

Rupert Hart-Davis Limited (London: 1946-)



Rupert Hart-Davis began working in the book trade in 1929 as an office boy for William Heinemann; in 1932 he became manager of the Book Society, the first of the modern book clubs. In 1933 he became a director at Jonathan Cape. Even after joining the Coldstream Guards in 1940 Hart-Davis remained on Cape's board of directors, and he was often able to take an active part in the running of the company. In late 1945 he wrote to Cape suggesting negotiable terms for his salary and other financial arrangements. Cape misunderstood Hart-Davis's letter, and his reply referred to Hart-Davis's suggestions as "unreasonable proposals" to which he "could not possibly agree, nor do they offer any basis for discussion: the gap is too impossibly wide. I very much regret it, but can only quote your own phrase to you: 'You've had it.'" Hart-Davis sold his Cape shares and used the money to set up his own publishing firm in 1946 in partnership with David Garnett, who had been a cofounder with Francis Meynell of the Nonesuch Press.

The new company began with an office at 53 Connaught Street. Some Cape authors moved to Hart-Davis; in 1949, for example, Hart-Davis published the second edition of Neville Cardus's *Australian Summer*; the first edition had been published by Cape in 1937. Nor was the traffic all one way; also in 1949 Cape published *The Essential Neville Cardus*, "selected with an introduction by Rupert Hart-Davis." According to Michael Howard, Cape and Hart-Davis never went out of their way to meet after the breach, but at least



Rupert Hart-Davis

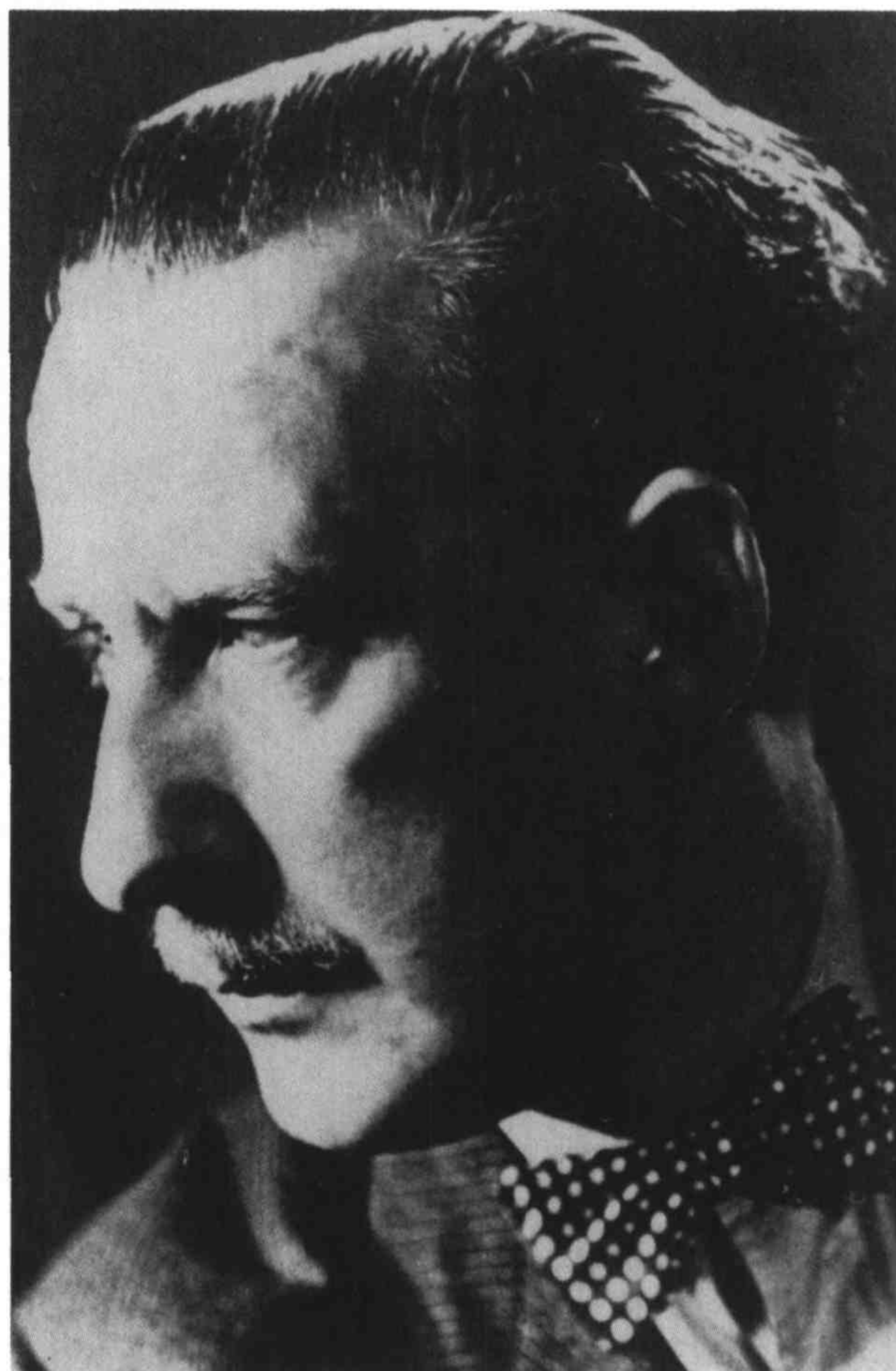
there was profitable communication between the two businesses.

Early Hart-Davis successes included Eric Linklater's *Sealskin Trousers and Other Stories*

(1947) and Stephen Potter's *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship* (1947); the latter became one of the classics of English humorous writing and was followed by Potter's *Lifemanship* (1950), *One-upmanship* (1952), and *Supermanship* (1958). An interest in Henry James became apparent from the start with the publication in 1946 of *Fourteen Stories*, edited by Garnett. Over the years reprints of James's work and critical works about him appeared regularly. Similar publications by and about Max Beerbohm resulted from Hart-Davis's personal interest in Beerbohm.

Two long-running series were started: The Mariner's Library of books concerned with sailing began in 1949, and The Reynard Library in 1950. The Reynard Library consisted of volumes containing selections from the work of various authors such as *Johnson: Prose and Poetry* (1950), edited by Mona Wilson, and *Memoirs of Laurence Sterne; The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy; A Sentimental Journey* (1951), edited by Douglas Grant; the books were well designed and printed, with wood engravings by Reynolds Stone. The title of the series was a reference to the firm's symbol of a fox, designed by Stone again, which was in turn a reference to Garnett's successful first publication under his own name, *Lady into Fox*, published by Chatto and Windus in 1922.

In 1951 the company moved to 36 Soho Square. Hart-Davis had an ability to find well-written books that sold well, sometimes exceptionally well; such works included J. H. Williams's *Elephant Bill* (1950), Alistair Cooke's *A Generation on Trial* (1950) and *Letters from America* (1953); Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* (1952) and *Fahrenheit 451* (1954); Edward Young's *One of Our Submarines* (1952); Heinrich Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet* (1953); and Gerald Durrell's *The Bafut Beagles* (1954), *My Family and Other Animals* (1956), *The Drunken Forest* (1956), and *A Zoo in My Luggage* (1960). At the same time as these successful popular titles were appearing, poetry and academic books were also being published. The poets included Charles Causley, Andrew Young, Phoebe Hesketh, Ronald Duncan, R. S. Thomas, W. S. Merwin, and F. T. Prince. Academic publications included Leslie Hotson's *Shakespeare's Motley* (1952), *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (1954), *Shakespeare's Wooden O* (1959), and *Mr. W. H.* (1964); Humphry House's *Coleridge* (1953) and *Aristotle's Poetics* (1956); and Leon Edel's editions of James's works. Bibliographical works included John Carter's *ABC For Book-Collectors* (1952) and



Hart-Davis in later years

Books and Book-Collectors (1956) and the Soho Bibliographies Series, which began in 1951 with Alan Wade's *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*.

The company had a commitment to good design, not just in the Reynard Library but in all its publications. Garnett's experience with the Nonesuch Press must have been an important influence; in addition, Young, the author of *One of Our Submarines*, was a book designer employed by Hart-Davis who later became a director of the book-design company Rainbird Limited.

Rupert Hart-Davis Limited was a small organization, and despite its string of successful titles (Hart-Davis is reported as claiming that it was *because* of the successful titles) the firm became overextended and suffered from a lack of capital. Young resigned in 1955, and the following year the company was bought by the Heinemann Group. The publishing policy remained unchanged under Heinemann, and the Hart-Davis imprint was allowed its independence. Authors such as Bradbury, Durrell, Hotson, and Williams stayed with the firm; the established series contin-

ued, as did the James and Beerbohm books. New authors such as Claude Cockburn and Diana Cooper were added to the list, and an important translation by Michael Meyer of the works of Henrik Ibsen was begun. Hart-Davis himself edited *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (1962).

But the company was still languishing, and in 1962 it was acquired by the American publisher Harcourt, Brace and World. Harcourt, Brace and World had also acquired another British firm, Adlard Coles, which specialized in books about sailing; perhaps it was thought that Hart-Davis's Mariner's Library would supplement the Adlard Coles list. In any case, American ownership of Hart-Davis was short-lived. The Granada Group, which consisted of MacGibbon and Kee, Staples Press, and Arco, bought both Hart-Davis and Adlard Coles from Harcourt, Brace and World in 1963. Rupert Hart-Davis resigned the next year and left publishing to devote himself to writing and editing. At first the Hart-Davis imprint continued separately under Granada; new authors included Seán O'Faoláin, with *I Remember! I Remember!* (1962) and *Vive Moi* (1965), and Michael Moorcock, with *The Time Dweller* (1969). In 1967 the Hart-Davis office was moved to 1-3 Upper James Street.

The Granada Group acquired Panther Books and Mayflower in 1970 and Crosby-Lockwood in 1972. The general publishing division became known as Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Limited, involving some loss of independence for the two merged imprints. The Hart-Davis element became less and less distinguishable.

In 1983 the Hart-Davis imprint was bought by William Collins and became part of Grafton Books. Rupert Hart-Davis Limited still exists as a registered company, but it has never traded since going to Collins, and it seems unlikely that it ever will. The company is typical of many publishers in the second half of the twentieth century which have been absorbed into the conglomerates. From its foundation to at least 1956 it was the epitome of small British publishers, independently controlled by a few enthusiasts.

Reference:

Michael S. Howard, *Jonathan Cape, Publisher* (London: Cape, 1971).

—John R. Turner

Harvill Press Limited

(London: 1946-1955)

Collins Harvill

(London: 1955-)

The Harvill Press was founded early in 1946 by Manya Harari and Marjorie Villiers, taking its name from a conflation of their surnames. Harari had worked on the *Dublin Review* and had founded the *Changing Years*; Villiers had written books. Paper was still being rationed, but the Harvill Press succeeded in having a supply allocated to it. The firm's starting capital was two thousand pounds.

The aims of the founders of the Harvill Press were to build bridges between people of different nationalities and religions, to help in the

restoration of the international cultural relations which had been cut off during the war, and to publish translations from French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. Both were Catholics, and they were to publish many books—both religious and secular—by Catholics. They took over the publication of the *Changing Years* for about two years; the coeditor of the *Changing Years*, a leading Catholic layman, Bernard Wall, was one of Harvill's most influential advisers. Another Catholic adviser was Alec Dru, who brought important German authors to the company. Through the critic

and translator Max Hayward the press became particularly well known for contemporary Russian literature in translation. Other sources of advice included René Hague and Fred Davey of the Harvill Press's printers, Hague, Gill and Davey; Davey eventually went to work for Harvill as production manager.

One of Harvill's leading authors was Ylla, whose photographic studies of animals joined books on cookery, gardening, and holiday-making in helping Harvill to stay afloat and to publish the books for which it had been founded. Probably the press's most important publication during its ten years of independence was Roy Campbell's translation of *The Poems of St. John of the Cross* (1951). Those years also saw the publication of English translations of works of many leading European theologians, philosophers, and scholars—including Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Guitton, Charles Péguy, Julien Green, Mircea Eliade, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Arnold van Haecker, Michael Hamburger, Le Corbusier, Patrice de la Tour du Pin, G. S. Fra-

ser, George Villiers, Tatiana Tolstoy, and Victor White—and political works on Kurdistan, Jordan, and Turkey.

The Catholic artist David Jones drew a device for use on the press's title pages, jackets, and publicity materials, but it was seldom used. Other artists who illustrated Harvill Press books included Osbert Lancaster, John O'Connor, and the cartoonist Anton.

In 1955 the Harvill Press, which was short on capital, was acquired by the firm of William Collins. Collins allowed the Harvill Press to retain its editorial independence. In 1958 the Harvill Press published Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, translated by Hayward and Harari. Harari died in 1969. Collins Harvill's address is 8 Grafton Street.

Reference:

Manya Harari, *Memoirs, 1906-1969* (London: Harvill Press, 1972).

—John Trevitt

"Rupert Hart-Davis Limited." British Literary Publishing Houses, 1881-1965, edited by Jonathan Rose and Patricia Anderson, vol. 112, Gale, 1991, pp. 147-149. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 112. Gale Literature: Dictionary of Literary Biography, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/GFKWCW701583703/DLBC?u=owu&sid=DLBC&xid=ffba7fe8>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2020.