



## Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers

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In 1922 the Woolfs issued a brief statement about their intentions in founding the Hogarth Press. They said in part,

We aimed in the first place at producing works of genuine merit which...could scarcely hope to secure publication through ordinary channels. In the second place we were resolved to produce no book merely with a view to pecuniary profit. We meant to satisfy ourselves to the best of our ability that the work had literary or artistic merit before we undertook to produce it.

Willis' account shows that the Woolfs generally remained faithful to these principles. The Hogarth Press introduced Britain—sometimes the entire English-speaking world—to works by Sigmund Freud, Maxim Gorky, Rainer Maria Rilke, Christopher Isherwood, T. S. Eliot, John Maynard Keynes, and, of course, the Woolfs themselves. Remarkably, while maintaining this high standard of literary excellence the Hogarth Press never lost money; by the 1930's it was earning the Woolfs a handsome profit.

Perhaps even more important than the financial rewards was the freedom the press provided Virginia Woolf. As her own publisher, she was free from editorial interference. Though she served as fiction reader for the press, reading as many as six hundred manuscripts a year, Willis argues that this was a small price to pay for independence.

Focusing on the internal dynamics of the Hogarth Press, Willis devotes only limited attention to situating the enterprise within the context of the private press movement, the publishing industry generally, or Bloomsbury. The lack of larger context may be appropriate, though, since the press was in many ways *sui generis*. Willis' book is likely to generate renewed interest in an often neglected facet of the Woolfs' lives, and it will appeal to anyone interested in them or in twentieth century publishing history.

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