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Inventing the Borzoi:

Alfred and Blanche Knopf and the Rhetoric of Prestige in

Modern American Book Publishing, 1915–1929

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Inventing the Borzoi:

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by

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In memory of my parents, Jesse and Gwen,
with gratitude for their love of language and learning

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Inventing the Borzoi:

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Modern American Book Publishing, 1915–1929

Amy Louise Root, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Michael Winship

Signified by an eye-catching wolfhound logo (the borzoi), the Alfred A. Knopf publishing company holds considerable prestige in the American book trade, having released works by twenty-one Nobel Prize winners, forty-nine Pulitzer Prize winners, and twenty-nine National Book Award winners to date. Founded in 1915, the firm developed a reputation for excellence in less than a decade, despite the fact that the husband-and-wife team at the helm—Alfred and Blanche Knopf—were young novices. At once a literary history and an analysis of a unique form of marketing rhetoric, *Inventing the Borzoi* traces the company's status to the early acquisition of books written by noteworthy European authors, the use of distinctive design and production elements that gave Borzoi books an artisanal appearance, and marketing messages that touted Alfred Knopf himself as a new arbiter of literary standards for an audience that comprised not only consumers but also literary agents, authors, critics, booksellers, and other members of the trade.

Synthesizing bibliographical research with Kenneth Burke's theories of rhetoric and identity, this dissertation yields a multi-faceted account of the Knopf company's first fourteen years, culminating at the cusp of the Great Depression. Burke's notions of dramatism provide a useful means for exploring the Knopfs' performance of a distinctive literary role. This study extends Burkean principles to a medium through which much complex language is transmitted—the book-publishing machine—uniting the philosophies of the father of modern rhetorical studies with the early history of a publishing firm whose success was largely built on the mastery of rhetorical strategies. Each chapter in this study concludes with an interpretation of Knopf history as illuminated by the pentad of Burkean dramatism: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. The first comprehensive examination of the company's rapidly achieved stature, this study argues that the Borzoi identity was shaped not only by conventional marketing motivations but also became a consistent extension of the way Alfred and Blanche perceived themselves.

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Introduction

"BORZOI BOOKS ARE BOOKS DE LUXE! In the refinement of the format—in the stability of the binding—in fact, in all those things that make a book worth while—its intellectual appeal, its ornamental appeal, and its appeal as a desirable permanent possession, Borzoi Books are Books de Luxe, equally a delight to the mind and an addition to the home!"

—1923 *NEW YORK TIMES* ADVERTISEMENT[1]

The Alfred A. Knopf publishing company holds high status in the American book trade, having released works by twenty-one Nobel Prize winners (including Thomas Mann, Sigrid Undset, Albert Camus, and Gabriel García Márquez), forty-nine Pulitzer Prize winners, and twenty-nine National Book Award winners to date. Knopf books easily can be identified on store shelves because of the company's eye-catching logo, which depicts a leaping Russian wolfhound, the borzoi. Founded in 1915, the firm and its Borzoi Books developed a reputation for excellence in less than a decade, establishing a legacy whose endurance was demonstrated as recently as 2008, when the *New York Times Book Review* published its annual list of the ten best books of the year. Seven of those titles were published by Knopf.[2]

Although Borzoi Books have maintained a consistently prestigious image, the firm's early history is marked by intriguing contradictions.[3] At the heart of the narrative is the image a garrulous, flamboyantly dressed, twenty-two-year-old Columbia graduate

[1] Fletcher, Frank Irving. *The Meaning of Borzoi: A Series of Advertisements and a Preface.* Promotional Booklet. New York: Knopf, 1923. AAKI Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 563:2, HRC.
[2] "The 10 Best Books of 2008," *New York Times Book Review*, 14 December 2008, BR9. ProQuest Historical Newspapers Online Database (PHN).
[3] Though the term "Borzoi Books" implies a subcategory, series, or imprint within Knopf, it has been used continuously by the company to refer to each of its products: all Knopf books are Borzoi Books. The phrase, along with the borzoi device, became a registered trademark on 12 October 1922.

who, with his equally youthful fiancée, managed to forge a corporate identity of elderly gravitas, achieving venerability before they had reached the age of thirty. Other surprising contradictions include the fact that the company is now linked with American literati, including Toni Morrison and John Updike, but was founded on the premise that European writers were far superior to their American counterparts. Paradoxically, the flourishing of the company was fed by an underpinning of modern promotional tactics and decidedly old-fashioned business acumen. Raised by fathers who were salesmen, Alfred and Blanche Knopf publicized themselves effectively, emphasizing their highly aristocratic, anti-commercial personae in interviews while simultaneously mastering a variety of advertising media, including the use of billboards for their top sellers. The books themselves offer a conundrum as well: early Knopf advertising emphasized new, innovative standards in book design and production, but the physical traits of early Knopf volumes were often highly derivative, reflecting trends associated with the fine printing movement of the late nineteenth century.

Cultural aspects of the Knopfs' identity also encompass complexity. The Knopfs' Jewish ancestry is noted by publishing historians who trace the rise of Jewish American publishers during the early twentieth century, though the decidedly secular Alfred spoke frankly of feasting as a boy at the Plaza Hotel on Yom Kippur, rather than fasting on this solemn day of atonement. In addition, Blanche Knopf is often extolled as a pioneering woman who defeated gender discrimination in a male-dominated industry, but when a women's college invited her to deliver a speech about the future of women in publishing,

she declined the invitation "on the ground that there 'was no future worth mentioning.'"[4] Her obituary in the *New York Times* mentioned superficial attributes such as her weight ("Mrs. Knopf was petite and chic; she was once plump, but for the last 35 years of her life weighed no more than 100 pounds"), diminishing the credit given to her serious professional achievements.[5]

This research project began simply as an attempt to determine the degree to which the company's swiftly formed prestige could be attributed to savvy rhetorical strategies, but it soon became clear that such an investigation was doomed in the absence of a book-length history of the firm drawn from primary research. The company's early years are steeped in lore, and this alone presented intriguing questions regarding the shaping of the Knopf identity. Rather than illuminating the significant challenges faced by the fledgling publishing house, the news clippings, awards-ceremony tributes, and commemorative volumes generally only serve to reinforce a belief in the Knopfs' inherent literary nobility, skirting the practical questions of how the company's list was built and ignoring the media's role in manufacturing corporate identities. Thus, my chief endeavor became a reconstruction of the facts regarding the launch of the Knopf company. The result is a business history, complemented by rhetorical analysis of the key elements that formed the Borzoi identity. Because this identity was derived primarily from Alfred Knopf's encounters with New York's social strata at an early age, in addition to his experiences as an undergraduate at Columbia, his ancestry, upbringing, and formal education form a

[4] "50 Years of the Borzoi," *Publishers' Weekly,* 1 February 1965: 51.
[5] "Mrs. Blanche Wolf Knopf of Publishing Firm Dies," *New York Times,* 5 June 1966: 86. PHN.

necessary starting point for this study, informing aspects of his business decisions for years to come.

The reality that emerges—a portrait of two publishers who managed their finances meticulously while feeding a reputation for extravagance, and who cultivated a circle of literary authors by artfully commercializing the company's supposed disdain for commercialism—undermines conventional wisdom about the origins of the Knopf cachet. An analysis of this history is well served by rhetorical theories developed by Kenneth Burke. The notions of dramatism established in Burke's *A Grammar of Motives,* and of identification established in *A Rhetoric of Motives,* provide an especially useful means for exploring the ways in which literary identities were shaped and performed by the Knopfs. While Burke generally restricted his observations to language and its manifestations in literature and in the rise of totalitarian political regimes, this study extends his principles to a medium through which much complex language is transmitted—the book-publishing machine—and unites the philosophies of the father of modern rhetorical studies with the early history of a publishing firm whose success was largely built on the mastery of rhetorical strategies.

Affiliated with the early twentieth-century Manhattan literary milieu in which Knopf was also steeped, Burke was revolutionizing rhetorical theory with a vigor that parallels the reinventions occurring with the publishing industry at that time. It is therefore fitting that each chapter in this study concludes with an interpretation of Knopf history as illuminated by the pentad of Burkean dramatism: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. While the use of drama as a metaphor for human behavior has been taken up by

scores of luminaries, from William Shakespeare to Erving Goffman, Burke's approach offers an opportunity to probe a variety of factors at play in human action, including the *inter*action that spurs infinite, subsequent motivations within communities. Moreover, this study serves as a unique extension of the conventional use of Burke's apparatus, which rhetorical theorist Barbara Biesecker succinctly describes as "a methodological instrument [that] makes it possible for critics to explicate and assess the motivational loci of discourses."[6] By applying this instrument to the operations of a prestigious publishing house, a vital medium of discourse production—complementing an analysis of the discourse itself—can be understood in terms of the motivations of its administrators.

Within the history of the Borzoi community, the "acts" are linked to the consumption and production of "texts," both the typographical as well as the visual variety, with "scenes" ranging from bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem to London and continental Europe as the Knopfs repeatedly set sail on the *Mauretania* searching for worthy literature. The Borzoi's midtown offices form a "scene" as well: in at least one instance, Knopf's promotional copy even used the Borzoi as a metaphor for theater, whimsically referring to it as a location where adventures (through books) were "performed." A 1924 brochure for a novel about a mischievous New Orleans native reads, "*Sandoval: A Romance of Bad Manners* by Thomas Beer presented May 23 by Alfred A. Knopf at The Borzoi. … Seats for each and every performance of this great romance are $2.00 net. Everyone can have the best seat."[7]

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[6]Barbara Biesecker, *Addressing Postmodernity: Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric, and a Theory of Social Change* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 24.
[7] Promotional brochure, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:6, HRC.

Burke's use of the word "agent" also neatly complements Knopf history, taking on a convenient double entendre as the professionalization of literary agents was underway during this period. The term also applies to the multifaceted roles played by all literate, modestly economically healthy Americans at the dawn of the Borzoi: each of them had the potential to serve Knopf as a word-of-mouth advertiser, an author, a critic, a scout, or some combination of these. The fan mail received by the company, from rural corners to cosmopolitan hubs, attests to this. The distinction between Burke's use of "agency" and "agent" is one of means: agency in this study refers to the method by which the agent is able to act.

"Purpose" is perhaps the most Burkean of these realms, delving into questions of motivation. The capitalist nature of the Knopfs' venture by no means contradicts Burke's assertion that rhetoric is motivated by a response to human estrangement. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke defines an essential function of language "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" but extends this definition to the emerging media's need for target audiences, noting that such a concept has remained fundamentally unchanged since it was implemented by Aristotle and Cicero.[8] Burke later added a sixth element, attitude (generally referring to the agent's state of mind), which I have implemented as an extension of purpose, particularly as a method for exploring exigency.

[8] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 43 and 64. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950.

The appropriateness of a Burkean theoretical lens also lies in the fact that Burke approached questions of identity as a social concept, applicable for the local and international "societies" of readership with which the Knopfs interacted. In a recent essay comparing Burke's theories of identification to those proposed by Sigmund Freud, whom he simultaneously revered and sought to rival, Diane Davis writes that both theorists "describe identification as a social act that partially unifies discrete individuals, a mode of 'symbolic action' (as Burke would say) that resides squarely within the representational arena (or the dramatistic frame)." Davis then reminds us of Burke's assertion that "the primary aim of rhetoric is not to win an argument but to make a connection, shifting the imagery of the persuasive encounter from a duel to a 'courtship.'"[9] Used to synthesize the historical findings presented here, Burke's theory of identification is used here to reveal a kaleidoscopic range of "courtships," in which two newly married publishers sought to establish a literary identity. The resulting Borzoi signification served as both a response and a call to authors, fellow publishers, consumers, visual artists, critics, and others concerned with the perception of written language in book form.

The "acts" explored here consistently reflect attempts to create social dialogue. The act of publishing, for example, becomes also an act of authorship as the Knopfs attempted to shape the reception of the authors' productions, in negotiations ranging from the financial to the aesthetic. The Burkean goal of consubstantiality—the quest between individuals to find elements of their own identities in one another—plays out repeatedly in this publishing story. As Burke predicts, the elements of identification reported here

[9] Diane Davis, "Burke and Freud on Who You Are," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33 (2008): 125.

are sometimes contradictory but always symbolic: the Knopfs sought admission to a community they perceived as Anglophilic, gentrified, and intellectual, while writers and artists in turn sought admission to the prestigious Borzoi list, which in turn set the stage for further recruitment to a newly minted symbol of exceptional literature.

Reflecting an element of "consubstantiation," ninety-one-year-old Alfred Knopf and eighty-six-year-old Kenneth Burke shared a stage at New York University on October 25, 1983, each receiving an Elmer Holmes Bobst Award in Arts and Letters for having "brought true distinction to the American literary scene."[10] Knopf earned his award in the publishing category, while Burke's was designated for literary criticism. They had seldom interacted with one another over the years. Knopf commissioned Burke to translate Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* in 1925, but few other Burke translations were published by Knopf, and Jack Selzer's account of Burke's years in Greenwich Village states that when Alfred Knopf published an anthology of poetry by contributors to the avant-garde journal *Others,* he declined to include a selection by Burke.[11] Nonetheless, Knopf and Burke had devoted their careers to influencing the way readers perceived printed texts, making their reunion in this dissertation appropriate, albeit ironic.

Whether they acknowledge it, all publishing companies intercede in the rhetorical exchange between author and reader, but the Knopfs' intercession commenced in an era defined by "making it new." Alfred and Blanche Knopf were successful in identifying themselves as power brokers among modernist literati and as arbiters of good taste for

[10]Bobst Awards program, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records (AAKI), Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 674:6, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin.
[11] Jack Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversations with the Moderns, 1915-1931* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 29.

American readers coast to coast, yet surprisingly few scholars of literary discourse and culture industries have considered the Knopfs' role in influencing not only the perception of their books among American book-buying audiences but also among other key audiences—agents, authors, reviewers, and scholars among them. The chapters that follow consider these roles at each stage of the Borzoi's evolution, beginning with the social and educational influences that informed Alfred and Blanche's opinion of literature, followed by a report on the extensive literary networks (at first derived from Knopf's Columbia University professors) that enabled the couple to acquire books by increasingly prestigious authors, such as John Galsworthy, H. L. Mencken, and Carl Van Vechten, who in turn served as scouts to expand the Borzoi's circle.

The equally important network of book designers is subsequently explored, demonstrating the ways in which Alfred Knopf's first forays in publishing as an apprentice to Frank Nelson Doubleday and Mitchell Kennerley led to alliances with leading typographers, illustrators, and designers (including Bruce Rogers, Frederic Goudy, Elmer Adler, and William Addison Dwiggins). Research for this chapter was greatly facilitated by the recent acquisition of G. Thomas Tanselle's Knopf collection by the Beinecke Library at Yale University. While the HRC houses a copy of nearly all early Knopf books, the Tanselle collection is arranged chronologically, which made it possible for me to efficiently chart the evolution of the renowned Knopf design traits through an examination of nine hundred and nine volumes, many in dust jackets.

The Knopfs' masterly use of book production as book promotion forms the bridge to a discussion of early Borzoi marketing, spanning trade promotion and consumer

advertising—for which they made innovative choices both in terms of copywriting and in the use of media, including human street hawkers wearing "sandwich boards" in lower Manhattan to promote the socialist Floyd Dell's autobiographical novel, *Moon Calf*. The shifting college-textbook environment, on which Knopf's college sales department attempted to exert considerable influence, is addressed as well. The study culminates in a consideration of the impact these early legacies have had on the Knopf identity in the twenty-first century.

Inventing the Borzoi also reflects the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the study of book history. The launch of organizations such as the Society for the History of Authorship, Readership, and Publishing (SHARP), founded in 1991, has done much to rectify the previously isolated nature of the field. In earlier decades, few scholars acknowledged these intersections between the publishing process and literary discourse. Richard Ohmann was perhaps one of the first prominent scholars to do so on a broad scale, but his work has not focused on the unique situation presented by Borzoi Books. Nonetheless, Ohmann undertook thorough work in attempting to unite theories of literature and realities of publishing, citing books such as Albert Greco's *The Book Publishing Industry*, which is laden with empirical data, and creating tabulations of advertising space versus review coverage in the *New York Times Book Review*.[12] My study owes much to his methodology and in some ways is a response to his calls for an examination of the publisher's role in shaping literate society. In the first chapter of his groundbreaking essay collection *English in America*, Ohmann describes the rhetors in the

[12] Richard Ohmann, "The Shaping of a Canon," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1983): 203.

process of creating a literary identity as monolithic conglomerates rather than individuals ("The point is to understand some of the institutions that are most responsible for the transmission of literacy and culture") but, like most other literary theorists, particularly Wayne Booth, he more often than not identifies those institutions as academic ones.[13]

Within that academy, few scholars of modern literature have considered the process by which such a great number of Borzoi Books have remained mainstays of academic reading lists. The hegemony of western literary canons has been the subject of considerable debate in a postcolonial climate, yet even in-depth examinations of literary canons tend to discount a publisher's role. (Though, to be fair, Knopf's profitable backlist of books selected for course adoption is representative of western European literary traditions, South American traditions, and North American writers from marginalized populations, a reality that would likely confound anyone who attempted such a study.) An apt example of this omission appeared in the September 1983 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, which was devoted to the topic of canons. Richard Ohmann was the only contributor to explore the role of publishers. In fact, editor Robert von Hallberg's introduction to the issue places canonical control squarely on the shoulders of authors, academics, and critics, as well as the existing canons themselves, summarizing the contributors' articles with the statement that "canons are discussed from three perspectives here: how artists determine canons by selecting certain styles and masters to emulate; how poet-critics and academic critics, through the institutions of literary study,

[13] Richard Ohmann, *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 3.

construct canons; and how institutionalized canons effectively govern literary study and instruction."[14] John Guillory's essay in that issue, examining the works of T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks, exemplifies the approach taken by most of the contributors to this dialogue, within and beyond the special edition of *Critical Inquiry*. Arguing that the authority of the canon lies both within the canon itself and within a cultural perception of elitism, Guillory makes a pragmatic theoretical proposal:

> For *some* reason *some* literature [author's emphasis] is worth preserving. We would not expect this or any other conception of authority to have escaped the vicissitudes of social hierarchy, but this is just the claim of the canonical text, which is assumed to be *innately* superior. Indeed we refuse (and this refusal is grounded in much critical theory) to think of the literary work as good or bad for some extrinsic reason; such a possibility can be conceived only as propaganda or censorship, the hot areas of ideological production.[15]

Guillory then dissects various ideologies that separate the intrinsic versus perceived literary status of works, but the role of publisher as propagandist, gatekeeper, or contributor in even minute ways is never addressed. One might almost develop the impression that a publishing house provides nothing more than printing services, delivering text exactly as the author conceived it, never interfering in the dialogue between author and reader. Even Foucault's deconstruction of those roles in the now-canonical "What Is an Author?" fails to sufficiently acknowledge the publisher as rhetor, emphasizing instead the social forces that influence an author, and the signification of

[14] Robert Von Hallberg, "Editor's Introduction," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no.1 (September 1983): iv.
[15] John Guillory, "The Ideology of Canon Formation: T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no.1 (September 1983): 3.

author identities.[16] It is ironic that as a published author himself, Foucault discounted the agency of publishers.

During the 1990s, several scholars of modern literature examined the relationship between commerce and modernism, most notably Robert Jensen's *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (1994); the anthology *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (1997) edited by Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt; and Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1999). Yet one of the most comprehensive examinations of the publishing industry's impact on creating canonical works during the rise of modernism arose not in the field of literature, rhetoric, or bibliography but was instead produced by an American Studies scholar, Catherine Turner, author of *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars*, a groundbreaking 2003 analysis of book-marketing campaigns. Only one chapter in Turner's array of useful case studies addresses Knopf, emphasizing the publication of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, allowing for breadth of coverage that extends to Knopf's contemporaries B. W. Huebsch; Harcourt, Brace & Company; Scribner's; and Random House.

While many book-length histories of American publishing houses have been published, ranging from Eugene Exman's *The House of Harper: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Publishing* to examinations of Bostonian endeavors, including Michael Winship's *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of*

[16] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141-160.

Ticknor and Fields, no comprehensive history of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., has been completed, much less a complete Knopf history that situates the Borzoi in the context of modern American literary discourse. *Newsweek* book critic and former E. P. Dutton editor Peter S. Prescott spent a number of years working on a biography of Alfred and Blanche Knopf, but Prescott died in 2004 before the project could be completed. I was fortunate to meet with his widow during the summer of 2008. Dr. Anne Lake Prescott, a professor of Renaissance literature at Barnard College, very generously gave me access to her late husband's research materials and provided me with an electronic copy of his unfinished manuscript for use as a research source, reiterating her support of Knopf history projects. As of this writing, the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) is in the process of acquiring Peter Prescott's Knopf papers. Prescott's project has been taken up by literary agent John Thornton, who is under contract with HarperCollins to write a complete Knopf biography suitable for a general trade audience.

Perhaps the most complete documentary history of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., is *The Company They Kept: Alfred A. and Blanche W. Knopf, Publishers.* Edited by Cathy Henderson and Richard Oram, this catalog accompanied the Knopf exhibition and symposium hosted by the HRC in 1995. Henderson and Oram have also culled copious amounts of Knopf data, slated for publication in a volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography series.

Randolph Lewis, an American Studies scholar, is another who has made extensive use of the HRC's Knopf archive. His master's thesis, titled *Prejudice in Publishing: Alfred A. Knopf and American Publishing, 1915–1935,* argues that anti-Semitism

experienced by the Knopfs led to their willingness to publish marginalized authors such as Langston Hughes. Other scholarly partial histories of Knopf include Maureen Gillis's master's thesis, completed in 2003 for the Master of Publishing degree at Simon Fraser University, titled *Branding the Borzoi: Imprint Branding and the Knopf Canada List*. This study describes Knopf's 1991 expansion into Canada.

The achievements of designers associated with Knopf's first decades have been explored in a variety of publications, ranging from Claire Hoertz Badaracco's study, "George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," to Joseph Blumenthal's biography, *Bruce Rogers: A Life in Letters.*[17] However, the designers who created the fine-printing aura of Borzoi Books served other publishers and worked in media other than books. Therefore, published surveys of their work generally span a variety of clients rather than focusing exclusively on Knopf, and such surveys are usually published for an audience of graphic-arts specialists, limiting the analytic lens of the research and omitting a consideration of the works as artifacts of visual rhetoric.

Within the broader field of bibliography, studies in twentieth-century American publishing are in the minority. Again, published works on Knopf generally focus on one limited aspect of the company. Jack W. C. Hagstrom's report, "From James Merrill's Dogs to the Alfred A. Knopf Borzoi Devices," published online by the Bibliographical Society of America, is an example of this, as is Robert Franciosi's "Designing John

[17] Claire Hoertz Badaracco, "George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," *Design Issues* 17, no. 3 (2001): 40–48.

Hersey's *The Wall*: W.A. Dwiggins, George Salter, and the Challenges of American Holocaust Memory," published in 2008 by SHARP.[18]

Thus, *Inventing the Borzoi* represents the first comprehensive documentary history of the Borzoi's introduction and rapidly achieved stature. Alfred Knopf attempted to write a memoir, but the result was a manuscript of more than one thousand disorderly, partially edited pages, which he dubbed "those damned reminiscences." Housed in the HRC, the memoir is nonetheless brimming with meticulous detail, providing many answers to my queries. Noting the unwieldy nature of the memoir, which covers nearly all of Knopf's life as well as a corporate history during which at least 5,000 new Borzoi titles were published, I interpreted Knopf's irritation as a cautionary tale. By necessity, I have limited the scope of my study chronologically, an endeavor that required at the outset a definition of "early history." *Inventing the Borzoi* charts the company's progression from its founding in 1915 to the cusp of the Great Depression in 1929, allowing for a survey of the house's lasting cornerstones, including alliances with key figures in book design and production, and with the acquisition of books by several Nobel Prize winners, commercially viable novelists such as Dashiell Hammett, and participants in the Harlem Renaissance. This chronology concludes at a moment of prosperity for the company, a point in time that would be followed by significant financial challenges within the American publishing realm—challenges from which

[18] Jack W. C. Hagstrom, "Alfred A. Knopf's Borzoi Devices," 2005, BibSite, Bibliographical Society of America, www.bibsocamer.org/BibSite/contents.htm. Accessed 14 January 2009.
Robert Franciosi, Designing John Hersey's *The Wall:* W. A. Dwiggins, George Salter, and the Challenges of Holocaust Memory," *Book History* 11 (2008): 245-274.

Knopf was not immune, marking a distinct turn and an opportunity for future research by other historians of the Borzoi.

In her adroit application of feminist criticism to the Knopf translation and marketing of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* Sheryl Englund wrote, "Those of us who love literature are prone to forget that in the publication of a new book—whether fictional or scholarly—the quality of a work's intellectual content cannot alone account fully for its public reception. Within a publishing house, the editors and the publicity department deliberately attempt to influence the public's perception of a work's text in order to increase sales of the book."[19] *Inventing the Borzoi* argues that the house of Knopf took this model considerably farther, examining the ways in which two young publishers made ambitious attempts to influence the public's perception of the fledgling house itself. At every turn, the Borzoi identity was a consistent extension of the way Alfred and Blanche perceived themselves—a motive that extended well beyond fiscal aspirations.

[19] Sheryl Englund, "Publicity to Overawe the Public: Marketing 'The Second Sex,'" *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* 22, no. 4 (1992): 103.

Chapter One
Acquired Tastes: The Literary Education of Alfred A. Knopf

"I did not grow up in a particularly bookish atmosphere, but my father was generous in the allowance he gave me. … I frequented the secondhand book shops in Harlem—especially one run by Cox—father and son. The old man looked rather like Mark Twain in a boiled shirt and long black bow tie, but the son, Carol, was not far from my age and sold me many bargains."

—ALFRED KNOPF, "SOME RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS"[20]

In 1915, Booth Tarkington and Zane Grey were among America's most popular living novelists. Other fiction writers topping the *Publishers' Weekly* bestseller lists included Eleanor Porter, who perpetuated a lucrative series that year with *Polyanna Grows Up*; Missouri native Winston Churchill, whose allegorical novel *A Far Country* scorned the affluence of Midwestern robber barons; and Mary Roberts Rinehart, the prolific mystery writer associated with the phrase "the butler did it." If Alfred Knopf had aspired to prosper as a fledgling publisher, he might have set his sights on accessible, formulaic works by authors such as these, featuring characters and settings that would have seemed familiar to American readers.[21]

Instead, the first Knopf list announced in the *Publishers' Trade List Annual (PTLA)* comprises the antithesis of commercial American publishing during the early twentieth century: *Four Plays* (Knopf's première) translated from the French of Émile

[20] Alfred Knopf, "Some Random Recollections: An Informal Talk Made at the Grolier Club, New York, October 21, 1948," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 5-6.
[21] Michael Korda, *Making the List: A Cultural History of the American Bestseller, 1900–1999* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2001), 26.

Augier; *Homo Sapiens*, a novel translated from the Polish of Stanislaw Przybyszewski; *Moyle Church-Town*, a novel by Englishman John Trevena (the pseudonym of Ernest George Henham); Claude Bragdon's *Projective Ornament*, a treatise on design theory; Guy de Maupassant's *Yvette (A Novelette) and Ten Stories*; anarchist Prince Petr Kropotkin's *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*; and five translated works of Russian fiction, including Leonid Nikolaievich Andreyev's *The Little Angel and Other Stories*, Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin's *The Signal and Other Stories*, the novel *Taras Bulba* by Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, *Chelkash and Other Stories* by Maxim Gorky (Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov's nom de plume), and Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time.*[22] The only American author featured on Knopf's inaugural list is Claude Bragdon, an architect and set designer who would soon have an impact on the physical attributes of early Borzoi Books. Published two years before the Bolshevik Revolution, these eleven titles emphasize the popular literature of eastern Europe and in several cases revive the names of authors who had died in the nineteenth century.

At this point in the firm's history, the most American aspect of the list was the publisher himself, and the modern traits of the firm's identity had yet to be seen. Understanding the origins of Alfred Knopf's literary taste is key to understanding how the Borzoi evolved throughout the twenties. It is also key to solving a conundrum of the early Knopf image: how did the Borzoi identity simultaneously become associated with innovation and tradition? Alfred Knopf's sources of inspiration varied in the short years leading up to the launch of his company, but it is clear that they also influenced Blanche

[22] *The Publishers' Trade List Annual* (New York: Offices of *The Publishers' Weekly,* 1915).

Wolf Knopf's taste. Though Alfred often referred to Blanche as a co-founder of the company, and there is evidence that she shared Alfred's enthusiasm for European literature well before the Knopf publishing company was conceived, she was unquestionably his apprentice at the outset.

Alfred's approach to book acquisition was shaped in particularly important ways by two elements: his coursework at Columbia, which immersed him in scholarly firestorms over pedagogy and literature, combined with his stints as an employee of other publishing houses. Inevitably, Blanche Knopf 's approach to book acquisition absorbed these influences as well. In later years, the couple would become notorious for their bitter office feuds and for living in separate quarters (she preferred their Manhattan apartment, while he preferred their house in Westchester County). In this early chapter of the company's history, however, Alfred and Blanche Knopf worked very much in tandem.

Alfred Knopf's literary education evolved at the hands of a diverse cast of characters, including a radical Columbia professor named Joel Elias Spingarn; the Nobel Prize–winning novelist John Galsworthy, whose friendship Knopf cultivated on a 1912 trip to England; two key figures in America's early twentieth-century publishing world (Frank Nelson Doubleday, conservative and prosperous; and Mitchell Kennerley, adventurous and perpetually broke); and Samuel Knopf, the publisher's father. Of course, Knopf authors served as literary scouts also and thereby exercised considerable influence over the shaping of the Borzoi circle, but that phenomenon does not account for the initial foundation on which the company was built. This chapter addresses the influences that shaped the house of Knopf before there was such a house.

The Narratives of Alfred Knopf's Youth

Writing his voluminous unpublished memoir, Alfred Knopf recalled that his father sparked his childhood literary expectations by introducing him to the novels of Captain Frederick Marryat, an Englishman who had served in the navy and was a member of Charles Dickens's circle. Knopf also reports that his father encouraged him to read detective stories by Émile Gaboriau.[23] Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, the works of Marryat and Gaboriau provide no echoes of Samuel Knopf's eastern European origins. Though Alfred never professed a link between his own ancestry and that of the authors who dominated his company's first lists, the parallel deserves exploration: acknowledging the schism between his aristocratic persona and the realities of his upbringing is essential in tracing the evolution of the Borzoi mythos. Furthermore, clarification of Knopf's genealogy serves a practical purpose, as members of Alfred Knopf's family were early investors in his company.

Alfred often claimed that he did not know the name of the town from which his ancestors emigrated, but Knopf biographer Peter Prescott traced Samuel's birth to the village of Przemsyl, in present-day southeastern Poland, near the Russian border. Prescott's research included extensive personal interviews with Alfred Knopf himself, and with many of his relatives. According to Prescott, the Knopf family (whose surname is the German word for "button," related to the English word "knob") arrived in the

[23] Knopf memoir, page 12, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records (AAKI), Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 610:2, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC), University of Texas at Austin.

United States in 1871, when Samuel was nine years old. Samuel's father, Abraham (honored in Alfred Abraham Knopf's middle name), had taught English at the University of Warsaw, and Samuel's mother, Hannah, had earned a degree in chemistry there. Setting up household on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Abraham taught English to recent immigrants, while Hannah used her skills as a chemist to make daguerreotypes. Neither endeavor was particularly lucrative, but Abraham and Hannah enjoyed social status as professionals in fields that had required them to receive advanced educations.[24]

Samuel broke from this tradition, relishing an early career as a traveling salesman for clothing and furniture manufacturers. Assimilating to his new homeland at a young age, he reportedly spoke English without an accent and, because his father did not emphasize the Polish language at home, was fluent in German instead. In 1888, he married Alfred's mother, Ida Japhe, a public-school teacher whose ancestors had emigrated from a Baltic region that corresponds to the present-day Republic of Latvia. She gave birth to Alfred at home, on Manhattan's Upper West Side, on September 12, 1892. During the same year, Samuel became an American citizen. According to Prescott, Alfred's birth certificate erroneously lists his father's birthplace as the United States. Alfred's sister, Sophia (called Sophie), was born two years later, sharing the name of Samuel's eldest sister.

Though Alfred emphasized his upbringing in New York City, Peter Prescott's research provides the family's broader account. In the 1890s, Samuel moved his family to

[24] Peter Prescott, unpublished biography of Alfred Knopf. Private collection of Dr. Anne Lake Prescott. As of August 2009, the Harry Ransom Center staff was in the process of acquiring Prescott's Knopf papers.

Cincinnati, where he opened a wholesale clothing business. Despite this prosperity, the Knopfs' time in Ohio was short-lived. In July 1896 the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the city's *Commercial Tribune* published allegations of Ida's marital infidelity. She and her husband then separated, and Ida moved to the Bensonhurst neighborhood in Brooklyn with her two young children. Not long afterward, in February 1897, she committed suicide by ingesting carbolic acid. This tragedy was also publicized in the Cincinnati papers and in the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Alfred Knopf's memoir express uncertainty about the cause of his mother's death, but Prescott's interviews led him to write that the even in his elder years Alfred retained troubling memories of the incident, which took place when he was four years old.[25] The following year, Samuel married divorcée Lillie Harris, and Alfred acquired a stepsister, Elizabeth. In 1899, Samuel and Lillie's son Edwin was born. Eddy, as he was called, became an editor of Borzoi Books in his twenties but left the company after five years, pursuing a successful career as a Hollywood producer, director, and screenwriter.

By the turn of the century, Alfred Knopf was settled into the image of childhood stability and privilege that would form the underpinnings of his public biographical narrative for years to come. His father purchased a four-story house, complete with a well-stocked library, on Convent Avenue in blocks that at that time formed the northern boundary Harlem at 148th Street. White-collar Jewish residents, many with Russian ancestry, populated the neighborhood alongside Irish and German immigrants. By 1910, Eastern European Jews would outpace the latter two populations as Harlem's dominant

[25] Prescott manuscript, chapter one, page 26.

ethnic group.[26] In his memoir, Knopf recalled that Samuel staffed his household with Irish servants.

The Knopf children were raised as Reformed Jews, though their affiliation was decidedly more cultural than religious. Knopf described a household in which the high holy days were only partially observed. On Yom Kippur, the Knopf children lunched at the Plaza Hotel rather than fasting throughout the day, a treat that Knopf says balanced the tedium he experienced during the services.[27] The Plaza was one of many establishments where young Knopf received his epicurean training.

He also frequented his neighborhood's public library, where he fed his hunger for Arthur Conan Doyle, and he attended local public schools. He briefly was enrolled at the prestigious Horace Mann School, a stint that ended after he was caught stealing books. His reasons for thievery could not have lain in lack of reading material at home. Describing the theft incident and his home library on Convent Avenue in the same segment, Knopf celebrated the design features of elaborately bound sets of works by Thackeray, Dickens, and Balzac purchased by his father, who also lined the shelves with Burton's *The Arabian Nights* and the ten-volume *Anglo Saxon Review* alongside many books on Napoleon. Knopf's vivid memories include full-color plates and red morocco (goatskin) bindings.[28]

By this time, Samuel Knopf had settled into the career that would shape his son's future in significant ways. Drawing on his experience in the garment trade, Samuel

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[26] Jeffrey Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 6, 40, and 174.
[27] Knopf memoir, page 11, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 610:2, HRC.
[28] Knopf memoir, page 12, 610:2.

launched an advertising firm in the West Village, producing catalogs and other promotional material for this industry, hiring such artists as Walter Appleton Clark and John Wolcott Adams to illustrate them. Before long, this led to Samuel's position at Barron Collier's national advertising agency, which managed railway media in more than 700 cities, including New York and Boston, and also provided full-service marketing for international companies, including the British firm Ridgways Teas.

The affiliation with Barron Collier coincided with Samuel Knopf's moving his family once again, this time to an impressive country estate, complete with tennis courts, in the village of Lawrence on Long Island's south shore. Living outside the city also called for the purchase of a motorcar, in this case a luxurious seven-passenger Packard. The family embarked on a chauffeur-driven summer tour of New England, but Knopf claimed to spend the trip focused on the pages of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, unimpressed with the American scenery.

Adolescent Alfred was uprooted a final time when his father decided to make him a boarder at the now-defunct Mackenzie School in Dobbs Ferry, north of New York City on the banks of the Hudson River. Depicting his schoolboy persona as that of a bookish outsider, Knopf seems to have admired the school's Scottish founder, James Cameron Mackenzie, and claimed to have had closer friendships with faculty members than with his classmates.[29] After just one year, Mackenzie declared that Knopf was sufficiently prepared for college, and in 1908, at the age of sixteen, Knopf entered Columbia University, which had dedicated a gleaming new campus just a decade prior. The

[29] Knopf memoir, page 12, 610:2.

Morningside location, with an entrance at 116th Street, was not far from the Manhattan neighborhood of his childhood. Knopf continued to live on Long Island, embarking on a complex series of train rides with reading material in tow. He attributed this cumbersome commute to his stepmother's belief that young men should not be coddled. His memoir also indicates that Samuel Knopf usually lived beyond his means; perhaps he was not able to afford the dual luxuries of a Long Island estate and on-campus housing for his son. Memories of this occasional financial insecurity may have contributed to Alfred Knopf's insistence that his publishing house pay its vendors and authors all that they were owed, and pay them promptly—a practice that was not universally followed in early twentieth-century American publishing.

At Columbia and in Europe

Knopf entered Columbia at a time when the university was experiencing an identity crisis. Nicholas Murray Butler, who served as Columbia's president for more than forty years, had begun his reign in 1902. By the end of his second decade at the helm, financial gifts to Columbia topped thirty-four million dollars, an unprecedented level.[30] The university saw other forms of extraordinary growth, captured in an early campus map featuring more than thirty completed buildings for student housing, classrooms, library space, and other uses, spread across nine city blocks (the result of the migration from the cramped midtown campus) and in sheer enrollment numbers, which jumped from 4,440

[30] "Gifts to Columbia … $34,609,091 Under Dr. Butler," *New York Times,* 28 January 1922: 28. PHN.

in 1902 to 9,929 in 1913.[31] Some faculty members perceived this growth as an indication of commercialization in higher education, a trend they viewed with disdain. Among those who shared this view was Joel Elias Spingarn, the professor of comparative literature whom Knopf often cited as sparking his desire to become a publisher of literary fiction.

Spingarn equated Butler's changes with increased impersonalization on campus, decrying the new emphasis on overly "pragmatic" course offerings. Spingarn's sentiments were vividly captured by one of his biographers, Joyce Ross:

> In the wake of advancing science, he sought to encourage interest in the humanities by inaugurating annual prizes for the best undergraduate entries in belles-lettres. He received widespread publicity in the New York press by refusing to conduct his classes in a new $500,000 lecture hall, on the grounds that the pure white plaster and shining new blackboards were incompatible with such a romantic subject as comparative literature.[32]

The field of college English experienced a variety of rifts during this period, including the departure of composition-studies researchers and speech teachers from the Modern Language Association, marked most notably by the creation of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1911.[33] Echoing the fine printing movement's interest in the physical aesthetics of books, debates also erupted between philologists and proponents of purely aesthetic criticism regarding approaches to literary scholarship. Butler succeeded in merging comparative literature studies with Columbia's English program, making Spingarn a subordinate member of the English faculty, a circumstance

[31] *Columbia University in the City of New York, Catalogue and General Announcements, 1909-1910*, page 170, University Archives and Columbiana Library (UACL), Columbia University. Frederick Paul Keppel, *Columbia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), 275.
[32] Joyce Ross, *Joel Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 7.
[33] William Ward, "A Short History of the NCTE," *College English* 22, no. 2 (1960): 71-77.

that Knopf's professor very publicly derided. Although the fragmented, highly abstract, and often illegible lecture notes preserved in the New York Public Library's Spingarn archive provide surprisingly little insight into Knopf's experience as a student in the comparative-literature classroom, other samples convey a rhetorical approach that may have pervaded Spingarn's pedagogy as well. For example, Spingarn engaged in open conflict with officers of the Modern Language Association, calling for the formation of a committee to explore the possible ineptitude of MLA secretary and publications director Charles Grandgent, a Harvard professor. Spingarn believed that American scholarship was being rejected by Grandgent, and that the best models for scholarly literary publishing lay overseas, particularly in Italian journals. "Compared with them our publications seem vulgar and banal," Spingarn wrote in a letter to Fred Newton Scott, founder of the University of Michigan's rhetoric department.[34] Such Eurocentrism, combined with a penchant for invective language, would become hallmarks of Knopf's style.

Though Lionel Trilling is often associated with the distinction of being the first Jewish member of Columbia's English department to earn tenure, Joel Spingarn was technically the first Jewish literature instructor at Columbia to do so, becoming a full professor in 1908, the year of Knopf's arrival on campus. It is difficult to determine the degrees of anti-Semitism in place at Columbia at the time. Frederick Keppel's *Columbia,* published in 1914 by Oxford University Press, offers an anecdotal assessment:

[34] Quoted in Donald C. Stewart, "Harvard's Influence on English Studies: Perceptions from Three Universities in the Early Twentieth Century," *College Composition and Communication* 43 (1992): 462.

> One of the commonest references that one hears with regard to Columbia is that its position at the gateway of European immigration makes it socially uninviting to students who come from homes of refinement. The form which the inquiry takes in these days of slowly dying race prejudice is, 'Isn't Columbia overrun with European Jews, who are most unpleasant persons socially?' The question is so often asked and so often answered in the affirmative by those who have made no effort to ascertain the facts that it will do no harm to speak frankly about it. In the first place, Columbia is not 'overrun' with Jews any more than it is with Roman Catholics or Episcopalians. The University is open to any student of good moral character who can satisfy the entrance requirements, without limitation of race or creed, and it is hoped that this will always be so. No questions are asked and no records kept of the race or religion of incoming students, but it is evident that the proportion of Jewish students is decreasing rather than increasing.[35]

Jerome Karabel, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, asserts that non-academic admissions criteria were not instituted in the Ivy League until the 1920s, when "it had become clear that a system of selection focused solely on scholastic performance would lead to the admission of increasing numbers of Jewish students, most of them of eastern European background. This transformation was becoming visible at precisely the time that the nationwide movement to restrict immigration was gaining momentum. … The top administrators of the Big Three (and of other leading private colleges, such as Columbia and Dartmouth) recognized that relying solely on any single factor—especially one that could be measured, like academic excellence—would deny them control over the composition of the freshman class."[36]

Nonetheless, there is direct evidence of at least one Columbia graduate student in English being subjected to anti-Semitism before the period described by Karabel. Earning his master's degree at Columbia in 1903, Ludwig Lewisohn applied for a fellowship to

[35] Frederick Paul Keppel, *Columbia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), 179-180.
[36] Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 1-2.

the Ph.D. program but was turned down. In *Up Stream: An American Chronicle*, he describes an atmosphere of anti-Semitism pervading American higher education, recalling that when he appealed to a Columbia professor after the denial, the letter of response included the following line: "A recent experience has shown me how terribly hard it is for a man of Jewish birth to get a good position. I had always suspected that it was a matter worth considering, but I had not known how wide-spread and strong it was. While we shall be glad to do anything we can for you, therefore, I cannot help feeling that the chances are going to be greatly against you." The professor's identity was not revealed; Lewisohn assigned a pseudonym to him.[37]

Unlike Lewisohn, Knopf did not require or seek financial aid at Columbia. In order to gain admission, Knopf had to meet the minimum age requirement of fifteen, produce a letter of recommendation (preferably from a principal), and earn sufficient points on a series of entrance examinations. Granting flexibility regarding the applicant's choice of subject matter, the examinations were grouped according to four areas, categorized not only according to academic discipline but also to level of difficulty. Area I, for example, included elementary English, elementary mathematics, and elementary Latin. Level IV examinations ranged from elementary history to advanced Greek, advanced English, and advanced mathematics. Knopf chose to embark on a generalist's bachelor of arts degree within Columbia College, requiring coursework in English; French or German; History; Latin or Greek; mathematics; philosophy; physical

[37] Ludwig Lewisohn, *The Origins of Literary Studies in America: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Gerald Graff and Michael Warner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 191-192. Originally published in *Up Stream: An American Chronicle* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922).

education; chemistry or physics; additional science courses chosen from a block whose options ranged from botany to experimental psychology; and units chosen from another broad spectrum that included astronomy, physics, and anthropology.

Columbia also required that Knopf be male. Female applicants were referred to Barnard College, founded in 1889. The implications for Blanche, who never attended college, are noteworthy. She would launch an esteemed career in literary publishing under the guidance of a man whose literature professors and classroom peers were all male, trained in a canon that emphasized male authors.[38]

When in later years Knopf would publicly credit Spingarn with shaping his literary taste, he was invoking a name that was associated with a degree of contrarianism that led to Spingarn's widely publicized dismissal from Columbia. Knopf was a student in the last comparative literature course Spingarn taught at Columbia. The termination letter, dated 16 January 1911, establishes the following: President Butler merged the comparative literature department with the English department, making Spingarn subordinate to the new chairman of the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Ashley Horace Thorndike. Spingarn refused to acknowledge Thorndike's authority over him, Butler wrote, and the university could not afford to pay multiple professors of comparative literature. Therefore, Spingarn's position was to be discontinued at the close of the semester.[39]

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[38] *Columbia University in the City of New York, Catalogue and General Announcements, 1909-1910*, UACL.

[39] Joel Elias Spingarn, *A Question of Academic Freedom: Bring the Official Correspondence between Nicholas Murray Butler and J. E. Spingarn* (New York: privately published). Central Files: President, 295:13, UACL. Also available in circulating collections of numerous university libraries.

The subtext, however, was more complex, a scenario that illustrates the climate of Columbia. The longer narrative was made plain in *A Question of Academic Freedom: Being the Official Correspondence between Nicholas Murray Butler and J. E. Spingarn,* a monograph of more than fifty pages published by Spingarn and, according to the title page, "printed for distribution among the alumni." Thus, Spingarn responded to his termination by distributing copies of his rhetorical duel with Butler, along with appendices featuring testimonials from former students, the parents of former students, and an international cadre of literary critics.

This monograph provides details not mentioned in Butler's letter. One month before his termination, Spingarn had made a motion in a meeting of philosophy faculty (English and comparative literature faculty were listed as members of the Faculty of Philosophy in the 1909-1910 catalog) proposing that the group publicly acknowledge the academic services of their colleague Harry Thurston Peck. In addition to serving as a professor of ancient languages, Harry Thurston Peck was also a noted literary critic and had served as editor-in-chief of *The Bookman*, launching what is often considered to be America's first bestseller list in 1895.[40] Peck had been the defendant in a widely publicized a breach of promise suit brought against him by Esther Quinn, a stenographer who claimed that Peck had engaged in a long-term extramarital affair with her, repeatedly promising to leave his wife and marry Quinn. The suit was dismissed, but Butler dismissed Peck before that outcome had been reached. Spingarn's motion was

[40] Michael Korda, *Making the List: A Cultural History of the American Bestseller, 1900–1999* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2001), xvii.

immediately tabled, but his support of Peck was perhaps viewed as insubordination. In a letter to Butler written two weeks after his termination, Spingarn asserted that he had established a good working relationship with Thorndike, despite his initial insistence that Thorndike was not academically qualified to oversee Spingarn's professional life, and that Butler had been made aware of the congenial reconciliation between the two. Spingarn also disputed the Board of Trustees' legal right to discontinue his professorship, rejecting the claim regarding the university's poverty.

In addition, Spingarn used his confrontation with Butler as a forum for asserting the importance of comparative literature, which he believed could combat narrow-minded nationalism. His argument likely echoed the charisma with which he captivated Knopf: "To abolish comparative literature (except as a mere name) is to abolish literary history. Instead of diminishing the number of professorships devoted to it, it would at least be more reasonable to suggest that one or more be added to every literary department in the University, in order that one or two scholars in every department should be able to see beyond its own national or parochial limits."[41]

Such dialogues were far removed from any discussions about books Knopf had engaged in at home, though Spingarn's name would have been recognized beyond the gates of Columbia. Not only did the academic world know about the ensuing war of words, but all readers of the *New York Times* were exposed to it also. Spingarn's imbroglio was covered in a series of updates over several weeks during the spring of

[41] Joel Elias Spingarn, *A Question of Academic Freedom: Bring the Official Correspondence between Nicholas Murray Butler and J. E. Spingarn* (New York: privately published). Central Files: President, 295:13, UACL.

1911. His departure from the university gave Spingarn a much wider stage, however, and in many ways he provided a model for Knopf's aspirations to become a literary impresario and country gentleman. In his memoir *Days of the Phoenix,* literary historian Van Wyck Brooks devotes a full chapter to Joel Spingarn's circle, who flocked to the estate he and his wife inhabited near Amenia, in upstate New York. Having inherited his father's fortune, amassed in the wholesale tobacco trade before the Civil War, Spingarn did not need to pursue a career in academia beyond Columbia, turning his eye toward creating a haven for writers and critics such as Lewis Mumford, Ernest Boyd, modern artists Walter and Magda Pach, and Geroid Tanquary Robinson, a contributor to *The Dial* who undertook doctoral research in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.[42]

Spingarn's voice as a public intellectual is perhaps best captured in *Creative Criticism,* a collection of essays that includes both his revolutionary lecture, "The New Criticism," as well as its update, a "new manifesto" titled "The Younger Generation." The book has been described by a variety of scholars as a radical work that pitted him against elitist New Humanists such as Irving Babbitt. Rhetorical theorist James Berlin, for example, notes that Spingarn wanted no moral interpretation, no taxonomy of genres or forms, and certainly no investigation of the author's personal life when exploring poetry in the classroom or as a literary critic.[43] It is important to note the distinction between Spingarn's New Criticism and that of second-wave New Critics (Knopf author T. S. Eliot among them) who rejected Spingarn's affinity for romantic reading theories.

[42] Van Wyck Brooks, *Days of the Phoenix: The Nineteen-Twenties I Remember* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1957).
[43] James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 80-81.

Arnold Goldsmith's survey of American literary criticism describes Spingarn's notion of "new" as stemming from frustration with philological approaches to literature, neo-Classical insistence on compartmentalization of literary forms, historical criticism, psychological criticism, and dogmatic criticism of any kind.[44]

Spingarn's desire to purge criticism of morality debates appeared in his satirical take on the seven liberal arts, appearing in the literary magazine *Seven Arts*. "To say that poetry is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle is immoral," he wrote. "Imagine these whiffs of conversation at a dinner table. 'This cauliflower would be excellent if it had only been prepared in accordance with international law.' 'Do you know why the cook's pastry is so good? He has never told a lie or seduced a woman.'"[45] Such attitudes were echoed by Knopf when he addressed censorship woes in the Borzoi's early years.

Spingarn's activist circles placed him in literary proximity with Knopf during the Harlem Renaissance. In a lifelong campaign to eradicate racism, Spingarn and his brother Arthur, a New York attorney, became members of the NAACP's executive committee in 1910. Literary appreciation created bonds between Spingarn and other NAACP members Walter White and James Weldon Johnson, both of whom became Borzoi authors. Spingarn's initial efforts on behalf of the NAACP were concentrated in the New York Vigilance Committee. Testifying on behalf of black theater goers who were denied seating beside him, writing newspaper editorials, and monitoring race relations in the city

[44] Arnold Goldsmith, *American Literary Criticism: 1905-1965* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 26.
[45] Joel Elias Spingarn, *Creative Criticism and Other Essays* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), 217.

comprised his local involvement. On the national front, he led daring but generally unsuccessful campaigns to overturn segregationist laws throughout the south, integrate the federal workplace, ban the film *Birth of a Nation* (which depicts the Ku Klux Klan as heroic), and impose federal laws that would impose harsh penalties on lynch mobs. He was nonetheless highly successful in generating numerous sizeable bequests to the NAACP while making significant financial contributions himself.[46] Perhaps surprisingly, there is no evidence of Spingarn's attempting to spur African American enrollment at Columbia. "Theme for English B," the widely anthologized poem by Harlem Renaissance poet and Knopf author Langston Hughes, is often interpreted as expressing the isolation Hughes experienced when he briefly attended the predominantly white Columbia in 1921.

Spingarn's influence on Knopf's emergence as a publisher extended beyond the abstract. In very practical terms, Spingarn led his student to his first essential connections in the book business. Knopf published several reviews for *Columbia Monthly*, the undergraduate literary publication, but was more successful as the publication's advertising manager (a triumph that Knopf attributed to his father's work as an advertising executive). Yet in April 1911 he published a review of Englishman John Galsworthy's novel *The Patrician*, aspiring to submit a longer piece on Galsworthy for Spingarn's student-essay contest. Knopf considered this to be the fateful turning point on his road to success.[47] In search of additional biographical details about the author (a quest

[46] Joyce Ross, *Joel Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).
[47]Knopf memoir, page 32, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 610:2,HRC.

that was antithetical to Spingarn's New Criticism), Knopf wrote to Galsworthy in care of his publisher, the venerable William Heinemann. Knopf did not win the prize, but he did launch a friendship with Galsworthy, who in turn would introduce him to William Henry Hudson, author of the novel *Green Mansions*, which would become Knopf's first lucrative title. Galsworthy never became a Knopf author, published in the United States primarily by Charles Scribner's Sons, but he served as the Borzoi's first impresario and contributed forewords to several Knopf books.

In approaching Galsworthy, the eighteen-year-old Knopf was not satisfied with a simple written interview. Instead, he wanted to place his professor and the venerable Englishman in conversation with one another, exemplifying an identity as ringmaster that would cause his literary circle to grow before he had even determined that he wanted to become a publisher. When Galsworthy dismissed academics in a letter to Knopf, the young student responded by sending his correspondent a copy of Spingarn's *The New Criticism* and printing the latter's reply in a subsequent issue of *Columbia Monthly*.[48] In June 1911, shortly after Spingarn's dismissal from Columbia, Knopf and his former instructor corresponded about the review, embarking on a friendship based on new roles as Spingarn enthusiastically debated questions of aestheticism.[49]

Secretary of the university's Peithologian Society, a Columbia literary organization formed in 1806 but on the wane by the 1920s, Knopf organized a tea for Spingarn in the aftermath of his turmoil with Butler, assuring the former professor that

[48] Alfred Knopf to Joel Spingarn, autograph letter signed (ALS), n.d., Joel E. Spingarn Papers, 6:2, New York Public Library (NYPL).
[49] Joel Spingarn to Alfred Knopf, typed carbon copy letter (TCL), 7 June 1911, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.

Peithologian members and comparative literature students remained his champions.[50] When Knopf neared graduation, he solicited a final essay for *Columbia Monthly* from the ousted Spingarn, who thought the request was courageous and agreed to submit a piece on New Criticism as his final "seminar" for the student literary publication. Knopf told his former professor that he would do anything for the cause of academic freedom.[51]

As a member of the last undergraduate course Spingarn taught, most likely Introduction to European Literature, "from the Renaissance to the present day," Knopf would have read works "from Dante to Tennyson, and with the development of the main currents of literature in modern Europe."[52] He recalled that Spingarn would frequently sit at the back of the classroom, asking the students to hold forth. The course concluded with an examination essay that Knopf found tremendously difficult, predicting that none of the students would pass. Yet they were each awarded an A because, Spingarn later told them, he wanted to give them something to remember him by. In addition, Spingarn asked a colleague, George C. D Odell, to post the grades on his behalf, knowing this would provoke the revered Odell ire.[53]

One other significant lesson was passed from Spingarn to Knopf: the significance of a publisher's reputation. Knopf asserted that Spingarn was the first instructor he had encountered who described books from the perspective of a bibliographer, citing Macmillan as an example of excellence.[54] At a talk delivered to the Grolier Club in 1948,

[50] Alfred Knopf to Joel Spingarn, ALS, n.d., Joel E. Spingarn Papers, 6:2, NYPL.
[51] Alfred Knopf to Joel Spingarn, ALS, 6 December 1911, Joel E. Spingarn Papers, 6:2, NYPL.
[52] *Columbia University Bulletin of Information*, 1909-1910 and 1911-1912, UACL.
[53] Knopf memoir, page 31, 610:2.
[54] Knopf memoir, page 29, 610:2.

Knopf found this characterization of Macmillan to be outdated ("It amuses me nowadays to recall his statement") but he reiterated Spingarn's role as a bibliophile, an influence that caused him even to appreciate the bibliographical features of his textbooks:

> He was the first to talk to me about the virtues of different editions of classic authors, of typography and the appearance of books. … Also at college I was much impressed by the beautiful work done by Ginn and Company at their Athenaeum Press. I was told that in those days books like Robinson's histories were set by hand. I do not know whether this was the case, but they struck me as very beautiful books—bindings apart. And Holt's first edition of Hazen's *Europe since 1815* was a very well-made book indeed.[55]

While the feud erupted between Spingarn and Butler, Knopf was savoring another course that would influence his early publishing decisions, led by Bayard Boyesen. A poet who did not hold a degree beyond the A. B., Boyesen exalted Russian literature, though eastern Europe was not featured in any Columbia literature course title at the time. Also dismissed from Columbia, for reasons that remain unclear, Boyesen subsequently gave a lecture to art students at the Ferrer School in Greenwich Village, praising "philosophic anarchists" who had fallen on their swords in the name of creative freedom, including Euripides, James Fenimore Cooper (who was expelled from Yale), and Spingarn's mentor, George Woodberry, another ousted Columbia professor. After the lecture, Boyesen was quoted in the *New York Times* as encouraging his audience to "read the story of the Russian makers of literature. Except Tolstoy, of whom the Government was afraid, every one of them was put to death, sentenced to death, or exiled."[56]

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[55] Alfred Knopf, "Some Random Recollections: An Informal Talk Made at the Grolier Club, New York, October 21, 1948," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 5-6.
[56] "Sees Artists' Hope in Anarchic Ideas," *New York Times,* 18 March 1912: 8. PHN.

Knopf was repulsed by anarchism, but the seeds for his interest in the literature of Europe, particularly Russia, were sown. Knopf later regretted his decision to avoid the legendary Brander Matthews's American literature course, a rare offering in a department that otherwise tended to restrict its course of study to English authors. Knopf would later write that at the time he believed there was no such thing as American literature.[57] However, he did study drama under Matthews (the latter's title was professor of dramatic literature), most likely in a course called The Development of the English Drama. This led Knopf to sometimes attend as many as three theatrical performances a week while in college, buying balcony seats for seventy-five cents and fostering an enthusiasm for dramaturgy that would lead him to publish more than thirty plays during his company's first decade, many of them packaged in distinctive checkerboard-patterned jackets and bindings within the Borzoi Plays series. While the concept of reading a play in book form has little appeal to most of today's book buyers, it was the early twentieth-century equivalent of buying a popular film on DVD for home use. Random House founder Bennett Cerf confirmed the lucrative aspect of hardcover plays (as opposed to paperback scripts, for performers) during this period, observing that such books were well advertised by the plays themselves. His firm's edition of Eugene O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness* reportedly sold more than 50,000 copies.[58]

As a student, Knopf's taste in theater meandered beyond Matthews's reading list, including a controversial play by John Millington Synge in which the protagonist gains

[57]Knopf memoir, page 22, 610:2.
[58] Bennett Cerf, interview by Robin Hawkins, Columbia University Oral History Research Office transcript, 23 October, 1967, page 45. Accessed 28 July 2009. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/cerfb/transcripts/cerfb_1_6_266.html

adoration among County Mayo villagers who admire his claims of remorseless patricide. Titled *The Playboy of the Western World*, the play sparked riots.[59] In a profile of Synge published in Columbia's literary magazine, young Knopf expressed ebullient admiration for his Irish literary hero and also revealed a flair for hyperbole, which would later inform the voice of advertising copy published under his signature. "Mr. Yeats has written beautiful verse but nothing in my opinion that can compare for sheer glory with the wonderful prose of Synge," the undergraduate Knopf wrote. "*The Playboy* is unique; nothing like it exists: it is a distinct and noble contribution to our literature. … His best works are well-nigh perfect specimens of theatric art." The only displeasure Knopf voiced regarding Synge's works was that the characters in *The Tinker's Wedding* too often invoked profanity and other vernacular forms, which Knopf derided not on moral grounds but on elitist ones: "There is less beauty in this work than in the others—for it deals with coarser folk."[60] Nearly fifty years later, Synge would posthumously join the Knopf ranks in paperback.

John Erskine, the Columbia professor perhaps most closely associated with the notion of twentieth-century literary canons, seems to have made only a minimal impression on Knopf. Erskine joined the faculty of Columbia in 1909 and, according to the university's catalogs, rose from adjunct to associate professor status while Knopf was an undergraduate student there. During those years, Erskine taught composition and English literature of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries. Erskine's

[59] Knopf memoir, page 24, 610:2.
[60] Alfred Knopf, "John Millington Synge," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol.1 : Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 215-219. Originally published in the *Columbia Monthly*, April 1911.

renowned "great books" course was not launched until 1920, under the title General Honors, emphasizing classical texts read in translation and discussed in small groups over a two-year period.[61] The course was renamed Colloquium in Important Books in 1932, three years before Erskine joined the roster of Knopf authors. In his memoir and in several interviews Knopf recalled being a student in a summer composition course led by the illustrious vanguard Erskine, but he more often invoked the name of Joel Spingarn when questioned about his literary education.

With a firmly established appreciation for all aspects of a book's value—intrinsic and extrinsic, physical and conceptual—Knopf graduated from Columbia in 1912 and embarked on a tour of the countries he had been trained to associate with superior literature. The Columbia catalog confirms that his bachelor of arts degree was conferred on February 12, 1912. At the time, Columbia conferred degrees at the October and February meetings of its University Council and on Commencement Day. Though always candid about his mediocre grades (he failed economics and earned a D in a course in harmony), Knopf was equally candid about his motivation to complete the degree early: his father had promised him a trip abroad. His family had embarked on a European tour the preceding summer, but Knopf stayed home, preferring to make his transatlantic sojourn alone, after his studies had concluded.

In preparation for the trip, Knopf diligently attempted to arrange appointments with a variety of literary figures, ostensibly for the sole purpose of enriching his

[61] "The Core Curriculum," Columbia University Website. Accessed 28 November 2008. http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/oasis/history2.php.

appreciation for books, not because he aspired to start a publishing house. Though several of the social engagements he enjoyed on this excursion led to significant acquisitions after he became a publisher, including books by Alfred Ollivant, by all accounts Knopf intended to study international law at Harvard in the fall of 1912. The only entrance requirement for doing so was completion of an undergraduate degree. Without the obligation to prepare for an entrance examination or the need to find employment, Knopf was able to savor an itinerary driven by sheer pleasure. In his case, this especially meant spending time in theaters, concert halls, and bookstores.

The U.S. State Department issued a travel certificate to him on January 29, 1912. The document describes Knopf as having a dark complexion and being five feet nine inches tall.[62] The other vital document he carried was a letter of credit for $1,500, sufficient for half a year's stay, from February through August, if he budgeted carefully.[63] His initial lodging had no running water.

Perhaps surprisingly, his first destination was not England but Germany, where he was to meet with novelist and teacher Hermann Krüger. Rudolf Tombo, Knopf's German professor at Columbia, had supplied a letter of introduction. Though the subject of German lessons with Krüger earned little mention in Knopf's later recollections, his memoir includes an anecdote in which he met a German professor at the Hanover pension he had found through his *Baedeker*. Befriending the man, who spoke no English, Knopf spent several hours with him in a beer hall, where his new acquaintance asked him

[62]Travel certificate. AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.
[63]Knopf memoir, page 61, 610:2.

whether he was Catholic or Protestant. When Knopf replied, "Jew," the professor asked if their boarding house provided kosher food, assuming that Knopf required an orthodox menu. In his retelling of this exchange, Knopf acknowledges a question of identity as he presented himself on foreign territory for the first time: how to resolve the difference between what a Jewish identity meant in his own mind versus the assumptions made by non-Jewish Europeans. Knopf also noted several reminders of his American identity encountered on the trip. These include the fact that he sailed aboard the Hamburg America Line's *President Lincoln,* and that a portrait of William Jennings Bryan hung in the boarding house, honoring the former presidential hopeful's time as a lodger there.

Immersing himself in European creative endeavors, he was in the audience for varied and numerous performances, including the controversial playwright Arthur Schnitzler's *Das Weite Land* (which Knopf declared "terrible"), a German performance of George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* ("excellent"), and Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Visiting many picture galleries, he declared that he was "mad about Rubens." Traveling by third-class rail he mapped out a tour that included Prague, Dresden, Berlin, Munich, Leipzig, Trieste, Mainz, Cologne, Heidelberg, and many other stops. In Bonn, he visited the house where Beethoven was born. In Budapest, he joined the Puccini craze and applauded opera performed in Hungarian. By April, he was in transit to Vienna, learning of the *Titanic* disaster while he was a passenger on the Orient Express.[64]

[64] Alfred Knopf's typed notes, filed apart from the bulk of his memoir, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.

In May, he sent a letter to Joel Spingarn, who had urged his former student to tour Italy, home of Spingarn's revered literary critic and future Knopf author Benedetto Croce. With candor, Knopf expressed complete disdain for Italy, showing no hesitation in writing disparagingly of a country his mentor had loved. The young graduate said that Italy disgusted him so much that he wanted to leave soon and had no intention of ever returning.[65] With similar candor, he told his parents that Paris did not suit him either, rejecting the city that his future wife would consider a second home.[66] He was more content in Versailles and Chamonix, savoring *A Set of Six,* Joseph Conrad's stories for children, en route.

The Great War would prevent Knopf from returning to Europe until more than a decade had passed, and he occasionally described the pending military crisis (albeit with a degree of naïveté) in correspondence with his family, quoted in his memoir notes. He surmised that the Kaiser Wilhelm II was a dove in a country on the brink of civil war. As for the Ottoman conflicts, Knopf declared that Italy should have dedicated more resources to improve the water quality in Venetian canals rather than annexing Tripoli.[67]

Knopf felt decidedly more at home in England and Scotland than on the continent, though one of his most-anticipated events in Britain involved eastern Europeans. In 1912, Hungarian-born Artúr Nikisch became conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra with a debut performance featuring a widely publicized new symphony composed by

[65] Alfred Knopf to Joel Spingarn, ALS, 26 May 1912, Joel E. Spingarn Papers, NYPL.
[66] Alfred Knopf's typed notes, filed apart from the bulk of his memoir, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.
[67] Alfred Knopf's typed notes, filed apart from the bulk of his memoir, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.

Ignace Paderewski, who shared Knopf's Polish ancestry. Nonetheless, the remainder of his experiences in the United Kingdom reflected his Anglophilic tendencies, including an Edinburgh performance of John Galsworthy's play *The Pigeon* and Shakespeare at the Savoy under the direction of Granville Barker.

Knopf had solicited an essay from novelist Alfred Ollivant for the *Columbia Monthly*, an endeavor that produced considerable correspondence and enhanced Knopf's admiration for Ollivant's novel *Bob, Son of Battle* (whose protagonist is a dog). While in Europe, Knopf telegraphed birthday greetings to Ollivant and asked for an appointment.[68] This led to Knopf's introduction to the Savile Club, where he dined as Ollivant's guest.

His most consequential hosts were John and Ada Galsworthy, who lived on a two-hundred acre farm in Devonshire. Met by Mrs. Galsworthy with a team of horses, Knopf found their village of Manaton preferable to Oxford and Stratford, which he had found to be as overrun by tourists as Italy was.[69] That night, the Galsworthys would express surprise that Knopf had not heard of their friend W. H. Hudson or his novel *Green Mansions*. Knopf would read it before the summer was over, enamored of the exoticism in the book's tropical setting, and in 1916 it would become his company's first strong seller.

Knopf also met a bookseller who would play an important role in the future of the Borzoi. In New York, he had frequented The Little Book-Shop Around the Corner, founded by Knopf's future employer Mitchell Kennerley. The store was managed by (and

[68] Assorted correspondence between Alfred Knopf and Alfred Ollivant circa 1911-1912, AAKI, Series IV: Author Files, 723.10, HRC.
[69] Alfred Knopf's typed notes, filed apart from the bulk of his memoir, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC.

in 1912 purchased by) Englishman Laurence Gomme.[70] Before his trip, Knopf received a letter of introduction from Gomme, providing a formal link with the London bookseller Dan Rider. Art critic, Aubrey Beardsley biographer, and future Knopf author Haldane Macfall described the shop as "where the young literary bloods, here and from America, were wont to forgather before the war—the 'lions' den,' where the young lions roared and the asses brayed on their way to becoming editors of limited editions … while Dan Rider's laugh, where he sat enthroned at the seat of custom—I never saw him sell a book,—rattled the windows of St. Martin's Lane."[71] Throughout the summer of 1912, Knopf spent considerable time at Rider's shop, meeting Macfall, journalist and publisher Holbrook Jackson, and social commentator Gerald Stanley Lee. The most significant introduction Knopf achieved there was to critic and Bloomsbury Group editor John Middleton Murry, often accompanied by Katherine Mansfield, his future first wife.[72] Books by both Murry and Mansfield would populate the Borzoi list over the next decade, though for unknown reasons the loquacious Knopf claims to have never spoken to Mansfield during those encounters in Rider's shop. If Knopf was reticent in Mansfield's presence, he was not shy with Rider, at one point even procuring an invitation to lunch

[70] Matthew Bruccoli, *The Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley, Bookman* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 75.
[71] Haldane Macfall, "Claud Lovat Fraser. English Art's Untimely Loss," in *The Living Age,* vol. 26 (Boston: The Living Age Company, 1922), 358.
[72] Knopf memoir, page 58, 610:2.

with the bookseller, whose other guest was Socialist leader Henry Halliday Sparling, former son-in-law of fine printer William Morris.[73]

Knopf's father had also supplied him with letters of introduction, though Samuel's associates had little to do with the literary world. Through his father, Knopf was a guest at the home of Ridgway Tea executive Stanley Cooper, who took him to the Royal Ascot derby. The guest of M.P. Cecil Harmsworth, Knopf watched a session in the House of Commons. Cognizant of the September 23 deadline for presenting his diploma to register at Harvard, Knopf could easily have spent his time in Europe fostering additional connections in mercantile fields and law. By the time he returned to the States, however, he had settled on publishing—a career that would allow him to immerse himself in the humanities as well as in commerce.

Alfred Knopf's Introduction to Publishing and to Blanche Wolf

Knopf claimed that his decision to abandon law school was inspired not only by his time in Europe but also by Blanche Wolf, a teenage girl he had met on Long Island during the previous summer. Returning to New York in late August 1912, he began thinking very tentatively of marrying her, deciding that law school would postpone the prospect of marriage for too long.[74] In a tribute to his wife published in *The Borzoi Quarterly* shortly after her death in 1966, Knopf stated that their mutual interest in books fostered their courtship. Though they had not corresponded while he was abroad, Blanche easily

[73] Alfred Knopf's typed notes, filed apart from the bulk of his memoir, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4, HRC. Though identified in Knopf's notes as a son-in-law of Morris named Spaulding, the correct surname is Sparling. His marriage to May Morris had ended in divorce in 1898.
[74] Knopf memoir, page 65, 610:2.

resumed their friendship, despite her parents' strong disapproval of Alfred. He was still living with his father, in Manhattan at that point because the Lawrence house had been sold, and was drawing just twenty-five dollars a week from his low-level publishing job. They became secretly engaged on March 6, 1915, and, after Blanche's persuasive appeals to her family, were married at the St. Regis Hotel on April 4, 1916.[75] The ceremony was officiated by city magistrate Alexander Geismar, a former rabbi. His decision to enter a secular profession impressed Alfred and Blanche, who agreed in rejecting the idea of a religious ceremony.[76]

Though much is known about Alfred Knopf's education, Blanche Wolf's life before the summer of 1911 is much less well documented, possibly because of her own silence on the matter. The notion of her family as having higher social status than his is a recurring aspect of many published anecdotes about the marriage, reflecting a reality of former dissention between American Jews with German or Austrian ancestry, versus those from eastern Europe, the former representing earlier immigration waves. Blanche occasionally implied that her father was a well-established jeweler, while Samuel Knopf's fluctuating wealth was derived from the burgeoning realm of advertising, still a field of dodgy respectability in some circles and associated with the stereotype of a *shtetel* peddler. When Blanche met Alfred for the first time, his family lived on Long Island year-round. Her family lived on Manhattan's Upper East Side, at 40 East 83rd Street, keeping a summer house on Long Island in Woodmere, an easy bike ride from

[75] *The Borzoi Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1966), AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 681:4, HRC.
[76] Knopf memoir, page 122, 610:2.

Lawrence. After their initial encounter in 1911, Blanche nicknamed Alfred "the talker" and declared him "the crudest young man she had ever met."[77]

Knopf biographer Peter Prescott conducted interviews with Blanche's relatives and determined that her family's wealth was derived not from precious gems but from the garment industry. According to Prescott, Viennese immigrant Julius Wolf manufactured caps for babies and became the second-largest purveyor of infant apparel in America. Blanche's mother, Bertha, was the daughter of a slaughter-house owner named Lehman Samuels. Though Blanche sometimes described being raised as an only child, she indeed had an older brother, Irving, who launched one of Manhattan's first motorcar garages.[78] Biographical sketches frequently and correctly mention that Blanche's formal education concluded with the Gardner School, though such profiles rarely mention that it was a finishing school whose student body mostly comprised Jewish girls. Prescott's research indicates that Blanche also attended the Ethical Culture School, founded in 1878 by Felix Adler (creator of the New York Society for Ethical Culture) as a kindergarten for the working poor.[79] By the time Blanche would have enrolled, the school had moved to a stately building on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Prescott also had reason to believe that Blanche attended a school founded by Julius Sachs, a Columbia University alumnus who served as a strong proponent of college-preparatory education for girls and later became a professor of secondary

[77] Charles Dellheim, "A Fragment of a Heart in the Knopf Archives," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 45, no. 45, 16 July 1999: B4.
[78] Peter Prescott, unpublished biography of Alfred Knopf, chapter three, manuscript pages 56-63.
[79] "Mission & History," Ethical Culture Fieldston School Website. Accessed 29 November 2009. http://www.ecfs.org/about/missionhistory/history.aspx.

education at Teachers College. Blanche Wolf would have made a strong candidate for Barnard College, but her only postsecondary degrees were honorary ones from Franklin and Marshall College (1962), Adelphi University (1966), and Western College for Women (1966). Alfred Knopf's interest in publishing, and his interest in sharing ideas about publishing with Blanche, presented her with an alternative form of higher education. He would also be her sole, lifelong employer.

When Alfred began aspiring to a publishing career in August 1912, he was not seeking his first job. In the summer of 1911, Samuel Knopf had used his connections to procure a position for his son as an advertising sales representative for the *New York Times*. Recalling the experience for the *Atlantic Monthly*'s "My First Job" feature in 1958, Knopf mused, "I couldn't have been a very bright boy, because some days passed before it dawned on me that I was receiving no salary, only carfare and the promise of a commission on any orders I secured." He called on a variety of prospects, ranging from a varnish company in Newark to an haute couture shop in midtown, but he was turned away each time. Eventually, a client of Samuel's was willing to sign a sizeable contract with the *Times,* and eighteen-year-old Knopf was allowed to place the order. The *Times* denied him a commission, however, because the advertiser (Meyrowitz Opticians) had previously bought space in the paper. The indignant Knopf demanded to be paid, to no avail. The Meyrowitz account was his only sale that summer.[80]

[80] Alfred Knopf, "My First Job," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 166-168. Originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1958.

Knopf's attempts to find employment in the book-publishing industry were equally unsuccessful. He reportedly called on every major house in the city, even meeting personally with Arthur Scribner, but no one was willing to hire him. Conventional wisdom, voiced by Prescott and other publishing historians, is that his rejection was the result of anti-Semitism, though it should be noted that among the publishers who refused to hire him was Benjamin Huebsch, whose corporate logo was a menorah. Huebsch, the publisher of an impressive list that included Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, merged his company with the newly formed Viking Press in 1925. Though he denied the young Alfred a job, he later became one of the Knopfs' friends.

To gain his first book-publishing job, Alfred Knopf was forced to rely once again on his father's contacts, an array that included Long Island Rail Road president Ralph Peters. Doubleday, Page & Company had recently built an extraordinary facility on nearly forty acres in Garden City on Long Island. Frank Nelson Doubleday was lobbying the LIRR to establish a railway station at the new complex and paid heed when, in October 1912, Knopf presented a letter of introduction from Peters. The publisher (whose initials, F.N.D., earned him the nickname Effendi, the Turkish word for "master") agreed to meet with Knopf, entertaining his applicant's promise that he would gladly do anything—even set type—in order to join the company. Two weeks later, Knopf was interviewed by treasurer Samuel Everitt and was assigned to the accounting department, a role that mirrored stereotypes equating Jews with financial ability, despite the fact that Knopf's coursework and aspirations were better suited to an editorial role. Knowing that Doubleday imported a considerable number of books from the English publisher William

Heinemann, Knopf carried a Heinemann edition of a Dostoyevsky novel with him to the interview. In subsequent commutes to his Garden City job, Knopf said, he passed the time by reading additional European works, including *War and Peace* and the ten-volume novel *Jean-Christophe.*[81]

Knopf's first foray into book publishing placed him in a company, and a facility, that embodied the absolute reverse of the future Borzoi image. The Country Life Press (whose train station still bears the name) was a marvel of industrial precision.[82] Opening its doors to employees in the autumn of 1910, barely four months after the cornerstone was laid by Theodore Roosevelt, the Country Life Press boasted that "nothing should be omitted which would add to its efficiency. The power was to be conveyed to every machine by electric wires, and each, no matter how small, even the adding and invoicing machines, should have its own motor. Letters, also, are folded, the stamps put on the envelopes, and the envelope sealed—by a machine with its tiny motor giving it life."[83]

In essence, Knopf went to work in a book and magazine factory. It housed Lanston monotype equipment, a mammoth press room (to which paper was delivered directly from freight cars), and a bindery that by 1919 finished 20,000 cloth- and leather-bound books a day. True to its name, the Country Life Press was also home to elaborately landscaped grounds, featuring a rose garden, hundreds of tulips and lilies, a bowling

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[81] Alfred Knopf, "The Old Days at Garden City," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 161-164. Originally published in *Double-Life* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1947).

[82] In the late 1980s, Doubleday converted the facility into the headquarters for the Doubleday Book Club, which has since been merged with the Book-of-the-Month Club and The Literary Guild. Bookspan, the current parent company of these and more than a dozen other book clubs, occupies the Garden City complex today.

[83] *The Country Life Press,* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), 20. Pages 12 through 19 describe the "break-neck speed" with which the facility was constructed.

green, a tennis court, seventy-foot-tall cedar trees leading to an Italianate pool, and a sundial emblazoned with a brass reproduction of two leaves from a Gutenberg Bible. Further conveying the notion of a worker's paradise, the Press offered onsite hospitalization and dental care.[84]

While a core staff remained in a Manhattan office, the Long Island facility was created not only to provide Doubleday, Page & Company with a centralized manufacturing plant but also to expand the company's magazine sector (including *The Garden Magazine, Country Life in America, World's Work,* and *Short Stories*), and to accommodate Frank Doubleday's enthusiasm for mass-produced, inexpensive reprints, in many cases produced, for a fee, on behalf of other publishing houses, including Grosset & Dunlap. Though Knopf would only work at the Country Life Press for a year and a half, he would be dispatched two key areas beyond accounting: production and marketing. This fundamental education would serve him well, and in time he would share the curriculum with Blanche. In the accounting department, he discovered economies of scale in the book trade, encountering figures that continued to stun him fifty years later when he recalled Effendi's profit and loss card for an edition of Kipling's poems. According to Knopf's memoir, the book's retail price was $1.80, with a royalty of 25 percent (steep by today's standards). Factoring in the firm's production expenses for laid paper, gold stamping on the spine, a high-quality cloth binding, and a gilt top, along with

[84] *The Country Life Press*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), frontispiece and pages 22 through 78.

the bookstore discount, Knopf estimates that Doubleday essentially broke even on a book whose costly features would become anachronistic over the next two decades.[85]

At Doubleday, his recent sojourn in London proved useful in at least two instances. His familiarity with Granville Barker led him to solicit a contract for *Prunella, Or, Love in a Dutch Garden,* a play written with Laurence Housman. Barker scoffed at Knopf's offer of a 10 percent royalty, insisting that he earned 20 percent minimum from English publishers.[86] When Gerald Stanley Lee's obscure, quasi-sociological book *Crowds: A Moving-Picture of Democracy* became a top seller in Chicago due to regional publicity, Knopf reminded his employers that he knew Lee personally, having met him at Dan Rider's bookshop. Knopf was then dispatched to spend several days with Lee, enticing him to remain a Doubleday author even if his fame led to offers from other houses.

Knopf took a special interest in the works of Doubleday author Joseph Conrad, who had befriended John Galsworthy during an 1893 South Sea voyage. When Knopf's duties included making binding selections in the production department, he chose to indulge in colored "extra cloth," a high-grade fabric, for Conrad's novel *Youth*. Because Conrad's books did not sell well, and would hence be printed in small quantities, Knopf was permitted to make slight upgrades in the production materials.[87] Again, today's production managers would find this approach to be counterintuitive: pricey packaging is

[85] Knopf memoir, page 67, 610:2.
[86] Granville Barker to Alfred Knopf, typed letter signed (TLS), 18 October 1913, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 610:2, HRC.
[87] Alfred Knopf, "The Old Days at Garden City," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 163. Originally published in *Double-Life* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1947).

reserved for books with high projected sales, not vice versa. Knopf was also permitted to attend weekly editorial meetings, which led to his being allowed to take home the manuscript for Conrad's *Chance*, the novel that would finally garner American commercial success for the author. The only one of Conrad's novels to feature a female protagonist, *Chance* inspired Knopf to embark on a testimonial-driven marketing campaign promoting all of Conrad's works. He enlisted Galsworthy's assistance and received a lengthy letter in which Conrad expressed gratitude and made it clear that he had felt considerably neglected by Doubleday. He then outlined the details of numerous other American publishing agreements to which he had been a party, from Appleton to Harper & Brothers, reiterating the consistently strong media attention he had received and the consistently poor sales that accompanied it. He urged Knopf to reissue his autobiography, published by Harper's only a year prior, and to implement a grander marketing scheme for it.[88] Knopf's reply demonstrates his role as a bold novice, proposing the promotional booklet and offering terms of a 12.5 percent royalty, with an advance of forty pounds, even though Effendi was out of the office. Knopf acknowledges his own youth, however, stating that he is too young to continue being called "Mr." by Conrad.[89]

The brochure Knopf had in mind would feature both a biographical profile and testimonials from leading authors on both sides of the Atlantic. The solicitation received eloquent praise from voices such as poet Robert Service (dubbed the Bard of the Yukon)

[88] Joseph Conrad to Alfred Knopf, TLS, 20 July 1913, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 501:2, HRC.
[89] Alfred Knopf to Joseph Conrad, TCL, 10 September 1913, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 501:2, HRC.

and adventure writer Rex Beach but was roundly perceived by others as being in bad taste. Knopf had tried to ward off accusations of poor etiquette by using his personal letterhead, rather than Doubleday's, ordering fine stationery for himself on handmade paper imported by the Japan Paper Company, adorned with the name of his father's Long Island estate: *Mon Terrace.*[90] Among the rebuffs that poured in were letters from fiction writer and poet Margaret Deland, who observed that Conrad's books were too long to be popular with typical readers. William Dean Howells apparently received follow-up correspondence from Knopf when Howells ignored the first solicitation, gruffly saying that he had ignored the initial request because he assumed it was common knowledge that he never provided promotional blurbs for books.[91] Despite rejections such as these, the marketing booklet was issued, featuring Knopf's lengthy, sophisticated, and of course hyperbolic homage to Conrad. Knopf's text lists Conrad's given surname, Korzeniowski, and praises the author's rapid mastery of English despite an upbringing in the Ukraine, but Knopf never publicly acknowledged that he shared an eastern European heritage with the author, preferring to focus on the achievements of assimilation (both Korzeniowski's and that of his own ancestors). Though Conrad's subsequent books sold well in the United States, perhaps because of Knopf's promotional prodding, Conrad would never become a Borzoi author. Nonetheless, he would later recommend that Knopf call on *Baltimore Sun* columnist H. L. Mencken, who frequently praised Conrad's works. This introduction would lead to one of the Borzoi's most significant early partnerships.

[90] Knopf memoir, page 84, 610:2.
[91] Assorted correspondence in response to Knopf's Conrad solicitation. AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 501:2, HRC.

In March 1914, Knopf went to work in Manhattan, leaving behind books by the likes of Booth Tarkington and accepting a job with a publisher whose office was less salubrious than the Garden City facility but whose wages were higher. Mitchell Kennerley offered to pay Knopf twenty-five dollars a week, compared to the twelve dollars he was earning at Doubleday, Page & Company.[92] While Frank Doubleday provided Knopf with practical skills, Kennerley provided Knopf with a pantheon of authors and designers, unwittingly building the creative bridge Knopf needed to launch a competing firm. The early look of Knopf books and the emphasis on imported highbrow titles owes much to Knopf's apprenticeship with Mitchell Kennerley.

In interviews and in his memoir, Knopf summarized his fourteen months spent working for Kennerley as a time when he honed his knowledge of how to navigate the realm of imported titles, how to alienate lucrative authors by failing to pay royalties, and how to under-promote a book, ensuring its lackluster success in the market. Fourteen years older than Knopf, Kennerley was born in England and exploited his transatlantic connections throughout his career in the United States. Like Blanche, he did not attend college, completing his formal schooling in his mid-teens. In London, he took a job in an antiquarian bookshop owned by John Lane, who also directed the Bodley Head publishing company and was publisher of the *Yellow Book.* Lane brought Kennerley to New York in 1896 to launch the American branch, the John Lane Company. Initially setting his sights on American magazine publishing, Kennerley served as the business

[92] Alfred Knopf, "The Old Days at Garden City," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 164. Originally published in the *Double-Life* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1947).

manager for a pre-Mencken version of *The Smart Set* and at age twenty-four launched a publication called *The Reader,* which emphasized literary criticism and poems (Yeats was a contributor). His book-publishing company was launched in 1906 in a building where the struggling typographer Frederic Goudy leased space. This led not only to collaboration on book design but also to Goudy's creation of a typeface bearing Kennerley's name. Other Kennerley designers who would later contribute to the Borzoi look included Thomas Cleland and Claude Bragdon.[93]

In 1910, Kennerley's publishing company created a highly unprofitable literary magazine called *The Forum,* which featured works by Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Leo Tolstoy, H. L. Mencken, and Jack London. Despite the publication's low rate of financial return, Kennerley was rewarded by his proximity to a highbrow literary milieu. High-profile Kennerley authors included Upton Sinclair and D. H. Lawrence, represented by literary agent Edward Garnett, who would, along with his wife and son, become part of the Knopf roster.[94] Other names appearing on both the Kennerley and Knopf lists include John Trevena (a pseudonym for Ernest George Henham), author of *Moyle Church-Town*, featured in the Borzoi's debut; and Joseph Hergesheimer, who, with his wife, became close personal friends of Alfred and Blanche. By 1917, Knopf had published Hergesheimer's *Three Black Pennys* [sic] with strong sales, marking his first attempt to publish an American novel. He then successfully negotiated to buy the plates of two other Hergesheimer novels from Kennerley.

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[93] Matthew Bruccoli, *The Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley, Bookman* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).

[94] Sinclair's *The Jungle* was not among the books published by Kennerley. It was issued instead by Doubleday, Page & Company in 1906.

Knopf often claimed that his insistence on paying all his bills on time was due to the influence of Kennerley, who was threatened with many lawsuits for failing to pay royalties. Kennerley is said to have refused to pay royalties to lucrative poet Vachel Lindsay because of Lindsay's "disgusting" table manners.[95] Edna St. Vincent Millay, for whom Kennerley exhibited great affection, complained that he would not release a penny of royalties. When he did attempt to pay authors their due, they had to cope with the fact that frequently his checks did not clear. At one point, Kennerley proposed to solve his chronic fiscal problems by selling his company to Samuel Knopf. Samuel, Alfred, and stepmother Lillie accepted an invitation to dine at the Kennerley home in Westchester County, but the overtures did not result in any negotiation for a sale. In his memoir, Knopf attributed this to his father's own precarious financial situation at the time, which led to the sale of the Lawrence estate. His family subsequently took up residence at 850 Park Avenue, on Manhattan's Upper East Side and approximately six blocks below Blanche Wolf's home.

By 1920, the year after he became a U.S. citizen, Kennerley was publishing just six books a year while Knopf's annual list topped seventy new titles. Knopf believed that Kennerley "had no real competition in distinguished books, especially by younger people" and was frustrated that Kennerley's titles were not being marketed to their potential. Knopf acknowledged having learned much from "a man who had a very fine

[95] Matthew Bruccoli, *The Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley, Bookman* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 66.

sense of typography and of sound conservative book-making" but who was "a damn bad publisher."[96]

Motivated by a desire for financial stability so that he and Blanche could marry, and by the belief that he could succeed where Kennerley was poised to fail, Knopf set in motion the launch of his own company. His poaching of Kennerley's authors would result in a termination letter, dated 21 May 1915, that oddly acknowledges Knopf's intent to resign:

> When you told me some weeks ago that you had decided to become a publisher, specializing in Russian literature, I felt that you had made a wise and fortunate decision. … I was quite willing that you should use my time and offices during the early stages of your preparations. … Some weeks ago when looking on your desk for a proof I came across a letter from Mr. Hergesheimer … and was shocked to find that you were negotiating with him for the publication by you of a book by him. … I am therefore going to ask you to resign your position with me to take effect immediately upon receipt of this letter.[97]

In fact, Knopf sought not only to publish Hergesheimer but also to become his mentee. In a letter dated only May 1915, handwritten on Mitchell Kennerley's letterhead, Knopf made plans for "Joe" to meet "Miss Wolf" over the summer and used his new friend as a sounding board for publishing ideas, particularly the potential demand for more Russian translations.[98]

Knopf composed a particularly exuberant letter to novelist Howard Vincent O'Brien, asking the author to imagine the possibility that Knopf might launch his own

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[96] Bruccoli 76.
[97] Bruccoli 85.
[98] Alfred Knopf to Joseph Hergesheimer, autograph letter unsigned, May 1915, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595.4, HRC. Written in pencil and ending abruptly in midsentence (subsequent sheets are not on file), this is perhaps a page from a draft of a letter.

company after Kennerley's spring 1915 selling season. Billing himself as a combination of Wannamaker, Machiavelli, and Savonarola (the latter reference surely reflecting an error on Knopf's part, as the 15th-century priest Savonarola was a zealous book burner), Knopf slyly asks to publish O'Brien's next book and requests that O'Brien maintain utmost secrecy regarding the proposed new publishing house.[99]

Another significant Knopf correspondent at this time was Blanche Wolf, whom he wooed with books, and with gifts of laid writing paper imported from Italy. Though the lasting legacy of Alfred and Blanche's office behavior would include loud, bitter, frequent fights, their courtship was generally steeped in tenderness, with only occasional evidence of discord. In her copious missives to Alfred, Blanche thanks him for sending beautifully bound books to her (including a copy of Conrad's *Lord Jim*) apologizes for criticizing him and spurring spats, and encourages him in his work for publishers.[100] She also begin signing the letters "V.V.," a lasting moniker given to her by Alfred after the publication of Henry Sydnor Harrison's 1913 novel *V. V.'s Eyes*.[101]

The cache of Blanche's messages to Alfred, dated between 1912 and 1915, captures her need to be in constant contact through notes addressed to him in Lawrence, at Doubleday, Page & Company, at Mitchell Kennerley's office, and at his family's home on Park Avenue. In a precursor to twenty-first-century text messages between teenage

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[99] Alfred Knopf to Howard Vincent O'Brien, ALS, n.d., AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595.4, HRC. Preserved in the sender's archive, this is perhaps a draft.

[100] Blanche Wolf to Alfred Knopf, assorted telegrams and ALS, circa 1912-1915, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 561:2, 561:3, and 561.4, HRC.

[101] Transcript, Edwin Knopf's speech delivered at a banquet commemorating the 50th anniversary of his brother's publishing firm, 19 October 1965, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 675:2, HRC. The protagonist of *V. V.'s Eyes,* a male physician named V. Vivian, appears to have nothing in common with Blanche Knopf.

lovers, she also sent telegrams to his office, often issuing them from within Manhattan at Western Union desks that were sometimes just blocks away from where he was spending his days. When he began making sales calls on behalf of Kennerley, with jaunts to Philadelphia and his first trips to the Middle West, she wrote to him in care of his hotel. Perhaps equally significant is the fact that Alfred preserved these missives for the rest of his days, giving them status equal to his correspondence with literary lions.

The Company's Cornerstones

His personal life in order and his early publishing education complete, Knopf spent the summer of 1915 trying to capitalize on his affinity for European authors. The full extent of Knopf's military service also occurred during this period, when he enlisted in the New York National Guard ostensibly because he wished to learn horseback riding; maneuvers featured horse-drawn caissons in Central Park. Though the United States remained militarily neutral in the recently erupted "war of the ten nations" until April 1917, headlines published in the months preceding the Borzoi's arrival conveyed American anxiety regarding the gruesome events. Completing his service with the rank of corporal, Knopf served in the seventh infantry, Battery B, first field artillery. He remembered the experience primarily as a means for meeting other publishing men, including a future advertising salesman for the *Atlantic Monthly*, along with commercial artist Louis Fancher and Heyworth Campbell, future art editor of *Vogue*.[102] When the Selective

[102] Knopf memoir, page 105, 610:2. Knopf's War Department card, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 682:3, HRC.

Service system was implemented in June 1917, Knopf was classified as 4A, or among the most eligible, though he was never drafted.

Knopf's decision to publish considerable Russian fiction reflected not only his taste in literature but also the American public's interest in a war-torn locale that was making headlines regularly. British readers were particularly hungry for information about Russia, their dubious new ally, which spurred English publishing houses to release many translations of Russian classics. Alfred and Blanche believed that this specialty would provide cachet and give them a means to differentiate themselves from other small presses. Unable to travel to Europe, Knopf contacted George Doran, a major American publisher whose British authors included Arthur Conan Doyle and Virginia Woolf, before the company was merged with Doubleday in 1927. On Knopf's behalf, Doran agreed to negotiate with the English house Hodder and Stoughton to purchase sheets of many books on the initial Alfred A. Knopf list, including Garshin's *The Signal and Other Stories* and a short-story collection by Leonid Andreyev. The terms of credit for such arrangements were advantageous, with English publishers often offering payment terms of up to six months. In some cases, Knopf's early "imports" were available without any transatlantic shipping. He published Prince Kropotkin's *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, for example, by contacting his former employers at Doubleday, who sold to Knopf the American rights and the American-made plates.

Living at home, Knopf had saved two thousand dollars, which his father supplemented in 1915 for startup capital totaling five thousand dollars. Samuel also provided the Borzoi with its first address, allowing his son to use a desk at his advertising

firm in the Candler Building at 220 West 42nd Street. Completed in 1914, the new building was the city's tallest structure above 24th Street, surely appealing to Samuel's extravagant tendencies. The twenty-two-year-old publisher soon moved to his own two-room space on the nineteenth floor of the building, whose location would prove convenient for future Grand Central commuters Alfred and Blanche. [103] They would remain in the Candler building until 1924, when they moved slightly uptown to the slightly newer Hecksher Building at 730 Fifth Avenue, at the intersection of bustling 57th Street.[104] The building gave the Knopfs easy access to the first incarnation of New York's Museum of Modern Art, which opened its first gallery in the Hecksher in 1929. Reversing roles, Samuel permanently took a desk in his son's office in 1918, when the Alfred A. Knopf publishing company became incorporated and Samuel began serving as treasurer. Knopf employees reportedly called Samuel's office "the gymnasium" because of the gesticulations that accompanied his frequent, angry outbursts.[105]

Though Alfred consistently said that Heinemann's windmill had inspired him to use a branding device that was not obviously related to books, he also consistently credited Blanche with perhaps the most crucial development in the emergence of the brand: the idea of using a borzoi for the logo, conveniently forming alliterative resonance with the word "book."[106] As the rise of Borzoi Books coincided with the Russian

[103]Knopf memoir, page 105-109, 610:2.
[104] Now called the Crown Building, this structure is not to be confused with an additional Hecksher building at Madison Avenue and 42nd Street completed in 1916. Both towers were constructed by developer August Hecksher. The Knopf offices remained on Fifth Avenue until 1937, when the firm relocated to 501 Madison Avenue.
[105] Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948, 47-48.
[106] Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: A Very Dignified Pavane," *The New Yorker*, 20 November 1948, 52.

Revolution, and with Knopf's acquisition of many titles by Russian authors, it is worth noting that the borzoi was associated with czars and therefore was rejected by Bolsheviks, who routinely slaughtered the wolfhounds.[107] As an American branding device, the borzoi encompassed Knopf's duality—old-world aristocracy and irreverent modernity—within a single intriguing icon that complicates attempts to classify the company's "persona."

In April 1916, Knopf tried to promote and justify his interest in Russian literature in an essay for the *New York Times Book Review*, stating that he wished to capitalize on an American interest in Russia sparked by the Great War, and by amateur translations of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy produced by Constance Garnett, wife of literary agent Edward Garnett. In these pre–Bolshevik Revolution months, Knopf claimed that he wanted to protect these books from being snapped up by American publishers who would not do a very good job of promoting them. In addition, he justified the absence of a translator's name on several of the books, stating that the English publisher refused to reveal these names. In the *Times* essay, he was also candid about the practical appeal of Russian literature: "If copyright relations were established between the United States and Russia, the Russian author would be able to control his American publisher, but even so, the American and English publishers would have a free hand as regards the work published before the passing of a new law."[108] At the time Knopf launched his company, American copyright protection could not be extended to an author from a nation that maintained no

[107] Marjorie Keyishian, "A Soviet Visitor and a Quest: Preserving the Borzoi." *New York Times*, New Jersey weekly edition, 14 July 1991, section 12, page 1. PHN.
[108] Alfred Knopf, "Russian Literature," *New York Times Book Review*, 16 April 1916:144. PHN.

reciprocal copyright legislation with the United States, unless the author lived in the United States at the time of publication.[109]

Such practical matters are omitted in the earliest media coverage the company received. In a *Publishers' Weekly* article titled "New Publisher to Specialize in Russian Literature," appearing four months before the first Knopf book was bound, the opening paragraph announces Knopf's plans and simply echoes his belief that American writers and belles lettres were antonymous. The reporter observed, "Certain it is that whereas we in America have produced no really great work of fiction, at least six such have come from Russia. Consequently the announcement that a new publisher is really 'going in for' the publication of Russian literature—not a subscription edition of all the classics, not stray books from a number of authors, but all of the novels of real value—is of more than passing interest."[110] An article published in the *New York Times Book Review* that month describes similar plans and motivations.[111]

Although Knopf's memoir emphasizes the influence of current events, Columbia coursework, and publishing apprenticeships in shaping his literary tastes, he also credits a memorable bookseller, Max Maisel, with opening his eyes to eastern European works.[112] A Jew of Russian ancestry, Maisel served as one of Knopf's earliest editorial resources at the shop on Grand Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side, where Knopf's grandparents had settled. Maisel's shop stocked one of New York's largest selections of Judaica (much

[109] Henry W. Lanier, ed., "ABC of Copyright" in *The Author's Annual 1929* (n.p.: Payson & Clarke, 1929), 205.
[110] "New Publisher to Specialize in Russian Literature," *Publishers' Weekly,* 2 July 1915: 10.
[111] "Makers of Books in Vacation Time," *New York Times Book Review*, 25 July 1915: BR 272. PHN.
[112] Knopf memoir, pages 109-110, 610:2.

of it in the original Hebrew or Yiddish) as well as numerous works in Russian. Maisel was also an anarchist, and when Emma Goldman organized fellow anarchist Prince Petr Kropotkin's well-attended New York lecture series, Maisel set up a bookselling stall on-site.[113]

While Maisel may have inspired Knopf to purchase the rights and plates for Kropotkin's *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* from Doubleday, he definitely inspired Knopf to commission a translation of *Homo Sapiens*, the novel that would lead the young publisher to his first tangle with censors. Sharing Abraham and Hannah Knopf's homeland, the novel's Polish author, Stanislaw Przybyszewski, had a following among Europe's avant-garde in the early twentieth century and was a key figure in the neoromantic "Young Poland" movement. At the time, Poland was under Russian rule, enabling Knopf to avoid royalty obligations to Przybyszewski.[114] Thus, Knopf's only editorial fee was to the translator, Thomas Seltzer.[115]

Though American reviews and sales for *Homo Sapiens* were mediocre, the book caught the attention of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, which considered the book to be pornographic and brought the case to court. The novel's protagonist, Eric Falk, is an alcoholic sadist who seduces a series of women, one of whom is thirteen years old when she begins her decade-long devotion to him. Knopf's attorney was his lifelong friend and fellow Columbia alumnus Osmond Fraenkel, who would later become widely recognized for his work on the board of directors for the

[113] Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 96.
[114] Stanislaw Przybyszewski died in 1927 at age 59.
[115] Knopf memoir, page 110, 610:2.

American Civil Liberties Union. Fraenkel was fighting a losing battle on behalf of *Homo Sapiens,* however, and the charges were only dropped after the intervention of his father Samuel Knopf's attorney, William Tipple, who was a member of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Knopf agreed to melt the plates for the book, and the Society's leader, John Sumner (successor to the deceased Anthony Comstock), agreed to drop the charges.

The case represents an important element of the early Borzoi identity. In subsequent years, the Knopfs would continue to take the path of least resistance on several potential encounters with censorship, most notably with D. H. Lawrence and Radclyffe Hall.

During the 1920s, D. H. Lawrence appeared on Knopf's lists numerous times, with the release of *St. Mawr* in 1925, *David* and *The Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcoatl)* in 1926, *Mornings in Mexico* in 1927, *The Woman Who Rode Away* in 1928, and *Pansies* in 1929. Conspicuously absent from this list is *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which Blanche had assured Lawrence she would publish, noting that he would only need to make minor revisions to accommodate American conventions.[116] Despite Blanche's optimism, the book was banned in Great Britain for more than thirty years, though an expurgated American edition was released in 1928 by Nelson Doubleday (an independent firm founded in 1912 by Frank Nelson Doubleday's son). *Lady Chatterley's Lover* never became a Borzoi Book.

[116] Blanche Knopf to D. H. Lawrence, TCL, 3 April 1928, AAKI, Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, 693:1, HRC.

In the case of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness,* Blanche's correspondence makes plain the reasons for a canceled contract. Unlike *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* Hall's novel is not sexually explicit and does not contain profanity, but its sympathetic portrayal of a lesbian relationship resulted in the book's being banned in Britain. Though Blanche at first wrote to Hall as a cordial champion of the novel, asking for samples of the pre-publication pamphlet being prepared by the English publisher Jonathan Cape, but in September 1928, she abruptly informed Hall that the contract would be canceled in light of legal issues that were being raised abroad.[117] The book was soon published in the United States on the debut list of Covici-Friede, a small house founded in 1928 by bookshop owner Pascal Covici, a Jewish Romanian-American, and Donald Friede, who had worked as a stock clerk for Knopf. *The Well of Loneliness* proved to be a significant financial success for Covici-Friede, and the company prevailed in Manhattan courts when the book was seized by John Sumner.

Several scholars have asserted that Jewish publishers were able to gain a foothold in American publishing during the early twentieth century because of such willingness to embrace risky works rejected by their WASP counterparts, but Knopf clearly should be cast as an exception to this trend. Nonetheless, George Bornstein's studies of the intersection between modernism and marginalization cast Alfred Knopf alongside such publishers as Benjamin Heubsch and Joel Spingarn (on the Harcourt, Brace board) as examples of men who were daring in their choice of publishing projects.[118] George

[117]Blanche Knopf to Radclyffe Hall, TCL, 20 September 1928, AAKI, Blanche Knopf Series, 691.8, HRC.
[118] George Bornstein, "The Colors of Modernism: Publishing Black, Irish, and Jewish Books in the 1920s," (lecture at the Race, Ethnicity, and the History of Books symposium, The University of Texas at Austin, 7

Hutchinson makes a similar extrapolation in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, which includes Knopf in a characterization of America's publishing climate at the time: "The new publishers … were almost all Jewish and had been excluded from the inside circles of the established, Anglo-dominated industry even in New York. … They had nothing to lose by taking risks—no influential contacts, no contracts with established writers, no debts to the publishing establishment."[119]

This view was also echoed by Tom Dardis, author of the definitive biography of Jewish publisher Horace Liveright, whose vocal pro-Bolshevik stance included his eager publishing of Trotsky after the October revolution. Unlike Knopf, Liveright fought censorship attempts, defeating John Sumner in court for the right to publish the ancient *Satyricon* of Petronius. In addition, Liveright defeated a local bill advocated by the Clean Books League without any assistance from established Christian publishers. The bill required jury trails in censorship cases, rejected expert testimony regarding a book's merits, and gave the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice wide latitude in banning any books it deemed offensive. Dardis suggests that Liveright's lack of support from other houses may have been a ploy on the part of anti-Semitic publishers who wanted to let their Jewish competitors become legislated out of business. Liveright appears to have interpreted the situation that way: offended by the indifference of the publishing community after a courtroom victory that financially benefitted them all,

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February 2009). Bornstein, an emeritus professor of English at the University of Michigan, presented similar findings in "The Colors of Zion: Black, Jewish, and Irish Nationalism at the Turn of the Century," *Modernism/Modernity* 12 (2005): 369-384.

[119] George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1995), 345.

Liveright withdrew from the National Association of Book Publishers.[120] Though Dardis acknowledges Knopf's hesitation to fight censorship, he attributes this to Knopf's lack of money rather than to his moderate sensibilities.

The culminating example of Jewish publishers who successfully fought censorship in the courts ultimately reflects an ironic outcome for Knopf. Random House founders Donald Klopfer and Bennett Cerf (a former vice-president of Boni & Liveright) launched the legendary case on behalf of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and are often exalted as examples of noble endurance in the name of free speech. However, Cerf's recollection of the events leading up to *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses* describes nonchalant customs officials at odds with a publisher and an attorney who had much profit to gain if they could spur a trial. According to Cerf, customs officials at first refused to inspect the luggage of his unnamed cohort who had agreed to "smuggle" *Ulysses* aboard the R.M.S. *Aquitania* on a sweltering summer day in 1932.[121] Cerf had enlisted illustrious civil-liberties attorney Morris Ernst, whose fees exceeded Random House's budget, leading Cerf to offer Ernst a lifetime 3 percent royalty on all future copies of *Ulysses* sold by the house if he helped Random House prevail in the courts. On the docks, Ernst and Cerf badgered customs officials into seizing the book in question, thereby setting the case in

[120] Tom Dardis, *Firebrand: The Life of Horace Liveright* (New York: Random House, 1995), 165-169.
[121] Bennett Cerf, interview by Robin Hawkins, Columbia University Oral History Research Office transcript, 23 October, 1967, page 266. Accessed 20 April 2009. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/cerfb/transcripts/cerfb_1_6_266.html. For an additional account, see Cerf's memoir, *At Random*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002), 90-101.

motion.[122] Cerf's baiting tactics in the *Ulysses* trial serve as an apt contrast to Knopf's approach, a distinction that took on a special significance when Knopf sold his company to Cerf's far more profitable firm in 1960. Scholars who group the Knopfs with daring new publishers of the early twentieth century, making generalizations solely because of the publishers' shared Jewish identity, overlook the reality that Knopf in fact distinguished himself from his peers—even those who eventually bought his company—by avoiding controversial works.

Twenty-five years after the *Homo Sapiens* incident, Knopf issued a statement on censorship, albeit a moderate one. His words reflect an unambiguous distaste for censorship, along with a distaste for distasteful literature: "Long experience with censors and much soul-searching has convinced me that the civilized and intelligent person can never be comfortable in any position other than that of unalterable opposition to any censorship of anything, anywhere, at any time," he writes, echoing a tenet often voiced by his former professor, Joel Spingarn, in essays and lectures promoting literary criticism that was devoid of moralistic judgment. The remainder of the statement lacks Spingarn's verve, however, and displays none of Cerf's eagerness to fight for his right to publish. Instead, Knopf's preference is simply to have patience, to hope that social standards will change, and to trust the whims of the marketplace: "My own considered opinion is that you have to wait, however uncomfortably, for time and the taste of the public at large to do the censoring. You may find this position painful from time to time, but in the long

[122] Joel Silverman, "Pursuing Celebrity, Ensuing Masculinity: Morris Ernst, Obscenity, and the Search for Recognition" (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2006), 211.

run you can live with it … in the sure knowledge that what doesn't deserve to endure never does last very long."[123]

In light of the considerable publicity surrounding Knopf's immersion in eastern European classics, the première title, *Four Plays* by Émile Augier, may appear to be a tame anomaly, posing a fundamental question in the history of a company that was founded on the promise of distinctive publishing. Why did Knopf choose to launch his imprimatur with the works of a minor playwright who had been dead for twenty-six years, and whose narratives contained little of the avant-garde exuberance of Broadway in 1915, and who is described as having "always stood for the great middle classes" in the book's preface by Eugéne Brieux?[124] The answer has little to do with the author and everything to do with the translator, Barrett H. Clark, who met Knopf through mutual friends. Clark was a prolific translator and, at the time, was active in New York's theater scene.[125] The author of the preface, Eugéne Brieux, had held steady on the *Publishers' Weekly* nonfiction bestseller list in 1912 and 1913 with *Three Plays.* Bookseller Adolph Kroch summarized the trio thus: "Knopf's first book … was *Four Plays*, by Èmile Augier, the realist with a sharp tongue and with no mercy for convention. The preface was by Brieux, whose *Red Robe* had stirred the conscience of France. The translator was

[123] Alfred Knopf, "On Censorship: A Statement," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 26-27. The statement is dated 7 May 1951, though its audience and exigency remain unidentified.
[124] Eugéne Brieux, preface to *Four Plays* by Émile Augier (New York: Knopf, 1915), ix.
[125] Knopf memoir, page 109, 610:2.

Barrett H. Clark, a young dramatic critic who has since attained fame in drama-lore."[126] Therefore, it was not far-fetched to imagine that a collection of French drama in translation might be a wise investment for an upstart publishing firm.

It was fitting that Knopf selected a book of plays for his debut. He loved theater, both as a spectator and, in life, as a performer of grand impresario roles. With the publication of Augier's *Four Plays* in October 1915, his stage was set.

Dramatism at Play

In *A Grammar of Motives,* Kenneth Burke acknowledges the simultaneous potential for universality and individuality in the experience of motive: "Each man's motivation is unique, since his situation is unique, which is particularly obvious when you recall that his situation also reflects the unique sequence of his past. However, for all the uniqueness of the individual, there are motives and relations generic to all mankind." This duality is an expected component of Burkean dramatism, whose goal is to expose ambiguity, not to create absolute taxonomies that lead to a rigid understanding of motive: "A perfectionist might seek to evolve terms free of ambiguity and inconsistency (as with the terministic ideals of symbolic logic and logical positivism). … We take it for granted that, insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must remain something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives. … What we want is *not terms that avoid*

[126] Adolph Kroch, "To Alfred Knopf, from a Bookseller," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965, vol. 1:* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 41. The tribute was originally written in 1940, for the Borzoi's twenty-fifth anniversary.

ambiguity, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise."*[127]

For Alfred Knopf, the act of becoming a publisher was a reflection of numerous ambiguities in his youth. Competing against such bastions as Harper & Brothers, Charles Scribner's Sons, and Houghton Mifflin Company, it took less than a decade for Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., to be recognized by numerous authors and literary critics as a premier American publishing house. Yet to argue that Knopf's fledgling house represented a separation from his father (and was therefore a daring challenge to publishing houses that capitalized on the sometimes erroneous impression of scions at the helm), ignores the paradox that Alfred's "house" was indeed a symbolic extension of his father's "home" in numerous ways, including Alfred's reverence for the home library his father stocked; Samuel's crucial assistance in both the *New York Times* and Doubleday positions; the use of Samuel's office space as the Borzoi's first home, and Alfred's decision to continue leasing in the Candler Building in the years that followed; and Samuel's financial "agency," which culminated in his role as treasurer for the Borzoi.

Therefore, the initial audience for the Borzoi surely included Samuel Knopf. Much to Blanche's frustration, Alfred would remain enmeshed with his father until Samuel's death in 1932. Unlike a number of Knopf authors who developed literary lives in Manhattan (Willa Cather, Carl Van Vechten, and Floyd Dell among them) as an alternative to their less cosmopolitan origins in other states, Knopf's act of launching a

[127] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 103-104 and xviii. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.

publishing house was a way of "staying home" with his father and relishing the identity traits they shared. These traits included an affinity for salesmanship, a desire to be connected to affluent circles, and a taste for expensive travel, housing, dining, and tailoring. The most crucial component of this symbiosis was lacking, however: a knowledge of literature. For this, Alfred had to adopt a surrogate father, whom he found in Joel Spingarn. In a literary sense, then, the Borzoi represented a schism between Alfred and Samuel. In a commercial sense, it represented a way for father and son to find consubstantiality.

Spingarn stoked Knopf's motivation to develop an identity as an aficionado of European literature, providing both the agency for Knopf's affiliation with John Galsworthy and the academic credentials that Samuel Knopf lacked. For Spingarn at Columbia, the academic stage comprised students, who were the most accepting audience members in his widely publicized feuds with administrators. His motivation in continuing the correspondence with Knopf was not limited to a craving for student flattery, however. Knopf distinguished himself by becoming a student who not only wrote *about* literature but who also wrote *to* producers of literature, clearly wanting to immerse himself England's literary scene, scheduling meetings with authors during his European tour and putting them in dialogue with his professor. It was surely apparent to Spingarn that Knopf would eventually share a stage with him, rather than simply remaining Spingarn's apprentice.

In his commercial apprenticeships, Knopf encountered two very disparate scenes: Garden City versus 32 West Fifty-Eighty Street, where Mitchell Kennerley's offices were

located. His act of leaving the Country Life facility reflected his belief that blatantly "industrial" publishing should not become a *property* of his identity, yet his departure from Kennerley reflected his decision to embrace the pro-business *properties* of his identity. Perhaps more than any other actions in his early career, those two represent the origins of the ambiguous initial Borzoi identity as a company that would exalt staid, un-experimental European literature over commercial American works while simultaneously applying wise marketing and accounting strategies with a youthful exuberance that would impress wizened authors such as W. H. Hudson.

Finally, we must ask how Burke would have read Alfred's most lasting partnership. To say that Blanche Wolf and Alfred Knopf's courtship was simply motivated by love and its accompanying release of the hormone oxytocin (perhaps the most universal of human experiences) misses a Burkean aspect of rhetorical *courtships*: the imperative of identification. In this case, too, the pentad points to ambiguity, and books were possibly as powerful as oxytocin in this exchange. When Blanche acted to pursue Alfred, she did so in defiance of her parents, who had little use for a son-in-law of eastern European descent with dubious financial prospects. From her perspective, Alfred represented the opportunity to become a director in a literary "theater." Though she would not join the company full-time until 1918, he did not keep his professional life sequestered and instead wanted to immerse her in it. He never cast her in a role of audience member and instead asked for her advice on a variety of matters relating to his career. Through a shared identification with bibliophilism, he showed respect for her intellect, acknowledging a facet of her identity that might have been discounted by other

men, particularly in a culture in which the wisdom of women's suffrage was considered debatable.

In return, through her Austrian ancestry and her affluence, she offered him a chance to rise in social status, bringing him closer to the aristocratic identity he idealized. Despite the impulse of scholars to group the Knopfs with other Jewish American publishers of the early twentieth century, a key component of the Knopfs' identity was their ability to defy assumptions that were inferred from their Judaism. The identity that the secular Knopfs seem to have been most intent on fostering, at least as acquisitions editors, was that of Anglophilic literary connoisseurs. Their nurturing of progressive American talent is irrefutable, but the American segment of the Borzoi roster strengthened only in the wake of their success with European works.

By acquiring an inaugural list that was Anglophilic in nature—even the Russian translations were procured through the "agency" of British houses—Alfred Knopf began to educate his young wife in the properties of literary prestige, while she educated him in the properties of prestige in general. Paradoxically, neither of them possessed any true prestige at this point, literary or otherwise, but they saw the seeds of it in each other and, through their publishing firm, began a performance of nobility that would outlive them both.

Chapter Two
"Books for Just a Few Intelligent People": The Evolution of the Borzoi List

"The Russian barzoi [sic], or Siberian wolfhound, is one of the noblest of all dogs."
"There seems to be a general feeling among owners of Borzois that the time has now arrived for the successful starting of a special club."
—*THE FIELD* MAGAZINE, MAY 1887 AND MARCH 1892[128]

Derived from the Russian word for swift, Knopf's Borzoi appropriately made haste in becoming associated with distinctive publishing. While the headline "For Just a Few Intelligent People" was tongue-in-cheek, suspended above descriptions of works by satirist H. L. Mencken in a 1921 *New York Times* advertisement, it captures the wry implication that Borzoi Books had a rarefied following.[129] Part of the appeal for many prospective Knopf authors lay in the notion that the Borzoi roster was elite, with membership denied to any members of the "booboisie" (as Mencken called them). Equally appealing to prospective Knopf authors was the contradictory assurance that, despite this air of exclusivity, each Borzoi Book would be marketed to the hilt, reaching the widest possible audience.

The reality behind this image is that early Knopf acquisition decisions were almost always driven by fiscal concerns (which were linked to international copyright laws) and by Alfred and Blanche's idealization of European cachet. The list of authors

[128] Quoted in the definition of "borzoi." *Oxford English Dictionary,* Second Edition, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
[129] "For Just a Few Intelligent People," advertisement for Knopf titles, *New York Times,* 9 January 1921, page 55. PHN. Knopf used a similar headline, "For Just a Few Intelligent Readers," in *New York Times* advertising for Mencken's books the previous year.

published under their imprimatur evolved from obscure eastern Europeans to poets and fiction writers revered primarily by Anglophiles, followed by Scandinavian authors rejected by other American publishers (the Knopfs' entrée to the Nobel stage), and eventual success with a disparate list of American authors—ranging from Willa Cather and Fannie Hurst to Langston Hughes and Dashiell Hammett. For most of the first fourteen years in the company's history, the majority of Borzoi Books were written by authors born in Europe. The only exceptions are 1917 and 1918, when the number of books written by European versus American authors was roughly equal, and 1919, when approximately 59 percent of Knopf's new releases were written by authors born in the United States. The implication for readers was one of prestige: university catalogs from the period underscore the fact that European literature was privileged over American works. The implication for the Knopfs was one of financial prudence, as the rights to books by lesser-known European writers could be purchased affordably, in deals negotiated through up-and-coming literary agents who capitalized on the increasingly fragmented nature of intellectual property, tracking and selling multiple incarnations of books, including serial, reprint, international, and motion picture rights.

Beginning with a brief discussion of Blanche Knopf's diminishing interest in family life and her intensifying commitment to a shared publishing life with Alfred, this chapter describes the process by which the couple began fostering an international "family" of authors, melding professional and personal realms in ways that made the Knopfs memorable among publishing communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Works by foreign writers mark the starting point of the Knopfs' approach to acquiring literary

properties, in a field that had become sufficiently complex to spur such the rise in literary agents throughout the industry.[130] This survey of the Knopfs' immersion in European publishing culminates with the launch of an ill-fated branch office in London and the simultaneous acquisition of significant authors within the Borzoi's American network, as well as a greater reliance on financial backing from the company's American shareholders. On one hand, this can be read as a business history, reflecting the growing expertise of two young entrepreneurs. On the other hand, it can also be read as personal history—a reflection of Alfred Knopf's evolving publishing persona and its effect on his wife's identity in the company's early years.

Blanche Knopf Enters the Publishing Business

By the time Blanche was promoted to president in 1957, when Alfred became chairman of the board, she had devoted more than four decades of her life to Borzoi Books, though as late as 1965 she was still barred from joining Publishers' Lunch Club, and from other organizations to which Alfred belonged, because of her gender.[131] She had risen to prominence in a slow process begun with her acquisition of erudite French works such as André Gide's philosophical novel *Strait Is the Gate,* published by Knopf in 1924. Today she is even more widely associated with the international aspects of the Borzoi than her husband is, in part because he became enamored of the American West and books on

[130] Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 22.
[131] "50 Years of the Borzoi," *Publishers' Weekly,* 1 February 1965, 49.

American history near the end of his career.[132] Nonetheless, Blanche's role in the company's initial decade reflects her disdain for domestic life but also her novice status as a businesswoman. Her rapid transformation from novice to savvy publisher in this initial phase of the Borzoi's history, before her global reputation in publishing had been established, is therefore noteworthy and ironic.

Blanche was named vice-president and director of her husband's firm when it was incorporated in 1918, joining the company full-time soon after the birth of the Knopfs' only child, Alfred Abraham Knopf, Jr. (called Pat, a nickname given to him by his mother when he was born).[133] In his diary entry for June 17, 1918, Alfred blended notations regarding the birth of his son with details of bookselling appointments.[134] He recorded the fact that Blanche had awakened him at six o'clock in the morning and told him that she was in pain, though she apparently did not think she was in labor. Nonetheless, Blanche went to White Plains Hospital and Alfred went to work, arriving in Grand Central by nine a.m. and subsequently calling on Brentano's and Baker & Taylor. After lunch, he received a phone call informing him of Pat's arrival, leaving his Manhattan office earlier than usual to meet his newborn son.[135]

In the two years before Pat's birth, Blanche very much lived the life of a conventional suburban wife, taking a trolley to the White Plains Produce Market more frequently than she took the train into Midtown. This was also the period during which

[132] Blanche eventually was named a knight and officer of both the French Legion of Honor and the Brazilian National Order of the Southern Cross.
[133] Knopf memoir, page 128, 610:2.
[134] Knopf often noted that his son shared a birthday with Carl Van Vechten, James Weldon Johnson. G. B. Stern, and John Hersey. Van Vechten hosted June 17 parties in honor of himself, Pat, and Johnson.
[135] Alfred Knopf's diary, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 621:1, HRC.

Alfred and Blanche briefly kept two borzois as pets, though they found the dogs to be unruly and disloyal.[136] The Knopfs were able to accommodate such a large dog because in 1916 they had bought a house twenty miles north of New York City in Hartsdale, near White Plains, making the down payment with money from Blanche's family. The seller unsuccessfully attempted to rescind his acceptance of their offer when he discovered that the Knopfs were Jewish. Two weeks before Pat was born, Blanche signed a contract for the sale of the house because (according to Alfred's memoir) it was beyond their means.[137] By the end of the summer of 1918, Blanche had ended her brief tenure as a housewife. The Knopfs and their infant son moved to Manhattan's Upper West Side, renting an apartment that was spacious enough to also accommodate their nanny. They would not own a home in Westchester again until 1928, when they would build the Tudor-style house (which they called The Hovel) that Alfred inhabited for the rest of his life, while Blanche took a small apartment on East 57th Street, staying in the city most weeknights.[138]

Though Blanche's volatility and fierce independence became legendary, the company's very early years are marked her tremendous dependence on Alfred in a variety of areas, from honing her familiarity with European authors to practical matters of paying translators. In the first months of their marriage, when Alfred frequently traveled on domestic sales calls, she wrote copious letters to him (sometimes signed "woof woof") that express continual romantic longing as well as bewilderment over how to manage

[136] Knopf memoir, page 124, 610:2.
[137] Housing contracts. AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 595:4, HRC.
[138] Knopf memoir, page 187, 610:3.

day-to-day affairs at the office. Sometimes writing to Alfred on Borzoi letterhead, which bore his name in all capital letters, she possessed a voice of deference to her husband/supervisor, conveying few of the traits that would suggest her future as the American editor of Simone de Beauvoir or Albert Camus.[139] Yet by 1918, as she followed Alfred's lead, she left the suburban house for the publishing house, becoming a salaried, full-fledged employee of the company and mastering the business as astutely as her husband had.

Though Samuel Knopf clearly weighed in on matters relating to all aspects of the Borzoi until his death in 1932, company correspondence throughout the 1920s demonstrates the gradual strengthening of Blanche's persona as a powerful decision maker. She relished her burgeoning role, making strides that were rare for women in the publishing industry, or in any corporate realm, at the time. The only other woman with similar status in a publishing house during this period was Ellen Knowles, who became a director of Harcourt, Brace & Company in 1920. She had served as Alfred Harcourt's assistant at Henry Holt & Company and later married him, but his business partner was always clearly Donald Brace, not Knowles.[140]

Thus, Blanche's presence alongside Alfred embodied the single genuinely progressive aspect of the firm, strengthening the Borzoi's reputation for sophistication despite the fact that she was a complete novice who took cues from her husband and father-in-law in the company's initial years. One of the fundamental business principles

[139] Blanche Knopf to Alfred Knopf, numerous ALS and TLS, undated but with contextual evidence of chronology, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 561:1.
[140] Dissatisfied with Henry Holt, Alfred Harcourt first considered teaming up with Alfred Knopf before deciding instead to launch a firm with Donald Brace.

she learned from Alfred was that, in the early twentieth century at least, imported fiction offered a surprisingly affordable way to acquire a reputation as highbrow publisher.

Acquiring Books from Abroad

Despite Alfred's affection for Lower East Side booksellers, who recommended many of his early Russian acquisitions, in the first months he relied just as heavily on British sensibilities in making his acquisitions, scouting for prospects by reading English reviews of European books. The Knopfs' affinity for European literature would last throughout the 1920s, a trend illustrated in the following table:

Year	U.S.	U.K.	Continental Europe	Other	Number of Borzoi Books published
1915	7%	7%	86%		15
1916	17	25	55	3%	36
1917	50	29	21		34
1918	50	29	21		38
1919	59	29	12		58
1920	35	50	15		74
1921	44	36	22		55
1922	34	35	31		80
1923	44	40	43		127
1924	35	35	27	4	110
1925	31	34	32	3	115
1926	43	34	23		146
1927	35	39	25	1	152
1928	36	33	31		128
1929	35	30	33	2	137

Figure 1. Percentage of Knopf books by authors born in America versus abroad

Between 1920 and 1929, books by American authors remained in the minority on Borzoi lists, even as the number of titles published annually grew from approximately thirty-five to more than one hundred and thirty-five, including the dozens of books issued in Borzoi series.[141]

[141] A note on methodology: To generate these figures, I created an inventory of books published by Knopf between 1915 and 1929, grouped by year, based on bibliographies featured in *The Borzoi 1920* and *The Borzoi 1925* as well as listings in *The Publishers' Trade List Annual* from 1926 through 1929. The twelve-

Knopf's lean start-up budget was indeed a factor in his decision to acquire works by foreign authors. This acquisitions process allowed him to enjoy favorable repayment terms when purchasing books in sheets and to sometimes avoid the cost of royalties. From an accounting standpoint, the purchase of imported books in sheets carries mixed risks. By buying sheets in small quantities as part of another publisher's edition, Knopf avoided the cost of paper, typesetting, and printing, but he incurred the cost of shipping and duty, and he took the risk of issuing a small quantity of a book that might quickly become a top seller. When publishers buy only the rights to a book, rather than purchasing sheets or finished copies from another publisher, they incur the risk of manufacturing unsold copies if they set the print run too high. In the absence of print-on-demand, it is even possible for a publisher to lose money on a bestseller because it is impossible to calculate with certainty exactly how many copies of a book will ultimately sell, while printers, paper vendors, and binderies must be paid for all finished copies, regardless of the final sales numbers on a title. Setting a print run too low is also risky, particularly for briefly popular books, resulting in lost sales if stores remain out of stock until after demand for the book has waned.

The Knopfs determined that it did not make fiscal sense to import more than 1,500 sets of sheets on any title. For books that held a strong promise of sales beyond that

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volume 1925 Stephen Crane series, which would have artificially weighted the outcome, was treated as a single book in my tabulations. Also, I excluded the few Knopf books that were published anonymously, as well as seventeen authors who fell into such deep obscurity that no prominent scholarly archive or encyclopedia now features them, leaving their homelands undetermined by me. Though other vagaries include the inherent imperfection of *PTLA* listings and the *Borzoi* bibliographies, my percentages for the company's first three years reflect the trend mentioned in Geoffrey Hellman's "Publisher: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948, 44.

number, the Knopfs found it worthwhile to take the risk of paying for the typesetting and printing costs themselves. They occasionally incurred excessive costs when they imported sheets for the initial release of a work and later invested in U.S. typesetting and printing for subsequent copies when a foreign book proved to be popular.[142]

It has been argued that part of the appeal of works by authors from countries that did not recognize international copyright law was the possibility that royalties would not have to be paid. Knopf liked the fact that Russian authors could exert no control over their U.S. publishers, but he did not cite freedom from royalties as a motivator.[143] Indeed, royalties pose no risk to a publisher's finances because royalties are essentially a profit-sharing plan—an expense incurred only if a book is selling. The payment of advances, however, does involve considerable risk, so it is not surprising that the Knopfs, like most of their contemporaries, paid advances rarely and grudgingly.

Nonetheless, it is important to note the implications of the international copyright laws under which the Knopfs were operating during this period, and to clarify the requirements of these laws. Until 1891, copyright laws in the United States restricted copyright protection to citizens or residents of the United States. Therefore, American publishers who wished to reprint foreign texts could do so without any financial obligation to the author or original publisher, though such publishers risked scorn (and the ability to issue foreign works without the fear of competition from other editions) within the industry if they declined to pay a courtesy fee. Those who ignored this

[142] Blanche Knopf to Stephen Haden Guest, TLS, 29 June 1926, Series VIII: London Office Files, 1516:1, HRC.
[143] Alfred Knopf, "Russian Literature," *New York Times Book Review,* 16 April 1916:144. PHN.

courtesy of the trade were labeled pirates, though they in fact broke no laws by doing so. That changed in 1891, when legislation provided a means for obtaining U.S. copyright protection on foreign works. Under a clause favoring American labor, authors of foreign English-language books could only achieve such protection when the book was manufactured by an American typesetter and/or printer. The law required that two copies of the book be mailed or hand-delivered to the Library of Congress no later than the day of the book's first publication, regardless of whether that debut occurred in the United States or abroad. Foreign authors could secure U.S. copyright only if they resided in a nation with a reciprocal copyright agreement.[144]

In 1909, a provision was added stating that no copyright could be assigned retroactively to a work that was already in the public domain. Any work published in the United States or elsewhere before the 1909 act went into effect was in the public domain unless it had been previously registered. The renewal term was increased from 14 years to 28, setting the maximum term at 56 years. Also, the manufacturing clause of the 1909 act also acknowledges the emergence of Linotype and Monotype technology, reiterating that the typesetting must be accomplished within the limits of the United States, "either by hand or by the aid of any kind of typesetting machine," and adding the requirement that books also be both printed *and* bound in the United States. In addition, authors from

[144] In addition, fees for registering the book with the American copyright office were incurred, and the book had to be published with the proper notice appearing near the title page. The renewal term remained unchanged, maintaining an 1831 statute that set the initial term at 28 years and the renewal term at 14 years. Under the 1891 law, however, renewal was available only if the applicant complied with all requirements within six months before the first term was scheduled to expire. *Copyright Enactments: Laws Passed in the United States Since 1783*. Copyright Office Bulletin No. 3, Revised (Washington: Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 1973), 49-54.

nations that held no reciprocal copyright law could now obtain U.S. copyright if they lived in America at the time of the work's first publication. The act included a provision that made it easier for American publishers to obtain U.S. copyright on foreign editions, stating that one complete copy of an English-language book published abroad before publication in the United States could be deposited in the copyright office within thirty days of publication abroad to secure a temporary U.S. copyright, replacing the previous requirement of sending books on the day of publication (defined by these statutes as the day on which a book was made available for sale). Within that thirty-day interim, an authorized edition manufactured and published within the United States could be deposited as a "replacement" copy, gaining full-term U.S. copyright protection.[145] Another change that would have affected the Knopfs was enacted in 1919, when the Great War caused the interim period to be extended to sixty days for books published abroad in English "on or after the date of the President's proclamation of peace."[146]

America's new, evolving international copyright laws affected the Knopfs in a variety of ways. Borzoi Books printed from imported sheets did not qualify for copyright protection because they had not been manufactured in America. Therefore, if a competing house planned to issue the same work, the Knopfs had to find ways to add value to their edition, through lavish bindings, illustrations, or the inclusion of a copyrightable introduction (usually written as a testimonial by a literary luminary). The same applied to previously published European works for which no U.S. copyright had been secured

[145] *Copyright Enactments*, 67-73.
[146] *Copyright Enactments*, 93.

within the required time constraints. On such titles, the Knopfs were not able to secure retroactive copyright, even if they manufactured the books in the United States rather than importing sheets. Essentially, the laws made it impossible for American houses to hold copyright on a foreign, English-language book unless the work was relatively new, manufactured domestically, and written by an author who either lived in the States at the time of publication or was a citizen of a country with which America shared reciprocal copyright laws.[147] Of the approximately nine hundred early Knopf volumes I have examined, only sixty-five were printed abroad (all in the U.K.) and exported in sheets, a volume that tapered sharply after 1923, indicating that the young publishers began setting and printing imports themselves as soon as it was economically feasible to do so.

It might seem as if the Knopfs called on British houses frequently, but in fact Alfred and Blanche remained in the United States during the company's initial six years, conducting overseas transactions through correspondence or through agents in New York. Alfred and Blanche would not make the first of their legendary European tours until 1921. In the meantime, Alfred continued to reap the benefits of his 1912 trip abroad, using contacts from the trip to enhance his ability to procure foreign works, a process that was most likely accelerated not by his personality but by his ability to pay the publishers, possibly unburdening them of excess or remaindered sheets. Nonetheless, of particular

[147] For the effects of these international copyright enactments, see Henry W. Lanier, ed., "ABC of Copyright" in *The Author's Annual 1929* (n.p.: Payson & Clarke, 1929), 205; Frederick H. Hitchcock, "Copyrighting" in *The Building of a Book*, 2nd Ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker and Company, 1929), 253; and Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: A Very Dignified Pavane," *The New Yorker*, 20 November 1948, 48.

use was his friendship with John and Ada Galsworthy, who served as two of the Knopfs' unofficial, entirely unpaid literary scouts abroad and encouraged Alfred's Anglophilia.[148]

Unlike Knopf's new professional relationships with agents and publishers in Britain, it is unclear what the Galsworthys hoped to gain from their continual correspondence and eventual reunions with Knopf. They earned minor fees from Knopf—Ada as a translator and John as a writer of introductions—but no Galsworthy title ever became a Borzoi Book. It is likely that their interest in Alfred and Blanche was rooted in the simple pleasure they took in serving as mentors to the amusingly enthusiastic young publishers. Revered in England both as a playwright and a novelist (and best known today for his trilogy, *The Forsyte Saga*), John Galsworthy actively assisted other literary figures on both sides of the Atlantic. The best evidence of this is preserved in the P.E.N. legacy. The P.E.N. American Center, whose acronym encompasses poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, and novelists, was founded in New York City in 1922, but its inception can be traced to Galsworthy and to Cornish novelist Mrs. C. A. Dawson Scott. The two had founded the P.E.N. Club in London a year earlier, hoping to foster an international writers' circle that could assuage animosity between nations in the aftermath of the Great War.[149]

During Knopf's solo trip to Europe, it was Galsworthy who introduced the aspiring publisher to the acquisition that would become the first lucrative Borzoi Book,

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[148]Replacing Max Maisel as an editorial advisor to Knopf, Ada Galsworthy expressed dislike for *Homo Sapiens* after receiving a copy from Knopf, telling him that she found it to be monotonous, with an overemphasis on sex. Ada Galsworthy to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 20 December 1915, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A Knopf Personal, 501:5.

[149] "P.E.N. History," P.E.N. American Center website. Accessed 22 April 2009. http://www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/155

W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions.* By the time Knopf produced the book's third American reissue in 1916, Hudson was 72 years old and represented the antithesis of modernist verve, though *Green Mansions* does convey exoticism.[150] Set in Venezuela and Guyana, the novel depicts a complex, doomed romance between an English-speaking traveler named Abel and an adolescent girl, Rima, who has never ventured beyond the jungle.

Though Hudson portrays Rima as heroic (she loses her life as a result of Abel's interventions in her community) and her naturalism as worthy of exaltation, Knopf's advertising copy reduces the plot to a commercial romance, without mentioning the novel's locale. Beneath a Borzoi Books banner, set in typography that is as large as that of the novel's title, the ad copy describes *Green Mansions* as "the story of a girl's slow and timid awakening to the meaning of love, and a man's passionate and chivalric devotion."[151] Other copy touts the foreword and says nothing about the novel: "This is the book which John Galsworthy would have every man, woman and child read. Read the first paragraph of his foreword at your bookshop. It will convince you."[152] Knopf did not believe that the Galsworthy introduction was suitable for the college market, however. When he produced yet another reissue of the novel in 1926 under his new *Students'*

[150] An ornithologist, adventurer, and naturalist, Hudson was born in Buenos Aires and his mother was American, but he lived in England for approximately the last fifty years of his life. Published by Knopf with an introduction by Galsworthy, *Green Mansions* garnered sizeable advance orders, including a request for one hundred copies from Los Angeles Bookseller C. C. Parker. Though the publisher's records do not specify the number of copies ultimately printed or sold, the Parker order mentioned in Knopf's memoir confirms the early establishment of a coast-to-coast Borzoi sales network, while providing a profile of the type of booksellers who appreciated Hudson: Knopf describes Parker as old-fashioned By the end of the year, Knopf saw fit to increase the price from $1.50 to $1.75. Knopf memoir, page118, 610:2.
[151] Advertisement for *Green Mansions, New York Times,* 4 June 1916: BR230. PHN.
[152] Advertisement for *Green Mansions, New York Times,* 2 April 1916: BR124. PHN.

Library of Contemporary Fiction, he replaced Galsworthy's text with an introduction by Thomas Rankin, a professor of rhetoric at the University of Michigan.

The decision to publish *Green Mansions* was spurred solely by Knopf's passionate admiration for the novel, mirroring the passionate admiration expressed by his mentor, Galsworthy. From a business standpoint, the Borzoi reissue made little sense. The book already had been published in the United States in 1904 by Putnam but had not sold well. In addition, Putnam's edition had been issued as sheets imported from Hudson's long-term English publisher, Duckworth. In later interviews, Knopf reiterated that because U.S. copyright had not been secured for the book at that time (and could not have been secured, as the sheets were not manufactured in the United States), all prospects for securing U.S. copyright, then or in the future, had been negated. Nonetheless, Knopf had a new edition typeset and printed in the United States. The new foreword by Galsworthy, at least, therefore qualified for copyright protection and explains why the book nonetheless carries the phrase "Copyright, 1916, by Alfred A. Knopf."[153]

Knopf seems to have attributed the poor Putnam sales to a poor marketing pitch. In contrast to Knopf's sensational advertising rhetoric, Putnam's copy had featured an excerpt of a tame review from the highbrow English literary magazine *Athenaeum:* "The author presents with admirable picturesqueness … the natural surroundings and the

[153] The copyright page of Boni & Liveright's Modern Library edition, released in 1921, also includes the line "copyright 1916 by Alfred A. Knopf," presumably only because their book featured a reprint of the Galsworthy foreword. Boni & Liveright did not rent plates from Knopf for their edition, which was pocket-sized.

characters of the South American Indians."[154] Knopf's determination to "educate" American audiences about European authors whom he admired became a theme of his marketing, an approach begun at Doubleday in his marketing campaign for Conrad.

Knopf's efforts to resurrect *Green Mansions* in the United States had begun as early as 1913, when Galsworthy sent a letter of introduction to his friend Hudson on Knopf's behalf. Knopf attempted to persuade Doubleday editors as well as Mitchell Kennerley to publish the book, though the grateful seventy-two-year-old Hudson remained politely skeptical that Knopf would succeed, telling his young correspondent that he did not believe American houses would be receptive to his works any longer, and predicting that his poor health would prevent him from writing another book.[155] Nonetheless, his American career eventually flourished under Knopf's guidance, a slow process captured in more than three dozen letters to Knopf written by Hudson over the next nine years, including a missive sent less than two weeks before Hudson's death in August 1922. The compelling aspect of this correspondence is Hudson's effusive gratitude for the financial security Knopf brought him in those final years. Knopf presented himself to the public as a benevolent impresario of culture, while he presented himself privately to his authors as a benevolent master of finance.

Hudson was not shy in broaching the subject of money with Knopf, characterizing the process of negotiating with his British publishers as being like going to war (he often

[154] "Ready August 1st," advertisement for *Green Mansions*, *New York Times*, 30 July 1904: BR511. PHN.
[155] William Henry Hudson to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 12 January 1913, AAKI, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 501.4, HRC.

sold his copyrights to his publishers).[156] Yet subsequent letters to Knopf from Hudson acknowledge receipt of royalty payments ranging from one hundred to nearly seven hundred dollars, paid directly to Hudson rather than to his copyright-holding publishers, and by March 1922 Hudson was suggesting that *Green Mansions* would be appropriate for the cinema, though no dramatic adaptation would appear until 1937 with the broadcast of a radio opera, followed more than twenty years later by the 1959 film.

Hudson's relationship with Knopf's house makes for an illuminating case study also because it demonstrates how the young publisher attempted (often unsuccessfully) to compete with other American houses for European works. Because *Green Mansions* was successful, Knopf soon found himself attempting to earn the privilege of becoming Hudson's sole American publisher, repeatedly losing to the established house of E. P. Dutton & Company, which had longstanding working relationships with Hudson's English publisher, J. M. Dent & Sons—a reality that Hudson mentioned more than once in letters to Knopf. Presumably, Knopf lost out not only because had no longstanding ties with Dent but also because he failed to be the highest bidder. In particular, Knopf had hoped to publish Hudson's memoir, *Long Ago and Far Away*—one of the few opportunities to release a previously unpublished work by the author, securing an American copyright—and offered to host Hudson as a houseguest in New York, giving the author a chance to see his mother's homeland for the first time. Despite Knopf's attempt to establish a more personal connection, Hudson sold the copyright to Dent for

[156] William Henry Hudson to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 1 August January 1913, AAKI, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 501.4, HRC.

£300 and apologetically informed Knopf that Dent had sold the memoir to Dutton because they were willing to pay more than any other American house. [157] Hudson was also pleased that Dutton had plans to publish *The Purple Land*, his narrative of South America, with a foreword by Roosevelt.[158]

Thus, out of the seven Hudson titles published by Knopf (*Afoot in England, Birds and Man, Green Mansions, The Land's End, A Little Boy Lost, Ralph Herne,* and *Tales of the Pampas*) none was exclusively published in America as a Borzoi Book.[159] He therefore had to distinguish his editions through packaging or illustrations and in one case asked Hudson to write a foreword. Knopf intended for it to appear in the 1917 reissue of *Little Boy Lost*, planning to secure copyright protection for that previously unpublished

[157] William Henry Hudson to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 28 October 1916, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 501.4.
[158] William Henry Hudson to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 20 September 1916, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 501.4.
[159] Knopf's diminished influence after *Green Mansions* proved to be a strong seller is evident in a search of the Online Computer Library Center's WorldCat database: Dutton released *A Crystal Age* and *Idle Days in Patagonia* in 1917; *Far Away and Long Ago* in 1918; *Birds in Town and Village* in 1919; *Birds of La Plata, Dead Man's Plack, A Shepherd's Life,* and *Adventures Among Birds* in 1920; *A Traveller in Little Things* and *Fan, the Story of a Young Girl's Life* in 1921; *The Naturalist in La Plata* in 1922; *Birds in London, A Hind in Richmond Park, Nature in Downland, Hampshire Days, The Collected Works of W. H. Hudson*, and *Rare, Vanishing & Lost British Birds* in 1923, the year after Hudson's death; and *A Hudson Anthology*, arranged by Edward Garnett, in 1924. George H. Doran Company also took a small share of the Hudson properties, releasing *The Book of a Naturalist* in 1919, re-titled and reissued as *The Disappointed Squirrel, and Other Stories from "The Book of a Naturalist"* in 1925. Many of Hudson's books found multiple incarnations among American publishers during the 1920s. Boni & Liveright launched the Modern Library series in 1917 with an edition of *Green Mansions. Birds and Man* was published by Knopf in 1916 and by Dutton in 1923. *Afoot in England* was published by Knopf in 1922 and by Dutton in 1923. The Modern Library released *The Purple Land* in 1926, after Dutton had published it in 1916. *The Land's End* was issued by Dutton in 1923 and by Knopf 1927. *Tales of the Pampas* was released by Dutton under the title *El Ombú* in1923, seven years after Theodore Roosevelt raved about the copy he received from Knopf. *A Little Boy Lost*, an illustrated collection of wilderness tales for young adults, was published by Knopf as a children's book in 1917 and released by Dutton in 1923 in a collected edition, which also contained *Ralph Herne*, published by Knopf also in 1923.

text and offering the author a royalty of 10 percent.[160] In his reply, Hudson fearfully claims that he doesn't remember what inspired him to write the book, though in the same letter he goes on to reveal many details about the process by which the book came to be produced. Knopf printed the letter verbatim as a postscript on the final pages of *Little Boy Lost,* including Hudson's conclusion that "children do not read forewords and introductions; they have to be addressed to adults who do not read children's books, so that in any case it would be thrown away. Still if a foreword you must have, and from me, I think you will have to get it out of this letter."[161]

Hudson in turn led Knopf to another beneficial relationship with an English literary figure, in this case a bona fide agent: Edward Garnett. Knopf's first correspondence with Garnett had occurred during the Kennerley apprenticeship, after Galsworthy had sent a letter of introduction, but until the success of *Green Mansions,* Garnett was lukewarm toward Knopf and in the summer of 1915 declined to write a book on the art of translation for the Borzoi's inaugural list.[162] In subsequent correspondence, he expresses doubt about Knopf's judgment, predicting that Americans will not embrace *Green Mansions.* By 1920, however, Garnett was signing a contract with Knopf for a new collection of literary essays, *Friday Nights,* which Knopf agreed to publish only if he could also publish an American edition of Garnett's biography of Ivan Turgnev. Knopf promised a royalty scale that was typical for his company (and for the industry) during

[160] Alfred Knopf to William Henry Hudson, TCL, 25 July 1917, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 654:11.
[161] William Henry Hudson, *Little Boy Lost.* Postscript. (New York: Knopf, 1918), 222.
[162] Edward Garnett to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 23 July 1915, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 709:6, HRC.

this period: 10 percent on the first 2,500 copies; 12.5 percent on the next 2,500 copies; and 15 percent after 5,000 copies, with an advance of fifty pounds on publication.[163] An English publisher, Jonathan Cape, in turn bought sheets for five hundred copies from Knopf.[164] In further transatlantic community building, Knopf attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to persuade the *New York Times Book Review* to publish John Galsworthy's review of *Friday Nights* after advance sales amounted only to an approximate figure of six hundred and fifty copies.[165]

Knopf's affiliation with Garnett would lead to the acquisition of books by numerous other English authors. Those with the most enduring legacies included D. H. Lawrence; Katherine Mansfield; and Garnett's son, David (co-founder of the Nonesuch Press and an award-winning author affiliated with the Bloomsbury Group). Alfred and Blanche eventually met Garnett in 1921 on their first trip abroad as publishers, arranging for a tea attended by the agent and by W. H. Hudson.

In part due to the growth of opportunities afforded by American participation in international copyright transactions, the role of literary agents such as Garnett had became professionalized at the turn of the century. One of the world's first professional literary agents, James Brand Pinker, was an early supporter of Borzoi Books. Knopf first encountered Pinker through Joseph Conrad and later on behalf of Mitchell Kennerley.

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[163] Edward Garnett to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 13 December 1920, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 709:6, HRC. Unfortunately, these correspondence files do not contain evidence of the terms of the agreement with Cape.
[164] Alfred Knopf to Edward Garnett, TCL, 27 February 1922, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 709:6, HRC.
[165] Alfred Knopf to Edward Garnett, TCL, 12 May 1922, AAKI, Series II: Alfred Knopf, Personal, 501:5, HRC.

Pinker had opened his firm in 1896 after working as a newspaper and magazine editor. Through his editorial work, he was able to attract a clientele that included H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, Stephen Crane, Henry James, and Ford Madox Ford.[166] Pinker was more encouraging than Garnett in responding to the young Knopf's queries during the summer of 1915, recommending that the aspiring publisher consider buying works by prolific novelist Francis Brett Young, who indeed became a staple of the Borzoi lists during the 1920s. Through Pinker, Knopf was also able to publish numerous works by Walter de la Mare, author of highly imaginative books for adults and children and an early contributor to Knopf's burgeoning line of juvenile titles. Pinker also brought poet, novelist, and classical-poetry translator Robert Graves to Knopf, as well as short-story writer Elizabeth Dashwood.[167]

Pinker's success was soon followed by the rise of agencies such as the Curtis Brown firm, founded in London in 1899 by Albert Curtis Brown. Like Pinker, he was a former newspaper staffer, an American correspondent from the *New York Press.* Reflecting the diverse opportunities for profit among literary agents, Brown's first

[166] James Hepburn, *The Author's Empty Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent* (London: Oxford UP, 1968), 57.

[167] Mary Ann Gillies' *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920*, illustrates the ways in which Pinker served as more than a hawker of copyrights or an administrator of intellectual properties. She shows that he clearly also served a patronage role in literary modernism, loaning money to experimental authors or at least giving them access to the services enjoyed by more marketable writers. By lending his time, effort, and other resources to risky projects, he shaped the agent's role into one that to some extent replaced the dying patronage systems of Europe's nobility. Gillies also considers the fact that Pinker and other agents managed an early twentieth-century paradox in which public disdain for wealth was the sign of a true artist, though private financial feuds between publisher and modernist, anti-commercial writers required arbitration by someone who was willing to communicate frankly about money, on behalf of an author who found such discussions problematic. "Do get me some money, will you: I am at the end," D. H. Lawrence wrote to Pinker, succinctly summarizing his agent's ultimate service. Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 101.

negotiated sale was not to a book publisher but to *Pall Mall Magazine,* where he placed an article by novelist John Oliver Hobbes.[168] In 1920, at the recommendation of Galsworthy as well as poet, translator, and playwright Witter Bynner, Knopf contacted Brown and bought the reprint rights for four novels by E. M. Forster (*Where Angels Fear to Tread, Howards End, The Longest Journey,* and *A Room with a View*) in addition to a volume of his short stories and an essay collection. By 1923, however, Forster was unimpressed with his sales as a Borzoi author, calling on Alfred and Blanche in their hotel suite to inform them that his next novel, *A Passage to India,* would be published in the United States by Alfred Harcourt and Donald Brace. In his memoir, Knopf described the loss of Forster as a bitter lesson, though he says the cause of the rift was low sales figures, not low royalties or advances.[169]

Yet the Curtis Brown agency was also involved in the negotiations for Knopf's first major bestseller: *Sorrell and Son,* a portrait of a Great War veteran adjusting to civilian life, written by Major Warwick Deeping. The novel was brought to the Knopfs' attention by their London scout, novelist Storm Jameson, whose role as a Curtis Brown author may have enhanced the Knopfs' negotiating power. Published in 1926 by Knopf and in 1927 by Grosset & Dunlap, this acquisition also represented the Borzoi's first windfall from the medium of motion pictures. Released in 1927 by United Artists,

[168] Albert Curtis Brown, *Contacts* (London: Cassell, 1935), 2.
[169] Knopf memoir, page 172, 610:3.

"Sorrell and Son" was directed by Herbert Brenon, whose work on the film earned him a nomination for an Academy Award during the Oscars' inaugural year.[170]

Grosset & Dunlap's edition of *Sorrell and Son* was illustrated with photographic stills from scenes of the United Artists "photoplay," while Knopf promoted his finely packaged edition with billboard advertising on upper Broadway.[171] The typesetting for Grosset & Dunlap's reflects a desire to economize: the kerning and leading are tight and therefore less inviting to the reader than Knopf's edition. The photoplay edition is not packaged in a way that targets serious readers so much as those who wish to own a picture book. The heavily illustrated full-color jacket emphasizes the book's photographs, and the back cover lists other titles in the house's photoplay series, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Jazz Singer* among them: "These Are the Books from which the Big Movies Were Made. … Your favorite pictures will mean so much more to you."[172] Perhaps to further differentiate his edition from that of Grosset & Dunlap, he reissued the book in 1927 in a deluxe package, touted in a lengthy back-of-the-book publisher's note that reveals six-figure sales:

> This entirely new edition of "Sorrell and Son" supersedes the original American trade edition, which is henceforth out of print. The occasion chosen for making "Sorrell and Son" available in this considerably improved format is a birthday—a relatively early birthday of the book itself. What is commemorated is the second anniversary of the original publication of "Sorrell and Son" in America, which

[170] The award for outstanding picture went to "Wings," a silent film also about World War I, with footage of stunt pilots portraying flyboys. Also recognized with an Oscar that year was "The Jazz Singer," the story of a cantor's son who struggles with questions of Jewish-American assimilation. The Academy recognized Warner Bros. with a special award for making this "pioneering outstanding talking picture, which has revolutionized the industry." "1927/28 (1st)," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences website. Accessed 24 April 2009. http://awardsdatabase.oscars.org/ampas_awards/DisplayMain.jsp?curTime=1240625554834.

[171] Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Publisher, II: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948: 48.

[172] Jacket copy, Warwick Deeping's *Sorrell and Son* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1926).

> took place February 19, 1926. Few books can have spoken eloquently enough, or to a wide enough public, to call for so special an observance. But this first of Mr. Deepings's books to bring the author world-wide fame has conveyed its meaning with the same directness and simplicity to the minds of exacting judges and to the hearts of all manner of readers everywhere. As, now, it enters simultaneously in America its third year and its third hundred thousand, its publishers have felt that to bring it out in a finer dress is at once the least that they can do, and the most fitting thing possible to devise. … The type chosen is Garamont [sic]. The edition has been set on the monotype, electrotyped, printed, and bound in imported sunfast on cloth, by the Plimpton Press, Norwood, Massachusetts. The paper, an eggshell finish, was made by the Ticonderoga Pulp and Paper Company, Ticonderoga, New York. The binding is after drawings by Mr. Percy Smith.[173]

It would not be accurate to cast the Grosset & Dunlap edition as competition for Knopf's. In fact, the presence of a more cheaply produced reprint is evidence of Knopf's familiarity with his market niche—consumers who wished to pay more for an edition that looked rarefied. The presence of cheaper versions only helped to underscore the Borzoi identity by demonstrating what a Borzoi Book was *not.*

Sorrell and Son also represents Curtis Brown's involvement in a contract arrangement that would be implemented many times in the Borzoi's early years, reflecting a response to authors who believed that their books were not sufficiently advertised. Though the packaging was elegant, seemingly elevated above the commercialism of the Grosset & Dunlap edition, Knopf's version was published with an agreement that was steeped in commercialism. The first Knopf title to sell more than a hundred thousand copies, *Sorrell and Son* was heavily advertised but at a slight cost to the author. Though Knopf's memoir is scant on details of the contract, he reported that he agreed to spend a fixed advertising sum on every copy of the book that sold. In return,

[173] Promotional copy appearing on the closing pages of Warwick Deeping's *Sorrell and Son* (New York: Knopf, 1927). The Garamont typeface was designed by Frederic Goudy in 1921.

Deeping agreed to a lesser royalty of 10 percent. If advertising expenditures dipped below a predetermined amount, the royalty would revert to 15 percent.[174]

As the use of literary agents was relatively new, Knopf was not restricted to negotiating all terms through agencies, as today's publisher generally would be. In many cases, Knopf developed epistolary friendships directly with English publishers such as William Heinemann, whose successor and business partner, Sydney Pawling, called on the Knopfs in New York throughout the company's early years. Sometimes Alfred Knopf was led to English publishers simply by reading U.K. newspapers. Such was the case with the acquisition of books by the Borzoi's most prolific British author, J. S. Fletcher, whose Knopf detective novels totaled more than forty. Knopf first read about Fletcher in the *Westminster Gazette* and decided to approach Ward Lock & Co., to whom Fletcher had sold his copyrights over the years, to arrange for U.S. publication of *The Middle Temple Murder*. Knopf manufactured his own editions of the Fletcher titles in America and paid royalties directly to Ward Lock, at one point attempting unsuccessfully to buy Fletcher's U.S. rights altogether. In a memo to Knopf staff member Saul Salzberg, Samuel Knopf noted, with exasperation, that the royalties on the Fletcher titles sometimes ran as high as 18 to 24 percent.[175] Though the royalties posed no financial risk, because they did not have to be paid unless copies actually sold, the percentages were excessive relative to Knopf's customary terms. Sales had waned by the time Samuel Knopf sent this missive in 1932, three years before Fletcher's death at age seventy-two, but *The Middle*

[174]Knopf memoir, page 206, 610:3, HRC.
[175] Samuel Knopf to Saul Salzberg, typed memorandum, 4 May 1932, AAKI, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:2, HRC.

Temple Murder had marked a lucrative Borzoi debut for the author in 1919, enhanced by media reports that Woodrow Wilson was reading it while recovering from a cold. This "testimonial" was of course touted in Knopf advertising.[176]

The Knopfs' acquisition of works by continental European authors was facilitated through a similar hybrid process involving publishers and agents. His few Spanish translations were procured by American agent John Garrett Underhill, a representative of the Society of Spanish Authors, whom Alfred Knopf met through Joel Spingarn.[177] With the exception of W. H. Hudson, who was born in Buenos Aires, acquisitions of books by authors born in South America would not become a significant part of the Borzoi plan until World War II, when Blanche traveled there in light of limited travel options in Europe. When the Knopfs made their first tour as publishers, calling on houses in France, Germany, and Scandinavia in 1921, it was Englishman Herman Bang, Heinemann's editor in charge of foreign and translation rights, who supplied letters of introduction.[178]

Though the trip to France led to a lucrative relationship with André Gide, who signed a contract for the rights to publish *Strait Is the Gate*, the most fruitful of these initial Continental encounters occurred in Scandinavia. In Copenhagen, the Knopfs formed important ties with the house of Gyldendal, from whom they purchased reprint rights for books by Knut Hamsun, who would prove to be the Knopfs' first Nobel Prize–winning author. Hamsun was best known for his stream-of-consciousness novel *Hunger*,

[176] Alfred Knopf's memoir, page 133, 610:2, HRC.
[177] Knopf memoir, page 132, 610:2.
[178] Alfred A. Knopf, draft of "On Publishing Thomas Mann," an article scheduled for publication in P.E.N.'s *The American Pen* on 6 June, 1975. Manuscript page 2, 9 April 1975, AAKI, Series II, Alfred Knopf Personal, 661.9. In the article, Knopf also attributes his interest in German literature to Joel Spingarn, who returned from the Great War impressed by Teutonic literature.

in which an unnamed protagonist tours the city of Kristiania (now Oslo), unable to feed his physical and intellectual hungers. The novel had been published more than thirty years before, but Gyldendal's publisher managed to convince Knopf that it was a masterpiece.[179] Knopf was also persuaded to buy the rights to *Jenny*, a novel by another Norwegian future Nobel Laureate, Sigrid Undset. In his memoir, Knopf wrote candidly of the fact that other American publishers weren't interested in the Gyldendal offerings and noted that he took a special risk in publishing Hamsun's 1917 novel *Growth of the Soil*, which ran more than six hundred pages in length. Published by Knopf in two volumes and priced at five dollars, the book nonetheless was described by Alfred as a gamble that reaped considerable rewards.[180]

The rewards extended well beyond financial ones. Though the Nobel Prize had existed for barely two decades when it was awarded to Hamsun, it conveyed an image of old-world aristocracy despite the reality of Alfred Nobel's industrialist identity. In a similar vein, the prize gave Alfred and Blanche an opportunity to project an image that belied their un-aristocratic heritage. Noting that to this day, the king of Sweden personally bestows the medals on each Nobel laureate, James English describes the Nobel Prize in Literature as being a particularly peculiar cultural prize, "founded in a thoroughly modern way, by a wealthy industrialist whose private foundation, bearing his name, would serve as the prize's perpetual sponsor, gradually laundering his economic fortune and symbolic reputation through a series of cleansing cultural transactions … yet

[179] Hamsun would later become a vocal Nazi sympathizer, despite the financial benefits he gained from being published by Jews in America.
[180] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 152, 610:2.

deeply rooted in the bureaucratic traditions of early modern royal and national societies." This matches the Borzoi duality as well, reflecting an economic model in which prestige could be purchased. Though several highly obscure Knopf books written by Nobel Prize winners failed to gather any sales momentum, the magnitude of a Nobel author's cash award, the massive scale of international competition, and the grandeur of the award ceremony combine to deliver the intangible commodity of status for the publisher as well as for the author.[181] Lengthy promotional copy that used the word "greatest" multiple times announced the debut of Borzoi-Gyldendal books. On the first printed verso page of the 1921 edition of *Grim: The Story of a Pike* by children's-book author Svend Fleuron, captures Alfred Knopf's attempts to enhance his reputation as a distinguished publisher through his relationship with Gyldendal:

> The firm of Gyldendal (Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag) is the oldest and greatest publishing house in Scandinavia, and has been responsible, since its inception in 1770, for giving the world some of the greatest Danish and Norwegian writers of three centuries. Among them are such names as Ibsen, Pontoppidan, Brandes … Hans Christian Andersen and Knut Hamsun, the Nobel Prize winner for 1920, whose works I am publishing in America. It is therefore with particular satisfaction that I announce the completion of arrangements whereby I shall bring out in this country certain of the publications in this foremost house.[182]

The Knopfs' acquisition of books by numerous authors who later won the Nobel Prize is often attributed to the young publishers' good taste, but luck clearly played a role as well, as the Knopfs sometimes expressed surprise to colleagues when one of their

[181] James F. English. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[182] Promotional copy appearing in Svend Fleuron's *Grim: The Story of a Pike* (New York: Knopf, 1921).

authors was chosen. When Russian author Ivan Bunin won the prize in 1933, ten years after Knopf had published his *Gentleman from San Francisco,* Blanche exclaimed, "What did *he* win it for?"[183]

Despite his success with books from the Continent and his wife's enthusiasm for Paris, Alfred Knopf seems to have especially relished their time in Britain, amassing a list that featured works by Bloomsbury feminist Dorothy Richardson (one of the first women published by Knopf), Somerset Maugham, Gladys Bronwyn Stern, Arthur Waley, and all three Sitwell siblings (Osbert, Edith, and Sacheverell), reflecting a broad range of approaches to modern literature.[184] Eventually, Knopf became convinced that he was capable of being not only a purveyor of British works but also a "British publisher" himself, launching an overseas branch and attempting to become a purveyor of books in the U.K. marketplace. The endeavor never measured up to his aspirations, however, and it only proved that his popularity among London publishers was in part merely due to his role as a good customer who eagerly bought their fragments of intellectual property and paid them promptly for that "privilege."

The London Office

The English publisher who had perhaps the greatest influence on Knopf was Martin Secker, a contemporary of Knopf's whose firm, founded in 1910, developed a reputation

[183] Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: A Very Dignified Pavane," *The New Yorker*, 20 November 1948, 56.
[184] Radically exalting German culture during the Great War, Richardson's *Pointed Roofs* is listed in the 1916 PTLA as the first volume in a trilogy, though it would in fact spur a much longer, thirteen-volume stream-of-consciousness *Pilgrimage* series, in which the female protagonist pursues a quest for her own authentic identity.

as a fashionable publisher of new talent, including Franz Kafka, D. H. Lawrence, and Thomas Mann, who would join the ranks of the Borzoi's Nobel Prize winners in 1929.[185] Through Secker, Knopf also acquired more than a dozen works by Welsh novelist Arthur Machen (known for the fantastical), and an anonymously published spoof titled *Women,* written by critic and novelist Frank Swinnerton (also a member of the Galsworthy set) as a treat for Secker. In addition, Knopf credited Secker with partly inspiring the look of Borzoi books, including the use of stained tops.[186] Thus, when Knopf first conceived of a London branch, his initial impulse was to offer to buy Martin Secker's company.[187] Though his offer was turned down, leaving Knopf to strike out on his own, familiarity with Secker's firm assists us in seeing Knopf's initial vision for his own London office.

Just as Knopf had taken a desk in his father's office, he was able to have occasional use of a desk in Heinemann's office. When he launched Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd., in January 1926, he leased an office on Heinemann's street, at 38 Bedford Square. A year and a half later, Knopf optimistically signed a twenty-year lease on the five-story building next door, at 37 Bedford Square.[188]

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[185] Mann's first Borzoi title was *Royal Highness: A Novel of German Court Life,* published in 1916, purchased in sheets. *Buddenbrooks* followed in 1924. *Death in Venice* was released in 1925 and *The Magic Mountain* in 1927. Each of these transactions was negotiated by Martin Secker. Though Knopf would succeed with *The Magic Mountain,* its momentum built slowly, while Secker apparently did not do well with it in the U.K. Alfred Knopf to Helen Porter Lowe, TCL, 15 December 1927. William Koshland Files, 2:1, HRC.

[186] Alfred Knopf, interviewed by Jules Schwerin. Transcript. AAKI, Alfred Knopf, Personal, 681:3, HRC.

[187] Alfred Knopf to Joseph Lesser, typed memorandum, n.d. 1967, AAKI, Alfred Knopf, Personal, 656:7, HRC. Lesser was hired as the firm's office manager in 1920 and succeeded Samuel Knopf as treasurer.

[188] Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd., was technically dissolved in January 1950, though the publishing assets of the London office were liquidated in 1932. The long-term lease prevented Knopf, Ltd., from ceasing operations sooner. Throughout those final years, the firm managed tenants in the building, making real estate—not publishing—the primary business of Knopf, Ltd., for most of its existence. Much of Britain's commercial and residential real estate has been concentrated for generations in the hands of the few gentry. Therefore, such long-term leases are not uncommon and in many ways approximate ownership. Knopf's building was

Knopf had appointed Storm Jameson to the helm of Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd., and she was joined in that endeavor by Guy Chapman, a history professor, editor, and war hero whom she married a month after the formation of the company. Though the Knopfs accepted Chapman grudgingly, company letterhead listed Jameson and Chapman as co-managers of the firm.[189] The newlyweds were charged with developing the company into a full-service publishing house, yet the task of acquiring British books not as imports but as commodities for sale to British audiences met with little success, and many opportunities for co-publication were lost due to poor transatlantic communication, lack of autonomy and authority among the London office's top personnel, and competitive situations in which Knopf Ltd. strangely found itself vying against other U.K. houses for the right to publish a variety of Knopf's American works.

For example, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. became Willa Cather's American publisher of choice in 1920, but throughout the following decade the U.K. editions of her books were released by other houses, most commonly Heinemann. She was represented by Paul Reynolds, considered by many to be America's first literary agent. Reynolds and Knopf shared such a high degree of mutual respect that Reynolds described Alfred Knopf as having the potential to become an American incarnation of William Heinemann, while Knopf claimed that Reynolds never brought him an unprofitable manuscript.[190]

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located in a heavily developed urban area but was nonetheless technically part of the Duke of Bedford's estate. Guy Chapman to Samuel Knopf, TCL, 15 July 1927, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:5 HRC.

[189] Alfred Knopf to Joseph Lesser, typed memorandum, ca. 1967. Series II, Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 656:7, HRC.

[190] Paul Reynolds to Alfred Knopf, TLS, 2 December 1920, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 595:5 and interview transcript, undated but filed with materials related to the Knopfs' documentary

Nonetheless, neither this friendship nor Knopf's ability to sell Cather well in America seems to have mattered in securing the British rights to Cather's works, most likely because Knopf Ltd. failed to be the highest British bidder in negotiations with Reynolds. Another factor was surely the mediocre reputation of the London office. Writing to London staff member A. S. Lowy, Alfred Knopf describes having recently signed up three novels by Isa Glenn, a native of Atlanta, but Knopf had great difficulty persuading Glenn's literary agents (Brandt & Brandt in America, A. M. Heath in the U.K.) that Knopf Ltd. would generate the highest possible U.K. income for the author. The agents were only willing to permit Knopf Ltd. to acquire the rights to the first of the three Glenn novels, a trial basis for determining where to place U.K. rights for the other two books, seeking an advance of fifty to a hundred pounds with a royalty that would increase from 10 to 20 percent if sales increased sufficiently over time.[191]

There is also evidence that London office staffers were frequently unsure about whether they had the authority to approve the acquisition of American rights for titles being acquired by Knopf Ltd.[192] Additional correspondence indicates that all aspects of the overseas operation received continual scrutiny and frequently sharp criticism, both in person and from overseas, from all three Knopfs—Samuel, Alfred, and Blanche—including decisions regarding sales calls, print runs, advertising schedules, and publicity campaigns. Even seemingly straightforward co-publication agreements, through which

endeavor with Jules Schwerin, which spanned the early1960s. AAK Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 679:5, HRC.

[191] Alfred Knopf to A. S. Lowy, typed memo, 3 July 1928, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:1, HRC.

[192] A. S. Lowy to Blanche Knopf, TLS, 5 July 1928. Series VIII. London Office, 1516:1, HRC.

the London office purchased sheets from the New York office, continued to require clarification a year after the inception of Knopf Ltd.[193]

One significant feature of the London office correspondence is that it provides additional evidence of Alfred and Blanche's deference to Samuel. Samuel's memoranda, some of which were composed aboard the *S. S. Mauretania* and the *S. S. Bremen* en route to England, indicate the extent to which his role as treasurer gave him control over editorial decisions, salaries, and other matters. He complains to Guy Chapman about the lack of regular updates on Knopf Ltd's financial status, claiming that Chapman ignores his requests for basic information such as the bank-account balance.[194] However, in keeping with his habit of lavish spending when it came to creature comforts, he spurred a costly, extensive renovation of the Bedford Street building, claiming to give Chapman free reign while simultaneously micromanaging the process.[195] Much of the renovation expense was related to converting the building from residential to commercial use and bringing the building into compliance with codes, such as the installation of a mandatory fire escape, but other expenses were purely ornamental in nature.[196]

Although the elder Knopf was at first decidedly sure of success for his son's company in London, asking Chapman to ensure that the ample new building be fitted in such a way that staff would not feel cramped as the company experienced future growth,

[193] Confusion over levels of authority is also reflected in Knopf Ltd.'s letterhead, which was printed in two versions. Jameson and Chapman were listed as managers on separate stationery, rather than being listed alongside the Knopfs as part of a management hierarchy. The Knopfs and investor Ira Morris are listed on Knopf Ltd. letterhead thus (note the display of Samuel's ancestry): "Alfred A. Knopf, Chairman, U.S.A.; Blanche W. Knopf, Managing Director, U.S.A.; Ira V. Morris, Resident Director, U.S.A.; Samuel Knopf, Director, U.S.A. (Polish Origin)."
[194] Samuel Knopf to Guy Chapman, TCL, 15 August 1927, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:5, HRC.
[195] Samuel Knopf to Guy Chapman, TCL, 28 June 1927, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:5, HRC.
[196] Handwritten bid, Thos. H Martin & Co., April 1928, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:6, HRC.

one of Samuel's last significant business duties before his death in June 1932 was to oversee the winding up of the London branch.[197]

Though the London records do not indicate whether any books achieved strong sales in the U.K. under the Borzoi imprint, records of the dispensation of Knopf Ltd.'s remaining inventory provide an indication of the company's London offerings, which clearly included a balance of American and non-American authors. During the liquidation of the Knopf Ltd., Heinemann negotiated for the rights to several novels by Joseph Hergesheimer and Dashiell Hammett, as well as works by Sigrid Undset and Guy de Maupassant. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. took practical nonfiction (*Improve Your Card Play, How to Bid at Contract Bridge, Restaurants of London*) as well as literary works, including Langston Hughes's first novel, *Not Without Laughter,* and James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan,* in addition to selections by Knut Hamsun and Claude Bragdon.[198]

A final accounting lists $98,675 as the total loss for the Borzoi's stint abroad.[199] In his memoir, Alfred Knopf recalls the economic strife that plagued post-war England, and the anti-American sentiment subsequently caused by demands that Britain repay its

[197] Samuel Knopf to Saul Salzberg, typed memorandum, 4 May 1932, AAKI, Series VIII. London Office, 1516:2, HRC.

[198] Despite the array of esteemed authors on their London lists, the Knopfs also solicited un-agented manuscripts submitted by the general public. The jacket copy for P. M. Shand's *A Book of Other Wines Than French* reads, "Alfred A. Knopf invite [sic] the submission of manuscripts, which will receive most careful consideration" beneath the publisher's address and an offer to be added to the Borzoi catalog mailing list. *A Book of Other Wines Than French* was published by Knopf Ltd. in 1929, while Prohibition was the law in the United States.

[199] Typed carbon report, unsigned and undated, presumably prepared by Joseph Lesser in response to Alfred's November 1959 request for a financial summary of Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd.. AAKI, Series VIII, London Office, 1514:9, HRC. One of Samuel Knopf's longtime friends, Ira Nelson Morris, had invested $25,000, losing approximately 75 percent. In 1923, Knopf had published Morris's memoir of his tenure as America's minister to Sweden.

war debts immediately.[200] Though he and his otherwise shrewd father had originally seen the British market as a viable opportunity for Borzoi Books, Alfred ultimately attributed the failure to resentment on the part of English publishers and their perception of the Knopfs as intruders.[201]

Producing American Literature

Ironically, though perhaps not surprisingly, two of Knopf's bestselling American authors—Philadelphia native Joseph Hergesheimer and H. L. Mencken of Baltimore—were referred to him by Englishmen. Knopf first met with Mencken upon the urging of Joseph Conrad, whose work was frequently praised in Mencken's book reviews for the *Baltimore Sun.* Knopf met Hergesheimer through Mitchell Kennerley, who had published his debut novel, *The Lay Anthony: A Romance,* in 1914. Over the years, Hergesheimer and Knopf, and their wives, seamlessly merged a business relationship with an enduring friendship, and Mencken was a member of this set as well, giving Hergesheimer editorial suggestions while participating in their frequent revelry.

Knopf was eager to publish Hergesheimer, doing so first with *The Three Black Pennys* (a novel of Pennsylvania ironworkers), though writer's block kept the book from being released until 1917.[202] Under Knopf's imprimatur, he would publish more than a dozen books, many with international settings that included Cuba and Mexico, receiving critical acclaim for a writing style that emphasized aesthetics. Though Alfred had lured

[200] Knopf memoir, page 174, 610:3.
[201] Knopf memoir, page 199, 610:3.
[202] Grosset & Dunlap immediately issued a cheap edition by arrangement with Knopf.

Hergesheimer to the Borzoi, the author's career was eventually shepherded by Blanche, whose copious correspondence with him describes contract negotiations, requests for autographed blank sheets to be tipped into special copies of his books for retailers, and other details of the publishing process. Hergesheimer's affectionate replies include a 1927 description of his unnamed, forthcoming "modern novel" as "a Blanche and Alfred and Dorothy and Joe book."[203] The novel he published two years later, *Swords and Roses*, bears a cryptic dedication to Blanche: "Here is a book of swords, now wholly discarded, and of old-fashioned dark roses—vanished objects and flowers we both regard with an especial deeply personal regret. Well, they have existed for us only in imagination; unhappily we have been delivered to very different and far less engaging realities; and so we must write books, we must publish books and read them, in order to return, and only for a little while, to the simpler loveliness of the past. To Blanche W. Knopf."

Mencken's presence in this Jewish literary circle confounds those who have difficulty reconciling it with allegations of his anti-Semitism. Ranging from his use of the word "kike" multiple times in his diary, which was made public for the first time as a Borzoi Book in 1989, to his statement in *Treatise on the Gods* that "the Jews could be put down very plausibly as the most unpleasant race ever heard of," the evidence presents a paradox because so much of his work comprised self-described satirical

[203] Joseph Hergesheimer to Blanche Knopf, TLS, 17 October 1927, AAKI Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, 691:10.

"buffooneries."[204] In his *Baltimore Sun* column, called "The Free Lance" (also the name of a Knopf series edited by Mencken), he used well-honed deadpan humor to assail a variety of cultural constructs, including all forms of Protestant Christianity and piety in general. "His most important bolts of lightning were reserved for the Baltimore scene, its prominent citizens, its crooked reformers, its 'honorary pallbearers,' as he called them," writes newspaper historian George Douglas. "He also attacked bureaucracy, Christian Science, chiropractic science, blue laws, the Anti-Saloon league, and the Rotary. The 'good' people were against prostitution, so he was for it; they were against woman's suffrage, so he was for it: quixotic ideas that were disarming the reader."[205]

Mencken had to perform an about-face on several occasions when his humor was misinterpreted by the "booboisie," such as the time he refused to allow a Chicago correspondent to reprint extracts from *Treatise on the Gods* because he feared that they would be inappropriately used in propaganda against Jews. Knopf approached the topic of Mencken's attitude toward Jews with nonchalance, believing that Mencken's anti-Semitic words were meant to spoof anti-Semites themselves and expressing exasperation with anyone who, in Knopf's opinion, was too small-minded to get the joke.[206]

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[204] H. L. Mencken, *Treatise on the Gods* (New York: Knopf, 1930), 345-346. Throughout the book, Mencken makes disparaging comments about people of all faiths. The quoted comment about Jews is followed by additional invective, curiously leading up to hyperbolic praise: "As commonly encountered, they lack many of the qualities that mark the civilized man: courage, dignity, incorruptibility, ease, confidence. They have vanity without pride, voluptuousness without taste, and learning without wisdom. Their fortitude, such as it is, is wasted upon puerile objects, and their charity is mainly only a form of display. Yet these same Jews, from time immemorial, have been the chief dreamers of the human race, and beyond all comparison its greatest poets."

[205] George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 202.

[206] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 104, 619:8.

Deriding Zionists, fundamentalist Christians, and Klansmen with equally sharp invectives, Mencken shared common ground with Knopf in their dislike of any form of extremism. Mencken's *Prejudices*, a series of six books featuring expanded versions of his newspaper and magazine articles, expresses prejudice on a seemingly limitless number of topics, including his disdain for prejudiced people. The Scopes Trial provided particularly rich fodder for Mencken, as did political conventions. Mencken arranged for Knopf to travel with him to the 1928 Republican Convention, securing a photojournalist's badge for the perpetually camera-toting Knopf, who relished this time on the road with someone he considered to be one of his closest friends.[207]

Mencken was also an accomplished translator, applying his knowledge of his ancestral German to a volume of Nietzsche published by Knopf as part of the Free-Lance series. With Jewish drama critic George Jean Nathan, Mencken also served as co-editor of the *Smart Set* from 1914 to 1923, and the two founded *The American Mercury* in 1924. Though Mencken and Nathan's friendship ended after bitter arguments over the editorial direction of the *American Mercury* (Mencken feared it was on the verge of becoming trivial and formulaic), Nathan's books were also a staple of the Borzoi's American lists during the 1920s.[208] Knopf provided the financial backing for *The American Mercury* and was its publisher until 1935.[209] The magazine was heavily promoted on the dust jackets

[207] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 12, 619:1. Knopf and Mencken shared a birthday, September 12, frequently citing this as evidence of their tremendous compatibility.
[208] Samuel Knopf, with Blanche and Alfred, made several attempts to effect a reconciliation between the two men. Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 24A, 618:6.
[209] *The American Mercury* was Knopf's only foray into periodical publishing, an anomaly compared to mammoth American houses such as Harper's, Scribner's, and Doubleday, all of which maintained healthy magazine divisions.

of Borzoi books, and a promotional Borzoi Broadside in turn appeared in the Mercury. Fine printer Elmer Adler was entrusted with the layout, and Mencken described the design as " 'whorish,' which indicated his approval," also praising the magazine's direct-mail announcements for their "fancy whorehouse typography."[210]

In addition to being a Borzoi author, Mencken served as a scout and manuscript reader for the Knopfs, urging them to buy Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and recruiting many American authors, including short-story writer Ruth Suckow (an Iowa native whose work he published in *Smart Set*), acerbic Midwestern editor E. W. Howe, and a literary editor from Virginia named Emily Clark, whose *Stuffed Peacocks* (sketches of her native Virginia) Knopf published in 1923. Mencken also encouraged the Knopfs to consider publishing James Weldon Johnson, praising his writing and expressing admiration for his career.[211]

Mencken is sometimes credited with introducing the Knopfs to Willa Cather, whose notoriety as a fiction writer was widespread when they published her story collection *Youth and the Bright Medusa* in 1920. In fact, Cather became a Knopf author through her own volition, but an advertorial appearing in the *New York Times Book Review* may have led to the erroneous claims that Mencken had served as her liaison. With a reference to Cather's longtime companion, Edith Lewis, the ad contains the following ditty:

> Blithe Mencken he sat on his Baltimore stoop,
> Singing, "Willa, git Willa! git Willa!

[210] H. Alan Wycherley, "Mencken and Knopf: The Editor and His Publisher," *American Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1964): 465.
[211] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 45, 618:7.

> The red-headed Lewis joined in with a whoop,
> Singing, "Willa, git Willa! git Willa!" They woke every bird from the Bronx to the loop
> Singing, "Willa, git Willa! git Willa!" So we, willy nilly, got Willa and read
> And Willa proved all that the booster birds said.[212]

Blanche recalled that she was staffing the switchboard during the lunch hour when Willa Cather first approached their company for consideration, asking for an appointment with "Mr. Knopf." Blanche, still in the role of apprentice to some extent, handled the call with nervous excitement.[213] Cather reportedly decided to leave Houghton Mifflin and sign on with Knopf because she was impressed with his advertising and with the packaging of his books. (Nonetheless, her interactions with the Knopfs are marked by continual complaints from her on both topics.) Her second book as a Knopf author, a novel of the Great War titled *One of Ours,* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1923, and she was soon one of the most lucrative authors on the Borzoi roster. Though she scorned commercialism, declining high-dollar offers for film rights and insisting on keeping her works out of the hands of publishers who produced cheap editions for mass audiences, she received mass-market attention from the media, including an August 3, 1931, profile in *Time* magazine that featured Cather on the cover. Though she is associated with her upbringing the Great Plains of Nebraska, her "prairie trilogy" (*O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark,* and *My Ántonia*) was published before her move to Knopf. Among Cather's Borzoi Books are those that celebrate settings other than Midwest farms, including *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *The Professor's House* (both set in Cather's beloved New

[212] "Borzoiana," advertisement for assorted Knopf titles, *New York Times,* 20 September 1925: BR22. PHN.
[213] Blanche Knopf, speech delivered at a Hotel Astor banquet celebrating the house's fiftieth anniversary, 19 October 1965. AAKI, Series II, Alfred Knopf Personal, 675:2

Mexico), *My Mortal Enemy* (New York and San Francisco), and *Shadows on the Rock* (seventeenth-century French Canada). Like the Knopfs, she was most at home in New York City and Europe.

An equally significant member of the Borzoi's exiled Midwestern authors was music critic, *New York Times* correspondent, and novelist Carl Van Vechten, an Iowa native who found most of Cather's works to be intolerably limited and lacking in glamour.[214] Knopf's affiliation with Van Vechten was rooted in their shared enthusiasm for classical music. Knopf read Van Vechten's first book, *Music After the Great War*, soon after it was published in 1915 and summoned the thirty-five-year-old author to his one-room office on 42nd Street. In 1916, Van Vechten's *Music and Bad Manners* was released as a Borzoi Book, followed by several other works of music criticism, seven novels, and two books about cats (*The Tiger in the House* and *Lords of the Housetops*). Yet Van Vechten's bestselling 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven* reflects perhaps his most noteworthy contribution to the Borzoi because it captures his immersion in the Harlem Renaissance.[215] Deriving its title from a slang term for the upper balcony of segregated

[214] Carl Van Vechten to Alfred Knopf, TLS, 10 October 1923, AAKI, Series IV: Authors and Book Designers, 728:9, HRC. A dandy, Van Vechten composed his letters using green and purple typewriter ribbons, sometimes on letterhead printed in fuchsia.

[215] Van Vechten was heavily involved in the packaging of his books, with a preference for calico cloth bindings. During the production process for *Nigger Heaven*, he told the Knopfs that he had found fabric that he particularly liked for use on "tall paper" editions of the novel (perhaps to be used for promotional purposes). He recommended that they act quickly before someone else buys the bolt, which could be found "at McCutcheon's, Fifth and 48th, third floor. Twenty-four inches wide and costs 25 cents for the yard." The accompanying sample is no longer attached to the letter, so it is impossible to determine whether the Knopfs complied, though subsequent correspondence indicates that "tall paper" editions were in fact produced. Carl Van Vechten to Alfred Knopf, TLS, 18 March 1926, AAKI, Series IV: Authors and Book Designers, 729:3, HRC.

theaters, the quasi-fictional work features easily identifiable members of the black intelligentsia who populated Harlem's jazz clubs and speakeasies.

Controversial within the circles it depicts, the novel was defended by James Weldon Johnson, who (through Van Vechten, after Mencken's earlier recommendation) soon permitted his *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* to be revived by Knopf. Confirming Van Vechten's role as the Knopfs' impresario to Harlem, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* had been published anonymously in 1912 by the small Boston house Sherman, French & Company, which failed to achieve strong sales for the novel. At Van Vechten's urging, Knopf released it as part of the new Blue Jade Library line, a reprint series launched in 1925 and described in promotional copy as resurrecting "those semi-classic, semi-curious books which for one reason or another have enjoyed great celebrity but little distribution."[216] The series was Van Vechten's invention and spanned a gamut of authors well beyond Harlem.[217]

In 1926, the same year as the release of *Nigger Heaven,* Langston Hughes's first book, *The Weary Blues,* was published by Knopf, the result of a chance meeting between the young poet and Carl Van Vechten in Harlem at a benefit party for the N.A.A.C.P. Their second encounter occurred at a poetry contest and dinner sponsored by *Opportunity* magazine, published by the National Urban League. Hughes took first place, and Van Vechten formally introduced himself. The widely circulated story that Hughes was "discovered" by poet Vachel Lindsay after bus boy Hughes laid three of his poems on

[216] "In the West Indies," *New York Times,* 6 December 1925: BR10. PHN.
[217] Notes typed 17 February 1965, likely a transcript of diary entries. AAKI, Series II, Alfred Knopf Personal, 595:5, HRC.

Lindsay's table at Washington D. C.'s Wardman Park Hotel is true, but Lindsay was not responsible for leading Hughes to his first experience with book publishing. Lindsay did respond enthusiastically to the poems, leaving a trove of poetry volumes as a gift for Hughes and inscribing one volume with a multi-page missive of encouragement. This generated considerable publicity for Hughes, who had to cope with embarrassment when "the head waiter would call me to come and stand before some table whose curious guests wished to see what a Negro bus boy poet looked like").[218] Yet it was Van Vechten who led to Hughes's affiliation with the editors of *Vanity Fair,* where his work soon appeared, and to his affiliation with the Knopfs.

Alfred Knopf entirely credited Van Vechten with the Borzoi's affiliation with the Harlem Renaissance, and he credited *Nigger Heaven* with sparking America's interest in literature by African Americans. The Knopfs' immersion in this movement was actually fairly limited, though in addition to James Weldon Johnson and Hughes, they published Nella Larsen, Rudolph Fisher, and Walter White, all of whom were frequent visitors at Van Vechten's apartment on West Fifty-Fifth Street. The Knopfs' apartment was the scene of musical performances by Johnson's brother Rosamund (accompanied by Taylor Gordon), and Paul Robeson and his wife also visited the Knopfs at home.[219]

Echoing others who attribute these interactions to the Knopfs' empathy, due to their marginalization as Jews, American Studies scholar Randolph Lewis characterized the Knopfs' decision to publish Langston Hughes as "more than a response to a fad. …

[218] Langston Hughes's autobiography, *The Big Sea*, reprinted in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes,* vol. 13 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 170.
[219] Knopf memoir, page 209, 610:3.

After making room for themselves as Jews in the Anglo-Saxon publishing world, the Knopfs provided a niche for other alternative voices."[220] However, as with all Borzoi decisions, potential profit was surely also a factor in the Knopfs' motivations in backing Hughes, although the initial interactions between the poet and the Knopfs reflect the publishers' attempts to enter a bookselling world they knew little about.

Marketing *The Weary Blues* (or any Knopf title) to the white intelligentsia was second nature to the Knopfs, but correspondence between Hughes and Blanche captures her education regarding the promotion of books to a subculture with which she had little familiarity. In 1926, Hughes recommended black newspapers for advertising, citing the circulation of *The Chicago Defender* (201,527) and reminding her that, like *The Saturday Evening Post*, it had a national distribution. In fact, the *Defender* was the nation's bestselling African American newspaper.[221] Blanche told him (as she told many authors) that the advertising budget was limited, assuring him that the company was running sufficient advertising in mainstream newspapers. In Washington, D.C., he took it upon himself to call on three bookstores, presumably owned by African Americans, reporting to Blanche the quantities that would be purchased on a consignment basis by Timgad, Maxwell's, and Gertrude's Gift Shop. Anticipating that the Wardman Park Hotel might be a good venue for capitalizing on its "Negro bus boy poet," Hughes personally

[220] Randolph Lewis, "Prejudice in Publishing: Alfred A. Knopf and American Publishing, 1915-1935," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1990), 63. Note that Lewis's study includes Hughes's 1930s transformation into a writer who embraced communism and wished to be perceived as a political voice, rather than being defined by his ethnicity—a transition from which the Knopf attempted to steer their lucrative author. Clearly, there were limits to the Knopfs' affinity for "alternative" voices.
[221] James Danky, "Reading, Writing, and Resisting: African American Print Culture," in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 4: Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 354.

investigated the procedure for stocking books there, reporting to Blanche that the manager would allow Hughes to sell his own copies at the stall. In exchange, Blanche granted him the newsstand discount, which was higher than the author's two-fifths discount he was typically granted when purchasing copies of his own book.[222] Hughes seems to have made tireless efforts to build grassroots sales. The Knopfs set their sights on a far broader plan that included the sale of foreign rights, leading a staffer to tell Hughes that he was vying with Kahlil Gibran for the distinction of becoming Knopf's most translated author.[223]

A year after the release of *The Weary Blues*, Knopf published Hughes's second collection, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. Lewis asserts that the Knopfs "flinched" at the title.[224] In his memoir, Hughes concedes "it was a bad title, because it was confusing and many Jewish people did not like it," but he claims that his publishers remained silent on the subject: "I do not know why the Knopfs let me use it, since they were very helpful in their advice about sorting out the bad poems from the good, but they said nothing about the title." The collection invokes African American folksong forms, taking its title from Harlem slang that equated pawn brokers with Jews. The poems are populated by impoverished black New Yorkers, "people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten,

[222] Assorted correspondence between Langston Hughes and Blanche Knopf, circa 1926, William Koshland Files, 2:1, HRC. The Koshland files were acquired after Randolph Lewis completed his research. It is surprising that these files contain letters related to the publication of *The Weary Blues* because Koshland did not join the company until 1934. Koshland eventually becoming president of the firm in 1966.
[223] "W," an editorial staffer at Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., to Langston Hughes, TCL, 29 June 1926, William A. Koshland Files, 1:5. "W" could not be Koshland's first initial as he did not join the company until 1934.
[224] Randolph Lewis, "Prejudice in Publishing: Alfred A. Knopf and American Publishing, 1915-1935," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1990), 63.

buying furniture on the installment plan, filling the house with roomers to help pay the rent, hoping to get a new suit for Easter—and pawning that suit before the Fourth of July."[225] The poems themselves elicited derision from Hughes's peers, many of whom disapproved of his emphasis on the use of vernacular English. "Langston Hughes's Book of Poems Trash," proclaimed a headline in the *Pittsburgh Courier,* an influential black paper. "Langston Hughes—the Sewer Dweller" announced Harlem's *New York Amsterdam News.*[226] His next book, *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations,* would not be published until 1931.

The late 1920s also marked the Knopfs' acquisition of a book that would forge their relationship with a quintessential modern American storyteller, Dashiell Hammett, whose *Red Harvest* was released in 1929. The manuscript had been submitted without an agent, under the title *Poisonville*. *The Dain Curse* was published soon after, in the same year, featuring another installment of the anonymous detective called the Continental Op. A former Pinkerton's National Detective Agency operative, the San Franciscan Hammett also represents a shift in the Borzoi's focus from the east coast to the west coast, and from the seemingly quaint mysteries of J. S. Fletcher to the grittier realism of hard-boiled works. In addition, Hammett's success is also proof of Blanche's maturation as a publisher who matched and perhaps surpassed her husband's publishing acumen. Nonetheless, the salutation in Hammett's first letter to Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. is of course

[225] Of course, Hughes's explanation only amplifies the bigotry in the title, which perpetuates a stereotype of Jews as being so greedy that they are willing to exploit the clothes off the back of a desperate co-minority. Ironically, the idiom also encapsulates cultural transitions in the neighborhood where Alfred Knopf had spent his boyhood.

[226] Langston Hughes's autobiography, *The Big Sea*, reprinted in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes,* vol. 13 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 202-203.

"gentlemen."[227] In return, Blanche's correspondence with Hammett was signed not "Blanche W. Knopf" but as "Mrs. Alfred A. Knopf."

At the time of his debut as a novelist, Hammett was not a novice to elite literary circles. His work had appeared in Mencken and Nathan's *Smart Set,* a fact that he mentioned in his initial query letter. Also, despite his association with a formulaic genre, he insisted on experimentation and novelty, with a particular interest in using elements of soliloquy to enhance the narrative voice of his fiction. Preparing to write *The Maltese Falcon,* which marked the debut of Sam Spade, he told Blanche that he very much wanted to apply stream-of-consciousness techniques, hoping to merge literary realms with detective writing and asserting that Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* could have made a fine detective novel. In the same letter Hammett readily agrees to eliminate much of the violence from *Red Harvest,* as Blanche had requested.[228] Blanche was abroad when it was time to edit *The Maltese Falcon,* turning the task over to editor Harry Block, who asked Hammett to eliminate homoerotic scenes, which Hammett politely refused to do on the grounds that it would add novelty to the genre.[229]

Less than two months after Hammett's initial query, the manuscript for *Red Harvest* had been revised, and Blanche had sent a contract to him, with a letter that reveals the Knopfs' attempts to be perceived as treating authors fairly. The boilerplate

[227] Dashiell Hammett to Editorial Department, TLS, 15 February 1928, AAKI Series III: Blanche Knopf, 691:9, HRC.
[228] Dashiell Hammett to Blanche Knopf, TLS, 20 March 1928, AAKI Series III: Blanche Knopf, 691:9, HRC.
[229]Dashiell Hammett to Harry Block, TLS, 19 July 1929, AAKI Series III: Blanche Knopf, 691:9, HRC.

contract, Blanche told Hammett, was written by the attorney for the Authors' League.[230] As is true with most Knopf authors, Hammett initially received no advance but began asking for one soon into his relationship with the firm (in contrast to Henry Mencken, who gained favor with Knopf by notoriously never asking for an advance).[231] By the end of 1929, Block had extended a new three-book contract to Hammett, offering an advance of a thousand dollars. In the same letter in which he refused to eliminate the homoeroticism from *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett objected to Block's offer, asking instead for twenty-five hundred dollars. Success had given him more financial and editorial leverage. The same was true for his publishers as their company approached a new decade.

Exoticism and the Symbolic Role of Transatlantic Connections

While Knopf authors can be easily categorized according to nationality, many of the company's early publishing endeavors reflect constructed identities that are neither entirely American nor entirely British, conveying a sense of internationalism that sometimes extended far beyond an author's homeland. Carl Van Vechten's brainchild, The Blue Jade Library, housed a number of such titles. The disparate Blue Jade selections ranged from Scotsman C. K. Moncrieff's translation of the letters of Abelard and Heloise to military veteran Haldane Macfall's *The Wooing of Jezebel Pettyfer*, a "comedy of negro manners" re-released in 1925 after its debut thirty years prior.[232] Set in the West

[230] Blanche Knopf to Dashiell Hammett, TCL, 2 April 1928, AAKI Series III: Blanche Knopf, 691:9, HRC.
[231] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 84, 691.1.
[232] "In the West Indies," *New York Times*, 6 December 1925: BR10. PHN.

Indies, the novel features long passages of vernacular and Creole dialogue, although Macfall was English. Other examples of English authors who brought exoticism to the Blue Jade Library (albeit through a racialist, colonial lens) include Londoner (Mohammed) Marmaduke Pickthall, a scholar and translator of the Koran who converted to Islam at midlife and traveled throughout the Middle East. Knopf published three of Pickthall's works during the 1920s: a children's book, *Saïd the Fisherman (1925)*; a novel, *The Valley of the Kings* (1926); and a travelogue, *Oriental Encounters* (1929).

This publishing approach, by which Knopf featured "international" works on his list without recruiting authors beyond the bounds of Europe, was not limited to the Blue Jade Library. In addition to the early acquisition of W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*, a prime example of this is the addition of Bloomsbury resident Arthur Waley to the Borzoi list in 1921. Waley had been mentored by Ezra Pound, with whom he shared an interest in Orientalism, serving in the Oriental Prints and Manuscripts division of the British Museum. Waley's translations for the Borzoi list include three collections of Chinese poems and *The Nō Plays of Japan,* applauded in a highly abstract *New York Times* review that praised Waley for preserving "so exquisitely the poetry, the delicate imagery, and the fastidious reticence" of these spare medieval dramas.[233]

The top contributor to Borzoi exoticism, however, spent most of his life in the United States. Born in the segment of the Ottoman Empire now known as Lebanon, Khalil Gibran emigrated with his family as a child and was raised in poverty of Boston's South End. An artist and poet, he arrived in New York in 1911 at the age of 28. Knopf

[233] Lloyd Morris, "The Nō Plays of Japan," *New York Times Book Review*, 7 May 1922: B52. PHN.

met him seven years later, through a network of authors who reflected the young publisher's network at the time. Knopf recalled that a group of friends invited him to lunch in Greenwich Village in order to introduce him to Gibran. Capturing the spirit of this aspect of Knopf's publishing program, the guest list included Witter Bynner, a gay playwright and translator of Chinese poetry whom Knopf had met while working for Mitchell Kennerley; James Oppenheim, a Jungian poet and novelist, and the founding editor of *The Seven Arts*; and Pierre de Lanux, future director of the Paris office of the League of Nations.[234] Gibran's first book with Knopf was *The Madman: His Parables and Poems* (1918) followed by *The Forerunner: His Parables and Poems* (1920). Combining the form of a novella with the tone of mystic wisdom, *The Prophet* was released in 1923 sans subtitle and received lukewarm reviews, nonetheless becoming a bible of modernist countercultures and their redux in the 1960s. To date, *The Prophet* has sold more than nine million copies in the United States alone.[235]

The concept of profiting from a truly international identity applied to agents as well, particularly during an era marked by sizeable populations of expatriate American writers living in Europe. William Aspenwall Bradley, an American literary agent who dedicated his life to building a Parisian literary agency, figured prominently in Blanche's professional world and in several cases led her to attempt the acquisition of works by prominent American writers by calling on Bradley in Paris. Bradley had begun his career as a European scout for Harcourt, Brace & Company and later for Macmillan & Co., and

[234] Knopf memoir, page 126, 610:2.
[235] Joan Acocella, "Prophet Motive," *The New Yorker*, 7 January 2008: 72.

Blanche was one of his earliest correspondents when their companies were new. In the 1920s, however, they had few manuscripts for each other: the Knopfs were eager to sell French translation rights for American authors through Bradley, and Bradley tried to place articles by his authors in the *American Mercury*, but he primarily offered the Knopfs deals on lesser-known nonfiction works, including books on French literary history and culture.[236]

Representing Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein (who named Carl Van Vechten the executor of her literary estate), Scott Fitzgerald, and later Richard Wright, Bradley befriended Blanche Knopf but brought none of those bestselling authors to her list. Blanche also attempted to recruit Scott Fitzgerald directly while they were both in Paris. He declined her invitations but once responded with a handwritten letter that includes an amusing Prohibition-era grammar exercise in which he conjugates the verb "to cocktail" in all moods and tenses.[237] In a similarly futile gesture, Blanche attempted to bring Ernest Hemingway to the Borzoi circles not through New York connections but through the London office, telling U.K. staff member Stephen Haden Guest that Ira Morris, a Knopf investor and friend of Samuel, should do his best to secure a contract with the rising star overseas.[238]

It is not clear whether Bradley offered Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* to the Knopfs, but he definitely offered them Ford's biography of Joseph Conrad, which

[236] William Aspenwall Bradley Agency collection, 85:6-11, HRC.
[237] Scott Fitzgerald to Blanche Wolf, ALS, 19 January 1928, Series III: Blanche W. Knopf, 690:5, HRC.
[238] Blanche Wolf to Stephen Haden Guest, TLS, 2 July 1928 AAKI, Series VIII: London Office Files, 1516:1, HRC.

Alfred Knopf rejected, predicting that Ford's name would not endure.[239] Bradley's circle also extended to Knopf author Walter White. The NAACP activist wrote for Parisian magazines and befriended André Gide, who had become a Knopf author in 1921. In a network that illustrates the complex transatlantic aspects of the Borzoi network, Frenchman Gide introduced White to fellow American Bradley. One of Bradley's most significant arrangements for the Knopfs was the acquisition of Gide's works, including his literary criticism of Dostoyevsky and his novels *Strait Is the Gait, The Immoralist,* and *The School for Wives*. Gide would become another of the Borzoi's Nobel Prize winners in 1947.

The other American "agent" who facilitated significant overseas transactions for the Knopfs was attorney John Quinn, whose anti-Semitism was well documented in his business correspondence. Nonetheless, Knopf never expressed any belief that he was being snubbed by Quinn, even praising the powerhouse agent's behavior during their first encounter. When young Knopf was embarking on the marketing campaign for Conrad at Doubleday in 1913, the author recommended that Knopf contact Quinn (who had purchased many Conrad manuscripts) for information that might help with an American promotional campaign. In his typically unabashed manner, Knopf consulted a New York telephone directory, found the John Quinn he was looking for, and was soon granted full access to the Conrad records.[240]

[239] Alfred A. Knopf to William Aspenwall Bradley, TLS, September 4, 1924, William Aspenwall Bradley Agency Collection, 85:6, HRC.
[240] Knopf memoir, page 83, 610:2.

Knopf encountered Quinn again in 1915 through Mitchell Kennerley, and ultimately Quinn was responsible for bringing expatriate authors Wyndam Lewis, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot to the Borzoi list, though the relationships of the latter two with Knopf were short-lived. Through Quinn, in 1918 Knopf reissued Lewis's *Tarr*, an autobiographical novel of life in Paris before the war.[241] Lewis in turn had befriended Quinn client Ezra Pound, who had published twice with Knopf, first in 1917 with an introduction to the classical stage of Japan (elucidating Arthur Waley's translations) and in 1918 with *Pavannes and Divisions*, a collection of prose, including mystical short fiction, Socratic dialogues, and a manifesto on behalf of *vers libre*.

T. S. Eliot's first book of criticism, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry*, became a Borzoi Book in 1917. However, negotiating the terms for T. S. Eliot's *Poems* in 1920, Quinn granted Knopf only a ten-year license. Full copyright would have afforded him a term of fifty-six years.[242] Knopf suspected that the abbreviated terms were Eliot's idea, and realistic speculation in light of correspondence between Eliot and Quinn regarding arrangements with Horace Liveright. "I am sick of doing business with Jew publishers who will not carry out their part of the contract unless they are forced to," Eliot wrote. "I wish I could find a decent Christian publisher in New York who could be trusted not to slip and slide at every opportunity."[243] However, anti-Semitism was not the reason Knopf lost out on the chance to publish the eventual classic *The Waste Land*. That negotiation, for a reprint from Horace Liveright, broke down because Knopf was not willing to pay

[241] Lewis was a Canadian-born Vorticist whose mother was English and whose father was American.
[242] Knopf memoir, page137, 610:2.
[243] March 1923 letter quoted in Tom Dardis's *Firebrand: The Life of Horace Liveright*, (New York: Random House, 1995), 98.

the asking price. With deep chagrin, he later admitted in his memoir that in hindsight, the amount was not unreasonable, especially in light of Eliot's subsequent Nobel Prize.[244] He also admitted that very real budget constraints, combined with his innate tendency to be tightfisted, caused him at first to be a publisher of debuts by authors who later sold their masterpieces to other houses, on both sides of the Atlantic.[245]

Selling to Scholars

In addition to his penchant for exoticism, European classics, and the prose of America's rising stars, Alfred Knopf clearly believed that nurturing affiliations with academia was a key to prestige, and to prosperity. Ellen Garvey suggests that this belief was not far-fetched, noting that every time a publishing house's traveling sales representative called on an academician, the reputation of the trade line was enhanced as well: "The cultivation of reputations did not create a brand name, except for those readers who occupied significant gate-keeping roles as critics, academics, and librarians. A strong reputation among academics, however, did benefit other, often more profitable parts of the firm's business."[246]

In the 1920s, it was not customary for trade books (i.e., intended for sale through standard retail trade outlets) to be adopted for classroom use.[247] Thus, in 1922 Knopf

[244] Knopf memoir, page 137, 610:2.
[245] Knopf memoir, page 125, 610:2.
[246] Ellen Garvey, "Ambivalent Advertising" in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 4: Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 177.
[247] In today's academic marketplace, hundreds of Knopf titles are adopted for courses each year, primarily through the company's Vintage paperback line. Knopf resisted developing a substantial paperback line for thirty-nine years, finally conceding in 1954 at the urging of his son. The timing was ideal: college

launched his Text-Book Department (soon renamed the Educational Department), accepting an offer from Columbia alumnus and Carnegie Foundation translator Paul Bernard Thomas to direct the division in exchange for a salary that Knopf considered to be modest.[248] This division represents one of the few Borzoi endeavors for which I have found no evidence of Blanche's involvement, perhaps due as much to her lack of a college degree as to her gender.

During the next six years, Paul Thomas oversaw the creation of numerous series, including Political Science Classics, the Borzoi Historical Series, the Contemporary Thought Series, the History of Civilization Series, Tudor Translations, Borzoi Handbooks of Journalism (which included a guide to writing book reviews), and Students' Library of Contemporary Fiction (housing a limited number of novels also sold in regular trade editions, including Hudson's *Green Mansions*). Knopf recruited professors to serve as scouts, paying them one hundred dollars if one of their suggested manuscripts was published. Among those who served as scouts as well as authors was Columbia alumnus Harry Elmer Barnes, a historian and sociologist at Smith College. Barnes serves as a useful example of the ways in which a scholar and Alfred Knopf could attempt a symbiotic, public pursuit of prestige while privately embroiled in ignoble squabbles over money and marketing. Dubbed "radical and aggressive" as a champion of a burgeoning form of revisionist history, and later a particularly controversial figure because of his denial of the Holocaust, Barnes may have seemed an unlikely candidate to spearhead the

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enrollments had surged as a result of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill of Rights). Pat Knopf was himself a veteran of World War II, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and rising to the rank of captain before going to work for his father.

[248] Alfred Knopf's handwritten notes, n.d., AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595.5, HRC.

Borzoi Historical Series and History of Civilization Series.[249] Nonetheless, his book *The Genesis of the World War* earned public praise from former Harvard President Charles Eliot, and he attracted a substantial number of authors to the list.[250] He also recruited scholars to write introductions, lending their names in ways that served as testimonials to the Borzoi's growing academic circle.

Barnes's abundant correspondence with Paul Thomas and with Alfred Knopf reflects a professional relationship fraught with haggling and, as is often the case in trade as well as academic publishing, conflicting predictions about what constituted a promising manuscript. Barnes frequently complained that his compensation of one hundred dollars per acquisition was too low, and he was annoyed by the fact that he received no compensation when he recommended a book that was published by Knopf's trade division. Thomas's responses invoke the low sales figures for those titles, stating outright that Barnes should not be paid for books that were apparently never going to pay for themselves. Like many authors, Barnes was indignant when Knopf billed him for making excessive late-stage corrections to his own works, and Barnes complained that his books were not advertised sufficiently. He envied the campaigns launched by the upstart Simon & Schuster touting the widely read works of Will Durant. Alfred Knopf asserted that no amount of advertising would make Barnes as popular as Durant. Confident in the merits of *Genesis of the World War,* Barnes sent Knopf a two-thousand-

[249] C. C. Eckhardt, Review of *The Genesis of the World War* by Harry Elmer Barnes, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 13 (December 1926): 417-419.
[250] Correspondence between Harry Barnes and Paul Thomas or Alfred Knopf, ca. 1924-1939, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 699 (multiple folders), HRC.

dollar check, using his supposedly limited earnings to fund a broad Borzoi advertising campaign.[251]

There is evidence that in addition to the acquisitions fee, Barnes also received royalties on books for which he had served as impresario. In composing his memoir, Alfred Knopf asked treasurer Joseph Lesser to clarify what the editorial arrangements had been between Barnes and the firm. Lesser's royalty research revealed that Barnes had received 2 percent retail royalty on four history texts released in the 1920s, none of which were written by Barnes: A. C. Flick's *Modern World History*, J. E. Gillespie's *History of Europe*, Harold M. Vinacke's *History of the Far East*, and C. Wittke's *A History of Canada*. There is evidence that other Knopf textbook authors were expected to share royalties with the editor.[252] For example, Alfred Knopf encouraged Walter de la Mare to accept revised terms for the textbook edition of his prize-winning novel *Memoirs of a Midget*. His ten percent royalty was to be reduced to seven and a half percent while the editor received two and a half percent.[253]

Knopf applied equally precise equations to his terms of sale for college bookstores. Publishers generally grant a lesser discount to bookstores on titles that were selected for course adoption (reasoning that the instructor spurred the sale, so the store is entitled to less compensation for this "automatic" sale). The rise of Knopf coincided with the formation in 1923 of the College Bookstore Association (now the National

[251] Promotional materials for *Genesis of the World War*, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 699:2, HRC.
[252] Joseph Lesser to Alfred Knopf, typed memorandum , circa 1967, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595.5, HRC.
[253] Alfred Knopf to Walter de la Mare, TCL, 3 September 1925, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 721.1, HRC.

Association of College Stores), an organization that aspired to gain greater bargaining power with publishers. The inaugural issue of the association's bulletin, published in 1928, offers a wry description of the textbook publishing environment. A note from editor Marion Dodd of the Hampshire Bookshop in Northampton, Massachusetts, acknowledges that some college bookstores "find money in doughnuts or athletic goods or neckties to cover the loss in a text book department." Dodd assures readers that the CBA is "quietly demonstrating to the publishers that the sooner they give us a square deal on the discount proposition and stop discriminating against the College Bookstore as a legitimate outlet for general books, the better for all concerned." The bulletin's editor appears to have solicited houses in advance for publishable statements on their discount schedules, and on their interest in stocking college stores with trade books as well as textbooks. While Macmillan and the John C. Winston Company offer broad good wishes without spelling out their terms, Knopf's notice is markedly detailed:

> The Educational Department of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., takes this opportunity to wish you a prosperous New Year and to announce that from January 1, 1928, the discount on text-books will be 25%. This change has been introduced with the feeling that the college bookstore, represented by its manager, plays a distinct and important part in the process of book distributing. With this increased rate of discount we will maintain our policy of allowing a 20% return within ninety days from the invoice date, and we must ask that you strictly adhere to these terms. At this time we are also adopting a policy of practically doing away with the publication of two editions of the same book. This means that our books, with a very few exceptions, will be either text books or trade books. In cases of two editions the price and binding will be decidedly different, so as fully to protect the college bookstores.
>
> Our trade discounts are decidedly generous. They are as follows:
>
> Before publication (all orders) 42%

> After publication: All orders containing five books of one title, for the entire order (40%)
> All other orders (1/3)
>
> These discounts apply without distinction to all stores. There is no return privilege with these trade discounts.[254]

Knopf's public candor regarding discounts may seem as striking as his discussion of a return policy. Some historians of the book have proposed that the "sale or return" plan, which allowed retailers to return unsold copies, had only gradually begun to emerge in the United States in 1907 after being standard in continental Europe.[255] However, ample evidence exists of nineteenth-century trial periods and consignment agreements in the American book trade, some with return periods as generous as six months.[256]

Other signs of Knopf's ability to placate his clients in the college market include a presentation given by Wilbur Pearce, the new head of Knopf's Educational Department, at the CBA's first annual convention in 1928. Pearce's lecture, "Selling General Books," represents a direct response to college stores' calls to be regarded as more than textbook vendors. Replacing Thomas, Pearce was repeatedly praised in the CBA newsletter because he had come to Knopf from the Syracuse University Bookstore and, as a former member of the association, possessed considerable credibility.[257]

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[254] *The College Bookstore Association Bulletin* 1, no.1 (1928). New York Public Library stacks.
[255] John Tebbel. *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, vol. 2: The Expansion of an Industry,1865-1919* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1975), 66-67.
[256] Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth* Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 154-155. Trade paperback edition.
[257] I have found no evidence that the many Knopf series were offered for sale through subscription, which is perhaps an indication of Knopf's wish to avoid competing with college retailers. Jacket copy for titles in the various series offers no means for entering a subscription. Addresses appear to have been collected only to generate catalog mailing lists, or for subscriptions to *The American Mercury.*

Despite the supposed clarity of the distinctions between Knopf's trade and text books, a 1928 memo from Thomas to Lesser indicates that internal tracking of that distinction was sometimes fraught with confusion. In response, the memo spells out numerous categories of books that were in Thomas's domain: textbooks "pure and simple"; books originally published by the trade division but later issued in textbook editions; textbooks published in both trade and academic editions; books published in trade editions due to the recommendations of the textbook department; and educational books, such as those comprising the History of Civilization Series, that had been transferred from the trade department.[258]

The textbook division had been launched at an auspicious time. Sales for Borzoi books had soared by 88 percent in 1921, the year before Knopf decided to enter the college market.[259] High school attendance rose from less than 5 percent to more than 50 percent between 1880 and 1940, in tandem with rising college enrollments and the founding of numerous new research universities.[260] Nonetheless, by 1930 the division had failed to produce substantial profits. Alfred Knopf sold it to F. S. Crofts & Co, which was owned by his longtime friend Fred Crofts. In his memoir Knopf notes that at least one title in the inventory had no commercial value: Harry Barnes's *The Making of a*

[258] Paul Thomas to Joseph Lesser, typed memorandum, 5 December 1928, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 572.3, HRC.
[259] Promotional leaflet addressed "To the Readers of This Catalog." 21 December 1921, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595.5, HRC.
[260] Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway, "A Framework for the History of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940," in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 4: Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 7.

Nation, of which Knopf reportedly had not been able to sell a single copy.[261] Also noteworthy is Knopf's equally unsuccessful attempt to create a viable textbook division abroad. The dispensation records from the London office underscore Knopf's extensive efforts to support his company's British educational department, which released such titles as *England in the Middle Ages, Grammar of the English Sentence,* and *Some Implications of Social Psychology.* Knopf Ltd. had even conducted a survey of English educators to determine their perceptions of the problems with "modern" educational books.[262]

Although Knopf's first American textbook division failed to succeed financially, it did lend an enduring trait to the Borzoi legacy: Alfred Knopf's stature as a publisher of critically acclaimed historians, including Henry May and public intellectuals such as Richard Hofstadter. Knopf's decades-long membership in the American Historical Association is further evidence of the significance the field held for him. Affiliations with academia, historians in particular, shaped the image of a publisher who perhaps deemed his own history—ancestral and personal—to be culturally insufficient.

The Investors

A discussion of the roster of early Borzoi authors would be incomplete without an acknowledgment of the simultaneous growth of a roster of shareholders. Despite the fiscal hemorrhage in the London office, Knopf's New York operations flourished

[261] Knopf memoir, p. 242-243, 610:3.
[262] Pamphlet of Borzoi survey. n.d. AAKI, Series VIII, London Office, 1515:5, HRC.

throughout the 1920s. Though financial records from this period are scant, a narrative report to directors and stockholders, produced in 1940, provides sales figures of $1,148,190 for 1927; $1,156,455 for 1928; and $1,223,550 for 1929.[263] The existence of shareholders reflects a crucial component of Knopf's acquisitions network: investors, many of whom were relatives of Alfred and Blanche.

Prior to the incorporation of the Alfred A. Knopf publishing house in February 1918, Alfred periodically incurred bank debt, sometimes borrowing as much as five thousand dollars at a time. The decision to incorporate with capital stock of $100,000 was in some ways meant to reduce the company's initial state of indebtedness, which provoked considerable anxiety in Knopf. Though the company was never publicly traded on a stock exchange, Knopf advertised in an attempt to attract investors.[264] He issued a thousand shares at $100 each, half of which were common shares (all taken by Knopf himself). Of the preferred shares, half were retained by Knopf and half were sold. Despite the advertising, almost all of the initial investors were already affiliated with the company. They included Jacob "Jake" Fassett, Jr., the son of an industrialist; Desmond Fitzgerald, one of the Borzoi's commission sales representatives; Blanche; Samuel; Blanche's mother, Bertha Wolf; Alfred's sister, Sophia Knopf Josephy; his stepmother, Lillie Knopf; and his stepbrother, Edwin Knopf, who worked in the Borzoi editorial department for five years during the 1920s. By 1927, $30 Class C shares also had been

[263] Author unknown, "Special Report to Directors and Stockholders," 14 May 1940. AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 656:7, HRC.
[264] Knopf memoir, page 127. 610:2.

created for purchase by other employees, and for use as dividend payments to those who held common and preferred shares.[265]

Samuel's influence on the Borzoi's early years is well established, but the HRC's Knopf archive contains no evidence of non-employee shareholders exerting any direct influence on the day-to-day operations of the company, with one exception. An unsigned, typed document from 1941 expresses frustration regarding investor and former Board of Directors member Samuel Knox, a family friend who first invested in the company in 1925. Apparently, Knox was dissatisfied with the return on his investment. The anonymous author of the report describes Knox's failure to realize that he had invested for sentimental reasons, as did the other Knopf investors who paid more than a hundred dollars for a single, nonvoting share in a company that had essentially no promise of paying dividends.[266]

Further details of dividend payments, much less salaries, are elusive, but one report from Joseph Lesser reveals Samuel Knopf's return on investment. Written upon Samuel's death, the memo states that from 1921 through 1932, his stock investments totaled $182,150, and his dividends totaled $72,730. Between July 1922 and June 1932, his salaries amounted to $221,000.[267] For his son and daughter-in-law, the financial rewards were surely just as impressive, though they also reaped an intangible dividend, having deemed the promise of prestige (literary and otherwise) to be invaluable.

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[265] Unsigned, undated typed report titled "Financial Setup, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.," produced no earlier than 1946, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 656:7.
[266] Unsigned, undated, typed report, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 656:7.
[267] Joseph Lesser to Alfred Knopf, typed memorandum, 18 April 1933, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 656:7.

Performing Prestige on the Transatlantic Literary Stage

In a recent analysis of *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Bryan Crable proposes that Kenneth Burke viewed rhetoric as rooted in dialectical, imagistic persuasion, with the quest for identification emerging only as an ancillary result of the divisions created by the purely persuasive act. "Scholars should not *begin* Burkean analysis by asking how, in any particular discourse, identification was produced, shared identities constituted, in order to further particular social, political, or aesthetic ends," Crable writes. "Instead, we should begin by asking how symbols have always already interposed distance, and how this ontological distance has generated analogies in our symbol realm."[268] In the case of the Knopfs and their attempt to differentiate themselves as publishers of books "for just a few intelligent people," it is possible to argue that identification was both the motivation for *and* the result of rhetorical interactions in a literary realm rife with symbolic interpositions (Crable's distance in this case being both a geographic, transatlantic one and a metaphorical one of class distinctions). Offering a means for discerning such distinctions, dramatism yields parameters by which we can interpret the ways in which the disparate communities of early Knopf authors enhanced the elite identity of the fledgling house. Over time, as the Borzoi identity came to have clearly defined properties (both in the Burkean sense and in the business sense of intellectual properties/commodities), the power gradually shifted from the authors and their

[268] Bryan Crable, "Distance as Ultimate Motive: A Dialectical Interpretation of *A Rhetoric of Motives*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39 (2009): 213, 237.

representatives to the increasingly well-heeled and well-connected trio—Samuel, Blanche, and Alfred—who sometimes uncomfortably shared the helm at Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Remarkably, the publishers' multi-faceted identity of power was performed in tandem with a diffuse, at times seemingly oppositional identity of power among the emerging authors who formed the Borzoi's self-perpetuating early network.

Because Burke considered the representative anecdote to be "the dramatistic approach to dramatism," an anecdote regarding Burke and Mencken serves as an apt preface to this application of Burkean rhetoric in assessing the Knopfs' early acquisitions history.[269] Migrating to New York from Pennsylvania in 1915, Burke immersed himself in cottage publishing industries whose mercurial nature mirrored the unpredictability of the lower Manhattan bohemians who contributed to them. Despite Burke's admiration for modernists, including his friends Man Ray and e. e. cummings, he was equally interested in the "usable past," in particular Walt Whitman and Herman Melville. According to Burke biographer Jack Selzer, early twentieth-century magazines represented equally shifting affections. *The New Republic*, for example, was at first radical, then simply leftist, then progressive, and this suited Burke's varying contributions to it. The only consistent theme in Burke's work and that of the editors who published him was a rejection of the bourgeoisie, and of gentility.

This philosophy represents consubstantiality (using Burke's definition of the term) between Burke and Mencken, but the two men nonetheless remained at odds

[269] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 60. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.

throughout their careers. Burke's encounters with Mencken's circle through *The Smart Set* led to a full-fledged rift when Mencken and Nathan launched the less literary *American Mercury.* The magazine's inaugural issue carried a spoof written by critic Ernest Boyd, who delivered a scathing lampoon of Burke's circle of "Greenwich Village aesthetes."[270] In retaliation, a group of Dadaists hurled stink bombs at Boyd as he tried to leave his apartment, keeping him stranded in his home for three days. Lobbing a subsequent volley, Burke wrote a mock advertisement for the new magazine *Aesthete* in which he called on readers to join the "Mencken Promotion Society" and "Menckenize" their lives. The ad asks such questions as "Can't you understand modern art? Let Mencken show you the absurdity of the Ku Klux Klan. Can't you follow modern philosophy? Let Mencken snigger with you at Williams Jennings Bryan. Did you flunk Trig? Let Mencken ridicule professors for you." Of course, Burke's own ambivalence toward higher education is reflected in his decision to forego a college degree, though he took classes at Ohio State and Columbia.[271]

A microcosm of the international literary scene in which Alfred and Blanche began forming their professional identities, verbal skirmishes such as the ones that erupted between Mencken and Burke demonstrate a climate in which the printed page itself became a scene of ontological distance, despite the fact that the various factions often shared similar literary sensibilities. Regarding the *American Mercury* incident,

[270] Emigrating from Ireland in 1914, Boyd was a Knopf translator and author, publishing a short biography of Mencken as a Borzoi Book.
[271] Jack Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversing with the Moderns, 1915–1931* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 48-50. Also see page 129, which features a photograph of Burke in costume as a mock professor.

Malcolm Cowley added a commercial element to this reality, summarized Boyd as being "like a cigarette manufacturer spreading the rumor that another cigarette manufacturer mixed alfalfa with his product."[272] For authors who were drawn to the Borzoi brand because of its emerging cachet, the purpose was indeed a competitive one, albeit in the spirit of Burke's competitive cooperation.[273] In the realm of satire, the goal was to demonstrate not only intellectual superiority but also a superior ability to entertain. Regardless of the genre, the "agents" (authors) engaged in acts that reflected an attitude of elitism in a quest to differentiate, not to identify. While authors and their readers might have viewed themselves as the wielders of agency in these interactions, the publisher in fact controlled the textual "scene" (whether it be a little magazine, a *Times* review, or a book).

Applying Crable's notion of pre-existing ontological distance to the larger question of the Borzoi's kaleidoscopic early rosters, we can conceive of the tensions inherent in the Knopfs' quest for prestige. They launched a "stage" shared equally by critics, readers, literary agents, other publishers, investors, scholars, and of course authors, representing Britain, continental Europe, America (urban and rural), and an aura of exoticism that transcended authentic origins. Rejecting an identity of domesticity—both in terms of Blanche's quick abandonment of a homemaking identity and Alfred's decision to keep domestic authors in the minority for his company's first fourteen years—the American Knopfs attempted to acquire not only books but also an elite

[272] Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 192. First published in New York: W. W. Norton, 1934.
[273] David Blakesley, *The Elements of Dramatism* (New York: Pearson, 2002), 17.

identity from abroad, even if their budgets and their aversion to risk meant the building of a list that initially featured numerous previously published titles bought without any involvement of the authors themselves.

To ask whether the Knopfs' purpose was financial success or literary prestige is to overlook the reality that those two motivations were inextricable. Burke acknowledges in *A Grammar of Motives* that "however impersonal may be the relations brought about by the high development of a monetary economy, money itself in its role as a medium or agency contains the humanistic or the personalistic ingredients that we have discerned at the very source of agency."[274] A purpose denied by aesthetes and modernists, financial security nonetheless yielded access to highbrow social strata that, in theory at least, kept the bourgeoisie at bay, despite the fact that profitability and wealth were supposedly bourgeois concerns (a reality examined previously by numerous scholars, ranging from Pierre Bourdieu to Lawrence Rainey and Kevin Dettmar). Thus, what Burke might define as the Borzoi constitution—encompassing enactments by myriad players who shared a similar motivational ground despite intrinsic differences in their self-perceptions—was a unified effort to succeed in the marketplace while appearing to scoff those who viewed literature as anything other than a means to intellectual superiority.[275] The method was generally successful, with one striking exception: the image of the Knopfs as quasi-Europeans failed to command respect when performed on a bona fide European stage at the London offices of Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd. In midtown Manhattan at Alfred A. Knopf,

[274] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 314. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.
[275] Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 341.

Inc., however, the Borzoi presented an opportunity to convincingly perform the identity of global sophisticate—an opportunity that was capitalized upon by authors as diverse as Khalil Gibran and Sigrid Undset, and by the Knopfs themselves.

Chapter Three
Distinctive by Design: Knopf and the Promotion of Production

"Her reaction to color and texture has always been subtle and sensitive: the shock of a cloth manufacturer when he was given a lovely crêpe de chine handkerchief and asked to match it for color is something I still remember."

—KNOPF PRODUCTION MANAGER SYDNEY JACOBS, DESCRIBING BLANCHE KNOPF[276]

Knopf advertisements and jackets, unmistakable because of the logo, often emphasized the innovative production quality of a Borzoi Book, assuring consumers that Alfred and Blanche Knopf were at the forefront of setting new, superior trends in American book design. In later years, frequently celebrated for developing a new aesthetic standard as much as new literary talent, the Knopfs would recall the Borzoi's early days as a period of originality and spontaneity. Nonetheless, any attempt to assess the significance of the physical traits of early Borzoi Books becomes mired in a fundamental problem regarding the Knopf mythos. To what extent were early Borzoi Books truly "modern"? To what extent did they instead inspire an image of a traditional "gentleman publisher" who would have resisted both the femininity and the use of color implied in Sydney Jacobs's recollection of Blanche's role in the design process? Finally, as with all things related to the Borzoi, the ultimate question is one of rhetorical power: what degree of hyperbole lurked behind the Knopf advertising promise of superlative "beauty in the binding"?

Fortunately, the inception of this dissertation coincided with the Beinecke Library's acquisition of bibliographer G. Thomas Tanselle's Knopf collection, leading to my examination of more than nine hundred first-printing Borzoi Books. The collection

[276] Sidney Jacobs, "There *Is* a Borzoi Style," in *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915–1965, vol. 2*, ed. Paul Bennett (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 281. Jacobs served as Knopf's production manager for more than forty years.

spans 1915 through 1930, a boon for a scholar who wishes to discern the reality and the evolution of the common physical traits found in early Knopf productions. The conclusions from this study cast the firm's anti-commercial aura in a decidedly ironic light, while confirming the Knopfs' ingenuity.

Others who have attempted to definitively describe the Borzoi aesthetic have met with difficulty. In a tribute to Alfred Knopf published in the Typophiles' *Portrait of a Publisher*, longtime Knopf designer George Salter insisted that "there *is* a Borzoi style" but acknowledged elusiveness as its fundamental trait: "A mode rather than a fixed graphic form, it lacks the stringency of a set formula."[277] Sidney Jacobs observed in the same volume that "it is … the catholicity of Alfred's taste and his tolerant receptivity to many design attitudes that make up the complex mosaic of Knopf design." Jacobs provided further acknowledgment of Blanche Knopf's contributions to the Borzoi look: "Frequently she selected the designers and jacket artists to be used for her books and, like Alfred, usually gave them free rein to interpret the author's work."[278] Yet assessments such as these omit the truly ingenious, unifying feature of early Knopf publishing: the marriage of design and branding.

Select title pages provide useful examples of this. Recognizing the affordable form of advertising space represented by a title page, Knopf often ensured that the Borzoi was a recurring focal point in ways that extended beyond simply displaying the wolfhound prominently on the page. The title page of Knopf's tenth-anniversary

[277] George Salter, "There *Is* a Borzoi Style," in *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915–1965,* vol. 2, ed. Paul Bennett (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 282.
[278] Sidney Jacobs, "Alfred and Designers," in *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915–1965,* vol. 2, ed. Paul Bennett (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 286.

commemorative volume, *The Borzoi 1925*, quite literally illustrates the distinctiveness of the brand. The decorative frame, designed by Thomas Maitland Cleland, forms an elegant vine whose "leaves" are fashioned from canines, and from AK monograms.[279] As an American branding device, the Borzoi encompassed Knopf's duality—old-world aristocracy and irreverent modernity—within a single intriguing icon that complicates attempts to classify the company's "persona." Used in print advertising as well, this Borzoi border captures the ways in which Knopf also evoked an ornamentation style favored by earlier fine-printing houses such as Stone & Kimball or Copeland and Day while conveying the promise of innovation.

Though not all early Knopf title pages depict such a creative use of the hound, a majority of the ones produced during the 1920s convey a similarly artisanal air, reflecting an affiliation with leading designers and typographers of the day, including Stone & Kimball veteran Bruce Rogers, whom the Knopfs met through master printer Elmer Adler.[280] However, such design features were not apparent in the very earliest Borzoi Books.

As the first book published by Knopf, Émile Augier's *Four Plays* represents the brief period in Knopf's history before he formed alliances with noteworthy designers. At

[279] Alfred Knopf, "Some Random Recollections: An Informal Talk Made at the Grolier Club, New York, October 21, 1948," in *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915–1965*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Bennett (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 15.
[280] Interview transcript, undated but apparently connected to the Knopfs' documentary endeavor with Jules Schwerin, which spanned the early1960s. AAK Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 681:3, HRC.

the time, Knopf made all design choices himself, with advice from Blanche. His only employees were an office boy and an assistant.[281]

In designing his inaugural book, Knopf chose a trim size of 203 x 132 mm., taller than most of the others he would issue in his company's first year. In his commemorative anthologies, *The Borzoi 1920* and *The Borzoi 1925*, Knopf listed the book as a "small octavo," using informal terminology that reflects trade conventions of the twentieth century, rather than the bibliographer's technical statement of format. For the binding, Knopf chose continuous bright orange paper over boards, with teal stain for the top edge to complement the stamping.[282] *Four Plays* also provides a specimen of the company's secondary approach to creating a brand: the publisher's monogram. The back cover features an interlocked A-A-K in typography that reflects Art Deco streamlining. Forty millimeters tall, the monogram overshadows the stamping used for the author's name and the book's title, instead emphasizing the identity of Alfred Abraham Knopf. Future Knopf cases would display this device more subtly, with the Borzoi frequently shown leaping over the monogram in back-cover stamping.

The interior typographic treatment of *Four Plays* was a source of shame for Alfred Knopf. In interviews and in his unpublished memoir, he expressed regret for his decision to have the book set in Monotype Cheltenham, calling it "a face I have never

[281] Knopf memoir, page 129. 610:2.
[282] Throughout this study, I implemented Knopf's custom of using the term "binding" to refer to all case-bound books, despite the technical distinctions between casing and binding. The publishing industry's conflation of these terms in the early twentieth century, demonstrated in such guides as Frederick Hitchcock's second edition of *The Building of a Book* (New York: Bowker, 1929) is a useful reflection of the fact that casing had become the standard form of edition binding at that time.

dared use for a book again."[283] Unfortunately, Knopf's rationale for this sentiment remains undocumented. Other publishers continue to use Cheltenham, and headlines for the *New York Times* often have been set in this face. In a further irony, by rejecting Cheltenham Knopf rejected typography created in part by the venerable Hannibal Ingalls Kimball, whose book designs were often echoed in Borzoi productions.

The title page of *Four Plays* lacks elaborate ornamentation but nonetheless represents the Borzoi's première as a publisher's emblem. The treatment of the emblem on title pages varied surprisingly little during the company's first fourteen years, though by the time the company reached its fiftieth anniversary, dozens of incarnations had emerged, as demonstrated in Jack W. C. Hagstrom's study, "Alfred A. Knopf's Borzoi Devices."[284] Nearly all of the title-page Borzois within the chronological scope of this dissertation fall into one of four categories, in which the most significant variable is background shading, not the depiction of the dog itself.

Like the simplistic title page, the endpapers of Émile Augier's collection are plain, and the book is printed on unremarkable wove paper. The edges are trimmed, contradicting a common trait of future Borzoi Books: the rough front—shaggy edges that provide another indication of European *fin de siècle* tastes.

Though perhaps rudimentary, the bright exterior of the first Knopf book demonstrates the publisher's attempt to differentiate his company from older houses. Throughout his life, Alfred Knopf would imply that his company had pioneered the use

[283] Knopf, "Some Random Recollections," 14.
[284] Jack W. C. Hagstrom, "Alfred A. Knopf's Borzoi Devices," 2005, BibSite, Bibliographical Society of America, www.bibsocamer.org/BibSite/contents.htm. Accessed 14 January 2009.

of interesting bindings, an assertion reflected in a 1926 profile of the Knopfs published in *The New Yorker:* "It was Alfred's idea—and Blanche has backed him in everything—to give the public something different in the format of books. He introduced into the trade brilliantly colored jackets which attracted the eye, and books a little better bound and printed than other publishers were producing. For these he asked a better price, and got it."[285] Many early Knopf jackets and bindings were indeed colorful, but during the company's first decade most Borzoi Books were in fact bound in black or maroon cloth, with discreet, unremarkable stamping on the front cover and shelfback.

This phase of the company's life also saw the use of a third logo, in addition to the wolfhound and the Deco device. The dust jacket for bohemian yet lucrative author Floyd Dell's autobiographical novel *Moon-Calf* features a variation on the A-A-K monogram, a rendition that is reminiscent of Art Nouveau typography.

Both the Deco and the Nouveau monograms appeared on numerous Knopf bindings, jackets, and sheets of letterhead through the early 1920s. The distinction between these two type styles is a reflection of variations within the company's identity. The *Moon-Calf* jacket, with a celestial orb that belies the title's vernacular definition (it refers to a simpleton), reflects an intriguing rhetorical strategy. Though the book was published in 1920, when Knopf's company was merely five years old, the jacket layout places the founder's monogram in proximity to an autographed quote that casts him as a long-established arbiter of literary taste: "MOON-CALF is by far the most distinguished and most significant first novel by an American that has ever been offered me." No mention

[285] Lurton Blassingame, "The Trinity—and a Dog," *The New Yorker,* 21 August 1926, 15.

is made of the author's radicalism or his popularity among those with rarefied literary taste. Instead, Knopf predicts mainstream appeal for the novel, which he believes will "command wide attention and universal respect."[286] Indeed, copyright pages confirm that the book reached its eighth printing within the first six months on sale.

In a 1922 interview with the *Chicago Daily News* during which he touted his company's artistic standards, Knopf identified this jacket's designer as Claude Bragdon, the architect and stagecraft maven who first brought a trained artistic eye to the fledgling house.[287] Knopf had met Bragdon while serving as an apprentice in Mitchell Kennerley's publishing firm.[288] Bragdon was known for his use of kaleidoscopic ornaments, one of which appears on the half-title pages of more than one hundred Borzoi Books. His endpaper designs also reflect this affinity for geometric representations, adding color and whimsy to more than fifty Borzoi Books between 1922 and 1927. In addition, he designed numerous bindings, including those for Willa Cather's first two Knopf books, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* and *One of Ours*.[289]

Though Knopf's association with renowned typographers and designers is legendary, his claim of singularity must be reconciled with the fact that his team of craftsmen did not serve him exclusively. William Dwiggins designed magnificent cases, jackets, and interiors for some of Knopf's most popular authors, H. L. Mencken among them, but he served other houses as well, notably creating fine slipcased editions for the

[286] Jacket copy for Floyd Dell's *Moon-Calf* (New York: Knopf, 1920).
[287] *Chicago Daily News* clipping, n.d. AAK Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 588:4, HRC.
[288] Knopf memoir, page 119, 610:2.
[289] Alfred Knopf to Claude Bragdon, TCL, 6 February 1922, AAK Series IV: Author Files/Book Designers, 731:10, HRC.

upstart Random House. George Salter was even more prolific, working for more than eighty American publishers.[290] Though Knopf touted his patronage of the Japan Paper Company, he was not the business's sole customer. Nor was he the only publisher willing to pay steep prices in exchange for the quality design, typesetting, and manufacturing provided by Elmer Adler and his colleagues at Pynson Printers.

Instead, the genuinely distinctive aspect of a Borzoi Book was Knopf's masterly use of book production as book promotion. Becoming an integral design feature, the Borzoi device appeared not only on cases, jackets, and title pages but also in varying colors on endpapers. In a more subtle merger of branding and book design, the Borzoi also appeared on the sheets used for printing the interior pages, and on select Knopf stationery. Referred to as "Borzoi rag," such paper features a framed Borzoi mark measuring 35 x 52 mm., with prominent chain lines.[291] The mark is positioned so that in most uses the dog runs west on the lower right corner of each recto page, a quadrant likely to be touched as the reader turns the page. The wolfhound is encompassed by the words BORZOI BOOKS. Knopf was not the first publisher to feature his name and emblem (rather than those of a paper manufacturer) on special stock. In fact, Borzoi rag paper simply resurrects another Stone & Kimball tradition. The latter's paper featured a mark in

[290] Wellesley College, Department of German. "George Salter: Gallery of Selected Works." Salter resource site created 24 June 2004. www.wellesley.edu/German/GeorgeSalter/Documents/image_gallery.html. Accessed 14 January 2009.

[291] Presumably, the chain lines are machine-made. Knopf colophons identify handmade paper as such, but that descriptor was not included in the fifteen titles I encountered that bore the Borzoi rag designation. Borzoi rag paper was furnished by W. F. Etherington and produced by the Worthy Paper Company, one of several specialty paper mills frequented by Knopf. Worthy catered to illustrators, art directors, and other fine-printing enthusiasts, a clientele identified in the company's promotional ephemera and through advertising in publications such as the *Bulletin* of the Art Center of New York.

which the letters S and K are separated by a depiction of a torch illuminating an open book.

The earliest occurrence of Borzoi rag paper encountered during my research appears in a 1923 limited edition of *From an American Legation,* written by America's minister to Sweden, Ira Nelson Morris (who was also an investor in Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd.). In the same year, it was also used in Carl Sternheim's novel *Fairfax,* a satire of the American bourgeoisie, translated from the German. In the United States, *Fairfax* was issued only in a limited print run of 950 numbered copies, priced high at $7.50. *The Borzoi 1925* simply describes the book as having a "cloth back, hand colored board sides." Space constraints in the listings portion of *The Borzoi 1925* prevented the inclusion of further details, such as the use of gold-stamped vellum, and batik sides that appeared in variant colors ranging from dark crimson to bright pink.[292] *Fairfax* also holds the distinction of being the only Knopf book designed by Frederic Goudy, who implemented heavily flourished ornaments throughout the text.[293] Though Borzoi rag paper was generally reserved for limited editions such as these, it sometimes appears in the accompanying standard trade issues. Carl Van Vechten's 1928 novel of Hollywood decadence, *Spider Boy: A Scenario for a Moving Picture,* exemplifies this dual application.

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[292] Harold E. Shaw, president of Holliston Mills, contributed a chapter on book cloths in Frederick Hitchcock's *The Building of a Book* (New York: Bowker, 1929), providing useful information regarding nomenclature. Shaw describes the many "linen" cloths that were being marketed at the time under the name "vellum," such as Rex Vellum, Vellum de Luxe, Aldine Vellum, and Art Vellum. He places "linen" in quotation marks because that too was a term fraught with vagaries in the book-binding business of the 1920s, when "linen" did not necessarily refer to flax-based cloth (202–3).

[293] *The Company They Kept: Alfred A. and Blanche W. Knopf, Publishers,* exhibition catalogue, ed. Cathy Henderson and Richard Oram (Austin: HRC, 1995), 52.

While discernment of a faint Borzoi logo on paper stock requires considerably close contact with a book's interior, jackets such as the one designed for *Moon-Calf* afforded a highly visible opportunity for distinguishing the Borzoi in the increasingly crowded retail environment of the 1920s. Though consumers often discarded the jacket (the book's price frequently was printed on the spine) the Tanselle collection preserves hundreds of specimens, leading the researcher to reasonably assume that nearly all Knopf books published before 1930 were sold in jackets. Additional proof of this appears in an undated photograph taken of the young Alfred Knopf in his office, which is lined with shelves of jacketed Knopf editions.[294] The Borzoi was usually featured on multiple surfaces of the jacket, including varying combinations of the spine, the front cover, the back cover, and one or both flaps. Usually printed on uncoated stock that spanned a spectrum of blue, yellow, orange, and green, the jackets are sometimes paired with a vibrant batik binding underneath whose hues have little in common with those of the jacket. In a few cases (including a majority of the examples in the Borzoi Plays series) the jacket stock and decoration are identical to the book's paper binding.

The layout of Knopf's early typographical jackets is restrained, echoing formulas used widely at the time by publishers such Boni & Liveright (particularly for their Modern Library series, launched in 1917), but the tone of the copy is markedly sensational. This is no less true for illustrated Knopf jackets. Bearing little resemblance to today's designs by Knopf's celebrated associate art director, Chip Kidd, the company's

[294]The Knopf Archive at Texas (Special Issue), *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* 22, no. 4 (1992): 32.

first forays into illustrated jackets reflect a sometimes awkward attempt to create commercial appeal while remaining "gentlemanly." Illustrated, multicolor Knopf jackets appeared as early as 1916, when Alfred Ollivant's *The Brown Mare* was brought to life with a rather rudimentary two-color depiction of a horse and rider. The artist's signature includes the last name only—Schutte—set directly above the promise that in this collection of fictional vignettes "the thunder and lightning are far away: but the reverberations of the storm echo across the sea in the crowded streets and quiet lanes of England under the cloud. A distinctive little book—unlike anything the war has yet produced."

Limited editions served as another hybrid of packaging and promotion for the Borzoi. At least forty titles published by Knopf between 1915 and 1931 were issued in limited editions, often with variations that reflected the recipient's rank within the Knopf circle. For example, the 1926 release of *Tampico*, a novel by the Knopfs' perennially top-selling friend Joseph Hergesheimer, was promoted through a limited edition whose first printed verso page bears the following message: "Of the first edition of *Tampico*, two hundred and fifty five copies have been signed by the author, as follows: fifty five on Shidzuoka Japan Vellum (of which five are not for sale) numbered from 1 to 55, and two hundred copies on Borzoi rag paper (of which eight are not for sale) numbered 55 to 255." The design elements for this version of *Tampico* evoke a commemorative ceremony: white paper over boards, a white ribbon bookmark, gilt ornamentation and a gilt top edge, uncut signatures of heavyweight stock, and a gilt Borzoi stamped on the back cover.

In some cases, a message on the copyright page let readers know that their copies were decidedly *not* limited. This was the case in 1923, when thousands of those who purchased Willa Cather's new novel were informed on the copyright page that "this first edition of *A Lost Lady* consists of twenty thousand two hundred and twenty copies as follows: twenty on Borzoi all rag paper signed by the author and numbered A to T; two hundred copies on Borzoi all rag paper signed by the author and numbered 1 to 200; and twenty thousand copies on English featherweight paper." In her Cather bibliography, Joan Crane notes no physical difference between the lettered copies and those that were numbered. Though the 220 readers who possessed limited editions may have savored their special bibliophilic status, they did not necessarily possess first-printing copies. Crane proposes that the chronology of textual changes "indicates that the limited issue was not put into press until the first and second printings had been printed."[295]

At least one Knopf designer did not relish the experience of producing limited editions such as those. In a 1926 letter to Alfred Knopf, William Dwiggins expresses relief at the possibility that a limited edition for an upcoming series on the secretaries of state might not be commissioned. Dwiggins describes his frustration at having to balance cost constraints with the mandate for elegance that accompanies such productions. Further, he states that he finds it much more appealing to design less expensive "garden-variety" books.[296]

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[295] Joan Crane, *Willa Cather: A Bibliography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982),102–3.
[296] William Dwiggins to Alfred Knopf, ALS, 19 October 1926, AAK Series IV: Author Files/Book Designers, 700:6, HRC.

An early series called Pocket Books, launched in 1923, represents Knopf's most noteworthy exercise in producing "garden-variety" volumes, though they were more ornately packaged than many standard Borzoi Books. The Borzoi appeared on several series throughout the 1920s, including Borzoi Classics and the Blue Jade Library, but Pocket Books was perhaps the most elaborately designed line produced by the company during that decade. Pocket Books often featured green cloth bindings, lavish stamping depicting a leaf pattern and the Borzoi device, elegant teal endpapers, and a jacket design that embraced these motifs. Accommodating a "duodecimo" trim size while priced at approximately one dollar, Pocket Books perpetuated the Knopf merger of production and promotion by reassuring readers that they had purchased an affordable but not shoddily constructed volume. The jacket-flap copy for Nobel Prize winner Sigrid Undset's *Jenny,* a novel reprinted in the series in 1929, goes so far as to promote the health benefits of good typography:

> PERIL IN THINE EYE. It hurts to read poorly printed books. Headaches or permanently injured eyesight may result. Just how the damage is done is not exactly known, but the countless little twists, wrenches, and strains which the eye undergoes in reading a poorly designed and printed type may be likened to the 20,000 jolts a day suffered by those who do not wear rubber heels. … There are many factors in the making of a transparently readable book: good size type, proper type design, even inking, even impression, good paper surface. Great skill is needed to combine all these requirements successfully. The fine results achieved in the Borzoi Pocket Books are due to the long experience of their publisher, who, for more than a decade, has led the way in the making of more beautiful books.[297]

[297] Jacket copy, Sigrid Undset, Jenny (New York, Knopf, Pocket Books edition, 1929).

With equal verve, an innovative series of *New York Times* advertisements appearing in 1923 touted Borzoi design features. Copywriter Frank Irving Fletcher wrote the campaign, composing headlines such as "Never Lend Your Borzoi to a Friend!" accompanied by the following sales pitch: "It is beautifully bound, to begin with—a piece of real bookmaking—artistic in its covers and typography—and just a little too good to share the fate of an umbrella."[298] One *New York Times* advertisement went so far as to reproduce a facsimile of a page from Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*, showcasing not only the author's exceptional prose but also the designer's lavish folio ornamentation and elegant typography. William Dwiggins and the Pynson Printers are credited in the ad for producing what Knopf proclaims to be "a beautiful edition."[299]

Yet the advertising space that Knopf is perhaps best known for utilizing is found on the closing pages of his books, where he began printing a colophon that was written in an unusual style. His elaborate, didactic "note on the type" distinguished Borzoi Books in a genuinely unique way. The Knopf colophon as we know it would not emerge until the mid-1920s, although earlier Borzoi copyright pages always showcased the name of the printer, eventually listing the paper supplier, bindery, and typesetting firm as well. Of course, the custom of paying tribute to such contributions in a colophon (by definition, printed at the back of the book) was not by any means innovative in 1915. Instead, it

[298] Fletcher, Frank Irving. *The Meaning of Borzoi: A Series of Advertisements and a Preface.* Promotional Booklet. New York: Knopf, 1923. AAKI Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 563:2, HRC.
[299] Advertisement for *My Mortal Enemy. New York Times,* 31 October 1926: BR22. PHN.

served as a quaint reminder of a practice renewed by William Morris and his followers, harking back centuries to an era before the emergence of title pages.[300]

Though *Portrait of a Publisher* editor Paul Bennett lists 1926 as the year of the Knopf colophon's inception, the earliest occurrence of it that I have found appears in Katherine Anthony's 1925 biography of Catherine the Great.[301] More than 125 words long, this colophon begins with the ubiquitous words A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET and informs the reader that the volume was composed on the Linotype in Scotch, and that "there is a divergence of opinion regarding the exact origin of this face, some authorities holding that it was first cut by Alexander Wilson & Son, of Glasgow, in 1827; others trace it back to a modernized Caslon old style. … The essential characteristics of the Scotch face are its sturdy capitals, its full rounded lower case, the graceful fillet of its serifs and the general effect of crispness."[302] The reader also learns that the book was printed on Scottish esparto. A lay audience might not be familiar with the history of esparto or its status as a good-quality paper but would nonetheless understand Knopf's reminder that the paper was imported from Britain.[303]

The Borzoi colophon, with its references to bygone masters of typography, does not necessarily undermine the modern aspects of the early Knopf identity. The Borzoi's image lies in the reality that American literary modernism can often be linked to a renewed interest in fine printing. In turn, the fine-printing movement that had flourished

[300] Pollard, Alfred, *Fine Books* (New York: Cooper Square, 1964), 14.
[301] Paul Bennett, Introduction, *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915–1965*, vol. 2, (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), viii.
[302] Colophon, Katherine Anthony, *Catherine the Great* (New York: Knopf, 1925).
[303] Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (reprinted by Oak Knoll Press; New Castle, Delaware; 1995), 222.

in late Victorian and Edwardian England (in large part a response to the increasingly industrialized nature of book production) was in many ways a precursor of modernism on both sides of the Atlantic. The Bodley Head, for example, published decadent writers such as Oscar Wilde and, as Megan Benton reminds us in *Beauty and the Book*, "explicitly catered to a small, vaguely avant-garde fringe of British book buyers."[304] Knopf was a direct descendant of Bodley Head sensibilities through his previous affiliation with Mitchell Kennerley, who had apprenticed with Bodley Head co-founder John Lane in both the London office and the New York branch. In his biography of Kennerley, Matthew Bruccoli observed that Lane was "regarded as the principal publisher of the new aesthetic movement" whose books "physically and textually proclaimed the message of art for art's sake."[305]

As much as Knopf may have known about creating an aura of handicraft—producing industrially manufactured books that to the untrained eye might have evoked images of a handpress, or handmade paper—he knew just as much about salesmanship. This is the greatest point of divergence between the Knopfs and such Arts and Crafts maestros as the socialist William Morris, who scorned the marriage of commercial profit and artisanal endeavors. Addressing Britain's Bibliographical Society in 1893, Morris said, "By the ideal book, I suppose we are to understand a book not limited by

[304] Megan Benton, *Beauty and the Book* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2000), 199.
[305] Matthew Bruccoli, *The Fortunes of Mitchell Kennerley, Bookman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 6.

commercial exigencies of price: we can do what we like with it, according to what its nature, as a book, demands of Art."[306]

Despite the rarefied look of many Borzoi Books, Alfred Knopf's distribution goals reflected a wide retail scale, which included department stores. Nonetheless, as asserted in Lurton Blassingame's 1926 *New Yorker* profile, Knopf's price points veered slightly higher than the industry standard, ranging from a dollar and fifty cents at the time of the Borzoi's inception to three dollars by 1929. These figures may have contributed to the Borzoi's perceived cachet: Knopf drew attention to his above-average pricing, asserting that it was a sign of quality, rather than evidence of a publisher's greed: "By the way, I should like readers to realize this: that I try to make Borzoi Books as well as I know how. Then I base the price on what they cost to make. I do not fix the price first and then try to trim the quality so as to come within that price," Knopf assures us in the postscript to *The Borzoi 1920*.[307] Such statements echo Morris's utopian ideal, but they do not match the economic realities faced by the designers of Borzoi Books. In a 1927 letter, William Dwiggins proposes that Knopf begin selling lower-priced yet attractive books, suggesting that the firm "give up the game of faking a standard of book-making that we can't even approximate under present cost conditions, and restudy book-manufacturing on another basis entirely."[308]

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[306] William Morris, *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 67.
[307] Alfred Knopf, Postscript, *The Borzoi 1920* (New York: Knopf, 1920), 134.
[308] Quoted by Alfred Knopf in "Dwig and the Borzoi," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915–1965*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Bennett (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 110. Knopf's homage to Dwiggins was originally published in *Esquire*, December 1959.

Despite Dwiggins' concerns, the fundamental ingenuity of the early Borzoi look is not illusory. The packaging demonstrates an unabashed attempt to intrigue, consistently marketed with a flair that translated into a reputation for excellence. We cannot know whether a cloth manufacturer would have been truly shocked to see Blanche present a handkerchief for precise color matching, but the presence of such anecdotes is evidence of a more important element: a lasting reputation for obsession with design, regardless of whether that reputation was steeped in hyperbole.

Alfred Knopf spoke frankly about this process, giving us reason to believe that he wanted his marketing rhetoric to be colorful and, above all, memorable. In the early 1960s, he told documentary filmmaker Jules Schwerin that the most appealing aspect of the phrase "Borzoi Books" was its ability to puzzle consumers, thereby making the Knopfs' company the subject of conversation. Anyone who asked what it meant, Knopf reasoned, was providing free advertising for his publishing company.[309] During the house's first fourteen years, the response for anyone who asked, "What is a Borzoi Book?" surely invoked exceptional design features that curiously balanced gentility and exuberant novelty. With few exceptions, early Borzoi Books indeed reflect a high level of artistic achievement, but it was Alfred and Blanche's ability to commercialize this achievement that forged a unique identity for the company, allowing the young firm to differentiate itself from other houses that were also implementing high production

[309] Interview transcript, undated but corresponding to the Knopfs' documentary endeavor with Jules Schwerin, which spanned the early1960s. AAK Series 2: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 679:5, HRC.

standards. In doing so, the Knopfs cleverly united an aura of discipleship to the fine-printing movement with a branding strategy that summarized the movement's antithesis.

Costumes and Commerce

As numerous scholars of rhetoric have observed, Burkean dramatism is firmly rooted in the symbolic: "From the perspective of dramatism, our symbol systems thoroughly mediate experience and sustain thought," writes David Blakesley.[310] Perhaps no aspect of the publishing act relies more heavily on the symbolic than the design of a book's physical elements. The presence of multiple editions of the same text (in some cases spanning centuries) provides proof of what we might refer to as the "costuming" of a written work as it is shared with varying audiences for varying reasons over time. For new publishing houses, the logo, jacket design, interior layout, binding, and other elements have the power to produce a lasting effect on how the house is perceived by book critics, prospective authors, retailers, and to some extent consumers (though consumer awareness of publishing "brands" remains limited, even in today's marketplace).

In the case of the Knopfs, the challenge was to reconcile the reality of their identity as young novices on a limited budget with the fact that so many of their texts were decades old, written by authors whose relevance to the modern American literati made for difficult rhetorical problems. The solution became a performance itself, a display of symbols that converged to constitute an enduring image that projected far

[310] David Blakesley, *The Elements of Dramatism* (New York: Pearson, 2002), 7.

beyond the narratives contained in Borzoi Books or, in some cases, beyond the motivations of the authors themselves. All publishers make design choices, some with more distinction than others, but the Knopfs' decision to heavily promote their design choices made the packaging of a Borzoi Book a decidedly rhetorical act. In this case, the purpose was twofold—striving for goals of profit and prestige—yet it also contained pure elements of Alfred Knopf's own aesthetic sensibilities, particularly his penchant for flamboyance. The agents in these interactions were not only the Knopfs, though their correspondence with designers shows that Alfred in particular was determined to oversee decisions regarding the look of his books (despite Jacobs's assertion that he gave designers free rein).

Knopf realized early on that he lacked the talent and training to produce polished concepts for the design of his books, but as he recruited the other "agents" in this process, he wished to retain veto power on even minute details of typography. Hiring notables such as Adler, Rogers, Cleland, and Dwiggins, he was able to turn the "agency" of these men into a symbol, touting the names in colophons, in publicity, and on title pages. The heraldic wolfhound presided over the properties of refinement, whimsy, beauty, quality, and innovation, transforming the case and interior pages of a book into a scene in which the author's message to readers—the text of the book itself—became mediated by the publishers. In time, as the Borzoi image was sufficiently well respected to attract other "agents" (both literary agents and authors) as well as booksellers and consumers, the performance of prestige perpetually encompassed both the producers of the image and those who received it, a purpose that is well documented in letters from readers who

applauded Knopf because he appeared to care more about packaging than other publishers at the time. From the Knopfs' point of view, an additional purpose was merely practical: copyright laws made it cheap for the Knopfs to import sheets but impossible for them to secure copyright on those titles.

Cloaking Knopf titles in wrappers, end papers, decorated title pages, and vibrant bindings, the blended visual rhetoric at play in such paratextual elements mirrors the sartorial choices of both publishers—Alfred's loud but expensive wardrobe versus Blanche's more subtle but equally expensive clothes. "She dressed very fashionably in Christian Dior creations. At the office she sometimes wore a carmine scarf over the shoulders of a smart frock. Mr. Knopf is a large man, addicted to purple shirts and loud neckwear," asserted the anonymous author of Blanche's *New York Times* obituary.[311] The Borzoi's distinctive design was often enhanced with flavors of exoticism in the form of bindings and interior paper from the Japan Paper Company (a fact touted in colophons), whose wares bore names such as Kinkami, Patria, Japanese Shadow Paper, and Italian Wood Block Paper.[312] Thus, the Borzoi identity was easily equated with rarefied aesthetic appeal, an image that shaped the reception of the works and their authors.

Applying Burke's principles to films, Blakesley explores the ways in which images function as a potent agent in dramatism, yielding concepts that are apt in analyzing the visual features of a Borzoi Book: "An image is the end result of an act of perception, which itself is more than just looking," he writes. "Perception involves what

[311] "Mrs. Blanche Wolf Knopf of Publishing Firm Dies," *New York Times*, 5 June 1966: 86. PHN.
[312] Sales representatives' samples, Michael Winship's personal collection. Examined 5 May 2009. Note that many of the papers sold by the Japan Paper Company were manufactured not in Asia but in Europe (often in France, Holland, and Italy).

we believe and know at least as much as it does the physiological processes of seeing."[313] The impetus and agency driving the Knopfs' vision included the cachet of enlightened designers. When Dwiggins expressed disdain for colophons, exuberance for typography, and certainty that the Knopfs were "faking a standard of book-making" and thereby presenting an image of quality production that was not supported by fiscal realities, he was engaging in an act of perception based on more than simple accounting tensions. He was positioning himself as a purist, affirming his perception of his role as the arbiter of tasteful subtlety and respect for the craft of book production. The "production" staged by the Knopfs was more elaborate, reflecting their perception of a desirable book's tangible traits (a perception that was informed to a great degree by Alfred's recollection of his bourgeois father's showy library, Joel Spingarn's exaltation of a book's aesthetic potential, and Martin Secker's modern volumes, all of which contrasted sharply with Alfred's months in Doubleday's Garden City factory).

In an act designed to cause the Knopfs and their house to be equated with elite literary circles and prestigious publishing (belying Alfred and Blanche's youth, their families' nouveau wealth, and the anti-intellectual households in which they were raised) the production of a Borzoi Book was also a decidedly symbolic production in the dramatic sense. Burke's notions of *actus* and *status* (act and state) are particularly relevant, as "the knowledge derived from the act is a knowledge of the act's context, or motivational ground. … Sociologically, this movement from actus to status involves *class* substance. It centers about the fact that the different occupational *acts* each have

[313] David Blakesley, *The Elements of Dramatism* (New York: Pearson, 2002), 109.

their corresponding *properties,* and out of these differences in properties there develop in time corresponding differences of status. … In a state there are implicit possibilities, and in action these possibilities are made explicit."[314]

Because the Knopfs' acts merged the concept of book production with book promotion, their state of implicit possibility entered the realm of tangible act with each title their company released. The resulting "product" merged the self-perceptions of designers, printers, the Knopfs, and sometimes the authors, delivering an explicit symbolic "costume" for playing the role of literary connoisseur. For the de facto audience—consumers—this message was embodied in the repeated use of the Borzoi emblem in the packaging of a single Knopf volume. The effect is perhaps best summarized in Burke's rendering of a reader who purchases self-help books. "*The reading of a book on the attaining of success is in itself the symbolic attaining of that success*," he observes. "It is while they read that these readers are 'succeeding.' I'll wager that, in by far the great majority of cases, such readers make no serious attempt to apply the book's recipes. The lure of the book resides in the fact that the reader, while reading it is then living the aura of success. … He gets it in symbolic form by the mere reading itself."[315] The widely varied agents who used Borzoi Books as the scene in their act of pursuing prestige enjoyed a prop with myriad traits—modern and *fin de siècle,* new yet steeped in old-world quality. Whether displayed on the shelf or read carefully in solitude (with an audience of only the self), early Knopf books wore intriguing "costumes" that

[314] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 41-43. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.
[315] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 299. Originally published in Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941.

signaled luxury and promised quality. The transition from the state to the act was ensured: Alfred Knopf's advertising promises made it so.

Chapter Four
Knopf in the Marketplace: Building the Borzoi Brand

"I seem to have published an unusual number of uncommonly good novels this Fall. … The poetry I have published this Autumn reaches, I think, as high a water mark as a publisher has a right to hope for in a single season. … Borzoi Books are in many ways the best, and the best looking, published in any country today."

—ALFRED KNOPF IN A 1922 *NEW YORK TIMES* ADVERTISEMENT[316]

In a tribute to Alfred Knopf, bookseller Adolph Kroch observed that "it takes talent to write books, but it takes genius to sell them."[317] Yet, with few exceptions, the "genius" aspect of early Knopf marketing lay not in the promotional endeavors themselves but in the voice that permeated them, continually paired with the Borzoi logo. Like his contemporaries, Knopf engaged in standard marketing practices: he produced catalogs, made sales calls, sent special gifts to booksellers, ran advertisements, and launched publicity campaigns—tactics that were formulaic rather than the work of a genius. However, Knopf's efforts to create a distinctive persona for himself and for the Borzoi brand were indeed memorable. The culmination of a publisher's endeavors in acquisitions, editing, design, and packaging, successful book marketing summarizes these efforts for retailers, consumers, authors, critics, and agents. Alfred Knopf ensured that his panache manifested itself throughout each stage of the publishing process, making the final marketing message a consistent reflection of his own colorful image: once again,

[316] "History of a Publishing Season," advertisement, *New York Times*, 8 October 1922: 55. PHN.
[317] Adolph Kroch, "To Alfred Knopf, from a Bookseller," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965*, vol. 2 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 40. The tribute was originally written in 1940, for the Borzoi's twenty-fifth anniversary. Kroch was chairman of the now-defunct Kroch's and Brentano's, at one time the largest bookstore in Chicago.

youthful exuberance seamlessly woven with the gravitas of an arbiter of old-world literary taste.

It is important to note that although Blanche's authority in all aspects of the company grew throughout the twenties, her persona remained in the margins of Borzoi marketing during these years. As Mrs. Alfred A. Knopf, she cultivated an identity that was, by necessity, decidedly secondary to his in the development of the company's marketing. By the 1950s, Knopf advertisements in the *New York Times* bore signed messages from Blanche, but in the company's early years the Borzoi's message was equated exclusively with her flamboyant husband. It was *his* personality, reflected in his flashy wardrobe (colleagues remembered his silk shirts in shades of crimson particularly well), that distinguished the company in a way that somehow made blatant salesmanship seem tasteful, or at least tolerable.

Knopf and the Bookselling Community

Knopf's early catalogs present perhaps the best example of his ability to create a memorable voice using a conventional promotional vehicle. His text-heavy early catalogs and copious brochures were not inherently different from those of his competitors (in fact, his first lessons in producing promotional materials were learned at Doubleday). Instead, his personal, passionate, candid tone established his role as a new standard-bearer: "I love books physically," he proclaimed in his 1917 fall catalog, "and I want to

make them beautifully. I do no one a serious injustice when I say that American books are *not* beautiful."[318]

In one exemplary case, he used books themselves as a form of trade catalog for touting the Borzoi to all five components of his audience: authors, agents, critics, booksellers, and consumers. Produced as commemorative volumes, *The Borzoi 1920* and *The Borzoi 1925* contain essays (sixteen and forty-eight, respectively) commissioned from his authors. Sold today as collectors' items, they are generally thought of as anthologies, but Geoffrey Hellman got it right when he called the 1920 edition an "elaborate catalogue" in his 1948 profile of Alfred.[319] These volumes comprise a prime example of Knopf's use of sophisticated rhetoric (visual and otherwise) to make a mundane medium his own vibrant one.

For both books, Knopf authors were asked to write about their fellow Knopf authors in commentary that was interspersed with essays on broader topics. In *The Borzoi 1920*, for example, Willa Cather's musings "On the Art of Fiction" are succeeded by an essay on Willa Cather written by H. L. Mencken, which is succeeded by an essay on H. L. Mencken by George Jean Nathan, and so on. Both volumes include numerous photographs of the authors, though the frontispiece for *The Borzoi 1920* features a hand-written, ink-stained page from the manuscript of Max Beerbohm's *Seven Men.*[320] Both volumes contain A Brief Who's Who of Writers Particularly Identified with the Borzoi as well as bibliographies of all Borzoi Books published to date. *The Borzoi 1925* includes D.

[318] Quoted in Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Publisher, I: A Very Dignified Pavane," *The New Yorker*, 20 November 1948: 46.
[319] Hellman, "A Very Dignified Pavane," 46.
[320] A lighthearted survey of lesser-known authors who were immersed in *fin de siècle* literary decadence.

H. Lawrence's pithy replies to letters from readers who found his work to be scandalous, Edwin Björkman's confession that books by Thomas Mann are difficult to read, and a tribute to Kahlil Gibran by Witter Bynner, who used the opportunity to produce an eloquent polemic against xenophobia. In both books, the effect is one of community: an image of Borzoi authors inhabiting a close-knit, highbrow literary realm with Alfred Knopf as their patriarch.

The production and design features of both volumes are striking. *The Borzoi 1920* is bound in lavender paper decorated with a black and yellow arboreal motif. The book is printed on laid paper with trimmed edges and a blue stained top. On the spine, the title gives the impression of having been hand lettered in wide, whimsical capital characters. *The Borzoi 1925* is packaged in even more elaborate Knopf style, bound in variant forms of Japan Paper Company batik with rough-front edges, a gold-stamped spine, Borzoi end papers, and Thomas Cleland's Borzoi frame on the title page and surrounding the initial capital letter of each chapter opener. The volume features an extensive colophon, which states that print run was 5,000 copies.

These anthologies were clearly meant to serve a promotional purpose, given as gifts to booksellers, agents, critics, and authors, though they were also sold to the public. Knopf attempted to drum up pre-publication sales of *The Borzoi 1920* with an announcement in the *New York Times* that described "an unusual and unusually interesting little book. … A Who's Who of authors especially identified with The Borzoi. *The Borzoi 1920* will be ready in a few days. Your bookseller will take your order now.

The price is only one dollar."[321] However, his efforts to draw consumers appear to have been unsuccessful. *The Publishers' Trade List Annual* indicates that it took eight years for *The Borzoi 1920* to sell out and seven years to deplete the inventory for *The Borzoi 1925*, assuming that neither volume was reprinted.

Knopf described his intentions in the foreword to *The Borzoi 1920*, not surprisingly claiming that his inspiration was derived from "the catalogs issued now and again by European publishers—no bare lists of authors and titles, but such wholly charming productions as, for example, the annual almanacks [sic] of the Insel-Verlag of Leipzig" and hoping that the book would serve "the individual reader, the bookseller, and the librarian."[322] Thus, it is not the *concept* of a "yearbook" but the voice—capturing Knopf's role as savvy master of ceremonies—that makes these anthological catalogs unique marketing devices. It is also worth noting that *The Borzoi 1920* contains traces of Knopf's early days as a procurer of reprints. The book's introduction by Maxim Gorky, for example, was reprinted from a translation that had appeared in the *Athenaeum* (London) in June of that year.

Though consumers do not appear to have bought *The Borzoi 1920* and *The Borzoi 1925* in bestselling quantities, Knopf received copious thank-you letters from those in the trade (often far removed from the publishing nexus of New York City) who had received the book as a promotional gift. What's more, he saved these laudatory letters as if they were fan mail. Brimming with praise, though written out of obligation in

[321] "Mr. Knopf Announces *The Borzoi 1920*," advertisement, *New York Times*, 17 October 1920: BRM115. PHN.
[322] Alfred Knopf, Foreword, *The Borzoi 1920* (New York: Knopf, 1920).

acknowledgement of a gift, the letters were composed by a range of editors (such as C. Lester Barnard of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* and George Sargent of the *Boston Evening Transcript*), booksellers (including U. P. James of Cincinnati), agents (Curtis Brown of London, of course) and other publishers (Arthur H. Scribner among them).[323] For retailers, it was particularly easy to match these handsomely packaged *Borzoi* commemorative volumes, filled with musings from an elite literary realm, with the vibrant young publisher whose gave memorable sales presentations.

This image was perhaps best captured by Adolph Kroch, whose recollections of the young Knopf were echoed in later years by many other booksellers. "A tall, sparse figure, a pink shirt-front, a black tie, and a black mustache," Kroch wrote, describing the first time Knopf called on him as a representative for Mitchell Kennerley. "What did I hear? Garshin, Andreyev, Gogol, Maupassant, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Artzibashev, Kropotkin, and more Russians. Names cherished by me a few years before, revived with a gusto, a slow-burning seriousness, and a fanatic enthusiasm. … I felt instinctively that here was a personality who would make his mark in literature or, still better, in American publishing. … His letters implied grandeur. They were not sales talks, but literary dissertations and elucidations."[324] Kroch's use of the word "personality" (rather than "person") aptly captures the continuum between the Borzoi's aura and Knopf himself, a continuum that extended not only to Knopf's acquisition of seemingly prestigious authors but also to book design, and ultimately to a cohesive marketing message. Kroch claimed

[323] Alfred Knopf's correspondence, 595 (multiple folders), Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, HRC.
[324] Adolph Kroch, "To Alfred Knopf, from a Bookseller," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965*, vol. 2 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 40.

that the binding of *Four Plays* made as much of an impression as Knopf's sartorial choices: "The physical appearance [of *Four Plays*] was a departure. No somber cloth, but gay batik for the binding, with the top harmoniously stained." Kroch continues by perpetuating the myth that all Borzoi Books featured colorful bindings: "Booksellers stocked the colorful books that stood out on shelves and tables of their shops. … Just what Knopf wanted! Food for thought and a stimulant to the eye. You could see the colorful volumes on boudoir tables of attractive women and carried, unwrapped, by young moderns."[325]

As head of Chicago's largest bookstore, Kroch also represents the reality of Knopf's national sales efforts. Though he and his authors are associated with New York, he often proudly credited Midwest booksellers—rather than shops frequented by East Coast intelligentsia—as being his best initial retail outlets.[326] His first order did not come from a bookshop frequented by Manhattan bohemians; in fact it did not come from a bookstore at all, but from the department store Marshall Field and Company.

Drawing on contacts he had made as a traveler for Mitchell Kennerley, Knopf formed that liaison easily and soon set about planning ambitious sales trips as far west as St. Louis, Omaha, Minneapolis-St. Paul. He also hired national sales representatives who worked on a straight commission basis, making an agreement with Louis Greene (later chairman of R. R. Bowker Company, a publisher of reference books and magazines related to the publishing trade) to handle sales in smaller towns on the east coast and in

[325] Adolph Kroch, "To Alfred Knopf, from a Bookseller," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965*, vol. 2 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 40-41.
[326]Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 99.

the Midwest. James Crowder, described by Knopf as a "veteran book man," was soon assigned to the Chicago territory. Knopf found it to be challenging to find representation on the west coast but eventually enlisted Desmond Fitzgerald, who became an initial shareholder in Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Though his sales force grew throughout the twenties, Knopf candidly stated in his unpublished memoir that he did not believe anyone could sell Borzoi Books better than he could, spurring him to call on New York and Midwest accounts personally.[327] He would not make his first trip to the west coast until 1930. Although he publicly lauded booksellers, his memoir includes many recollections of his exasperation with them. The implication is that if Knopf could have managed the handselling at the retail level as well, he would have. When describing publishers' dummies (blank mock-ups that demonstrate the binding, bulking, and title page of an upcoming book), Knopf claimed that such devices were necessary because some booksellers were not smart enough to buy books based on the contents and would decide whether to order (and in what quantity) only after seeing sample bindings and jackets.[328]

Samuel Knopf evidently involved himself in retail matters on occasion as well, scoring a small victory in a censorship incident. In 1926, H. L. Mencken published a work of nonfiction titled "Hatrack" by journalist Herbert Asbury in the *American Mercury*. The essay recounted the story of a woman from Farmington, Missouri, who worked as a maid by day and a prostitute by night. Called "Hatrack" because of her angular physique, she was shunned by her church when her secret became public. The

[327] Knopf memoir, pages 106-107, 610:2.
[328] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 17A-17AA, 618:6.

essay highlights small-town religious hypocrisy (which is surely why Mencken liked it) but sparked the ire of the Reverend J. Frank Chase, secretary of the New England Watch and Ward Society. Thus, the April 1926 issue of the *Mercury* became the subject of litigation when Mencken arranged to have himself arrested in Boston for selling a copy of the banned magazine. Though the *Mercury* prevailed in court, the case cost Knopf $20,000 in legal fees.[329] Nonetheless, Knopf proceeded with plans to publish the essay in a collection, *Up from Methodism,* by Asbury.[330] Though the book was not banned in Boston, bookseller Richard Fuller refused to carry it in his Old Corner Book Store, described by Knopf as a key account. The refusal was reported by Knopf sales representative and shareholder John Mullen.[331] In his memoir, Knopf credits Samuel with angrily spearheading a campaign to intimidate Fuller, writing that Samuel traveled to Boston to successfully coerce Fuller into stocking *Up from Methodism,* which in the end sold barely 4,000 copies despite the enticing publicity.[332]

This was not Knopf's first tangle with the Old Corner Book Store. In 1922, he reported to Joseph Hergesheimer that he had closed the shop's account because *Cytherea,* a novel featuring adultery, was sold from the counter rather than being displayed on

[329] Terry Teachout, *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003), 228.
[330] Though he was a descendant of the first Methodist bishop in America, Asbury had turned his back on religion.
[331] The shop also occupied venerable literary real estate, housed in the building occupied by Ticknor & Fields from 1833 to 1864.
[332] Knopf memoir, supplemental draft, page 17B, 618:6.

shelves.[333] In an odd reversal of roles, Fuller invited Knopf to lunch, persuading the young publisher to allow the old-guard bookseller to remain a customer.[334]

Knopf's cultivation of relationships with bookstores and department stores, in equal measure, is a feature of early-twentieth-century American publishing that belies the contentious nature of those two factions. On December 1, 1913, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of department stores in a case that resolved more than a decade of litigation between R. H. Macy and Company and the American Publishers' Association. Macy's often charged less than the publishers' retail price, creating the potential for price wars with bookstores. Books proved to be lucrative "loss leaders" for Macy's, attracting a clientele that purchased high-margin merchandise. The APA contended that its members had the right to dictate the retail price of their books, and the right to refuse to sell to Macy's (or any retailer) that would not comply. In the end, the APA was forced to pay more than $100,000 in damages to Macy's, an expense that forced the association to dissolve.[335]

The second volume of John Tebbel's *History of Book Publishing in the United States* quotes a December 13, 1913, *New York Times* interview with a Macy's book buyer, Miss E. L. Kinnear, who asserted that Macy's never technically sold books at a loss because books attracted profitable customers to the store. She also describes the

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[333] Alfred Knopf to Joseph Hergesheimer, typed carbon, 2 March 1922, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 715:8 HRC.
[334] Richard Fuller to Alfred Knopf, typed letter signed, 18 February 1922, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:4 HRC.
[335] John Tebbel. *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, vol. 2*: The Expansion of an Industry,1865-1919.* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1975), 63-79, and Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America*, Second Edition (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1952), 385.

channels through which she procured books while APA members were refusing to sell to her:

> I found booksellers [relatives and friends] as far South as Texas and as far West as Denver who were in sympathy with me. They would buy books and ship them to Macy's. … When the trust [APA] succeeded in locating a dealer who was selling me books, he would be notified to stop that sort of thing or be driven out of business. They were obliged to pay the highest price charged by the trust to dealers. … We even went to the extreme of opening book stores in other cities in order to get books. … When the commission and the freight charges were paid the price was never far from the price at which we sold the books. But is it not true that we ever sold books at a loss. We sold them, of course, at a loss of profit, but never at less than they cost us in order to attract people to the store.[336]

The Macy's situation illuminates two noteworthy aspects of the market conditions under which Knopf launched his company: Books possessed such broad appeal that they were considered a necessary department-store commodity, and (much like today) large, national retailers posed a threat to independent booksellers who could not afford to offer steep discounts to price-conscious consumers. Knopf's decision to set his prices slightly higher than the norm (Tebbel even refers to him as "the pioneer in the $2.50 novel") and to publicize these higher prices was an extension of his company's persona.[337] In a marketplace characterized by price wars and cheap editions distributed to drugstores through jobbers, Knopf sought to differentiate himself as a man of prestige, whose wares rose above drab mass-production—with prices to match. Though the voice of Knopf implied a preference for readers who frequented bookshops owned by well-read intellectuals, he in fact welcomed consumers from all corners of the nation (even

[336] Tebbel, vol. 2, 78-79.
[337] John Tebbel. *A History of Book Publishing in the United States,* vol. 3*: The Golden Age Between Two Wars 1920-1940.* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1978), 66.

department-store shoppers), scorning only retail outlets that would have required him to do business with periodical and paperback wholesalers such as the American News Company, the primary publishing supplier for railway stations and pharmacies.

Perhaps surprisingly, Knopf actively pursued the Book-of-the-Month Club when it was launched in 1926 by former advertising copywriter Harry Scherman. Described by Janice Radway as "a modern selling machine for books … that, like Ford's assembly line, installed speed at the heart of its operation in the interest of facilitating ever-faster circulation of goods, messages, and ultimately capital itself," the club represents everything publicly eschewed by Knopf.[338] Yet he never hesitated in suggesting Borzoi Books for BOMC, carefully following the club's instructions to submit six bound page proofs of any appropriate books for which he planned a print run of 25,000 or more.[339] Almost immediately, a Borzoi Book was chosen by the club: *The Orphan Angel*, a novel by the American poet Elinor Wylie.[340]

Knopf was even able to persuade the prickly Willa Cather, who routinely turned down sizeable offers for film or reprint rights for her works, to allow her 1931 novel *Shadows on the Rock* to become part of the BOMC program. His tactics illustrate an interesting aspect of the club's impact on the marketplace. Dismayed that Cather routinely refused to allow Knopf to submit any of her works to his program, Harry Scherman hoped that the situation could be remedied by BOMC judge Dorothy Canfield,

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[338] Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 154-155.
[339] Robert Haas to Knopf employee Walter Tulley, TLS, 27 September 1926, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 564:8, HRC.
[340] In the novel, Percy Bysshe Shelley's drowning is not fatal. Wylie's reimagining of that event depicts the poet being rescued by an American ship, which brings him to the States for a literary sojourn.

Cather's friend since their days as undergraduates at the University of Nebraska. Canfield's efforts were to no avail. Cather "felt most strongly that only people who really *wanted* to read her books should be asked to buy them," Knopf recalled. "At the time the retail book trade was conducting a vehement, though ineffective, campaign against book clubs. I decided to telegraph each of our salesmen to ask the most important bookseller he visited that day whether or not we should let the Book-of-the-Month Club have *Shadows on the Rock*." He assumed that the retailers would agree with Cather's stance, yet all but one buyer very much wanted the book to become a BOMC selection in order to *increase* retail sales. "It was this refusal to sacrifice immediate sales for a longer objective that made the victory of the book clubs inevitable in this battle." Knopf added that while visiting a Midwestern shop whose owner scorned book clubs he found "right in the middle of his store—indeed in front of his own desk—a big display of the latest Literary Guild selection."[341]

Knopf did not restrict his efforts to retailers and book clubs. He operated an extensive direct-mail business that maintained a relatively intimate air, generating an abundance of correspondence with individual customers from across the country. Knopf's jacket copy encouraged consumers to write to him and ask for a catalog, permitting the company to develop extensive mailing lists (a tactic that is most successful when executed by a marketer like Knopf, who succeeded in producing a rhetorical strategy that made recipients feel as if they had a personal correspondent in this

[341] Alfred Knopf, "Publishing Then and Now," in *Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965, vol. 1: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 40. Knopf's Bowker Memorial Lecture was delivered 15 October 1964.

publisher). In the early years, such consumers *did* have a personal correspondent in Knopf. His files are rife with carbon copies of replies to inquiries on whether certain titles were out of print, or whether a Borzoi translation was underway for various European works. In some cases, the writers praise the catalogs as much as the books. W. A. Lyle of Atlanta professed to "so enjoy the sketches that appear on them" and wished to obtain back issues of Knopf's other "exquisite catalogues."[342] In several speeches decades later, Knopf proudly referred to a Prohibition-era letter he received from an attorney in Marshall, Texas, who relished being able to procure "intoxicating" Borzoi Books in his desolate locale. The catalogs also spurred consumers to place orders through their booksellers, though Knopf of course greatly benefited each time a consumer ordered directly from him, allowing him to forego the discount extended to retailers. Cash-receipt figures and other daily income totals are sporadically recorded in his diaries; sales totaling one hundred dollars per day were not unusual in 1918, though it is impossible to confirm whether these numbers include retailers' receipts or only reflect sales to private individuals.[343] During the company's first year, those who ordered directly from Knopf were likely to receive a package that had been stuffed, sealed, and addressed by him, or by Blanche.

Knopf also produced a range of promotional leaflets, with copy that was customized for consumer versus trade audiences. One leaflet, presumably inserted into a seasonal catalog (it is addressed "To the Readers of This Catalog") demonstrates a means

[342] W. A. Lyle to Alfred Knopf, typed letter signed, May 1922, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:5, HRC.
[343] Alfred Knopf's 1918 diary entries. AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 621:1, HRC.

through which Knopf may have added a message intended only for booksellers, allowing him to use the catalog itself for dual audiences. The leaflet reads, in part, "It is very gratifying to say that at the time this catalog goes to press (21 December 1921) our volume of business since January 1st is over 88% ahead of the same period for 1920. Since this great increase comes at a time of not too rosy general business conditions, is derived chiefly from the sale of the very best of Borzoi Books and, finally almost entirely from books priced about twenty-five percent higher than the books of other publishers—all of us here in the office feel hugely pleased."[344] Leaflets designed for consumers were promoted in Knopf's print advertising, with the promise that he would personally send the requestor an informative, free publication on specified authors, in the spirit of Knopf's Conrad brochure for Doubleday.

Who comprised this booming audience? Were Borzoi Books purchased by middlebrow or highbrow readers? Twentieth-century demographic empiricism cannot be applied, especially in the absence of the company's early mailing lists or geographical sales records (unlike the trove of data available for early BOMC subscribers). Even if such data were available, Lawrence Levine admits the possibility that lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow constructions are merely "historically evolved systems of classification" within populations that sometimes arguably defied categorization.[345] What is certain, however, is that whether Knopf's customers lived in Marshall, Texas, or

[344] Promotional leaflet, 21 December 1921, AAKI, Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 595:5, HRC.
[345] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 242.

Greenwich Village, they could imagine that displaying a Borzoi logo on their bookshelves placed them in elite company.

Capitalizing on Modern Media

Knopf's advertising strategies are now part of the legacy of innovation so often described in histories of his company, ranging from Tebbel ("Knopf's innovative advertising … had established his own name nationally, as firmly as that of the dog on his colophon") to Hellman ("Knopf advertising has long had a peculiar stateliness—half-professorial, half impresario-like").[346] However, it is important to remember that it was the *voice* of the advertising—not necessarily the advertising plans themselves—that was truly distinctive. In addition, while Knopf's notoriety can be linked to flamboyant advertising rhetoric, he was certainly not the first to use a hybrid tone of erudition and ebullience to sell books. James Green credits bookbinder and auctioneer Robert Bell of Glasgow, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1768, with initiating extravagant sales rhetoric to American book advertising, albeit for auction catalogs. Before Bell, according to Green, "book advertisements consisted of nothing more than a transcription of their titles; no one had ever used language to sell books in this way."[347] Green provides a sample from one of Bell's auction catalogues, which is rife with Knopf-style hyperbole in describing the upcoming sale of William Byrd's library: "Those who behold with their eyes, sentimental entertainment, going off reasonable, and do not improve this very great chance of

[347] James Green, "English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin," in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007 paperback edition), 285.

purchasing the books by the assistance of the magical mallet, will probably wish in vain for such another opportunity."[348] His emphasis on production value in a proposal for a subscription orders for the four-volume *Blackstone's Splendid Commentaries on the Laws of England* is equally Knopfian: "The Work is to be printed on fine Royal Paper … with a handsome large margin … and peculiar attention will be given to the correctness of the matter, and beauty of the letter-press. … This splendid and expensive work … will cost above One Thousand Pounds."[349] Bell was also known for describing books as precious gems, as demonstrated in the following auction advertisement: "Jewels and diamonds for Sentimentalists, consisting of a very considerable variety of the most excellent ancient and modern authors in arts, sciences, poets, plays, novels, and entertainment."[350]

Bell's promotional rhetoric refutes not only the myth that Knopf inaugurated the pairing sophistication with hype to sell books but it also refutes the notion that American book advertising as a whole was staid until the twentieth century. While ample evidence supports Ellen Garvey's assertion that "until 1920 or so, old-line publishers advertised trade books … with restrained announcements, perhaps quoting from a review or an endorsement" to win prospective authors, not consumers, her generalization overlooks the exceptionally flamboyant claims made by publishers such as John P. Jewett, whose exclamation-point-laden advertising hawked *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "THE GREATEST BOOK

[348] Green 285.
[349] Green 285.
[350] Advertisement for 23 October 1781 auction by Robert Bell, quoted in Robert F. Roden, "Book Sales: Famous Ones in Philadelphia Since the Time of Franklin," *New York Times,* 1 September 1900: BR4. PHN.

OF ITS KIND."[351] Book historian Susan Geary established that the bestselling nineteenth-century novel *Ruth Hall*, whose protagonist is saved from destitution by becoming a bestselling novelist, was made popular by a highly strategic, extensive, three-phase advertising campaign featuring such claims as "A SUPPLY AT LAST—THREE THOUSAND COPIES PER DAY!" (most likely an inaccurate figure) and "THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN BOOK."[352] Geary's research was supplemented by a March 1856 article appearing in the *American Publishers' Circular* titled "Where, When, and How to Advertise," which emphasizes the utter necessity of advertising all new books.[353] While Geary focuses on the dozens of newspaper advertisements run for *Ruth Hall* by the book's publishers (the Mason Brothers), literary scholar Richard Brodhead observes that further promotion included the naming of a railway car in honor of the author, Fanny Fern (Sara Eldredge's pseudonym).[354]

Though the use of bold advertising claims was not new to American publishing, one aspect of the marketing climate in which Knopf launched his company did mark a transition: Between 1900 and 1929, advertising in America matured from a rudimentary function marked by scattershot media buys and sensational headlines to a high-revenue industry bolstered by market research, new production technologies, and the

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[351] Ellen Garvey, "Ambivalent Advertising" in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 4: Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 173. Michael Winship. "*Uncle Tom's Cabin:* History of the Book in the 19th-Century United States." Essay derived from a presentation delivered in June 2007 at the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the Web of Culture conference. Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities. University of Virginia. Accessed 1 June 2009. http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/interpret/exhibits/winship/winship.html

[352] Susan Geary, "The Domestic Novel as a Commercial Commodity: Making a Best Seller in the 1850s," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 70: 388-389.

[353] Geary 373.

[354] Richard Brodhead, "Veiled Ladies: Toward a History of Antebellum Entertainment," *American Literary History* 1: 277.

professionalization of fields such as copywriting. The expansion of mass media, including not only national radio broadcasting companies but also nationally linked periodicals such as William Randolph Hearst's newspaper chains, gave manufacturers new venues for touting their wares to mass markets and created new streams of revenue for the media moguls themselves. Sometimes owned by book publishers, national magazines proliferated, their circulations soaring when subscription prices dropped as a result of increased ad revenue.[355] At the same time, "little magazines," such as the *Dial* and the *Little Review,* flourished.[356] Though their circulations often hovered below 3,000, such publications provided a useful means for shaping and communicating the identities of authors within Manhattan's small but powerful publishing community. It would be inaccurate to assume that small literary magazines operated in a realm unnoticed by readers of high-circulation magazines such as the *Saturday Review of Literature.* In "Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press," literary scholar Karen Leick proves that publications such as the *Little Review* received frequent attention in mass-market magazines, despite the rarified aura of those small-circulation literary reviews.[357] One key to Knopf's success was his ability to attract authors and readers from both strata.

As Richard Ohmann and other scholars have observed, most major book publishers, as well as the many upstart houses founded during this period, joined other

[355] Richard Ohmann. *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*. London: Verso, 1998, 25.
[356] The *Dial* serialized James Joyce's *Ulysses* between 1918 and 1920 before a censorship moratorium quashed the novel's U.S. distribution.
[357] Karen Leick, "Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press," *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 123, no.1 (2008): 125–139.

purveyors of merchandise in experimenting with new ways to promote their products, though publishers' budgets were far more limited than that of major national advertisers. When Catherine Turner writes, "Knopf revered literature, but he never hesitated to advertise literary commodities in the same way Campbell's Soup or Listerine advertised their products," she refers primarily to the Borzoi's continual appearance in advertising alongside messages that conveyed a consistent corporate image.[358] This approach may have mimicked the branding strategies used to sell household goods, but the budgetary limitations of publishing campaigns present significant distinctions between Henry Ford's approach to branding and the relatively small-scale commodification of books frequently associated with modern American publishing. Emerging national advertising agencies promoted emerging national brands through extraordinarily expensive multi-media blitzes, featuring large-scale sponsorship of radio shows, full-page magazine space, sometimes full color; and nearly daily newspaper advertising. Spanning dozens of cities, billboards were also essential to the mix. To group publishers with leading national advertisers during this period, or in present-day America for that matter, leads to dubious claims unless the tremendous limitations of a publisher's media buys are recognized. The sheer numbers of consumers who were reached by early modern national advertising campaigns (using the term "campaign" according to its most common definition within the industry) far exceeded the audiences that were exposed to book advertising.

[358] Catherine Turner. *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 81.

Knopf's approach to advertising-budget allocation mirrored the norm for publishers: he adjusted his plans according to the sales of the books, assigning minimal dollars in advance of publication and tracking his advertising schedules in tandem with the tracking of sales and reviews. Unlike manufacturers of motorcars or tooth powder, publishers rarely designated a sizeable advertising budget for launching each new "product." For several authors, including Warwick Deeping, Knopf created contracts in which advertising expenses were guaranteed only if the author agreed to take a cut in royalties.[359]

Despite the fiscal disparities between publishers and more prolific advertisers, the transformation of the advertising industry reflects a transition that enhanced the publishing field: increased literacy, urbanization, and consumerism changed the significance of books in America in the early twentieth century. Whether consumers actually read the books they purchased cannot be ascertained, but the rising emphasis on books as status symbols presented a transformation from which Knopf greatly benefitted. In *Fables of Abundance*, historian Jackson Lears draws on two disparate symbols—the rural cornucopia and the sanitized modern home—to capture this change in America's self-perception. As the emphasis of advertising messages turned from sprawling fields to the efficient factory, Lears argues, American identity shifted as well. Images of semi-corpulent women surrounded by nature were prevalent in chromolithographed promotional cards and magazine advertising in the late-nineteenth century.[360] In the wake

[359] Knopf memoir, page 206, 610:3.
[360] Jackson Lears. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 26.

of an increasingly urbanized, industrialized society, the ideal woman depicted on advertising pages began to sport a slender, perhaps even boyish figure. A wise administrator of home economics and germ prevention, she has access to knowledge (standardized "book learning") that her rural stereotype eschews. Though book advertising before and after the turn of the last century was never rife with images, much less images of human beings, the visual transition described by Lears was reflected in the voice of book-advertising copy that evoked neither the rural carnival barker nor the succinct messages of Garvey's restrained old-line publishers. Modern advertising copywriters, at least one of whom—the renowned Frank Irving Fletcher—produced pitches for Knopf, believed that a didactic voice was called for, capturing the essence of an educated, sophisticated leader. Unprecedented levels of consumerism implied an audience of shoppers who were deliciously vulnerable and insecure. In a company speech, J. Walter Thompson executive William Esty declared, "We have got universal literacy without very much accompanying judgment; people are eager and anxious to be told what to do and how to do it and when to do it."[361]

In his comprehensive history of early twentieth-century American advertising, Roland Marchand identifies several categories of "parables" that encompass most advertising messages from the Progressive Era, including "the first impression," in which merchandise saves an unwitting novice from social shame. Consumer goods, particularly books, could serve as an admission ticket for an acceptable social realm—a way of

[361] Catherine Turner. *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 142.

leaving behind the agrarian poverty of the nineteenth century and entering a world where enlightenment would vanquish naïveté. Capitalizing on social phobias while educating audiences about literature with the tone of a patient professor (or perhaps even a patient parent as described by Marchand), Knopf adopted advertising strategies that cast himself as a reassuring sage. Fletcher's 1923 campaign, which ran in the *New York Times* alongside news stories rather than in the book review section, serves as a particularly apt example of this. Once again using books as an advertising medium, Knopf published the complete Fletcher campaign that year as a monograph titled *The Meaning of Borzoi: A Series of Advertisements and a Preface*.[362]

The Borzoi campaign refers to no individual Knopf authors but instead offers a corporate identity that promises to lend a hand to the befuddled, possibly cusp-of-bourgeois reader. The use of plural, first-person pronouns in the copy presents opportunities for reassurance: "We do the picking and choosing for you," one ad promises. "Books by their nature can never be uniform in quality of contents. But they must conform to certain well-defined standards … to achieve the imprint of BORZOI. … It must attain a certain altitude above sea level, so to speak, before we will publish it at all." Another assures that "even if you don't know the author, the BORZOI imprint is a guarantee that his work is good." Knopf's penchant for discussing money in ads, ignoring those who might think it crass, is evident in this campaign as well with an ad that touts revenue as a barometer of quality: "When a writer brings us a manuscript that we think

[362] Fletcher, Frank Irving. *The Meaning of Borzoi: A Series of Advertisements and a Preface.* Promotional Booklet. New York: Knopf, 1923. AAKI Series II: Alfred A. Knopf, Personal, 563:2, HRC.

the public should have a chance to read, we publish it. … We hope it will register on the Cash Register. … Most of our books are financial successes for the author."

One headline in the series even capitalized on the oppression of Prohibition, crying, "OH! FOR THE PROHIBITION OF LITERATURE AND AN ERA OF BOOKLEGGING!!" The subsequent copy describes the imagined impact if Knopf's commodities were to become contraband, suggesting it would cause "the millions in New York, who never think of a BORZOI" to develop a craving for them. The ad positions Knopf as daring: "We wish that a BORZOI BOOK on the person were more perilous than a flask on the hip," the copy reads, equating the company's "productions of genius" with the "respect now lavished on a cellar of gin." The rhetorical strategy underway in this message, particularly for an audience member who only skims it, is to place Knopf's products in an environment of temptation. This is progressive temptation, however—urging uplift through literature for the reader who has not yet become hooked. For such a reader, inhabiting a thirsty city rife with ways to circumvent the 18th Amendment, the ad's closing line conveys clever perceptiveness: "We know that if we can sell you a BORZOI volume now, we can come pretty close to keeping you interested forever in the immortal subject of books." Printed in minuscule type, the word "immortal" is easily misread as "immoral."[363]

Although this era marks the professionalization of advertising research, it lacked the empiricism of twenty-first-century demographic data collection. Compared to today's

[363] Ironically but not surprisingly, H. L. Mencken routinely mocked advertising copy and the gullible American "booboisie" who were seduced by it.

standards, media buys in early twentieth-century mass-market publications were essentially based on a hunch regarding readers' affluence and attitudes. Not even the rudimentary process of zip-code sorting and tabulation was possible; zip codes were not implemented in the United States until 1963. Nonetheless, mass-market magazines such as Henry Luce's *Time* carried mass-market advertising price tags to match, despite the dearth of facts about who Luce's readers were. Cost is surely the reason why Knopf emphasized free publicity efforts in these venues, saving his print-ad dollars for clearly literary magazines such as *The Saturday Review of Literature,* established by Book-of-the-Month Club editor Henry Seidel Canby, and newspapers in Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and New York. To some extent, Knopf engaged in semi-targeted marketing as well. Ezra Pound's *Pavannes and Divisions*, for example, was not advertised in the *New York Times* but did appear under the headline "For the Intelligenzia [sic]" in *The Nation* during the summer of 1919.[364] Knopf's own *American Mercury* may not have possessed an empirically researched audience, but Mencken and Nathan clearly defined the audiences they hoped to offend, constantly satirizing the American middle class that Knopf appears to have wanted to educate.

The launch of *The New Yorker* in 1925 heralded the arrival of a publication that epitomized the persona of the irreverent "community insider" but nonetheless helped authors and publishers broaden their notoriety within powerful circles. *The New Yorker'*s earliest issues include profiles of upstart book publishers, including the Knopf "trinity" and Horace Liveright, and the magazine's first advertisers included Boni & Liveright,

[364] Turner 96.

Haldeman-Julius, Doubleday, Page & Co., and G. P. Putnam's Sons, all of whom bought full-page space during *The New Yorker'*s first year alongside purveyors of tires, perfume, pianos, and fine clothing. Other periodicals came aboard as *New Yorker* advertisers, viewing the magazine not as a threat but as a good investment: *The New York Herald Tribune'*s weekly book review, also featured in a full-page ad, is touted with the reminder that a subscription provides access to interviews, poems, and other features "for less than the price of one novel."[365] The audience for publishers' ads running in *The New Yorker* surely comprised the publishing community itself as much as potential consumers.

Surprisingly, Alfred Knopf was slow to add the magazine to his company's consistent media mix, though it is a staple of today's Borzoi advertising. The first Knopf advertisement to appear in *The New Yorker* promoted *Nigger Heaven* exclusively. Published in the 28 August 1926 issue, one week after the magazine ran a laudatory profile of the house of Knopf, the single-column layout awkwardly combined Cleland's ornate Borzoi border with extracts of Miguel Covarrubias's decidedly modern jacket illustrations. The headline casts Van Vechten's novel as a nightclub tour: "Why go to Harlem cabarets when you can read Nigger Heaven?"[366] The ad was placed near a section of the magazine devoted to entertainment venues.

During the magazine's first five years, it soon grew from a whimsical, gossipy, thin publication to a robust showcase of literary talent (including Knopf authors, such as poet Elinor Wylie). The pages became packed with spot-color advertising that bore

[365] Advertisement for *New York Herald Tribune* book review. *The New Yorker*, 21 March 1925:32.
[366] Advertisement for *Nigger Heaven. The New Yorker*, 28 August 1926: 53.

sophisticated headlines for luxury products aimed at precisely the sort of well-heeled readers the Knopfs sought to attract. Nonetheless, no further Borzoi advertising appeared in *The New Yorker* until 24 November 1928 with a full-page quasi-testimonial approach for Francis Brett Young's novel *My Brother Jonathan.* "Mrs. Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, prominent in the society of New York, Newport, and Palm Beach, is an enthusiastic admirer of Borzoi Books," the copy proclaims, beneath a large illustration of the pearl-bedecked Mrs. Bonaparte holding her handsomely jacketed new hardcover.[367] The ad was soon ridiculed in the magazine's "Talk of the Town" section, which on 8 December ran the following lampoon, beneath an illustration of a book-toting woman astride a pony-size borzoi:

> Mrs. Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte … is an admirer of Borzoi Books. … Her endorsement, incomplete though it was, touched us deeply; somehow we couldn't dismiss the matter, and went around thinking about it, wondering which Borzoi Books she had read, why she liked them, and why the publisher thought we cared whether she did or didn't. Before long a curious, haunting refrain was running through our head: "Mrs. Bonaparte likes Borzoi Books, Mrs. Bonaparte likes Borzoi Books." Finally, the refrain became confused, and gradually changed into another song—a lilting lay such as shepherds used to sing: "But does she like animal crackers, does she like animal crackers!"[368]

Soon after, *The New Yorker* ran two cartoons that appear to mock the Knopfs' attempts to characterize their readers as highbrow. The first, published on 15 December 1928, depicts a conversation between two manhole workers: "Do you do much reading, Bill?" "Sure. I'm an enthusiastic admirer of Borzoi Books." [369] The second, appearing on 2 March

[367] Advertisement for *My Brother Jonathan. The New Yorker*, 28 August 1926: 55.
[368] "The Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, 8 December 1928: 21.
[369] Cartoon, *The New Yorker*, 15 December 1928: 26.

1929, features a woman in a drugstore requesting "some Pond's Extract and a Borzoi book [sic lowercase]."[370]

There was little veracity in *The New Yorker's* implication that attempts to commercialize Knopf books and create a Borzoi brand meant that the books were inherently lowbrow. By this time, Knopf had published three Nobel Prize winners (Knut Hamsun, Sigrid Undset, and Thomas Mann) and Willa Cather's Pulitzer Prize winner, *One of Ours.* Conversely, the rise of literary prizes during this time period can be viewed as a related feature of the commercialization of publishing, offering money and prestige (replacing old-world patronage) in the form of an emblem that branded certain books as "respectable" for a literate but insecure audience.[371] Knopf was faced with the task of preparing an advertisement to publicize his first Nobel Prize winner in the fall of 1920. An event that required no hyperbole, the occasion was marked by advertising copy in which the Knopf voice remained uncharacteristically quiet. The text was set in space that measured just one column wide and two inches tall: "Knut Hamsun has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1920. 'HUNGER,' one of his greatest novels, has just been published in America. $2.50 at all booksellers. ALFRED A. KNOPF, Publisher. Candler Bldg., New York"[372] The elaborate Borzoi borders, even the Borzoi emblem itself, are absent. The copy is framed only by a plain double-rule box for a layout commonly referred to as a tombstone. The restraint belies the complexity of the novel, whose author who was characterized by Peter Gay in *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* as "an eccentric

[370] Cartoon, *The New Yorker*, 2 March 1929: 60.
[371] James F. English. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[372] Advertisement for the works of Knut Hamsun, *New York Times*, 8 November 1920: BR14. PHN.

among eccentrics, a grimly isolated figure in the history of the novel, the most subversive of modernists. … He remained an outsider for all of his large readership, despite the Nobel Prize. … Until Joyce's later work, Hamsun's stream-of-consciousness technique was unsurpassed."[373]

Knopf's humble approach to advertising an obscure Nobel Laureate would not last long, however. The following year would see the arrival of elaborate layouts for Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*, in which the Knopfian braggadocio would once again dominate the page, complete with the publisher's signature, which was indecipherable but entirely recognizable to those who viewed his subsequent advertising with regularity. Such ads would also extol the handsome design and production features of Borzoi books with consistent vigor and frequency. It is as if the Nobel Prize served as the ultimate tipping point in the company's advertising, leading Knopf to leave behind a gentler tone and frequently derivative type styles on the march toward elaborate, heavily flourished layouts and classically unapologetic Knopf headlines such as "Books for the Civilized Minority," which topped a group ad (showcasing multiple titles in a single space) featuring luminaries such as Camus in the *New York Times* nearly forty years later.[374]

The book-publishing industry spends more advertising dollars on space in the *New York Times* than in any other newspaper, despite the fact that the efficacy of advertising books in the *Times* has not been measured in any reliable way. [375] Knopf, who had briefly served as a sales representative for the paper during the summer of 1911, was

[373] Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: Norton, 2008), 191.
[374] Advertisement for assorted Knopf titles, *New York Times*, 21 September 1958: BR19. PHN.
[375] Edward Nawotka, "Reviewing the State of Book Review Coverage," *Publishers Weekly* 9 Oct. 2006: 4.

vocal about the dubious correlation between the amount his company spent on ad pages in the *Times* and the amount of revenue generated by the books featured in such ads. Nonetheless, he followed the lead of most other houses and made the *Times* a significant component in his advertising plans from his first season as a publisher.[376]

For publishers, the *New York Times* represents an exceptional audience due to the high concentration of editors, literary agents, and book critics in residing New York City. Knopf also appreciated the national reach of the newspaper. Traveling to Seattle in 1930, he observed that in towns that had no substantial daily newspaper the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Saturday Review* were eagerly read.[377] Nonetheless, his notoriously colorful voice evolved gradually on the *Times*'s ad pages. The earliest Knopf advertising in that venue demonstrates only a glimmer of his persona's future luster.

Homo Sapiens is the sole title featured in the first *New York Times* advertisement to bear Knopf's name. This artifact is compelling precisely because of how seemingly unremarkable its design and copy are, representing the antithesis of Knopf's legendary flair. Published on 30 October 1915, the ad ran on the general editorial pages, grouped with other book advertising alongside journalism unrelated to the world of books. The ad ran again on the following day, appearing in the *New York Times Review of Books* (as it was called on the masthead, though running headers and in-house advertisements referred to it as the *New York Times Book Review).*

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[376] Alfred Knopf, "My First Job," *The Atlantic Monthly* Aug. 1958: 79-80. Richard Ohmann would argue that Knopf's investment in *Times* advertising was likely due to his awareness of a correlation between review coverage and ad dollars spent in the newspaper's book review section. Richard Ohmann, "The Shaping of a Canon," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1983): 203.
[377] Knopf memoir, page 232, 610:3.

The layout for Knopf's humble premiere advertisement is decidedly a small-space endeavor, two columns wide but bearing a mere seven lines of text in type sizes that range from approximately 8 to 14 points. The ad was assigned to the bottom of the page, though it garnered top billing for the second insertion on 31 October.[378] It is not unreasonable to speculate that Knopf or his father may have called to complain about the poor placement of the initial run. No artwork is featured, but all-type layouts were typical in book advertising during that decade. The Borzoi mark would not be shown in *New York Times* advertising until the following spring. The earlier version of the Knopf logo, with interlocking publisher's initials set in an Art Deco typestyle, appeared only in initial trade advertisements and was not featured in the *Times.*

Despite the constraints of a limited budget and fierce competition for attention on a page crowded with titles, traces of Knopf's trademark exuberance are evident upon close scrutiny. The author's difficult last name, Przybyszewski (pshay-buh-SHEV-skee), is typeset in all capital letters, in a point size matching the novel's title. These are the largest and therefore most noticeable elements, gaining far more prominence than the descriptive copy. Editorial coverage of *Homo Sapiens* in the *Times* included a pronunciation guide beside the author's surname, but no such phonetic assistance appears in Knopf's ad, contributing to the word's curiosity. Combined with the lack of extensive body copy—with which most of the other publishers packed their notices—the name "Przybyszewski" acquires intriguing prominence. Such prominence was diminished,

[378] Advertisements for *Homo Sapiens*. *New York Times,* 30 October 1915: 11 and 31 October 1915: BR423. PHN.

however, by the fact that the advertisement positioned above Knopf's on 30 October used a similar tactic. In this upper layout, B. W. Huebsch's ad for translations of Russian novels by Artzibashef, the author's surname was set in a bold sans serif font, giving Huebsch's author more impact than Knopf's. The use of a single typeface, rather than a combination of serif and sans serif faces or the inclusion of a distinguishing style such as occasional italics, is another surprisingly utilitarian aspect of the Knopf design.

The use of a double-rule box gives the layout a bit of weight, but elegant borders and elaborate ornamental flourishes did not appear in Knopf advertising consistently until the 1920s. By 1922, Knopf's *New York Times* advertising had begun to feature a typographical border bearing the words "Borzoi" and "Alfred A. Knopf" repeated continually in a small point size. Though far less aesthetically appealing than his ornamental advertising borders, this rendition provides an example of an attempt to brand his own name, along with the identity of Borzoi Books, in every corner of his advertising space. The most distinctive advertising border used by Knopf, comprising borzoi logos and "AK" monograms, emerged during that period as well, the result of Knopf's introduction to designer Thomas Cleland, through Elmer Adler, in 1922.[379] Adler designed Knopf's advertisements throughout the 1920s, often to Adler's tremendous frustration. In 1927, for example, after at last gaining Willa Cather's approval for a series

[379] Alfred Knopf, "Some Random Recollections" in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965, vol. 1* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965) 15.

of ads he had set for *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* Adler complained to Blanche that his repeated requests for instructions on production had gone unheeded by Knopf staff.[380]

Unlike the Cather campaigns, the sparse inaugural ad for *Homo Sapiens* did not require author approval. At this phase in the company's life, Knopf used his sole discretion to make grand proclamations despite the ad's minuscule point size, a reflection of the hyperbole that Knopf would amplify in subsequent years. The book is described as "The Great Polish Novelist's Sensational Love Story" (a premonitory message in light of the book's demise due to threats of censorship), "FIRST TIME IN ENGLISH," and "In All Bookstores," which is perhaps an optimistic claim for a fledgling publishing house. Knopf's name is presented as the equivalent of his company's, a trait that would appear even after incorporation: "Published by Alfred A. Knopf." Knopf's decision to conclude the ad by listing the book's price is not unusual, though the $1.50 price point places his book at the higher end of the range. Ultimately, efficient use of white space is the ad's most distinguishing characteristic on a page dense with lengthy, detailed copy.

Knopf's inaugural trade advertisement in the *Publishers' Weekly* was decidedly unrestrained, however. Published in the 25 September 1915 issue, the ad bears a headline "BOOKS YOU MUST HAVE" (*Homo Sapiens* is not among them; the listings are limited to Russian authors) while the loquacious publisher bubbles away for more than two dozen lines, delivering a pitch that reinforces Kroch's descriptions of the young Knopf. "In the first place these books of mine are good books," Knopf asserts, "and though I have been

[380] Elmer Adler to Blanche Knopf, typed letter signed, 3 May 1927, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 731:9, HRC.

thinking about it for a long time I cannot recall a single good book out of which both bookseller and publisher have failed to make money." That his syllogism results in a commercial conclusion demonstrates an understanding of his trade audience. "Well, the first of the books are ready," the copy continues. "You will sell a lot of them right now and you will go right on selling them as long as you remain in the book business. Not one of these books will ever become a 'plug'; they have already made their way to a lasting fortune. It is up to you now to have them on hand when some of your very best customers ask for them."[381]

Though the *Publishers' Weekly* announcement features the Borzoi logo, the phrase "Borzoi Books" is absent.[382] The illustration of the wolfhound marks one of the few clearly documented instances of former advertising executive Samuel Knopf's involvement in the marketing of his son's company. Though a "kennel" of Borzois (as W. A. Dwiggins called it) would be drawn by various artists over the years, Knopf recalled that the first one was created "by an artist in Barron Collier's organization whose name I have long since forgotten, if indeed I ever knew it. My father had this drawn—he was, at the time we started the business, associated with Collier."[383] The initial Borzoi features a heavy rule beneath the dog's feet, presumably to ensure correct alignment in the layout. By 1916, a less rudimentary Borzoi was introduced, leaping freely sans the rule. With

[381] "Books You Must Have," advertisement, *Publishers' Weekly*, 25 September 1915: 899. Four of the five titles featured in the ad were reprints, including *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, which Knopf's copy describes with surprising candor as "a new and cheaper edition of a standard book that has long been out of print." It appears that *The Little Angel*, a collection of fifteen stories by L. N. Andreyev, was the sole wholly original Knopf production in this ad.

[382] Knopf's *New York Times* advertising did not feature the brand "Borzoi Books" in April 1916.

[383] Alfred Knopf, "Dwig and the Borzoi," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965, vol. 1* (New York: The Typophiles, 1965) 15. Barron Collier owned a national advertising agency.

very few exceptions, the Borzoi faces the west, perhaps because of commentary from Dwiggins when he encountered proofs in which two of the dogs ran east. He jotted a note of displeasure to Knopf: "These hounds are in retreat, heraldically. What scared them?"[384]

The Borzoi logo's arrival coincides with Knopf's first use of group advertising on 2 April 1916 in the *New York Times,* representing the only mention of Knopf's first book, *Four Plays*, in *Times* advertising.[385] There was nothing innovative about the practice of running group ads, and the layouts and descriptive copy used to promote the Borzoi in the 1916 insertions are markedly similar to that of other publishers' advertisements. The device, however, makes a dramatic difference in the visibility of Knopf's messages on a crowded page of text. It is therefore surprising that Knopf did not make more extensive use of the Borzoi device in his advertising that year. Throughout 1916, he continued occasionally to run text-only, small-space layouts.

One of these would promote his most frequently advertised book during the company's first five years: *Eat and Be Well* by Eugene Christian, "America's Foremost Food Expert," whose book promises to tell readers "what to eat to be well, how to eat to keep well, what to eat to get well."[386] The typical Knopf "campaign" in the *New York Times* comprised running a layout once. Occasionally a layout ran twice, almost always on consecutive days, presumably because the *Times* offered discounts for such a

[384] "Dwig and the Borzoi" 15.
[385] Untitled group advertisement, *New York Times,* 2 April 1916: BR124. PHN.
[386] Despite Knopf's description of the author, Christian had faced criminal charges in 1905 for practicing medicine without a license. "Food Expert Arrested," *New York Times,* 7 July 1905: 14. PHN. He mounted an appeal and was successful in reversing a judgment against him. "Court Calendar/State Courts/Decisions," *New York Times,* 21 December 1907: 12. PHN.

schedule. The one-column square ad for *Eat and Be Well*, however, featuring no logo or other artwork, ran no fewer than ten times in 1916. After a two-year hiatus, the ads reappeared multiple times in the fall of 1919 through January 1920, presumably in an attempt to capitalize on Christmas gift giving. The book's health claims may have also made it of particular interest during the influenza epidemic, but the advertising waves do not coincide with the epidemic's surge in the fall and winter of 1918.[387] In fact, the book was not advertised in the *Times* at all during the surge, despite the fact that Knopf himself fell ill with the flu that year.[388]

The first distinctive design approach in Knopf's *New York Times* advertising is evident in 1916 with arrival of a checkerboard border, from which the Borzoi emblem protrudes. The rhetorical voice is distinctive as well, persuading by gently balancing charm, pride, and authority. The tone of these small-space messages is the precursor to the more aggressively charismatic voice that would come to dominate Knopf's promotional identity, an unlikely mixture of populism and elitism, or, as Catherine Turner describes it, advertising that "combines snobbery with accessibility."[389] The evolution was gradual over the company's first decade, but a turning point was reached with 1920 advertising to announce that Knut Hamsun had won the Nobel Prize. The nascent stage of the assertive but not aggressive voice is captured in such *Times* copy as "Borzoi Books are unusually interesting" (12 November 1916) and "Alfred A. Knopf has

[387] "The Deadly Virus: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918," National Archives website. Accessed 25 November 2007, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/influenza-epidemic/.
[388] Knopf memoir, page 129, 610: 2.
[389] Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003) 99.

just issued the most beautiful book of the season, THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING" (10 December 1916). The promise that Knopf books were available everywhere was also occasionally replaced with a humbler phrase that nonetheless presents Alfred as a personality: "At your bookseller. If not, write Mr. Knopf, 220 West 42nd St., NY" (12 November 1916).[390]

Running throughout 1917, this style is also marked by ragged right margins in the body copy, rather than the uniformly justified blocks of text so prevalent in *Times* book advertising at the time. Knopf's unjustified type has the effect of making the messages look like lines of poetry rather than conventional sales pitches. The line breaks for one such ad are particularly striking, as is the content, which mentions homeless populations and George Bernard Shaw in the same breath:

> Once
>
> a great poet
>
> tramped America
>
> as a hobo
>
> He tells his story in
>
> THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
>
> OF A SUPER-TRAMP
>
> And George Bernard Shaw wrote
>
> a preface for "this amazing book"
>
> $2.50 anywhere

[390] Advertisements. *New York Times*, 12 November 1916: BRM478 and 10 December 1916, BR542. PHN.

A Borzoi book of course

Published by Alfred A. Knopf.[391]

Though the publisher and Shaw receive attention in this copy, the author, William H. Davies, is never mentioned. Others ads in this series emphasize second-person pronouns and descriptions of Knopf as a human being, rather than a company. This creates an almost intimate tone, again enhanced by eccentric line breaks: "People like you/who care for quality/even in a book/should ask anywhere/for Borzoi Books./Alfred A. Knopf,/their publisher, will gladly/send you his catalogue./Address him at/Candler Building, New York."[392] Note that this copy celebrates the Borzoi in general rather than a specific title—an uncommon approach to book marketing, and a prime example of Knopf's innovative decision to brand his company.

The first approximation of a Knopf book jacket in *New York Times* advertising occurs on 30 September 1917, with *The Three Black Pennys* [sic]. Three-dimensional mock-ups of books in *New York Times* advertising do not seem to have appeared until 1924, with the novels of Zane Grey. Though the jacket elements are extraordinarily rudimentary in Knopf's 1917 layout, with crudely drawn ornamental pennies and a seemingly hand-lettered title belying a sophisticated novel that would remain in print at Knopf for more than fifty years, the copy touts the wrapper: "Jacket in full colors."[393]

Samuel Knopf officially assumed the role of treasurer in his son's company in 1918, which may explain why that year bears evidence of two shifts in Borzoi advertising

[391] Advertisement, *New York Times*, 25 March 1917: BR6. PHN.
[392] Advertisement, *New York Times*, 14 April 1917: 9. PHN.
[393] Advertisement, *New York Times*, 30 September 1917: BR367. PHN.

in the *Times:* an investment in larger space and the presence of longer, more elaborate, and frequently more dramatic descriptive copy, such as lines for Italian poet Annie Vivanti Chartres's *The Outrage* that read, "Before deciding the amount of your subscription to the next Liberty Loan—imagine members of your family in the position of Louise and Chérie—two Belgian women caught in the German invasion. Imagine yourself facing their dreadful problem. Read 'THE OUTRAGE.' It is a story that will make you realize what German brutality and lust means to the individual—what it would mean to you. … It is a Borzoi book. 'THE OUTRAGE' is not just a story of Belgium's suffering—not 'just another war book.' It is a production of literary merit and lasting worth. The fact that Mr. Knopf has included it in his list of Borzoi books assures you of that."[394]

That year's advertising concluded with the company's most sizeable *Times* ad to date, measuring approximately two columns wide by 10.5 inches tall and featuring eleven books under the unremarkable headline "BORZOI BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS," which was set beneath a much more noteworthy tagline: "The Russian Wolfhound Identifies Borzoi Books."[395] The titles serve as a useful snapshot of the diversity of Knopf's three-year-old list. Titles include Carl Van Vechten's *The Music of Spain,* Kahlil Gibran's *The Madman,* and R. G. Kirk's *Zanoza,* "an exciting tale of mystery and adventure with a Russian Wolfhound (Borzoi) for its hero. A rattling good dog story. Pictures by Harvey Dunn."[396]

[394] Advertisement, *New York Times,* 20 September 1918: 6. PHN.
[395] Advertisement, *New York Times,* 24 November 1918: 74. PHN.
[396] Over two decades, Dunn had made a name for himself as a prolific commercial illustrator with numerous publishing clients. "Harvey Dunn Biography." South Dakota State University Art Museum

From that year through 1929, most of Knopf's advertising budget would be spent on such group ads, precisely the sort of line listings that Garvey asserts were being phased out in the 1920s, though Knopf's flamboyant voice once again distinguished his crowded group ads from those of his competitors.[397] One such ad, published in the spring of 1924, was crammed with descriptive copy for more than a dozen sundry books, including Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir,* Carl Van Doren's *Many Minds*, Floyd Dell's *Looking at Life*, Storm Jameson's *The Pitiful Wife*, Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, and T. Alexander Barns's *Across the Great Crater-Land to the Congo*. Each listing carries adjective-laden copy, but the Borzoi logo and Alfred Knopf's signature atop the listings distinguish an otherwise overwhelmingly text-heavy ad on the page. Knopf's signed message reads, "I have the honor to announce the publication on April 25th of THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE translated from the Danish of J. Anker Larsen. This powerful novel won the great Gyldendal Prize of 70,000 kroner ($14,000) last year, and has thus far been published in seven languages. Profoundly philosophic in theme and teeming with life and experience, THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE is an epic of the religious instinct in man. It comes at a period of great religious unrest, and will, I am sure, prove to be one of the outstanding literary and religious events of this generation."[398]

The copy in this and other Knopf group ads, of course, also emphasizes quotes from critics and other authors. The effect, particularly in Knopf's numerous tall group

website. Accessed 27 November 2007.
http://www3.sdstate.edu/Administration/SouthDakotaArtMuseum/Collections/Dunn/

[397] Ellen Garvey, "Ambivalent Advertising" in *A History of the Book in America, vol. 4: Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 177.

[398] Advertisement for assorted Knopf titles, *New York Times*, 13 April 1924: BR17. PHN.

ads, is to showcase a roster of names—reviewers, biography subjects, and authors—including George M. Cohan, Moliere, Maupassant, Conrad, Ibañez (whose name was typeset without the diacritical tilde but was nonetheless accompanied by a phonetic guide emphasizing a Castilian pronunciation of the Spanish: "ee-bahn-yeth"). The message to the publishing community is that Knopf travels in good company. The message to consumers is that they too can discover this pantheon, vicariously joining an international literary circle. Knopf will even ensure that pronunciation gaffes are avoided, a service not provided in the inaugural ad featuring *Homo Sapiens.*

Despite the formulaic layouts and packed group ads, Alfred Knopf's verve is evident in his copy throughout 1920: once again, it was the distinctive Knopf voice that proved to be so successful in setting Borzoi Books apart. Even the simple detail of referring to Knopf with the honorific "Mr.," added personality to the identity behind a company that, by its fourth year of existence, was receiving consistent review attention and enjoying healthy financial solvency.[399] He emerged as a master of ceremonies that year: "Mr. Knopf's List just published" (June 6), "Mr. Knopf recommends …" (July 4), "Mr. Knopf's Fall Announcement" (July 25). "I am proud to have published these novels and I cordially recommend them to all readers who have confidence in the Borzoi imprint," he proclaimed in an April 11 group advertisement. In a rhetorical sleight of hand that certainly distinguished Knopf from other publishers, he even referred to himself

[399] Alfred A. Knopf, *Those Damned Reminiscences: Further Selections from the Memoirs of Alfred A. Knopf. Edited* by Cathy Henderson. Keepsake for the Exhibition "The Company They Kept: Alfred and Blanche Knopf, Publishers," Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas, 1995: 6.

as a master of understatement, perhaps satirically. In long-winded promotional commentary that fills two back pages of Warwick Deeping's novel *Kitty,* Knopf wrote:

> Shortly after the publication of *Sorrell and Son* the publishers received from an American author [subsequently identified as Alice Brown] noted for her own beautiful and careful craftsmanship a letter of criticism and protest. Her complaint was that the advertisements of the book—written, it should be explained, by a publisher who has convictions about the force of understatement—erred on the side of carefulness; she called for a greater enthusiasm, a little more lavishness of adjective. She said that, from the advertisements, one "didn't get an idea of the unusual character of the book—written as it is with such distinction, truth, and charm."[400]

In fact, Knopf's advertising copy for *Sorrell and Son* was not lacking in flamboyance. An early *New York Times* ad for the book even contained the word "adjective": "A Novel for Every Father and Every Son. Delightful, moving, engrossing, fascinating are adjectives that may well apply."[401] His praise is underscored by exuberant praise from the British press, set in boldface above the equally exuberant Borzoi logo.

On 7 November 1920, Knopf ran a group ad featuring not one but four Borzois, stacked in a striking row to signal announcements of the novel *Moon-Calf,* by Floyd Dell, and the short-story collection *Youth and the Bright Medusa,* Willa Cather's first book to carry the Borzoi logo.[402] Though she often claimed that she decided to leave Houghton Mifflin and publish with the upstart Knopf because his bindings were colorful and the overall production quality of Borzoi Books reflected high standards, correspondence with

[400] Promotional copy bound into the back pages of Warwick Deeping's *Kitty* (New York: Knopf, 1927).
[401] "A Novel for Every Father and Every Son," advertisement for *Sorrell and Son, New York Times,* 28 February 1926: BR25. PHN.
[402] Advertisement, *New York Times,* 7 November 1920: 57. PHN.

her Houghton editors indicates that Knopf's advertising was perhaps the more crucial lure.

According to Erika Hamilton's recent study, "Advertising Cather during the Transition Years (1914–1922)," Cather believed that Houghton's advertising copy was too impersonal, and she admired the fact that Knopf's ads showcased quotations from favorable reviews within just days of the reviews' publication. Houghton had attempted to promote her books using a personal epistolary tone in October 1915, two weeks before Knopf launched his company. However, the advertisement, which ran in the *New York Times*, contained an unfortunate typographical error in its opening lines, hailing the release of *The Song of the Lark* thus: "Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Company take pleasure in announcing a new and impotant [sic] novel." When Cather approached Knopf and subsequently allowed him to publish *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, she had not yet agreed to publish her novels with him. During this trial period, Knopf advertised the story collection not only in the *Times Book Review* but also in *The New Republic*, a vehicle rarely used by Houghton to promote fiction. The copy for this 29 September 1920 advertisement included the lines, "There are not many living writers from whom a new book commands the attention with which each successive volume of Miss Cather's is now awaited. There seems to be no disputing the fact that she is our foremost living woman novelist."[403] Regardless of whether such copy would influence a consumer who may have felt immune to hyperbole, the message does a marvelous job of flattering the

[403] All Cather information in this paragraph is drawn from Erika Hamilton, "Advertising Cather during the Transition Years (1914-1922)," *Cather Studies* 7, no. 1 (2007). Note that book advertising also served to attract Knopf to Cather. He recalled being intrigued by an ad in Houghton's perhaps sub-par campaigns on her behalf.

author. Cather made Knopf her publisher soon afterward, and the timing was a boon for him as she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for *One of Ours*, the first Pulitzer Prize–winning novel to bear the Borzoi logo. Knopf celebrated his acquisition of Cather's work as part of a remarkable advertorial published in the *New York Times* in 1922. Under the headline "History of a Publishing Season," with typesetting, photo credits, and a layout that blended seamlessly with the editorial look of the Times, this advertisement ran adjacent to regular news, not in the Book Review. The tone is anything but journalistic, however, with the profuse application of first-person pronouns in every paragraph as Knopf guides readers through the publishing process of more than ten varied works. He uses this opportunity to also present Knopf authors as a close-knit circle, announcing his new publishing agreements with Mencken's arch-enemy Ernest Boyd thus: "I am glad to take this opportunity to announce publicly that Mr. Ernest Boyd, formerly of the editorial staff of The Evening Post, is now one of the Borzoi official family." He also notes the recent death of two Borzoi authors, W. H. Hudson and Wilfred Scawen Blunt, with the observation that although "the year has been saddened by the death of two friends and authors … each will live through his books." The ad closes with Alfred's signature and an invitation to correspond with him "about the above or any other of his publications."[404]

Though Knopf's consumer advertising plans throughout the 1920s mirrored the Cather program, featuring group ads in magazines and in the *New York Times*, he also occasionally purchased space in city newspapers other than the *New York Times.* Such

[404] "History of a Publishing Season," advertisement. *New York Times*, 8 October 1922: 55. PHN.

buys were not innovative for publishers: Knopf bought 410 inches total in Chicago's *Daily News, Tribune,* and *Post* in January and February of 1919, for example, but that paled in comparison to the inches of Chicago ad space bought by E. P. Dutton & Co., Harper & Bros., or Charles Scribner's Sons, all of which numbered in the thousands.[405] Knopf advertising also appeared in *The Washington Post* in the 1920s, though evidently none of the layouts featured the works of Langston Hughes, who received copious publicity in the paper as the city's "Negro poet." Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven,* however, was included in a holiday group ad run in the *Washington Post* under the headline "LANDMARKS OF A MEMORABLE SEASON."[406] Not surprisingly, Knopf advertising in the *Los Angeles Times* often featured books that were made into motion pictures, including Deeping's *Sorrell and Son* and Hergesheimer's *Cytherea.* One advertisement from the *Los Angeles Times* provides evidence that Knopf very likely offered cooperative advertising agreements with retailers in his company's early years. Such agreements allow a bookseller to receive accounting credit from a publisher for the cost of bookseller advertising that is dedicated to that publisher's books. Published on 10 February 1924, an ad placed by the west coast department store chain J. W. Robinson Co. touts "eight new Borzoi Books which might have been planned as Valentines," including Storm Jameson's *The Pitiful Wife.*[407]

In addition to the proliferation of periodicals, non-print media also evolved during this time period. Radio, which many publishers feared would eliminate their industry,

[405] "Book Lineage," advertisement, *New York Times,* 15 Mar 1919: 87. PHN.
[406] "Landmarks of a Memorable Season," advertisement, *Washington Post,* 12 December 1926: BS4. PHN.
[407] "Give Books for Valentines," advertisement, *Los Angeles Times,* 10 February 1924: 23. PHN.

proved to be a medium that sustained readership in America. Publishers emphasized radio publicity rather than sponsorship of individual shows, very likely due to budget constraints. By 1926, at least ten regularly scheduled talk shows featuring books, hosted by locally well-known speakers, were broadcast in the United States. These ranged from Joseph Henry Jackson's Oakland program on Monday nights (Jackson was the literary editor of *Sunset* magazine) to Chicago's Harry Hansen, of the *Daily News*, who broadcast on Tuesday nights. Doubleday used this medium more than other publishers, garnering an unprecedented 16 million listeners in a historic book-radio tie-in with the release of Edna Ferber's *Show Boat*. "A front-cover advertisement in PW announced that the house was 'Broadcasting Show Boat!' and three days later, the Eveready Hour did just that, with Lionel Atwill announcing and Russell Doubleday introducing the performers and musicians. … It was the widest publicity ever given to a single book."[408]

On a smaller scale, the *New York Times* radio-program listings for the 1920s include frequent references to programs featuring books, such as the 9 p.m. literary hour from Newark's WJZ, though authors are not specified.[409] Though it is most reasonable to assume that Knopf authors would have been among them, also appearing on shows listed in other newspapers coast to coast, the Knopf archive contains no verification that the house used this medium before 1930, when Joseph Hergesheimer sent a telegram to

[408] John Tebbel. *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. vol. 3: The Golden Age between Two Wars, 1920–1940.* New York: R. R. Bowker, 1978, 33.
[409] "Today's Radio Program," *New York Times*, 14 April 1922: 24. PHN.

Blanche extolling the dignified and charming promotion she delivered on air for his fiction.[410]

Joan Shelley Rubin explores the tandem between early radio programs and innovations in book promotion in her groundbreaking work, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture.* Noting that the airwaves were often used for educational purposes in the days after the Great War, with the emergence of licensed stations, Rubin argues that the medium was heavily influenced by the involvement of academia, which in turn led to entrepreneurial efforts on the part of book publishers—a synergy that Knopf clearly valued, as demonstrated in his attempts to gain prestige through textbook publishing. "By 1923," Rubin writes, "seventy-two universities, colleges, and schools had obtained broadcasting licenses. Many educational institutions, regarding the medium as an arm of university extension divisions, gave listeners the opportunity to pay tuition and receive degree credit for courses they 'took' on the air. They often paraded a procession of faculty members before the microphone."[411]

Rubin also describes a climate in which radio's literary lectures further enhanced the perception of authors as learned authority figures, whose books could enhance the reader's prestige and social mobility. Joy Elmer Morgan, who chaired the National Committee on Education by Radio, championed radio's power to improve "quality thinking among the masses").[412] Eventually, commercialization obliterated the surge in

[410] Joseph Hergesheimer to Blanche Knopf, Western Union telegram, 25 April 1930, AAKI, Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, 691:10.
[411] Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992, 270-271.
[412] Rubin, 272-273.

educational radio programming that marked the Borzoi's early years. Competition for available channels combined with the rise of privately owned stations financed by ad dollars and an increase in network broadcasting backed by national advertisers, forced many colleges and universities to either share their air time or withdraw altogether. A 1930 Supreme Court ruling sounded the death knell, declaring that educational stations were not entitled to special standing.

The refined aura of books and authors endured, however. The commercial book programs for radio retained a theme of empowering an insecure audience while delivering tasteful messages. Protestant minister Edgar White Burrill's "Literary Vespers," launched in 1922, also united the threads of pragmatism and Matthew Arnold's character-building: Burrill would read literary passages aloud, then link them to current events. But the most significant marriage between book promotion and radio emerged in the form of audio book reviews, sometimes delivered by managers of bookstores. One of the most successful radio book reviewers during the medium's dawn was Joseph Henry Jackson, a newspaper critic and travel writer whose "Reader's Guide" series began in San Francisco in 1924 but eventually aired nationwide on NBC. The key to his popularity may have lain in his concerted efforts to avoid sounding didactic, envisioning himself addressing people in a living room rather than a classroom, facing "easy chairs rather than rows of desks."[413] The conversational tone he adopted set a new standard for the form and, in a reality not lost on publishers, lent itself beautifully to sales pitches under the guise of criticism. It was not until the 1930s, however, that network book broadcasts

[413] Rubin 278.

became the norm, and nationally recognized authorities blended celebrity with book criticism. In their early years, radio book reviewers were generally obscure commentators who perfected the voice of the friendly "living-room conversation."

An additional turning point in the use of radio for book promotion occurred, surprisingly, in the wake of the stock market crash that signaled the Great Depression. Despite (or perhaps because of) looming economic peril, ten publishers, ranging from Knopf to Simon and Schuster, joined with the American Book Bindery to sponsor the first nationwide book-review program, "The Early Bookworm," which debuted in October 1929. Hosted by legendary theater critic and Algonquin Round Table regular Alexander Woollcott, "The Early Bookworm" aired not early in the morning but during the lucrative 7:45 to 8:00 after-dinner time slot. It was broadcast on the CBS affiliate WABC, a station that could provide hook-ups to thirty-three affiliates. Though the audience was vast, Woollcott's tone was intimate, conveying the spirit of a gossipy, dynamic buddy who would speak candidly about the publishing world's latest products and his opinion of them. The advertisers required Woollcott to restrict his reviews to their books, though he could choose freely among them.

Promotional tie-ins for the show were diverse. One such tie-in contributed to the sense of intimacy and audience involvement that was Woollcott's hallmark: a thirty-two-page "Radio Book Chat" booklet was printed by the American Book Bindery and distributed to listeners as well to bookstore owners, featuring personal information about upcoming authors whose works were going to be reviewed on "The Early Bookworm" in

the future. This lengthy brochure also promoted contests for the best review, written by a listener, for any of the titles featured on the show.

An additional way in which Knopf capitalized on emerging media was his decision to film his top-selling authors and submit the footage to Pathé News, a French motion-picture company and distributor of newsreels. *Washington Post* film critic Felicia Pearson called the scheme "an advertising stunt that will acquaint us with the faces of our best-known names. Which is like looking t'other end of the telescope for us movie fans who are usually busy learning the names of our best known faces."[414]

Not all book-promotion strategies reflected technological innovations. One "new" practice involved a centuries-old medium: the human street hawker. In 1921, Knopf hired a group of men to wear sandwich boards promoting *Moon Calf*, the autobiographical novel by the socialist Floyd M. Dell, who recently had been acquitted on charges of violating anti-espionage laws related to his work for *The Masses.* The sandwich-board crew was instructed to troll Times Square and Wall Street wearing artists' smocks and tam-o-shanters, presumably to position Dell as a bohemian. Samples of the book were adhered to the boards, which listed the names of nearby retailers who had been enlisted to track the effectiveness of the campaign. *Moon Calf* was indeed a top seller, though the direct impact of the street team is not known (the book was heavily advertised in newspapers as well). The only evidence that Knopf was pleased with the results of the street team is the fact that he continued to use the technique for other works.[415] While

[414] Felicia Pearson, "Moviegraphs." *Washington Post*, 6 November 1927: F2. PHN.
[415] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. vol. 3: The Golden Age between Two Wars, 1920–1940* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1978), 332.

Knopf was hawking books by old-fashioned means at the street level, however, the small, new progressive house of Covici-Friede hired a skywriter to emblazon the skies over Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn with the word MURDER, followed by a question mark, to promote the title of a novel by Evelyn Johnson and Gretta Palmer.[416]

Mass transit also provided a means for experimentation in publishers' advertising, though this was not a twentieth-century innovation within the book business.[417] In 1924, Brentano's (at the time both a publishing house and a book retailer) rented advertising space inside Fifth Avenue buses.[418] The book that Brentano's chose for this campaign was Ernest Pascal's *Dark Swan,* which was also made into a silent film that year, as were several of Pascal's novels. Knopf also experimented with transit ads, but this was the result of convenience rather than innovation. Geoffrey Hellman's 1948 *New Yorker* profile of Knopf indicates that his father, Samuel Knopf, was able to negotiate complimentary train-car advertising on the Long Island Rail Road for the Borzoi, with the promise of adding an air of sophistication to the commuter rail in an era that equated books with prestige.[419] Samuel negotiated this with his employer, Barron Collier, who in addition to owning a large advertising firm was also a streetcar and real-estate magnate.[420]

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[416] Tebbel, vol. 3, 335.
[417] Michael Winship has found archival evidence of book advertising in elevated train stations during the late nineteenth century.
[418] Tebbel, vol. 3, 334.
[419]Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Publisher, II: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948: 48.
[420] The offer of free transit advertising was not exceptional. In an act that supported women's rights, or perhaps merely the attempt to appear progressive, Collier's Street Railways Advertising Company, based in New York but providing services in more than 700 cities, awarded $8,000 worth of complimentary advertising space to suffragists in New York City. Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 63.

Publishers' budgets do not appear to have permitted advertising on the spectacular electric signs that transformed Times Square into a colorful commercial square during this period, the antithesis of the staid black-and-white newspaper that was the locale's namesake. Billboards, however, formed an ancillary but vibrant advertising medium for book publishers in an era that saw outdoor advertising proliferate in tandem with the rise of the automobile. Knopf's major bestseller, Warwick Deeping's *Sorrell and Son*, was advertised on a large, upper-Broadway billboard in 1926. Knopf used the medium again the following year to promote the Borzoi brand itself, under the headline "Now you can buy books by the label."[421] Again, Knopf was not the innovator in the use of this medium to promote books. Boni & Liveright, for example, made use of billboard space at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, visible from the New York Public Library. Reflecting the budget disparities between the branding of toiletries and the branding of publishing houses, Boni & Liveright touted Emil Ludwig's *Napoleon,* one of the bestselling books of the decade, on a diminutive sign that was perched atop a far more noticeable four-story billboard promoting Colgate's Ribbon Dental Cream.

One of today's most widely known book-advertising agencies, Spier New York, was founded by a member of Knopf's marketing team whose duties extended well beyond the realm of advertising.[422] On staff as Knopf's publicist in the early 1920s, Franklin Spier played a key role in developing the voice of Knopf in the media, jockeying

[421] Tebbel, vol. 3, 334.
[422] In 2008, Spier New York was renamed WKP-Spier. Incorporated into its parent company (Warren Kremer Piano), it is now merely the book-publishing segment of an agency that focuses on more lucrative business sectors.

with dozens of other book publicists for media attention.[423] Curiously, Knopf rarely mentioned Spier in later interviews. Though he engaged in frequent name-dropping regarding book designers and literary agents when looking back on the success of Borzoi Books, Knopf seldom mentioned the names of editors or marketing personnel who had fostered the growth of his company, almost giving the impression that editorial and promotional coups were solely the result of his efforts, and Blanche's. Spier was one of many marketing mavens who participated in the professionalization of publicists in the early twentieth century. The best embodiment of the perceived empiricism of the field was the 1928 publication of *Propaganda,* published by Horace Liveright and written by Sigmund Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, who is often hailed as the father of modern public relations. In candid chapters, Bernays boldly equates public relations with the free world: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society."[424]

In addition to procuring media attention for Borzoi Books, Spier's duties also included coordinating an extensive network of touring authors, who were encouraged to accept invitations for book signings in towns far removed from the entertainment centers of New York and Los Angeles. Joseph Hergesheimer's bookseller visits ranged from an afternoon at "Miss Stockwell's Bookstore" in Nashville and to the Brick Row Book Shop

[423] The HRC's Knopf archive contains Spier correspondence from 1921, 1922, and 1923 only. Spier launched his own advertising firm in 1929.
[424] Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2004), 38. Originally published in New York: Horace Liveright,1928.

on the Yale campus, for example.[425] Of course, not all authors felt comfortable with the carefully strategized, exhaustive book tours recommended by the Knopfs. Khalil Gibran received a delicately persuasive letter from Blanche assuring him that giving readings at a bookfairs across the country (particularly Joseph Horne Company's in Pittsburg, which Blanche cited as a good starting point for the fearful author) were not necessarily distasteful.[426] Touring was a Knopf imperative, and Spier often handled the logistics of this process.[427]

Out of the dozens of Borzoi authors who wrote to Spier demanding that he execute their publicity ideas, ranging from the minutia-laden to the grandiose, Carl Van Vechten perhaps supplied the most frequent requests. When Van Vechten informed Spier that a local fan had recently commissioned an elaborate bracelet reflecting the catalog of jewels described in *Peter Whiffle,* Spier patiently requested the woman's address so that a photographer could be dispatched, accompanied by a newspaper columnist to conduct an interview with the bracelet.[428]

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[425] Joseph Hergesheimer to Blanche Knopf, Western Union telegram, 25 April 1930, AAKI, Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, 691:10.

[426] Blanche Knopf to Kahlil Gibran, typed carbon unsigned, 16 January 1919, AAKI, Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, 691:2.

[427] For Knopf's early authors, publicists sometimes also carried the burden of serving as the rationale for contracts that promised no royalties on the first five hundred copies sold. Orrick Johns agreed to let Knopf publish his *Asphalt and Other Poems* under such an arrangement after Knopf explained to him the tremendous marketing efforts required to launch a work by a first-time author. Johns was also instructed to write his own jacket and catalog copy and submit it along with the standard author photo and biography to assist the publicists in delivering the promise of notoriety in lieu of any initial financial rewards. Alfred Knopf to Orrick Johns, multiple undated letters, presumably circa 1916-1917, AAKI, Series II, Alfred A. Knopf Personal, 501:1.

[428] Correspondence between Carl Van Vechten and Franklin Spier, August 1922, AAKI, Series IV: Author and Book Designer Files, 728:9 HRC.

Spier was equally tenacious in the publicity campaigns that truly set the Knopfs apart from their publishing peers, promoting the publishers themselves in equal measure with the promotion of their authors. From Blanche's affection for "riding the hounds" in Westchester County to Alfred's affinity for pink shirts, the Knopfs basked in the limelight to a degree that could have only been the result of tireless efforts on the part of shrewd publicists. The Knopfs' trips abroad were a routine theme of this continual campaign.[429] In addition, because the publishing industry is one of the few creative ventures in which the artists often serve as the critics, it should be noted that Spier's efforts to expand the Borzoi's network of book reviewers was crucial to the development of the Borzoi's author roster as well. Each time his secretaries produced a mailing list for review copies, they did more than fulfill a clerical task on the Addressograph labeler. Reviewer mailing lists often contained the names of current and future Knopf authors, preparing editorial inroads that Spier and other publicists were expected to traverse to the fullest possible extent. Clarence Day, for example, whose autobiographical collection *Life with Father* became one of the top-selling Borzoi Books, was brought to Knopf's attention by house author Max Eastman, who liked Day's book reviews in *Metropolitan* magazine.[430]

The Borzoi's marketing persona was effective because its aura of prestige was seamlessly blended with brash promotional techniques. The unique flair of the Knopf voice was presented consistently to retailers, consumers, authors, critics, and agents alike.

[429] Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948, 46.
[430] Knopf memoir, page 138, 610:2.

This formula proved to be enduring perhaps because it was as versatile as it was consistent, uniting myriad identities. The Borzoi managed to conform while rebelling, surprise while maintaining a sense of dependability, lend an air of sophistication to middlebrow titles while popularizing erudite literature, and merge with the establishment while exploiting the novelty of being a newcomer.

Scripting the Scene Through Marketing

Describing the rhetorical transactions that take place when we read literature, Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement* features a definition of form that emphasizes the audience rather than the literary protagonists who captivate them: "The psychology here is not the psychology of the *hero*, but the psychology of the *audience*. And by that distinction, form would be the psychology of the audience. Or, seen from another angle, form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."[431] Reading the launch of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. as an act that is analogous to a dramatic literary narrative, we can clearly discern the role of marketing in the formation of Alfred Knopf's identity as not only an arbiter of literary taste but as the creator of an appetite for his brand of literary prestige. His act, of course, was not only the shaping of his identity. Its commercial element involved the act of spurring people to purchase his products, primarily through a variety of marketing techniques—a process that easily exemplifies traditional rhetorical concepts. Whether conveyed through a sales

[431] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 31. First published in Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931.

representative's brochures, an announcement in the *Washington Post*, or a publicity blurb in the *New York Herald*, Knopf's marketing messages formed the script through which his company's identity could be performed, while his company's sales figures swelled.

In such communication transactions, whose purpose is commerce, the rhetor (agent) is typically thought to be someone who has a commodity to sell, while consumers comprise the audience. For the Knopfs, however, the parameters were not so definitively established. The audience for which the Knopfs wished to create and feed an appetite included not only consumers but also literary agents, booksellers, authors, and to some degree other publishers (who had the ability to accept Alfred Knopf into their circles, satisfying his appetite to be seen as a member of a band of elite powerbrokers at the helm of America's literary marketplace). During the company's early years, the scripts he chose gave Blanche a public voice that was only ancillary to his, yet her presence (made known more frequently through publicity or sales calls than through traditional advertising) became a paradoxically unspoken aspect of his script, reminding the audience that he had not struck out alone in his publishing venture. Where Blanche loyally followed him, so might other bibliophiles.

The agency in performing these scripts was not solely Alfred Knopf's but also resided in book critics or reporters who determined whether or not to feature his works, and in booksellers who determined whether to pass his message on to their own audiences of customers. When the Borzoi's marketing message was conveyed, the voice of Knopf—a singular identity—differentiated the company as being led by a man who was by turns appealing and bombastic, and sophisticated yet possessing a charming

universal perspective that translated neatly for a variety of audience members. The visual components of these messages in display advertising eventually meshed seamlessly with the visual rhetoric conveyed in Borzoi Books themselves, with designers such as Thomas Maitland Cleland creating borders that could be used as easily on title pages as in ads appearing in the book review section of the *New York Times.*

During this period in the company's history, the creation of a symbolic Borzoi identity was an act steeped in transformation. The identity of the Knopfs themselves, nearly synonymous with that of their publishing firm, was being built upon a new stage, in a scene populated (in adjacent "theaters") by publishers such as Liveright and Kennerley—men whose reputations comprised properties ranging from daring to foolish. As the Knopfs crafted their identity, their marketing messages alluded not only to who Alfred and Blanche were but also to who they *weren't.* Referring again to literary narratives, Burke observed that "since the symbolic transformation involves a sloughing off, you may expect to find some variant of killing in the work (I treat indictment, vituperation, vindictiveness against a 'villain,' etc. as attenuated aspects of this same function). So we get to the 'scapegoat,' the 'representative' or 'vessel' of certain unwanted evil."[432] To differentiate Borzoi Books, the Knopfs' marketing script by necessity carried claims that distinguished their house from quasi-villainous competitors: those ignoble publishers who would sell formulaic, commercial plots, packaged in cheap

[432] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 40. Originally published in Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941.

bindings that would not endure (and did not need to endure, serving as the "costumes" for disposable works that themselves had no chance of enduring).

Applying Burke's notion of form to the Knopfs' acts of performance, formation, and transformation in the early years of their company, Borzoi Books become both an enticement and a fulfillment for readers (including the publishers themselves) who craved to be seen as cosmopolitan, enlightened, and more intelligent than mass-market throngs. This was the promise of the company's marketing messages, symbolized by an elegant, energetic, exotic dog and conveyed in an entertaining copywriting voice that urged America to believe in the superiority of Alfred Knopf. Delivered in an era rife with new media, the assurance of quality provided an added value for every reader who purchased a Knopf book. For bibliophilic consumers who had difficulty navigating the overload of promotional information about recently released titles or the lives of their authors, distinctiveness was Knopf's greatest coup, feeding his most powerful marketing medium: testimonials conveyed by word of mouth.

Chapter Five
"This Is a Borzoi Book": The Legacies of Prestige

"When all scores are settled, it will be written that Alfred Knopf was the greatest publisher this country has ever had."

—PULITZER PRIZE WINNER JOHN HERSEY IN HIS EULOGY FOR ALFRED KNOPF[433]

In May 1965, *Newsweek* marked the Knopf publishing company's fiftieth anniversary with an homage, claiming that the house "harks back to a time when publishing was a profession for cultivated gentlemen instead of a more or less hot investment for bull-market speculators who wouldn't know a book from a portfolio."[434] Despite the article's assertion that Knopf eschewed financial gain in his "noble" approach to publishing, five years had passed since the sale of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., to Random House, and the latter's acquisition by RCA would be initiated by a handshake between Bennett Cerf and Robert Sarnoff the following year.[435]

Although he continued to oversee operations at the firm, Knopf's involvement at this point waned as he approached the possibility of retirement. Ironically, his reputation for anti-commercialism, which had contributed to his reputation as a prestigious publisher, in turn led to perceptions of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., as a valuable company. The reality of Borzoi Books as business rather than a dalliance launched by a "cultivated gentleman" was illustrated dramatically as recently as 2008. Ninety-three years after Alfred Knopf announced his inaugural list of Eurocentric titles, Effendi's firm became

[433] "Knopf Is Eulogized as 'Greatest Publisher' in U.S.," *New York Times*, 16 August 1984: 1. PHN.
[434] Saul Maloff, "Golden Anniversary," *Newsweek*, 17 May 1965, 106.
[435] Gene Smith, "RCA Confirms Random House Bid," *New York Times*, 11 January 1966: 48. PHN. The merger was commemorated on Knopf letterhead with the image of a Borzoi cocking its ear toward RCA's gramophone logo.

subsumed under the Knopf Publishing Group, upon directives from the German parent company Bertelsmann A.G. The merger embodied the Knopfs' ultimate wish: to be seen as superior to other American commercial and literary publishers alike, particularly the large powerhouses such as Doubleday, where Alfred's apprenticeship led him to claim to have developed a distaste for mass-market books. Nonetheless, in a memorandum to all Random House, Inc., employees, CEO Markus Dohle lauded Knopf's enduring reputation as a publisher of quality books by authors who often achieved superstar status.[436] The 2008 creation of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, which made Doubleday subordinate to Knopf, would have especially pleased Alfred and Blanche because this recognition was bestowed by European owners, a fitting turn of events in light of the fact that the Knopfs' aspirations of success—in terms of cachet as well as profitability—were formed in tandem with their reverence for literature from abroad.

Through book publishing, Alfred Knopf was also able to achieve his goal of acquiring personal prestige, rejecting gray flannel suits but nonetheless landing memberships at the Grolier Club, the Club of Odd Volumes (Boston), the Caxton Club (Chicago), the Century Country Club, the Publishers' Lunch Club, and other exclusive organizations.[437] The company's notoriety is evident in equally profuse ways, such as the inclusion of Knopf in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as an example of how the word "borzoi" was being used in 1969 (from the *Times Literary Supplement:* "One inevitably comes up with Gollancz's yellow jackets, Alfred A. Knopf's borzoi colophon, and so

[436] Markus Dohle to all employees of Random House, Inc., Memorandum, 3 December 2008. Collection of Amy Root.
[437] Geoffrey Hellman, "Publisher: Flair Is the Word," *The New Yorker*, 27 November 1948, 36.

on").[438] Researchers have even tried to assign a quantitative value the prestige of Borzoi Books. In 1981, a team of sociologists surveyed American book editors in an attempt to determine which houses ranked as the most prestigious among their publishing peers. Knopf received high marks from scholarly, trade, and university press editors. "In fact," the researchers concluded, "no trade house rated more highly."[439]

Perhaps it is surprising, then, that as their company reached its fiftieth anniversary, Alfred and Blanche Knopf downplayed their initial vision for the company in understatements that contrast sharply with the verve of their early marketing rhetoric. Alfred Knopf depicted his initial prospects as dodgy at best. Narrating a montage of his home movies, he insisted that "our ambitions and hopes for the future were very modest indeed. It was clear to me that there was room on the American scene for a publisher, a small one, who would choose books with discrimination, produce them in a better style than was customary at that time, and above all pay his bills promptly."[440] In a fiftieth-anniversary interview with *Publishers' Weekly*, Blanche was unable to define their target consumers with clarity, and her definition never invokes Nobel Prize winners: "'Quality middle-brow' is the way Mrs. Knopf characterizes the firm's editorial program," the reporter proclaimed, quoting Blanche as saying that "we're not *avant-garde,* but we're not pure middle-brow either; we don't aim especially at the book clubs or the *Reader's*

[438] "Borzoi," *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[439] Lewis Coser et al., *Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 68.
[440] *A Publisher Is Known by the Company He Keeps*. (New York, NY: Louis de Rochemont Associates, 1961), DVD from 16 mm film. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter "AAK" and "HRC").

Digest." While making these statements, she puffed away on a cigarette in the study of her midtown apartment, relaying the reporter's drink request to her maid in "rapid colloquial French."[441]

According to Harding Lemay, Knopf's publicity manager from 1958 to 1961 and others, Blanche eventually became Alfred's competitor, and employees (as well as heir apparent Pat Knopf) frequently found themselves embroiled in the Knopfs' manipulative attempts to undermine each other.[442] Novelist and poet Robert Nathan was one of many Borzoi authors who asserted that it was not possible to be edited by both Alfred and Blanche: an author "belonged" to one or the other.[443] Willa Cather perhaps represents one of the few exceptions to this rule, requesting Alfred as her editor from the beginning but nonetheless corresponding with Blanche profusely and enjoying frequent gifts from her. The notorious feuds between Alfred and Blanche (seen by some as childish and by others as evidence of the couple's passion for publishing) only stoked the notoriety of their company. Nonetheless, Alfred's interviews and reminiscences (as well his tribute to Blanche upon her death in 1966) present his life with her as a complete partnership, professionally and otherwise, as if his persona required the presence of a supportive wife with whom he never engaged in tempestuous bickering. United under a single moniker, their extraordinarily different temperaments and eventually separate publishing endeavors fulfilled a common purpose.

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[441] "50 Years of the Borzoi," *Publishers' Weekly,* 1 February 1965: 49-50.
[442] Harding Lemay, *Inside, Looking Out: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1971), 230-249.
[443] Transcript, Robert Nathan's speech delivered at a banquet commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Knopf firm, 19 October 1965, AAKI, Series III, Blanche W. Knopf, Personal, 690:4, HRC.

Whether working together, as Alfred and Blanche did in the company's initial years, or memorably at odds, as they were at the zenith of their careers, the media-hungry Knopfs left a legacy of marketing savvy that equaled the critical acclaim received by their many prize-winning acquisitions. It would of course be grossly inaccurate to say that the content of Borzoi Books had no merit, or that the company's prestige was wholly manufactured from the colorful personalities of its publishers. In truth, the Knopfs' editorial choices often simply proved to be as wise as their marketing and packaging choices, setting in motion an infinite rhetorical exchange that further stoked the development of a prestigious identity, for the Knopfs themselves and for those who were professionally involved with them.

They launched their company in an era when old-guard publishers were dubious about an overt marriage of marketing and books. Henry Holt warned readers of this in a now-canonical polemic published in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

> During all this time of upheaval and chaos, the experiments that make up the miscellaneous publishing business, even in the calmest times, have grown much more expensive. Drumming has been introduced, and advertising has been quadrupled,—both in cost and volume,—dummies are sent out with the drummers, posters have become works of art, and each novel must have a fifty-dollar cover design, where a couple of dollars' worth of lettering used to fill the bill. Yet not as many books pay for themselves as did before. … Hence the mad quest of the golden seller, the mad payment to the man who has once produced it, and the mad advertising of doubtful books in the hope of creating the seller. Even temperately conducted, the miscellaneous publishing business—the kind that advertises and, to a large extent, the kind that drums—is an extremely hazardous business.[444]

[444] Henry Holt, "The Commercialization of Literature," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1905: 599.

Alfred Knopf excelled in this "hazardous business" because he avoided overspending in acquisitions and made scrupulous use of every potential advertising space in which he invested—including the space provided on the jackets and title pages of his own books. Moreover, the salesmanship decried by Holt was executed by the Knopfs in such a way that they were never identified as mere "drummers."

Today, the company is in the hands of publisher Ajai Singh "Sonny" Mehta, the soft-spoken, elusive native of India, a diplomat's son whose Oxbridge lilt was developed during his nearly two decades spent in England as a student and, eventually, as a prominent member of the British publishing scene. Paradoxically, Mehta is Alfred Knopf's antithesis, yet he embodies much of what the Anglophile Knopf wished to have been. Knopf advertisements are now devoid of a sensational publisher's voice, relying instead on sensational quotes from copious laudatory reviews. Though the ubiquitous colophon remains, interior book design receives little public attention, but provocative jackets designed by associate art director Chip Kidd are the subject of publicity. Recent bestsellers retain echoes of the company's transatlantic legacy: Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking,* originally published in 1961, experienced resurgence in 2009, quickly ranking #1 on the *New York Times* list after the release of the film *Julie and Julia*, while the Knopfs' affection for Scandinavian fiction is reflected in Swedish detective writer Stieg Larsson's detective novels, which have held fast to the *Times* bestseller list in hardcover and in Vintage trade paperback since the release of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in 2008.

Despite their modest late-career statements to the contrary, the Knopfs' most enduring legacy was that of a broad publishing stage that could easily accommodate both Child and Larsson in a manipulation of what Kenneth Burke referred to as "circumference":

> One has a great variety of circumferences to select as characterizations of a given agent's scene. For a man is not only in the situation peculiar to his era or to his particular place in that era (even if we could agree on the traits that characterize his era). He is also in a situation extending through centuries; he is in a "generically human" situation; and he is in a "universal" situation. Who is to say, once and for all, which of these circumferences is to be selected as the motivation of his act, insofar as the act is to be defined in scenic terms? … The contracting and expanding of scene is rooted in the very nature of linguistic placement. And a selection of circumference from among this range is in itself an act.[445]

Whether they were negotiating for the rights to Eunice Tietjens's poetry or a collection of satire by Mencken, the Knopfs created widely varied scenes in which to act as publishers. The traits of these disparate "circumferences" encircled one unified message, however: the promise of superiority. "THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK" proclaims the copyright page of today's Knopf releases, implying that a particular volume has received a unique "circumference" in receiving this designation. In reality, all Knopf books receive this designation, carrying only a manufactured implication of status. The meaning of "Borzoi Book" varies for each reader (if the reader even notices the designation at all) yet its unifying trait has served the Knopfs' purpose well: its distinctiveness lies in the fact that it was produced by publishers who consistently remind us of their own distinctiveness.

[445] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 84. First published in New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.

In a 1965 tribute to the Knopfs, writer and translator Harriet de Onís summarized the theatricality of the Borzoi's invention by claiming that "if Blanche and Alfred had chosen the stage as their profession they would have given the Lunts a run for their money. They play their parts as publishers up to the hilt." Onís recalls that when she was first interviewed by Blanche, she thought, "Here is Rosalind Russell in a role she might have dreamed of. Everything was perfect: setting, voice, attire." Yet Onís concludes her observations with a reversal: "On second thought perhaps what I have just said falls short of the truth. What seems a role is really their life, and they are only doing what comes naturally."[446]

Regardless of whether we cast it as Henry Holt's much feared "drumming" or as a naturally occurring rendition of powerful self-perceptions, the Knopfs' invention set a stage and refined a script that remains in performance, well past their lifetimes. They crafted a definition of prestigious publishing that was closely linked to their personal identities, but that definition has nonetheless been easily assumed by their descendants in the industry—perpetuated in the circles of authors, agents, designers, prize committee members, and professional-managerial publishing personnel (as Richard Ohmann might call them) who continue to associate Borzoi Books with superior standards set by "the greatest publisher this country has ever had."[447]

[446] Harriet de Onís, "The Man in the Sulka Shirt," in *A Portrait of a Publisher, 1915-1965,* vol. 2 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 204.
[447] "Knopf Is Eulogized as 'Greatest Publisher' in U.S.," *New York Times,* 16 August 1984: 1. PHN.

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ALS: Autograph letter signed
TLS: Typed letter signed
TCL: Typed carbon copy letter

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