

1925–1927

**“Damn His Impertinence. Bloody Crook”:
Roth Publishes Joyce**

The infamous *Ulysses* excerpts of 1926 and 1927 established for Samuel Roth a uniquely degraded status within the literary profession. His business tactics were rash and full of chutzpah. They set off a cascade of events immersing Joyce’s publishers, lawyers, newspaper editors, and journalists writing in the *New York Post*, *The Nation*, *transition*, and *The New Statesman*. Hard facts flowed headlong together on both sides with panic at lost revenue and self-serving notions of High Art versus mercenary motives for exploiting prurience. One of the most discordant noises in the maelstrom was Roth’s own outrage. “Hardy” was Herbert Gorman’s way of putting it; his “hide was apparently that of a rhinoceros.”¹ Gorman was Joyce’s first biographer, another Roth friend turned enemy. Only two years after he had launched his *Two Worlds* quarterly Little Magazine, Roth found himself a pariah to whom both sexually explicit avant-garde writers and conservative moral authorities directed terms such as “scoundrel,” “rat,” “smut monger,” “pirate,” and “pornographer.”

**Roth’s *Two Worlds* Enterprise Begins; Joyce’s “Work in Progress”
(1921–1925)**

Roth wanted to launch what he hoped would become the first magazine in his publishing “empire” with a sensation. He thought somehow he could publish entire novels, starting with *Ulysses*, in a single issue (Roth’s daughter makes the point that when he first considered printing *Ulysses* in one issue, he probably had not seen Sylvia Beach’s 732-page edition).² Advertising a complete novel,

TWO WORLDS
A LITERARY QUARTERLY
EDITED BY SAMUEL ROTH

New York May
10th 1922

Dear James Joyce-

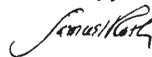
If you will read the prospectus at the right of this note you'll get something of an idea of the sort of magazine *Two Worlds* is to be. Among other things we shall try to publish a novel complete in every issue - I already have one very fine one in view. But if possible I would like to begin the series with a novel by you. On its appearance in my first issue I shall send you an advance royalty of one hundred dollars and later fifteen percent on the sales of the issue.

If you have not a novel on hand let us see anything you do have - a play, a story or an essay.

Also, I would like a copy of *Ulysses* for review - even if I have to pay for it, as I shall be glad to if there are no more review copies left. I would like to devote a special article to it in the first number, so please turn this request over to whoever has charge of such matters. I wish you would sign the copy you send to me.

And let me hear from you very soon.

Faithfully,



Several years ago Mr. George Moore prefaced a new book with the announcement that, due to the difficulties his work was continually encountering in the moral business of publication, he would henceforth issue all his books privately. He felt certain, he wrote, that his readers would eventually come to the conclusion already reached by himself that his only alternative was not to publish at all.

The reception accorded by his readers to Mr. Moore's subsequent books, published privately and at a substantial price, encourages the hope that there is among readers of English an understanding of the choice that at least once in a lifetime confronts the conscientious writer in these English countries. In the wake of Mr. Moore in his new venture have followed other contemporary writers, notably Mr. James Joyce.

The privately printed book has never been adequately appraised. Like *Anonymous*, it is without a biographer. It is not always had and it has been very good. At its dullest it is not as distasteful to me as the hard boiled, carefully controversial product which backs in the assurance of a publisher's trade mark. So it came about that in the midst of a discussion of the programme of the new quarterly I made the suggestion afterwards adopted that *Two Worlds* be limited to a certain number of copies and issued only to subscribers.

The advantages of private publication to honest writing having been made apparent it was asked: but why make it a magazine? It is very important, I explained, that *Two Worlds* be a magazine. A magazine differs from a book in several important ways. It is, among other things, closer to the original manuscript. A book appears fully armed out of the advertising columns of a publisher. A magazine is written. Be it good or bad, a book is accepted as something accomplished, beyond revision. The tradition of the magazine is alive with the hazard that underlies the firmness of the printed word. It is fitting that a living writer, especially a young one, should publish in a magazine. The only excuse for his not doing so is that there is no magazine to take his work. That sometimes happens.

Latterly, the only magazine ready to print the best being written in English by contemporary writers has been *The Little Review*, which Mr. Ezra Pound helped to make illustrious. But *The Little Review*, always under the surveillance of the censors of the living word, has often had to disappear from view. So that the grand enterprise of its career, the printing of *Ulysses* (which *Two Worlds*, had it been in the field, would simply have included in one issue) stumbled through several years only half way towards completion. However, *Two Worlds* is not designed to take the place of any periodical. Besides doing its share in the work of stringing out the grain from the chaff where the chaff is plentiful it will serve established writers as the organ of their opinion and as a refuge from their persecutor.

Two Worlds will appear quarterly - on the fifteenth of every September, December, March and June. It will be attractively printed and bound, and will have about two hundred pages. Every issue will contain a complete novel, a play, a short story, verse, and reviews of the books and plays of the period. Seven hundred and fifty copies will be printed and numbered, seven hundred to sell at one dollar and a half a copy, and the first fifty, to be signed by the leading contributors, at three dollars each.

Figure 9. Roth's letter to Joyce, May 10, 1922. Sylvia Beach Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. By permission of Fred Dennis.

not to mention one by Joyce, would be a good way of increasing circulation. The single-issue gambit would also be enticing to a writer, even if the logistics, necessarily, were unclear. Roth's first contact with Joyce, a February 12, 1921, letter, contained the tentative query, "Why is *Ulysses* not yet in book form?"³ The publisher of *The Egoist*, Harriet Weaver, wrote lawyer and Joyce's friend John Quinn in September 1921 that she had twice refused Roth's request to

publish it.⁴ As bizarre as his plan to publish a new novel in each issue seemed, he did have one “in view,” according to a prospectus printed in column form in the right quarter of his *Two Worlds* letterhead. The work was the eighth volume in Dorothy Richardson’s “Pilgrimage” series.⁵ By 1926, another six were certain, according to him, composing “the tremendous cycle of David Zorn [Samuel Roth].”⁶ Possibly, Roth floated this offer to many writers, Joyce being only one. He may have been planning to ask a writer, as the magazine went to press, if, in the interest of space, he or she would consider abridging.⁷

Roth’s May 10, 1922, letter, asking Joyce for “a novel [*Ulysses*] by you,” was typed on his ingenious *Two Worlds* letterhead. (The *Revue des Deux Mondes*, [1829 to date] was a very influential Paris journal.) At this time he had no money to publish this subscription magazine. He hoped to get sufficient funds more quickly than he was able to. There is no trace of a permission letter from Pound, which Roth asserted was dated July 3, 1922. That missing letter may have suggested *Ulysses* as the featured work in the first issue of *Two Worlds*. We do have one dated the next day. In it, Pound stated, “I wrote yesterday, this is epistle II.”⁸ It may be that Pound did suggest Roth begin his quarterly with excerpts from *Ulysses* and “Work in Progress” as well.⁹ But even if that missing July 3 letter were found, three years is a long time to assume that an agent will not have changed his mind about permission. In not informing Pound and Joyce in 1925 that the first issue of *Two Worlds* would come out presently, Roth was churlishly inconsiderate.

The 1921 conviction of Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, the editors of *The Little Review*, for publishing excerpts from *Ulysses*¹⁰ factored into Roth’s decision not to begin *Two Worlds* in 1922. Further contributing to the delay were Roth’s lack of money and a letter from Henry Seidel Canby, the *New York Post*’s literary editor, warning him off. “To publish your advertisement which offers the whole of *Ulysses*,” said Canby, “would be to hand over, in so many words, the whole affair to Mr Sumner.”¹¹ John Saxton Sumner was secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and the lawyer who had successfully prosecuted *The Little Review* for the “obscene” excerpt from the “Nausicaa” episode, which describes Bloom masturbating as he watches Gertie MacDowell lean back to watch fireworks. In the early 1920s, Sumner’s power to interdict literature about sex, even if devoid of explicit description and “vulgarisms,” was as strong as his power to impound underground pornographic pamphlets, photos, novelties, and prophylactics.

Realizing that the conviction of *The Little Review* made publication of *Ulysses* in the early 1920s quixotic (and filing away until later the recognition that it also compromised chances for American copyright of the novel),

Roth therefore published, with permission and with at first delayed payment, excerpts from “Work in Progress” in *Two Worlds* (although of course the complete work, *Finnegans Wake*, had not yet appeared) when it began publication in 1925. He had finally accumulated the necessary capital, with the success of the English Institute he began on Houston Street to teach English to immigrants.

Roth called his venture “an experiment in magazine publishing,” explaining that a magazine, unlike a book, lets the reader see the writer’s work as it develops. Ford Madox Ford, in accepting a contributing editorship, applauded this idea as one he had not previously realized was “quite true.”¹² The idea of private subscription Roth attributes to the freedom that George Moore had in mind when he said he would publish his books privately because of difficulties he had had “in the moral business of publication.” Roth wrote Cabell, Ford, Eliot, Huxley, Symonds, Santayana, and H.D., as well as Joyce, for contributions. He wanted the contributors to sign personally fifty copies, according to the 1922 letterhead (several contributors who lived outside New York wondered how that would be possible). Frequent revision of his letterhead prospectus column allowed the editor to publicize his efforts for prospective authors, advertisers, and agents. The prospectus on the letter dated December 2, 1926, stated that *Two Worlds* would become a collector’s item, an “investment” as well as a “pleasure,” which has already at “book sales” fetched more than the published price. The wording of at least one of these prospectus columns would cause Roth problems in the controversy to follow.

The plan for *Two Worlds* stressed the freedom of the writer, but as Adelaide Kugel said, her father wanted to publish “daring and erotic” pieces. As every publisher knew in the early 1920s, before the younger ones had begun to challenge Sumner’s power to force expurgations or expensive obscenity cases, private printing was the way to handle what the anti-vice societies called “the virulence of sex.” If the book were only available by subscription, it would not fall into the hands of people susceptible to being “corrupted.” In 1920, John Quinn told Joyce that he had advised Ben Huebsch (before the conviction of *The Little Review*) to publish *Ulysses* privately at \$8 a copy (over \$100 today). It would be attractively printed, not for sale in stores, and the writer would collect a much larger royalty than with a trade edition. He referred, as did Roth, to George Moore’s *Storyteller’s Holiday*.¹³

Advertising in several leading literary magazines, including the *Times* (London) *Literary Supplement* (where Radclyffe Hall found a coupon and replied with a subscription),¹⁴ Roth realized his goal of 450 subscribers.¹⁵ This made it possible for him to pay his contributors to his first issue. He paid as

little as he could: \$25 to all but Joyce, who (eventually) received \$50. But that was standard practice with literary journals.

Roth's prospectus capitalized on both the investment and the experimental literary value of *Two Worlds*. A finely printed work reflected a level of taste that raised the "risqueness, gaiety" from the indecent to the artistic. Those responsible for the production and distribution of "gallantiana" in the 1920s, whether unbarbered or "abridged," often profited from the aristocratic refinement the "gallant" experience embodied. The category of gallant literature was not a genre but rather a convenient way of marketing sexually focused literature, including that from the past and in the public domain. Much more so than the much later category "soft core," gallantiana included a lot of serious writing. *Two Worlds* contained a fair amount of this: Pierre Louys, Oscar Wilde, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Twain (1601), Mather's translations from *The Arabian Nights*, and shorter contemporary works that "could not be printed in the ordinary commercial magazine."¹⁶ Even after Roth printed the *Ulysses* installments, Pound admitted that Roth started out "not merely as a man on the make but . . . also to rebel against and satirize something more vile than any possible act of an individual."¹⁷ That would be the vast venality and smug morality of American censorship.

In his letterhead's marginal prospectus, Roth presented *Two Worlds* as a successor of *The Little Review*, the recently adopted motto of which was "the advancing point toward which the 'advance guard' is always advancing."¹⁸ Conveniently, Roth did not mention the score of American Little Magazines with limited resources and a readership with literary and/or political enthusiasms. They flourished in the 1910s and after the war: Joseph Kling's *The Pagan*, *The Liberator* (which as a leftist political publication had a large number of readers and a belligerent attitude toward the censors, as did *The New Masses*), the eclectic *Poetry*, or the well-reputed *Contemporary Verse*. The goals of these magazines' editors and the scope of their interest in experimental forms were far in advance of those of *Two Worlds*. Roth featured a lot of material old enough to be in the public domain. Meanwhile, *The Little Review* had presented to its readers Vachel Lindsay, Djuna Barnes, Witter Bynner, Gertrude Stein, Malcolm Cowley, Edger Lee Masters, Yeats, Huxley, Dorothy Richardson, and H.D.¹⁹

Joyce had accepted \$200, \$50 apiece for four selections. That Pound had given Roth permission to publish this "new work [in progress]" while he was Joyce's literary agent is probable, three years before *Two Worlds* appeared. But Sylvia Beach, in 1925 Joyce's agent, denied that any proper permission had been forthcoming.²⁰ Did she mean she denied him permission? She could not

have flatly denied his request if Joyce did not agree. In a March 5, 1926, letter to Weaver, who had tried to get excerpts from *Ulysses* included in *The Egoist*, Joyce writes that he had planned to do some revising of a segment of the Shem and Shaun chapters “for Mr. Roth” but was too tired to do so. Richard Ellmann annotates this statement by acknowledging that “a letter from Pound suggests that Joyce had made an arrangement of some sort with Samuel Roth.”²¹ Joyce may have heard positive evaluations from Pound, or perhaps H.D. or George Moore, who met Roth or communicated with him in London. Perhaps, too, the Savoy Hotel stationery Roth used to write letters upon arriving in London impressed some Joyce acquaintances, if not Pound himself.

No evidence shows that Roth paid in advance, as he should have. Beach’s December 3, 1925, letter, in response to one of Roth’s, upbraids him for publishing excerpts from “Work in Progress” without permission.²² A month passed after her December letter before he sent a check for \$100 for the first two “Work in Progress” episodes, dated January 2, 1926 (on the back Joyce has written “pay to an order of Sylvia Beach”).²³ Such a delay was bad business even for a beginning editor, and Roth, in addition to being short of funds, was a bad bookkeeper as well as an inexperienced publisher. In any event, Joyce took the money when it was, tardily, paid for the first two episodes, and there is now good evidence that Roth did pay with dispatch for the other two.²⁴ The agreement for the “Work in Progress” selections was made in 1922. At the time, Roth invited Pound, Ford, and Arthur Symonds to be *Two Worlds’* contributing editors. All three agreed, Pound and Ford suggesting several young writers. A new literary publication presents to established men of letters an opportunity to cement their status and influence by getting promising younger writers’ works before the public. Roth seemed at that point industrious and even financially sound.

Roth’s “Magazine Empire” Expands; the *Ulysses* Excerpts (1926)

In April 1926, Roth launched a second subscription publication, *Casanova Jr.’s Tales*. He changed the rather puerile title to *Secret Memoirs of Gallant Men and Fair Women* for volume 2. Each issue of volume 1 contained lengthy segments of Gertrude Beasley’s memoir of her west Texas upbringing, *My First Thirty Years*. Irresistible were Beasley’s brooding, detailed descriptions of the violence, child abuse, bestiality, and incest in her large family and her vivid delineations of the regional dialect, outhouse graffiti, landscape, architecture, and character types. H. L. Mencken admired the book and noted that it could never be published in America. That partly explains its appearance in a Roth