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An Interview with Barney Rosset

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Syracuse University

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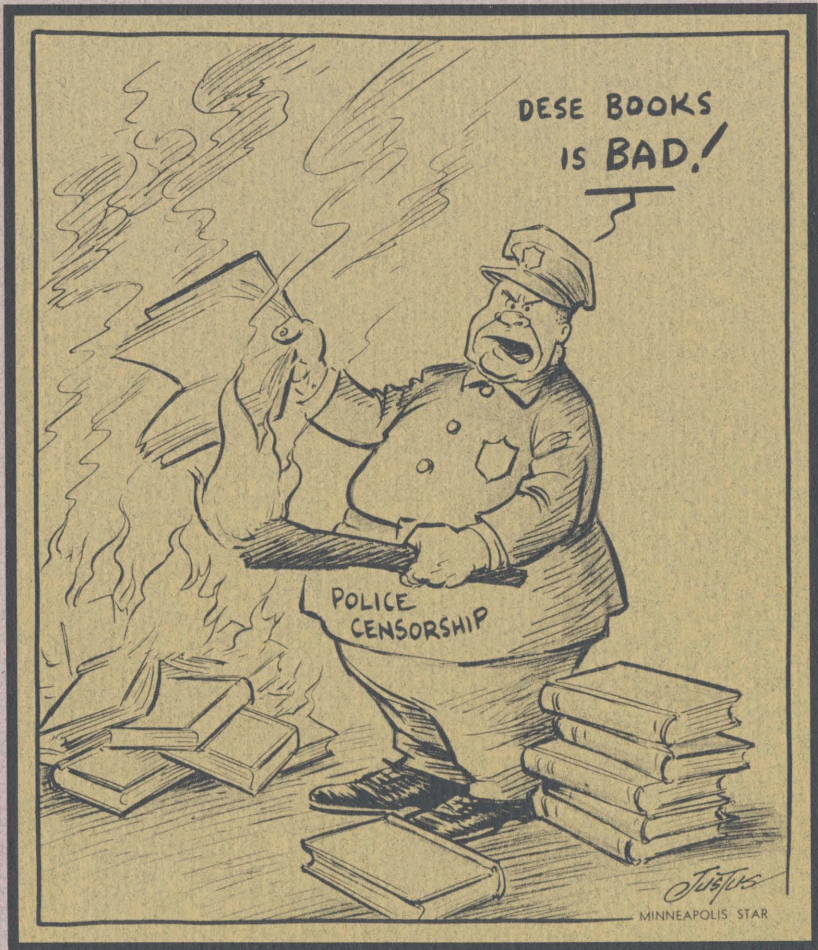
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*This issue is dedicated with gratitude and affection
to Gwen G. Robinson*

An Interview with Barney Rosset

BY MARY BETH HINTON

THIS WAS Barney Rosset's Grove Press:

This cheap, exploitative, radical, avant-garde, courageous, daring, pandering, freedom-loving, woman-debasing, stupid, trashy, noble, tight-fisted, profligate press managed, almost always, to provoke or charm some group or other.

Gilbert Sorrentino¹

It was Grove Press, then, that brought to national prominence the art and artists of the counterculture, of the post-World War II disillusionment in Europe and America. . . . [It had] a broad-based avant-gardism, a general post-war dissatisfaction with the status quo, a militant anti-authoritarianism, and an unwavering commitment to absolute freedom of expression in speech, print and finally film.

S. E. Gontarski²

Because of the liberating effect of Grove Press, Inc., on the literary trade, especially book distribution, Barney Rosset, as its chairman and president, has contributed an important chapter to the history of American publishing.

*Current Biography*³

The phenomenon known as Grove Press began in 1952 when Barney Rosset bought the small Manhattan publishing venture. It ended in 1985 when Grove was sold to Ann Getty.⁴

1. S. E. Gontarski, "Working at Grove: An Interview with Gilbert Sorrentino", *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10 (Fall 1990): 105.

2. S. E. Gontarski, "Dionysus in Publishing: Barney Rosset, Grove Press, and the Making of a Countercanon", in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10 (Fall 1990): 8-9.

3. Charles Moritz, ed., *Current Biography Yearbook* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1972), 375.

4. After the sale Rosset continued to function as CEO of Grove for about a

On the sixth floor of Bird Library, in the closed stacks, a huge room with row upon row of tall shelves full of boxes, 775 linear feet of Grove Press archives are preserved. They started arriving here in the early 1960s because, as Barney Rosset explained, Syracuse University asked for them. Kathleen Manwaring, who has tended the Grove archives since 1985, gave me a tour.

There was a whole range of nothing but Grove Press manuscripts, authored by Samuel Beckett, Eric Berne, William S. Burroughs, Marguerite Duras, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, Nat Hentoff, Eugene Ionesco, Jack Kerouac, Pablo Neruda, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Alan Watts, and many others. Several large boxes contained transcripts of the censorship trials of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, and the film "I Am Curious (Yellow)". Manwaring commented, "One tends to think of Grove in connection with censorship, but they had a lot of South American, African, and Asian, as well as European writers. They translated into English things that we still wouldn't know about but for them. They published in lots of areas: pop culture, psychology, cookbooks." There were endless boxes of production records and correspondence between authors and editors, especially Donald Allen, Fred Jordan, Judith Schmidt, and Richard Seaver. One long shelf was filled with a complete run of the *Evergreen Review*. "That", Manwaring explained, "was the magazine they produced between 1957 and 1973 to give people a taste of what Grove was publishing, such as the California Beat writers. It featured artwork and photography as well as writing." Standing amidst the archives one can feel the world-changing power that Grove Press wielded in a never-to-be-repeated era—call it the magic that clings to culturally significant artifacts.⁵

year. Then, according to Rosset, Wheatland Corporation (owned by Ann Getty and George Weidenfeld) "in effect discharged me. They made it impossible for me to stay." A few months later Rosset sued the owners of Wheatland for breach of contract and editorial interference. The suit was settled out of court.

5. Phillip Larkin wrote, "All literary manuscripts have two kinds of value: what might be called the magical value and the meaningful value. The magical value is the older and more universal: this is the paper he wrote on, these are the words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this miraculous combina-

On 15 December 1992 I interviewed Barney Rosset in his loft in Greenwich Village. Having traced his street address to a grim building with multiple locks, I announced my arrival through the intercom. Then I ascended three flights of stairs and came to a formidable iron gate that guarded the last flight and the entrance to Rosset's apartment: a spacious and colorful haven. In an area to the right a woman sat at a computer. A young man rushed by carrying papers (I learned that he was Rosset's son Beckett, named after Samuel Beckett). Both were working for Blue Moon Books, Rosset's post-Grove publishing company. To the left, through a beaded curtain, was a small room mostly filled by a pool table. The walls were lined with copies of all the books Grove Press had published. On the other side of the curtain, in a comfortable sitting area, we talked. I could see that Barney Rosset was no staid businessman, but a man who often giggles as his words tumble out, a man who sits lightly as though at any moment he might occupy another perch.

MBH: When you spoke to the Syracuse University Library Associates in November 1990 you mentioned a recurring dream, which, according to the transcript of your talk, goes as follows: "I'm in a circus-like theater where there is a large audience and I am a great trapeze artist about to perform, yet I have no memory of ever having seen a trapeze closely, let alone ever having been on one. I can only think that since I've been asked to perform, I must know how to do it. The dream always ends just as I'm about to leap out and grab the swing." Grove Press would never have become what it was had you not been willing to take risks—such as losing the family fortune and going to jail. What made you willing to take these risks?

BR: The background I came from was attuned to that. I came from Chicago. I grew up in the 1930s, the Depression, which was bad for people, and I was aware of it. But my father gave me a great deal of self-confidence. He never showed that he was in trouble. So I had a feeling of omnipotence—coupled with total weakness.

tion". Quoted from "A Neglected Responsibility: Contemporary Literary Manuscripts", in *Required Writing* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 99.

I went to a very, very progressive school for its time, the Francis Parker School, which was extraordinarily important in my life. That was right at the period of the greatest flourishing of progressive education—"progressive" wasn't a swear word yet. Chicago was international, and we had teachers from Austria, Germany, and other countries who were refugees. At Francis Parker you didn't get grades. We were free souls, but, in a way, very naive. We were free to learn a lot. Things like student government really mattered, along with the usual high school things such as money. So I had a mixed kind of background that encouraged risk. There always seemed to be a reserve left to call upon—a reserve of good will, good advice, admiration, and even money.

In 1940 I went to college at Swarthmore because I thought it was near Vassar. A girl I loved very dearly was going to Vassar, and I chose Swarthmore so that I could visit her. But I discovered to my distress that not only were the two schools not near each other, but at Swarthmore you weren't allowed to own an automobile. I had owned a car since I was fourteen! Furthermore, Swarthmore was a good school, and you were supposed to study there. My philosophy teacher, who I thought would love me, had a sister who had gone to my school in Chicago. He said two things about me. One was that when I snored in class it disturbed the other students. He couldn't really put up with that. And on my term paper he said after reading it that he was discouraged with progressive education.

At Swarthmore I read Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*—not because of the school itself but because the school was near New York City where I bought the [then banned] book at the Gotham Book Mart. Who could stay at a place like Swarthmore after reading *Tropic of Cancer*? I ran away during the first year. (I was good at real running, too. I was the best member of the freshman cross-country team.) I decided that one thing I wanted to do was leave the country and join Henry Miller wherever he was. I headed for Mexico. I didn't make it because the car broke down and—I was with another fellow—we ran out of money. I had to retreat back to Swarthmore. They had a rule that you would automatically flunk a course if you missed two classes—and I'd missed weeks. They said that since nobody had ever done this before, they'd forget that it

happened and let me stay. I didn't really appreciate their response at the time. I should have, but I didn't. With my freewheeling background I thought I could do anything, but I wasn't really equipped to do anything. So that's where the trapeze came in.

MBH: What was your worst fall?

BR: The dismissal from Grove Press by the Gettys.

MBH: With your high school and college experiences in mind, how would you describe a good education?

BR: I think it would be like Swarthmore in some ways. There they did study, and they did learn something, and I think that's good. On the other hand, what we had at Parker was also good. And some people learned a lot there. Some very successful people, especially some very good scientists, came out of my group. But people who were not too well organized to begin with didn't do as well. So I'd say a good education would be somewhere in the middle.

I joined the army, finally, to escape from college, though I did it partially under the guise of patriotism—I truly did consider myself to be a committed anti-fascist. I was one of those people whom my government labeled as “premature anti-fascists”. By then my girlfriend had moved back to Chicago. After the war I went to the University of Chicago, briefly, where Hutchins [the president] said, “If all people want is a degree, I'll give them one, quickly”. Which he did in my case. I got a two-year degree. But the atmosphere was so different with the GI Bill and so on. People were serious. There I did study. But it so happened I wanted to get out of there and come to New York.

MBH: In another section of the Library Associates transcript, you talk about learning to choose authors: “You might not know what's going to fly into your web, but you put it where you think there might be flies. If you leave your web out long enough, you might have the option to pick only those flies that please you, and eventually you can discern a pattern or similarity in the flies you choose, and finally you accidentally learn to choose wisely.” How have you gotten wiser in making those kinds of choices?

BR: I didn't mean to imply that I'd gotten wiser. I don't think that at all. Amongst the first people I chose were Samuel Beckett and Ionesco, and I never got any better certainly. I reached an early peak. Although other people were already publishing Faulkner and Hemingway, I knew there were other authors out there somewhat like them. Many of the ones I published were not American. I found people like Beckett, and that caught the attention of young Americans—people like Kerouac and Ginsberg.

I don't think of Henry Miller as an American. He was American, but the Americans wouldn't accept him. I went naturally toward him. In order to get to Miller I thought it would be a good idea to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which I admired. I wasn't fanatic about it, as a matter of fact. I thought in certain ways it was a sort of set piece. It presented a philosophy in a rigid way—the idea of the industrial society destroying the free man. I wasn't even sure I agreed with it. But it was a means to an end. Miller was thought of as a no-good scoundrel. But D. H. Lawrence, despite everything, had reached a certain acceptability. If he wasn't acceptable, then Miller's chances were very slim. So the first thing was to build a foundation with Lawrence. Actually I did that, exactly and deliberately.⁶

In those days I was going to the New School for Social Research. I finally got a bachelor's degree. I met some wonderful people there like Wallace Fowlie, and I became aware of people like Proust and Beckett. It was in the air. When I read a little of Beckett I felt, There's a kindred spirit. That's another thing that's a little like the trapeze; it's also like being an amoeba: where there's an opening you go. I was a football player, a rather small one. I didn't try running into people; I tried to run where they weren't.

I had lived in France with Joan [Mitchell].⁷ My background because of her was with painters. When we returned from France I

6. Rosset recommends Raymond Caffrey's account in "Lady Chatterley's Lover: The Grove Press Publication of the Unexpurgated Text", *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 20 (Spring 1985): 49–79.

7. Mitchell was Rosset's first wife. Within a few years after their return from France, Rosset and Mitchell divorced. Rosset has four children from subsequent marriages.

became friends with Pollack and de Kooning and others. They were living a few blocks from this building. They were poverty stricken. I thought they were great painters. So I learned from them. It worked in both directions. I introduced Joan to Beckett.

I did one very bad thing at the New School. I took a course in art history from Meyer Schapiro. We had to write a paper. I did one on pointillism. There was only one thing wrong with it: Joan wrote it. I found it the other day. It's magnificent. I think it may be the only thing she ever wrote after her college days. Anyway, I handed it in as mine, and then I took the exam. The poor professor said, "I don't understand how the same person could write such a wonderful paper and do so terrible in the exam". Joan and a professor at the art department of the University of California at La Jolla—the two of them did it, they got intrigued.

But somehow I did know something about painting. I watched Joan. She was an extremely capable painter who could do anything. Her father, who was quite a well known doctor, would have exhibits of his paintings at medical shows—sort of like Da Vinci, with tendons and bones; she could do the same thing. Gradually, while we were living in France, she shifted. In the beginning I tried to get her to be a socialist realist—I thought of myself as a communist. Joan even went along with it.

Thank God she changed, and changed me with her. It was because she couldn't *not* do it. I watched her change from a figurative painter to an abstract painter. It happened day by day, and it got very exciting. We watched a bicycle race—the Tour de France. The bicycles all whizzed through this village we were in. Her next painting was abstract—all the wheels and the tires and everything were meshing. It was wonderful. I went on in France about three or four more months. Then I thought, It's done. I should go home. And she needed to go home, where she became involved with de Kooning and Pollack and people on Ninth Street. Our friends were both literary people and painters. There were people like Frank O'Hara the poet, who crossed the lines. He worked at the Museum of Modern Art, he was very attuned to painting, and his friends were painters. Yet he was a very good poet. There was a

cross-fertilization. Painters were a lot more fun to be with, much more relaxed, not jealous, not competitive like writers, who tend to hole up.

MBH: A 1969 *Life* Magazine article about you, “The Old Smut Peddler”, by Albert Goldman, says you were planning to create uncensored movies for the new home videocassette players. What happened to that plan?

BR: That was a figment of his imagination. We did try to make an *Evergreen Review*, for example, on film, but there was no market for it. We took parts of foreign films and we shot a few things. At Southampton College I showed the program, which was announced as “Barney Rosset: From the Word to the Image, with the screening of the first experimental issue of *Evergreen Review*”. It was also the last. This was before the era of videocassettes—perhaps unfortunately so.

MBH: Your choices seem more like improvisations than strategies devised by a businessman to gain profits. Where did the rewards lie for you?

BR: Again, even early in my life—although I thought of myself as being very left-wing politically, which was also very strange for someone who had a convertible LaSalle car—I was imbued with the idea that censorship was bad. In the eighth grade we had our own student newspapers, and I had one called *The Anti-Everything*. I had a strong feeling that people should not be prohibited from expressing whatever they felt like expressing.

As a matter of fact, I heard someone say the other day that he became a communist because they talked about free love, only he never found any. I had exactly the same experience. For me at that time communism symbolized freedom, not Stalin. But it never worked out for me that way.

One of the greatest sorrows of my life is that I was not in the Spanish Civil War. I felt very guilty about it; but I was only fifteen or sixteen when it was going on. That, to me, was the fight for freedom in my lifetime. The memory of that war has always been there. My mother was Irish, and her father was extremely anti-English, and they spoke Gaelic. I must have been imbued with

their revolutionary ire. As a matter of fact, I now have my Irish [dual] citizenship. But I've never been to Ireland.

MBH: Do you want to go?

BR: No. It's a fantasy. It's like Beckett and Joyce. Their road never seemed to lead to home.

MBH: About rewards?

BR: I like to have money. Even when my father was relatively poor, I didn't know it. I never felt a desperate need for money. So it never was a compelling factor. I've wanted it to do certain things. I wanted a car, but I tried to scale my desires so as not to want a jet plane. I didn't have that monetary drive that a lot of people around me had. I looked for other rewards. One of them was peer recognition, I guess. But I did have some money, and I didn't have any great skills, so that's why publishing became a natural for me. It didn't require any special expertise—at least I didn't think so. Yet I did come out of a business background. I knew a lot about it; my father was a banker. And in the army I knew about the army, how it worked. Oddly enough, although I came from this progressive education background, once I was in the army I struggled along, I obeyed all the rules, I thought it was a good war, and I put aside my opinions about censorship and freedom—that would have to wait.

MBH: Regarding censorship, you are often credited with loosening up the publishing world. Do you have any criticisms of the way our increased freedom from censorship is being used?

BR: First of all, I think that's funny. It depends on how you look at it whether you feel that it's censorship or not. I think that there's a great deal of censorship. It's not always the legal kind. I've run into very severe problems in the last few years because of some reverend in Mississippi who threatened K-Mart stores with a boycott if they sold my books in their Waldenbooks stores. So overnight, more than thirty percent of the orders for books I was publishing were canceled. That's censorship. But it's a different kind. It leaves me so baffled. I don't think the reverend should be stopped from saying whatever he wants to say. It's more subtle than that.

The other thing about too much freedom—when we did the

film “I Am Curious (Yellow)”, unbeknownst to ourselves we created a sort of demon that destroyed us, because with the money we made from “I Am Curious (Yellow)”—and it was a lot of money—I bought more foreign films. But there was no longer any place to show these so-called foreign art films. We had opened up the way for the theaters to show sexually explicit films. Now the theaters that had been showing very good foreign films switched over to porno, X-rated films. And all these lovely French, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Spanish, Greek, Chinese films I had bought were a disaster. Did I think they shouldn’t show the other films? Not at all.

The only kind of censorship I believe in is this: I don’t think people need to be affronted with something they don’t want to look at. You don’t have to affront the sensibilities of some people to hurt them or their children. Don’t put nude photos or whatever on the door of your theater. If people think that’s censorship, so be it. I don’t think it is, as long as you can go through the door to see what you want to see.

I got a letter the other day from a bibliographer of American and English literature at the library at the University of Texas, asking me for a copy of a book we had published. And this person said, “Would you please send us a copy of the book *Isabelle and Veronique*?” It was sort of unusual because he didn’t offer to buy it—you know, just, “Give me one”. He also included a newspaper called *The Other Texan*, which was a graduate school thing. He just said, “Enclosed is a newspaper. Look at page 12.”

Page 12 had a long, long article about a professor at the University of Texas who was accused of sexual harassment. And, lo and behold, the reason for this was that he’d written this book *Isabelle and Veronique*. I had bought the book from an English publisher. And at first this idiot professor of philosophy denied that he had written it. He said, “It’s a despicable book”—his book! Later, I think, the circumstantial evidence convinced him that he might as well say he wrote it, and he did. And he said, “Well, it’s a fantasy. It’s a world that never existed, but I wish that it did.” His critics attempted to prove through the book that he must be sexually harassing people because in the book he speaks about women in a way

that the person writing the newspaper article didn't like. Particularly bad was that he sort of differentiated between two fictional characters, a dark-skinned person and a blonde, and he treated the dark-skinned one worse—that proves something!

Anyway, I thought it was very amusing. I wrote to them all. I wrote to the author of the piece—"Now I've found my author"—and to the person in the library I said, "If Dostoevsky and Agatha Christie were convicted of every murder they'd committed in writing, they would have been executed very quickly". Nobody's answered.

I've seen censorship from people I previously felt identified with. One of my terrible sadnesses is that the women's movement took a very right-wing turn, from my point of view, in saying that pornography was an attack on women and therefore should be outlawed. In 1970 we were violently attacked—I mean physically—by women's groups.⁸ It hurt me and it hurt Grove Press. I was confounded. People whom I had considered our allies were literally trying to destroy us. Around this same time we published *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. They attacked me about that too. I think they were FBI-inspired. They said the widow of Malcolm wasn't getting paid, which wasn't true. Their attempt [in conjunction with the Furriers Union] at unionizing us and telling us what to publish and what not to publish went on for about a year. As someone who had always fought for unions, I found myself on the

8. Gontarski, "Dionysus in Publishing", 16–17. The incident Rosset alludes to occurred in connection with an attempt by the Publishing Employees Organizing Committee of the Fur, Leather and Machinists Workers Joint Board (AFL-CIO) to unionize Grove Press: "On 8 April 1970 several Grove employees attended a union meeting and took out union cards. On the 9th and 10th Grove discharged nine employees, including union activist and feminist Robin Morgan, who on the 13th led a group of nine women, none of whom, except for Morgan herself, was an employee of Grove, to occupy the sixth floor executive offices of the Press, charging it with 'crimes against women'. . . . The Grove Press takeover was timed to coincide with a union rally outside the Mercer Street offices, and the feminists occupying Grove called on management to recognize the union. Henry Foner, president of the union, filed unfair labor practices complaints against Grove for firing the nine employees."

other side. There was no publisher that was unionized. Wouldn't you think it strange to pick on Grove Press as your target?

The head of the union finally agreed with me. But it was months and months later. Before that happened we attacked back and said, Do you want to have all the seals killed? In that union, which had been much maligned by McCarthy—terribly—they had had to put into their constitution a statement saying you couldn't be a member of any organization that advocated overthrow of the government by violence. We had a lot of young Black Panthers working for us and so on. So we just handed out a constitution of the union, without comment. You'd hear all these kids saying, "I can't be a Black Panther anymore". It was disastrous for the union. During that period we couldn't work; we couldn't function. The building was under constant physical assault, all day long: fire engines, police, sit-ins, bomb threats. At least they did not actually bomb us, as some anti-Castro Cubans had done previously.⁹ For a period of years we were under assault from both the far right and the far left.

MBH: I wanted to ask you about Madonna. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* contains eroticism combined with substance. But the sort of thing Madonna is doing seems empty.

BR: I've thought about that. First of all I haven't seen much of what she's done. But I'd fight to the death to defend her. I think that she did open up some new avenues by her book selling so much, making it acceptable to certain book stores and printing companies. I consider it like a battering ram in front of me. So I'm happy, even though I've seen no evidence of any kind of great intelligence and sensitivity in what she's doing. I'm all for it. That doesn't mean I would have wanted to publish it.

MBH: Who were some of the authors who influenced you? You've mentioned Beckett a lot.

9. Gontarski, "Dionysus in Publishing", 15. "In the early morning hours of 26 July 1968 a group of anti-Castro Cubans launched a fragmentation grenade through the window of the Grove Press offices after a portrait of Che Guevera appeared on the cover of the *Evergreen Review*."

BR: And Miller. They're not too much alike. I brought them together in Paris, actually. They had known each other in the thirties and hadn't liked each other. They were both known as difficult people. I took them out to lunch together and afterwards each said to me separately, "You know, he's mellowed". So that was pleasing. But there were many others. I think Beckett and Miller sort of encompass a lot, because they really come at things from very different directions. I mean, the more Miller could say about something, the better he liked it. The less Beckett could say, the more successful he thought he was. As a person Beckett meant an enormous amount to me. Miller was intriguing, but not as lovable.

MBH: Do you think Henry Miller was a great writer?

BR: In some things. I thought *Tropic of Cancer*, when I read it and when I reread it, really had something to say through its use of language, its concepts, and its surrealism. I published *Sexus*, *Nexus*, and *Plexus*, but I'd be less than truthful if I told you I read them—little bits. But I did read other things, shorter things that I thought also had great, brilliant insights. He was a primitive, what I think of as a primitive, that is, he didn't have an academic background. It's not that he wasn't well-read. He was. But he developed his own approach outside of an organized framework. He was a sort of American Douanier Rousseau.

MBH: Do you want to say anything about the sale of Grove?

BR: The sale was one thing, getting thrown out was another. In looking back I realize I shouldn't have sold it. I thought that finally somebody was going to provide us with the funds to publish a lot of things. We would do the *Evergreen Review* again and all sorts of things. As it turns out they did put in a lot of funds, but not when I was there. They also lost those funds, sunk without a trace. Why all that happened I still don't know. I may be very obtuse about it. I don't think it was the person who bought it, but some other kind of influence around her.

MBH: What have you been doing since you left Grove in 1986?

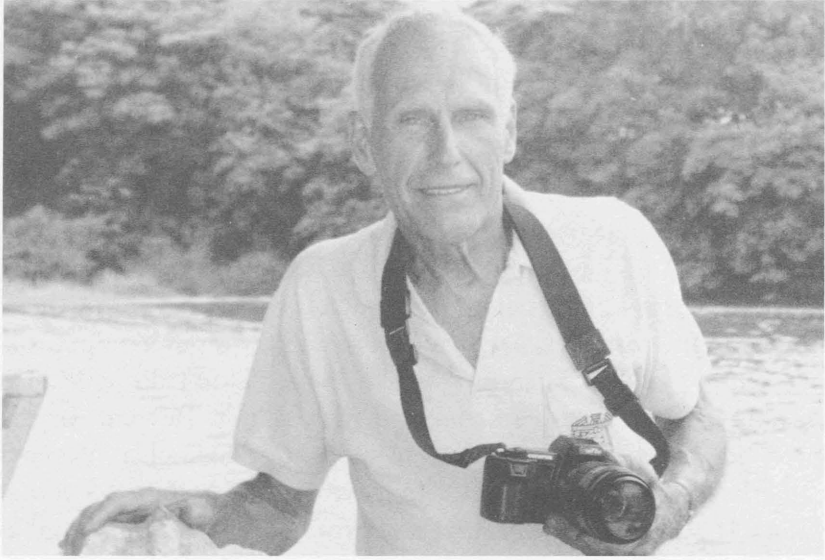
BR: Well, after the state of trauma had somewhat subsided, in '87 I

started another little company, which I've been going along with ever since. Right here. Downstairs is the office.

MBH: Is Blue Moon Books anything like Grove?

BR: Well, in desire it is. We've published one thing of Beckett's, for example, and something by Marguerite Duras. We've redone the *Olympia Reader*. Right now we're doing a new version of the *Evergreen Review Reader*, which will be a compendium of material from the years 1957 to 1967. One of the things I had at Grove, which really kept the company going for a long time, was Victorian erotica—*A Man and a Maid*, and so forth. When I sold Grove I said that they should let me have that [the Victorian Library] in case they decided they didn't want me after a while. They said okay, but later they reversed their position. They tried to sell it after I was gone. I made the only bid, but they wouldn't sell it to me. So I said, "I'll just take the Victorian-style books", and I did. So I started sort of in reverse. Whereas with Grove I started with Henry James and worked finally to the other side, this time I thought, "That is the only thing I know I can publish immediately and I can understand the technical problems and how to do it and so on". I hoped and still hope to branch out into other things. We have done four poetry books, a children's book from South Africa and—it's not been easy.

I didn't get any money out of that Grove Press thing, and I've long since spent what I accumulated. I'm not wasteful, but on the other hand I've never had a concept of saving. But we're doing it. And I've found that I'm getting manuscripts which I've slipped into this so-called erotic group of books. I've been finding some young writers—most of them are women and most of those women are English, I don't know why—but also a professor of neurobiology from Chicago, a lawyer for a big military school, an Israeli who writes wonderful Japanese novels (he's an anthropologist), psychologists from New York—a very interesting group of people. I'd really love to get them together. I haven't met most, and they certainly haven't met each other, and they all use assumed names, but I can sense the quality level going up. Right now we have three new books by three new women authors. They're serious writers. So I enjoy it.



Barney Rosset in Costa Rica, December 1988. Photo: Astrid Myers.

There is an advantage in publishing now—better than a long time ago. With a small operation you use outside facilities. I have a perfectly good production manager. There are now distribution companies for small publishers; there were not before. I have an art director who works for another company and moonlights for me. We have plenty of freelance copyeditors. So I don't think you need a lot of intensive labor on hand. You can run a publishing house this way, but you can't run a big bookstore chain in a similar manner. I think you can get along against big publishers by joining other small ones in service centers. I don't feel completely at a disadvantage.

MBH: People tend to associate you mostly with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and censorship issues. Is this fair?

BR: If you look at the books that I published there are at least as many political books as literary books. In grammar school I was already very politically motivated—the CIA and the FBI and so forth have been filing reports on me since I was twelve. When I was in high school I read Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, which made a

great impression on me, and *Man's Fate* by André Malraux. Then I got sent to China during World War II. I was chosen to photograph the peace signing in Shanghai (which actually never happened there) before the war ended. And there I was, a live actor in *Man's Fate*, which takes place in Shanghai, and *Red Star Over China*. I was way ahead of everybody there because I had read these books. It gave me insights that others didn't have. This really annoyed the generals because I was only 23 years old and irreverent, spending money as fast as I could get hold of it, while they were putting their money in the bank because they believed it was a golden opportunity to buy land in Shanghai. I told them, "Don't do it; Mao is coming". I had read the script and they hadn't. Reward for my good advice was the Army threw me out of Shanghai. When I came back and got into publishing we republished *Red Star over China*. It was full circle. I even met Snow. This was as important as anything else. So the answer to the question is, Who knows?

MBH: I often think of Ezra Pound's words: "What thou lovest well remains / The rest is dross". What did you love about being "the man who was Grove Press"?

BR: Giving free creative expression to a lot of suppressed feelings and beliefs. The French have a phrase for it: "épater la bourgeoisie" [to confound or to stun the conventionally-minded].