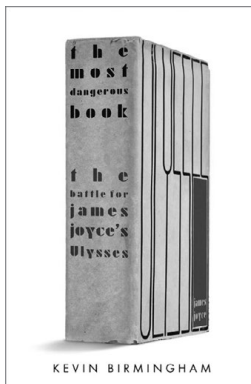


class issues, which at some point excluded her parents from the “in” crowd. The claim is similar to those for artists featured in previous volumes, and it may indeed be the case. On the other hand, I wonder if the answer might be simpler, less conspiratorial: that for a couple of generations, B.C. was blessed with more artistic genius than we could handle or appreciate.

~ REVIEWED BY PHYLLIS REEVE

The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce’s Ulysses

BY KEVIN BIRMINGHAM
(PENGUIN, 2014, \$34.95)



WHILE FACT-CHECKING for this review, I stumbled upon a report of the demise of Imprimerie Darantière. Established in 1870, the distinguished French printer has fallen victim to 21st-century economic realities.

On June 27, 2014, Michel Bachelard, mayor of Quetigny in Dijon, where Darantière was based, issued an emotional press release expressing his sadness at learning of the judicial liquidation of one of the area’s “emblematic” business enterprises. He lamented this most recent blow to the label “made in France” and paid tribute to Darantière’s stature as printer of Gallimard’s prestigious “Pleiade” collection, whose catalogue contains “the greatest works of our literary heritage and world philosophy” (translation mine). The closure is, said Bachelard, “une page douloureuse de l’histoire économique de Quetigny.”

It is also a painful page in cultural history, and far beyond the Quetigny city limits. Among Darantière’s many productions have been fine editions of works by Émile Zola, Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Gertrude Stein, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and the Imagist poets, as well as issues of *The Little Review*, the magazine in which appeared the first serial installments of *Ulysses*.

In 1922 Darantière also printed the first edition of the complete *Ulysses*, published by Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company of Paris. The typesetters assembled this monstrous book in a foreign language “by hand, one letter at a time,” while the author returned page proofs covered with new material right up until the moment of publication; this is just one of the episodes in Kevin Birmingham’s “biography” of James Joyce’s novel.

After printing came the no less frustrating and equally adventurous attempts at distribution in the face of police raids and courtroom dramas. I appreciate knowing that Ernest Hemingway facilitated the smuggling of *Ulysses* into Canada from the U.S.

Birmingham’s research focuses on “twentieth-century fiction and culture, literary obscenity and the avant-garde.” This, his first book, provides all that and more. It might have been a chronology of the technical, political and moral challenges facing attempts to publish literary modernism’s greatest book, but because Birmingham can’t bear to leave anything out, *The Most Dangerous Book* becomes a racy account of publishing and printing in the first half of the 20th century. It features biographical tangents on interesting people, some more relevant than others, from poets such as Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot to publishers, including the aforementioned Sylvia Beach and Bennett Cerf, of Random House. Policemen, postmasters and philanthropic lawyers also get their due.

The dolorous news of Darantière’s passing makes Birmingham’s lively and inclusive book all the more valuable as a contribution to the history of books and the varied, unexpected individuals who make them possible.

~ REVIEWED BY PHYLLIS REEVE