**The Hogarth Press**

**By Claire Battershill**

**Thumbnail:**

The Hogarth Press was a publishing company run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. A small independent publisher, the Press produced works by modernist thinkers and writers including Sigmund Freud, T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf herself. The Press originated in the Woolfs’ drawing room at Hogarth House in Richmond, London. In 1922, the Press moved to the Bloomsbury area of London, a geographical hub for modernist publishing and the home of their social and intellectual circle, Bloomsbury Group. Despite its domestic origins, the Hogarth Press quickly became a fully-functioning publisher and an influential force in the early twentieth-century literary world. The Press published over five hundred titles between 1917 and 1946 (when the firm was sold to Chatto & Windus). These books and pamphlets ranged across a wide variety of topics and approaches: everything from best-sellers to privately printed personal memorial books for family and friends came under the publisher’s imprint, with its widely recognizable “Woolf’s head” logo [IMAGE 1: Logo].[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Detailed Entry:**

**Book Design and Printing**

The first books that the Press produced were handmade by Leonard and Virginia Woolf: they were typeset, printed, bound, and packaged for sale in small, limited editions. T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1923)is an example of an early Hogarth Press book; Virginia Woolf set the type herself and tied the simple knot in the single piece of waxed thread that binds the small book together [IMAGE 2: The Waste Land dust jacket]. Although the earlier publications were short pieces of fiction, biography, and poetry sent to subscribers, the Woolfs began, as early as the 1920s, to accept for publication novels and works of non-fiction that were too lengthy to be reasonably printed by hand. Beginning with Maxim Gorky’s *Reminiscences of Leo Nicolayevitch Tolstoi* (1920) they sent works out to commercial printers throughout the UK, though they continued to produce special limited editions, particularly of poetry, through the 1930s.

An important part of the Press’s appeal in both its hand-printed and commercially produced books was its distinctive visual aesthetic that could be recognized across a bookshop by the early 1920s for its Post-Impressionist qualities [IMAGE 3: Monday or Tuesday dust jacket]. The most famous artist-writer partnership at the Press was between Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, but there were also mother-daughter pairs of artists and writers, designs by E. McKnight Kauffer of London Underground fame,[[2]](#footnote-2) and woodcuts and hand-painted papers from the Omega workshops.

**Bloomsbury and Beyond**

Over the years, nearly all of the now-famous figures of Bloomsbury and early twentieth-century literary London came through the offices of the Hogarth Press. The Press’s early lists of subscribers contain a who’s who of English arts and letters in the late 1910s: Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, T. S. Eliot, and Ottoline Morrell were just some of the initial supporters of the venture. Although the Press was a separate entity from the Bloomsbury Group, ideas about Bloomsbury’s exclusivity nevertheless often extended to characterizations of the Hogarth Press as a private operation that published experimental work that had little to offer to the “common reader.” However, within three years of its inception, the Press had already begun to publish a wide range of works by writers outside of the Woolfs’ immediate social circle. These included, among many others, South African novelist William Plomer; Birmingham writer John Hampson;[[3]](#footnote-3) teenage poet Joan Adeney Easdale;[[4]](#footnote-4) and Trinidadian essayist C. L. R. James. While it is true that the Press, like its founders, produced its share of difficult modernist works, its full list contains a much wider social and international engagement than the common perception of Bloomsbury as an isolated literary clique might imply.

The book designers, artists, printers, and Press staff who worked daily with the writers contributed to the production of Hogarth Press books in a variety of ways. Book clubs bought and distributed works, ordinary readers wrote back to the Press, expressing their views on the emerging literary trends and asking questions, and the records of these correspondences can now be found in the Hogarth Press Business Archives, housed at the University of Reading.[[5]](#footnote-5) Vita Sackville-West, now associated with Virginia Woolf because of their romantic attachment, also published her best-selling novels at the Press, including the extremely popular, *The Edwardians* (1930), which sold over 30,000 copies in its first six months. In the 1930s, the poet John Lehmann became a partner in the firm, buying out Virginia Woolf’s shares, and brought in the next generation of modernist writers including Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, W. H. Auden, and Henry Green, as well as the *New Writing* series.

**Virginia Woolf and the Press**

An important part of Virginia Woolf’s own life story, the Press afforded her, as she wrote in her diary, the chance to be “the only woman in England free to write what I like.” (*D* 3: 43). As Hermione Lee notes, Virginia Woolf began setting type as a kind of therapy – a mindless activity to help her relax. And yet, while there is some truth to this aspect of the Press’s origins, her interest in the book arts and in publishing went well beyond the therapeutic. Woolf had been practicing bookmaking techniques by re-binding books in her father’s library since she was a teenager. The Press’s role in Woolf’s life was not only as a distraction or a crafty hobby but as an aspect of her feminism, as Alice Staveley has pointed out: a way of producing work that avoided mediation by the male-dominated world of editors and publishers.[[6]](#footnote-6) As significant as the Hogarth Press was for Woolf’s own creative independence, it also afforded several other women and men the chance to “write what they liked,” thinking chiefly of artistic merit over and above sales and popular success, though these were not unfamiliar to the Press. One of the most remarkable features of the Hogarth Press is that despite its stated interest in literary merit and in unusual forms, it was profitable from the beginning and remained so throughout its time as an independent venture. Without it, Virginia Woolf could not have written and published the works for which she is now known, but even more significant is the fact that both Leonard and Virginia also gave that chance to other writers, and therefore contributed to the making of literary modernism and to the diversity of the literary landscape; slowly, and on a small scale at first, setting letter by letter by hand, and then more rapidly, using commercial printers and building wide network.

**Publishing Modernism**

Given the Press’s associations with Virginia Woolf and the highbrow bohemianism of Bloomsbury, it might come as a surprise to find among its publications a children’s book about youths who metamorphose into wild beasts, an early film studies publication on the construction of paper silhouette puppets, and a peculiar autobiographical account of a journey to a monastery, *The 6,000 Beards of Athos*. Among over five hundred publications that the Woolfs produced between 1917 and 1946 are books of all shapes, sizes and kinds, and looking at the whole group of publications together offers a view of early twentieth-century literary culture, politics, art history, music, and essay-writing that is far more diverse than might be expected.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Woolfs actively encouraged debate and dissent, frequently soliciting the most wildly contradictory works they could find to sit alongside one another on their list.

Leonard Woolf had a great love for pamphlets, which, with all their seeming ephemerality and slightness, contain a powerful reminder of the everyday: of what it must have felt like to begin to see the effects of the motor car and of the League of Nations, the tremble in the stability of political structures as Mussolini came to power, or the surge of panic in the war years of young men writing autobiographies before the age of forty for fear that they would not live to see their stories in print. The pamphlet series *The Hogarth Essays*, *The Hogarth Letters*, and *The Hogarth Lectures on Literature* each took a form and offered writers the chance to reflect on subjects of their choosing in whatever style they liked [IMAGE 4: Pamphlet Series]. Since the Hogarth Press was not only literary in its focus, the view of the early-twentieth-century world offered by its list of publications places the novelist’s imagination alongside the journalist’s musings about real life. Whatever was modern was of interest to the Woolfs, and the publisher’s list emphasized the blending and clashing of a variety of new voices.

**References and Further Reading**

Kennedy, Richard. *A Boy at the Hogarth Press* London: The Whittington Press, 1972.

Southworth, Helen. *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks*

*of Modernism* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Svendsen, Jessica. “The Hogarth Press” *Modernism Lab*.

<http://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/Hogarth_Press>

Willis, John H., Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-41

Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992.

Woolmer, James Howard, A Checklist of the Hogarth Press, 1917-1946 Winchester:

St Paul's Bibliographies, 1986.

Image 1

Entry Name: The Hogarth Press

Material: Hogarth Press Logo

Purpose of Inclusion: Example

Link to Material: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~woolfed/HPWolfshead%5B1%5D.JPG>

Copyright Holder: possibly Random House? Not sure if it's in copyright, though.

Image 2

Entry Name: The Hogarth Press

Material: Dust Jacket Image for The Waste Land

Purpose of inclusion: Example of hand-printed book

Link to Material: <http://zsr.wfu.edu/special/blog/the-waste-land-by-ts-eliot-published-at-the-hogarth-press/>

Copyright holder: Not sure if it's the library (Wake Forest) or the publisher (now Random House), or if it's out of copyright because it's earlier than 1922?

Image 3

Entry Name: The Hogarth Press

Material: Dust jacket for Monday or Tuesday

Purpose of inclusion: To show Post-Impressionist aesthetic

Link: <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/images/hogarth/monday.jpg>

Copyright Holder: U of Delaware Library?

Image 4

Entry Name: The Hogarth Press

Material: Dust Jacket Images for Pamphlet Series

Purpose of inclusion: Example of pamphlets

Link to Material: <http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/rarebook/exhibitions/images/penandpress/large/13a_hogarth_letters.jpg>

Copyright holder: Smith?

1. See Elizabeth Gordon "Under the Imprint of the Hogarth Press: Material Texts and Virginia Woolf's Corporate Identity." Thesis (PhD). University of Alberta, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Elizabeth Willson Gordon “On or About December 1928 the Hogarth Press Changed: E. McKnight Kauffer, Art, Markets and the Hogarth Press 1928-1939.” Leonard and Virginia Woolf: The Hogarth Press, and the Networks of Modernism. Ed. Helen Southworth. Edinburgh UP, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Helen Southworth ‘“Outside the magical (and tyrannical) triangle of London-Oxford-Cambridge’: John Hampson, the Woolfs and the Hogarth Press.” Woolfian  Boundaries: Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Annual Woolf Conference. Ed. Anna Burrells et al. Clemson: Clemson UP: 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. # See Mark Hussey “W. H. Day Spender’ Had a Sister: Joan Adeney Easdale” Leonard and Virginia Woolf: The Hogarth Press, and the Networks of Modernism. Ed. Helen Southworth. Edinburgh UP, 2010.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Nicola Wilson "Virginia Woolf, Hugh Walpole, the Hogarth Press, and the Book Society." *ELH* 79.1 (2012): 237-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Staveley, Alice. "Marketing Virginia Woolf: Women, War, and Public Relations in Three Guineas." *Book History* 12 (2009). Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Diane F. Gillespie “Wedding Rituals: Julia Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and Viola Tree” *Woolf Studies Annual* 19 (2013): 171-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)