the publishing company that for some time bore his name.

⁵ See Famler, ‘Life’, pp. 23–6.

⁶ See Calder, ‘Boyars [née Asmus]’.

⁷ Calder, ‘A Personal Interest’, p. 9.

⁸ Bateman, ‘The Book’s the Thing’, p. 29.

⁹ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 142.

¹⁰ Robbe-Grillet, *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*, back cover.

¹¹ Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, pp. 6–7.

¹² Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, pp. 6–7.

¹³ Boyars, ‘The Disintegrating Novel (5)’, p. 50.

¹⁴ ‘Calder Modern Authors’, p. 810.

¹⁵ Adorno et al, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Sarraute, *Tropisms and the Age of Suspicion*, p. 128.

¹⁷ Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, p. 6.

¹⁸ Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, p. 8.

¹⁹ Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, p. 8.

²⁰ McDonald, ‘Calder’s Beckett’, p. 160.

²¹ Calder, ‘The Crisis of Communication’, pp. 7–8.

²² See McDonald, ‘Calder’s Beckett’, pp. 160, 167.

²³ See Anne Wyndham Lewis correspondence.

²⁴ See ‘The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies’ (information page).

²⁵ See also Kenner, ‘A Last Sight of Lewis’.

²⁶ Gąsiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature*, p. 6.

²⁷ Gąsiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature*, p. 554.

²⁸ See Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel*.

²⁹ Amis, ‘Fresh Winds from the West’, p. 565; Larkin, ‘Statement’, p. 79.

³⁰ Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 7.

³¹ See letter Anne Wyndham Lewis to Marion Boyars, 4 January 1967, Anne Wyndham Lewis correspondence.

³² Compare Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* [1937], p. 18, and Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* [1967], p. 16.

³³ Lewis, *The Childermass*, back cover.

³⁴ See Barnhisel, *James Laughlin, New Directions Press, and the Remaking of Ezra Pound*.

³⁵ Lewis, *The Childermass*, back cover.

³⁶ Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 169.

³⁷ Lewis, *The Childermass*, back cover.

³⁸ ‘Tropic of Cancer’, p. 7.

³⁹ See “‘Tropic of Cancer’: No Proceedings’, p. 4.

⁴⁰ See Calder, *Pursuit*, pp. 222, 282.

⁴¹ ‘Three of the Best!’, p. 26.

⁴² See Potter, *Obscene Modernism*.

⁴³ See Calder, *Pursuit*, p. 96.

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- ⁴⁴ Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, p. 291.
- ⁴⁵ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, pp. 318–19.
- ⁴⁶ Beckett, *Molloy*, back cover.
- ⁴⁷ ‘Censorship and the Avant-Garde’, p. 690.
- ⁴⁸ ‘News from Calder and Boyars’, p. 1100.
- ⁴⁹ ‘Samuel Beckett’, p. 982.
- ⁵⁰ Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 170.
- ⁵¹ ‘Samuel Beckett’, p. 982.
- ⁵² Calder, *The Garden of Eros*, p. 3. Calder’s statement here is typical of his own tendency towards revisionism. Both Grove’s Evergreen Books and Calder & Boyars’s Calderbooks drew on the earlier innovations of hardcover reprint series such as the Travellers’ Library and the Phoenix Library, which sold modernism to a large audience. See Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism*.
- ⁵³ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 127.
- ⁵⁴ Friedman, ‘Periodizing Modernism’, p. 427.