

History with Feeling: The Case of Macmillan New York

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The Macmillan Company New York started life in 1869 as an outpost of a British publishing empire. Within a few decades, it had developed from a small distribution agency to a thriving business in its own right and was incorporated in 1896. The London parent, Macmillan and Co Ltd, held a majority shareholding but New York operated independently, with its own sales territories and editorial lists. At the same time the two companies also benefited from important synergies, through a 'first refusal' arrangement for all book titles and reciprocal distribution.

By the early 1950s the New York company was a major player in American business and culture. But it had a problem, or at least something perceived as such: it was still majority-owned by London, making it vulnerable to nativist attitudes in American society. As the US came to eclipse the UK in the postwar years, the shift in power relations intensified existing longstanding tensions, and New York mounted a campaign with London to divest its stock.

London was reluctant; its longstanding investment had created both financial and cultural capital for the Macmillan brand worldwide and a reduced presence in the US at that juncture went against the tide.¹ But finally, following intense pressure, the shares were put up for sale on January 17, 1951, through a consortium of American stockbrokers. The stated intention of both parties was to continue their transatlantic cooperation but this came up against the same tensions that had led to the sale, prompting London to set up a new venture in New York the following year. That move set off a new round of conflict, while London learned of insuperable obstacles to using the family name as a trademark in the US

– a development with lasting consequences. Thus began an intense legal fight that lasted until 2002, and which still gives rise to confusion over some legacy titles.²

The precise rationale for the sale has been a matter of conjecture among publishing professionals and scholars. Accounts published to date³ offer explanations for the sale. But so far, the episode has been described only in broad strokes, and rational explanations do not always account for the strong emotions that rise off the page, when one examines the source material.

The account that follows attempts, therefore, to fill some of the gaps by providing more details and by exploring the complex motives driving events, with the aim of offering new perspectives on an important moment in Anglophone publishing history. To do so, it draws principally on the correspondence between key parties from the period, and offers a reappraisal of some later accounts.⁴ Some of the correspondence has received a mention in previous studies, but the present article adds extensive new detail from those sources, supporting a fresh reading of existing narratives, as well as correcting earlier errors.

Perhaps even more importantly, this account brings into view a significant amount of material that is being published for the first time. The new material has been selected to highlight three illustrative examples; a letter from the American company president in October 1950 conveying a strong sense of his personal motives; a correspondence between New York staff that demonstrates the intensity of feelings after the sale; and a correspondence from London about the new local company, St Martin's Press, that challenges later American narratives. As far as I am aware, none of these three examples have been publicly discussed to date, in any form.

The findings firm up some existing theories but also permit new lines of argument. In particular, I make the case that although there were hard economic, business, and financial

reasons for the sale, cultural and personal factors either side of the Atlantic were also greatly consequential; and these two types of agency, rational and emotional, do not present an either-or choice but work together in interrelated ways. More generally, the material brings out the way in which different narrative strands are woven into the main cloth of events, enriching our understanding.

The sale of company stock may seem unglamorous in itself. But behind the financial transactions there are passionate stories: a family psychodrama, a clash of cultures, and historic events on the world stage. The letters and memos evaluated here provide telling details about the individuals involved, the history of publishing, and the postwar era in general, as British companies faced the challenges of the Cold War and the first moves towards what became the European Union. Such details, spiralling from a single event, evoke a period of intense change with some echoes for today.

A recurring theme of the period concerns the shifting balance of power between the two countries, and the feelings of ambivalence arising from their former colonial relationship. An immersion in the written conversations from the mid-twentieth century, a period when awareness of the power shift became inescapable, reminds us of that important context. On occasion, ambivalence on the American side appears to accommodate a subtle anti-British sentiment that reflects a complex range of post-colonial anxieties.

My approach to the correspondence has been to explain and interpret not only the explicit meanings contained in documents with an obvious persuasive purpose, but also the appeals made therein by distinct human voices that speak to us as new readers, as they did to the original recipient. In taking such an approach I aim to explore the full register of rhetorical meaning, from the ulterior motive of persuasion to what Kenneth Burke calls 'ultimate' motives that aims to create states of mind through the use of language.⁵

Burke argues that context is not an external “thing” but is located *inside* the rhetorical process because language is a communicative event between people, and so motive is not obvious: the same words can have different meanings depending on tone, voice, and other compositional decisions. In the same vein, he says, rhetoric’s *pathos* can be understood as an appeal to the senses that takes in evidence, rather than emotion divorced from reason. This form of rhetorical poetics, I contend, provides a disciplined way of understanding subjectivity as an integral part of factual discovery.⁶ It is hoped that such an approach can enhance our reading of the Macmillan material, while also allowing the material to speak for itself.

The core event: London sells its stake

At the start of 1951, the Macmillan companies in London and New York were both led by a third generation of family directors. In London, the publishing house was headed by Daniel de Mendi Macmillan, son of Maurice and grandson of one of the two founding brothers. Daniel had been thrown into the role in 1936, when all three senior directors – Maurice, his brother Frederick and their cousin George – died within a few weeks of each other and he held the reins of Macmillan & Co Ltd until his death in 1963. He was supported by his brother Harold, a Conservative MP. Harold had relinquished his directorship in May 1940 when he entered the wartime coalition government but he returned during the years of Conservative opposition from July 1945 to October 1951, a period that encompassed the New York deal, and his signature can be found on some of the key correspondence.

Fig 1: Daniel de Mendi Macmillan

Because of Harold’s career in politics, including his years as prime minister from 1957 to 1963, there is a wealth of biographical detail, including some stray observations about his

abilities as a publisher. The more private Daniel receives little attention in his own right. One biography of Harold describes his brother as “highly nervous” and another as “a scholastic star ... a shy, kind, very private man, who could be difficult to work for”.⁷

Across the Atlantic, The Macmillan Company New York was headed by George P. Brett Jr,⁸ operating from a vast office on Fifth Avenue and 12th Street; “the last of the major houses to be so far downtown”.⁹ He had taken the reins from his father George Platt Brett Sr in 1931 and assumed full control on his death in 1936; the same year as Daniel, each generation shifting in synchronicity.

Fig 2: Fifth Ave office

Before that Brett Sr had succeeded in turn from his father George Edward Brett, who had been appointed in 1869 by Frederick Macmillan, Daniel de Mendi’s uncle. The business, established first as an agency, then an independent partnership, was incorporated as a separate legal entity in 1896; by 1931, when Brett Jr took charge, the company was ranked as the biggest American publisher by volume and number of titles.¹⁰

A company biography of the Macmillan group, published in 1943, relates that “[t]hough the two firms, in London and New York, are independent of each other ... the link between them has always been close.” Mutual arrangements included sales and distribution support for each other’s titles within their respective territories worldwide,¹¹ and the right to first refusal of authors, in which “each firm judges independently its own interest”. The biography, written by author and family friend Charles Morgan, notes that “[t]he English firm, however much it grew, always remained less departmental than the American, division of responsibility being allowed to arise from the tasks and interests of the directors.” New York’s policy on the other hand was “to build up the business [so] that each department,

regarded almost as an independent kingdom, should rival and if possible outstrip firms that specialized in its particular field.”¹²

Morgan notes the success of this policy, which brought a two hundred-fold increase in business volume from \$50,000 p.a. in 1896 to \$10 million in 1943.¹³ Such growth benefitted the majority shareholders directly: in the five years to 1949, the New York company yielded the London family annual dividends of £50,000, equivalent to approximately £1.7m in today’s money.¹⁴ This was in a period when total turnover for the London parent amounted to £1.89 million (approximately £59m today’s money).¹⁵

The story of the sale of London’s stake in the New York company makes a long journey through the files and letterbooks held at the British Library.¹⁶ But in published sources, one finds only a few contemporaneous reports. On January 20, three days after the sale – when London’s stake could safely be referred to in the past tense – *Publishers’ Weekly* cited a joint statement from the two Macmillan companies. It noted that shares were distributed through a consortium of 50 brokers across the US, a total of 167,015 shares at \$21 per share, representing 61.3% of the company. Joint arrangements for distribution, sales and promotion, they insisted, would remain the same as before. The transaction was described by the industry magazine as “one of the largest and most significant in our publishing history”.¹⁷

The report added that London would retain a majority in the Canadian company and “[a]ll three companies will work with close understanding and take full advantage of the prestige of the imprint, which has been made internationally familiar”.¹⁸ The reference to the “imprint” alludes to the Macmillan name, which became the subject of intense legal dispute when that “close understanding” fell away.

The reasons given in US media for the sale were various. *Publishers' Weekly* made a sedate reference to “complicated problems of exchange and taxation” but *Time* magazine, echoing office gossip, took the line that “[t]he offspring [had grown] bigger than its parent company”.¹⁹ It also wrote (accurately) that the share sale was a long-held wish of the company president and reported his view that “an American publishing firm should not be controlled abroad” – a sentiment reflecting a longstanding concern in the transatlantic relations of the two Macmillan companies, as we shall see.

According to *Time*, Brett was finally able to get what he wanted because London was keen to avoid a new capital gains tax proposed by a Labour government, which would eat into any profits from the sale.²⁰ However, there appears to have been only occasional talk in London about a new “excess profits tax”; if anything, there is stronger evidence of such fears on the US side.²¹ The correspondence suggests instead that the tax story was a convenient fiction spun for the American market. Brett sent Daniel the clipping, distancing himself from *Time's* handling of the story but praising it as something that did “a great boon to the underwriters and the fifty brokers from coast to coast distributing the stock”. In response, Daniel described the article as “vulgar and inaccurate – but if it helped the brokers, so much the better”.²²

Fig 3: George P. Brett Jr

There *were* short-term financial calculations contributing a sense of urgency to the sale, but their source was in New York, not London, and they related to political risk, not tax. The UN intervention in Korea a few months earlier, following North Korea's invasion of the South in June 1950, had led to a sharp fall in college numbers, as young men were drafted into the US army. This hit the sale of textbooks, which accounted for a major share of New York's business. Brett's concern was that the stock price might not hold if there was

another political shock of that nature. And because of the yearly cut-off point for company returns, any delay would result in a lower valuation of the company in a public share offer.²³

In short, it was New York, not London, that voiced urgency about the sale. And it was New York, not London, that wanted the sale in the first place; insistently so. As late as the previous October Daniel wrote to George about the prospect of the divestment: “It may be best for us all to go on as we are, for this and perhaps for the next generation as well. The partnership has certainly done pretty well up to now.”²⁴ Why was it so important for Brett to cut loose?

Reasons for the sale

The obvious reason, identified in both private correspondence and published accounts, is the extreme difficulty faced by British business in the decade after World War Two, in the face of a sterling crisis and uncertainty about the terms of international trade and finance. Strict quotas were imposed by the UK Board of Trade that lasted until the mid-1950s, slashing UK exports; each country in Europe had differing tax regimes and trade rules; and publishers continued to face paper shortages. Many firms were reduced to forms of barter to minimise cash transactions which they looked for strategies to reach European markets.²⁵

For the house of Macmillan, these constraints disrupted an extensive international network and accentuated New York’s longstanding frustrations with the reciprocal arrangements, in which all US sales in Europe, the Middle East and territories connected to the British Empire went through London – thus falling into the UK’s tight re-export quotas. And they came at a time when New York faced intense new competition from rivals such as Doubleday and McGraw-Hill. “We were not always happy with the results,” the company’s long-time editor Harold Latham wrote, “and sometimes felt that we could have found a

wider market for certain titles had we been free to offer them to other English firms”²⁶ – or indeed, to sell the books directly from the US. But London did not wish to give up the agency, since exports and re-exports made up more than half of its total turnover, a much larger share than for the American company.²⁷

London was only too aware of New York’s dissatisfaction, and one finds eloquent begging letters to the Bank of England asking for permission to carry out extra business with America. In the early days of currency controls, Macmillan & Co Ltd *did* succeed on the grounds of its unique ownership arrangement with New York, and the company had reason to hope that latitude would continue. For example, Daniel wrote to Brett Jr that he had persuaded the Board of Trade to raise their import quota for the next three months from £5,000 to £25,000, adding: “I rather think that this privilege has been extended only to ourselves, in which case it is extremely important that nobody else should know anything about it.”²⁸ But eventually the shutters came down – no exceptions could be made, because the problem on the national scale was just too big.

To keep New York happy, during 1949 London invested a huge amount of time and money to establish an office in Amsterdam. The idea was to provide a local clearing house for the whole of Europe, where bookshops could pay in either dollars or pounds and thereby increase sales in the region. London succeeded in gaining permission from the Bank of England for the necessary funds and went as far as to secure premises. But the office had to be closed down after only a few months because the Board of Trade – against a background of economic talks in Washington – was fearful of setting a precedent, and the dollar quota for the Netherlands under the Marshall Plan’s Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) required orders to go through a central body in New York.²⁹

These difficult terms of trade added to a general unease on the American side about the imbalance between the two companies. But the calculations driving Brett and his management team included other broader concerns, which deserve amplification. Besides being noted in the *Time* article, Brett's antipathy to "control" from "abroad" also figures in the company's annual report of April 1951, a few months after the sale. According to the account in John Tebbel's *History of Book Publishing in the United States*:

Brett disclosed that he had been trying since 1931 to persuade the British stockholders to sell their shares because, as he said, "a Company of this size and importance in the educational field could not afford to be accused, however wrongly, of being swayed in its editorial policy, or otherwise, through having the control of its stock held in England. Let me add that at no time did the majority shareholders in England ever exercise any influence whatever in connection with the operation of this Company."³⁰

More details are provided by Latham, who records that besides "external" problems with international sales, the New York company faced an "internal" difficulty; namely, a strong antipathy among customers to the company's British connection. In his memoir *My Life in Publishing*, published in 1965, he comments that rival salesmen were known to argue against the adoption of a Macmillan text by saying the New York Company was English-owned:

'Who knows,' they were reported as saying, 'what subtle propaganda there may be in Macmillan texts? Would it not be safer and wiser to use texts wholly of American origin? You never know what foreign ideals may be implanted in others.' Of course there wasn't a word of truth in the allegations, for the English house never, to the slightest degree, exercised any sort of oversight of our books. But the attacks had some effect, and as time went on their intensity along this line increased and so did their effectiveness."³¹

Here again, we encounter popular suspicions about foreign ownership, linked to fears about the editorial influence of “foreign ideals”, set against the virtue of “texts wholly of American origin”. It was only because both Macmillan companies were family-controlled and run, rather than traded on the public stock exchange, that the full extent of London’s majority ownership was not better known in the US, but there were rumours, and that was enough.

In his memoir Latham does not elaborate on the nature of the suspicions being preyed on by their rivals, but in private correspondence Brett was explicit. Immediately after the share sale he wrote with relief to Daniel: “the sword of Damocles has been removed from over my head, because now I no longer have to worry lest we lose the majority of our educational business through somebody raising a hue and cry of British control at a time when the country is undergoing the pangs of isolationism.”³²

It is worth attending to Brett’s temporal qualifier, since the phrase “at a time when...” implies that the mood of hostility to foreign company ownership was of recent vintage. But an isolationist strand had run through American culture since at least the late nineteenth century, and warnings about its potential impact on publishing operations were being made by Brett’s father from the start of his presidency in 1896.³³

One gets a sense of the historical nature of New York’s nervousness about its London connection from a letter sent by the son just after the outbreak of World War Two in October 1939. The British Consul in Boston had enquired if The Macmillan Company New York was “still a branch of this British firm” and requested from the Boston office “particulars of the nature of your association with the parent company”. Brett replied stiffly: “I cannot conceive how your files indicate [such a thing]. The Macmillan Company is a New York corporation, entirely independent, having nothing whatever to do with Macmillan &

Co, Ltd ... We are neither an affiliate nor a subsidiary of the English corporation. We are *wholly American*" (emphasis added). One notes the recurring trope in the final phrase.

More generally, the defensiveness suggests an element of anxiety, since Brett's statement was true only in part. In a note to Daniel the same day about the letter, he said: "I am especially anxious to have you read my reply denying emphatically that [we are] a branch of Macmillan & Co Ltd. I have always thought it useful to make this position clear. I think it especially useful at this time."³⁴ This last can be understood as a reference to the fact that in 1939 the outbreak of war, which put all company ownership under a new spotlight, did not yet involve the US.

Nativist suspicion had an impact on all American publishers, but it posed a particular worry for those with large college and school departments, including The Macmillan Company New York, where school textbooks accounted for at least 60% of gross profits in the early 1940s.³⁵ As others have documented,³⁶ local library committees had significant buying power. Even if the specific book in question engendered no concern, those controlling the local purse strings could still punish a publisher if it had made contested decisions in other sectors – a racy novel, for example, or a book outlining a controversial scientific theory.³⁷

Brett's deliberate linkage of "the pangs of isolation" to the period in which the 1951 share sale took place, noted earlier, suggests that he perceived a continuity between older American suspicions about foreigners, first noted in correspondence by his father, and the new expressions of paranoia appearing in the postwar period, sometimes associated with McCarthyism. In either case, foreign influences are perceived as a domestic threat. An example of the sentiment is conveyed by an advert directed at American newspaper editors in the same month as the share sale, which decries federal government spending as a

dangerous relapse of weakness towards “old-fashioned, *foreign ideas*”³⁸ (emphasis added).

The advert, part of a long-running series, was placed by the Small Business Economic Foundation led by DeWitt Emery, who had campaigned against the New Deal in the 1930s.³⁹

Fig 4 Advert in E&P

One would need to consult other studies from the postwar period to identify the extent to which attitudes towards London were distinguished from any broader suspicion of foreignness. But the Emery adverts just noted specifically include Britain as an example of “socialism”⁴⁰ and the fears expressed by the Macmillan New York management appear to make the link. Certainly the notoriously paranoid FBI director J. Edgar Hoover saw no reason not to show ostentatious interest in New York’s London connection. In a letter to George Brett in September 1948, Harold Macmillan relates receiving a *faux* innocent inquiry from Hoover about the availability of the London company’s books in the US and notes drily: “Normally, I should merely reply that our books were obtainable from The Macmillan Company, New York. But I have been wondering why Mr Hoover should write to us to ascertain a fact which must be known to him, and why the letter is signed by a director and not the librarian.”⁴¹

Effort to keep New York on board

The private correspondence shows that London made a sustained effort to address Brett’s fears about both external and internal threats, as Latham puts it. In addition to the Amsterdam experiment to boost sales of American books in Europe, it went to considerable lengths to meet requests from Brett to disguise the British origins of its ownership stake – a manoeuvre that does not appear to have been reported publicly before now. In January 1949, following lengthy consultations with lawyers, London split its shares into four lots and

transferred them to US proxies.⁴² The complex manoeuvre then had to be reversed less than two years later, to pave the way for the final share deal.⁴³

In a letter to the company's solicitors at the time of the initial transfer, Harold made clear the rationale: "When Mr Brett was here in the summer [of 1948] he referred to the injury which might be done to the interests of [the New York company] if the large proportion of British share-holding in that organisation became generally known in the United States. On one or two occasions he had had difficulty, particularly with text-book adoptions." Harold expressed his reservations about the effectiveness of the step, noting, "Anyone who obtained the list of shareholders would observe that far the largest single holder is [the English company]"; however London went ahead with the transfer, to show willing.⁴⁴

A memorandum to the Bank of England in June 1949 provides the gist of another attempt to placate New York. The note from company secretary Rowland Clark asked for additional foreign exchange so that an annual retainer of £400 could be paid to Brett's son Bruce (who had joined the company as a graduate trainee that year) as an incentive to stay with the New York business and secure the family succession. The memorandum, sent via the company bank, lays out plainly the concerns weighing on the minds of the two parties: New York's ongoing fear that its share ownership structure could become public knowledge – supporting the thought that this was not yet the case – and the anti-foreign sentiment in American society that made such an exposure risky.

"The Americans are very intolerant of British control, though they are not averse to a loose sentimental attachment with this country," the letter states. "It is certain that [the New York company] would not have thrived ... if we had not kept in the background so that the American public as a whole *believed it to be* an American institution" (emphasis added).

Any continued discretion was only possible, it continues, if the person running the American company “had the interests of the British shareholders at heart”. Since the current company president could not continue indefinitely in the role, both parties wished to bring “a fourth generation of the Brett family into the American business”. If that could not be arranged, the letter warns, “we may have great difficulty in maintaining the value of this overseas investment.”⁴⁵

By August 1949 it was clear that the attempt had failed. The entire episode is related in a memo to Harold from his son Maurice, dated September 9, summing up important recent developments at the publishing house.⁴⁶ It conjures up the image of a powerful New York entity nevertheless consumed with anxiety about having to “pass” as wholly American.

When Harold wrote to the Treasury the following November to prepare for the final share sale, succession issues again took up a large part of the narrative, with the emphasis on acting while the Brett family was still in charge: “The American Company has become a very large investment, and we do not consider that in the interests of our shareholders we should be justified in retaining [it] if there is a favourable opportunity of realising it. This opportunity appears to us to exist at the present moment, and there is a risk if we do not seize it now that it may not exist at a later stage.”

He then addressed other reasons for selling off London’s 61% stake, “which we must frankly admit, has greatly influenced us”. These reasons include the alleged whispering campaign by competitors in the Midwest, who “are not slow to gibe at the [New York] Company for being ‘British controlled’”. But he also brought up something new; namely, the “natural and growing restlessness among the American *management* which strains even Mr. Brett’s loyalty to us” (emphasis added). Previously such a feeling was not so strong, said

Harold: "But now that Britain is a debtor and not a creditor country, and something of a poor relation to America, the position is becoming increasingly difficult to hold."⁴⁷

From the present vantage point, the second set of reasons look much more consequential than the first. Brett issued regular warnings about his health but he died at the ripe age of 91,⁴⁸ and his son Bruce took his place on the board in due course without the need for persuasion, inheriting the presidency in 1958. It was a later corporate buy-out that did for the family succession.

It is also noteworthy that Harold Macmillan's letter distinguishes between American xenophobia in general and a more specific animus held by the New York management: the first time this element is specifically recorded. The timing of the letter may explain the new twist. Just a few weeks earlier, Daniel received a long and intense letter from Brett which makes clear the emotions driving his behaviour. Brett begins by saying that he has "mellowed" with the years, before admitting that this was not always the case:

It is quite true ... that I was belligerent, that I seemed to resent the ownership of The Macmillan Company of New York being in London. That resentment stems back to my youth, to my early years as president of this Company ... I never felt that my father got his just deserts in connection with the conduct of the business. I felt that it was his genius which built up this enterprise for the benefit of foreign owners and that the foreign owners did not give him a fair return, a return commensurate with the huge success which he had made of the enterprise here, the vast sums of money which the English owners were able to make out of the business [in return for] a very small number of English pounds ... invested by the English owners in the American enterprise.⁴⁹

The letter ends by repeating warnings about his own health and the family succession; *this* is why he feels the honeymoon is over; that "we ought to get out while the going is good".

The last phrase is underscored in pencil by the London recipients.

Fig 5: Letter extract

Decades later, these words still make an impact. Reading them with attention to voice, style, and narrative force, one notices the repetitions advancing rhythmically in sequence—“foreign owners ... English owners ... English pounds” – before landing on a concluding, triumphant “American enterprise.” The earlier belligerence is avowed so that it can be repudiated, but in effect it serves as a rhetorical device that permits the ensuing onslaught: Brett has come not to bury Caesar but to praise him. And it gives voice to a sentiment distinct from any pragmatic calculation about sales figures. It prompts the thought: while the threat to business from customers in the Midwest may have been real, the anti-foreign sentiment is surely shared here in some measure by the company president himself, and his senior staff. And while anxiety about the succession was also likely to be real, it may have also represented an attempt by Brett to throw everything at the Macmillan family in London – to make one last heave – to achieve the desired effect. Brett was supposed to be holding the line, against hostility from his management and from the American public. What if even that line was about to give way? One way or another, the pencilled underscore on the letter suggests a decisive moment when the message was received in London, loud and clear.⁵⁰

The uses of Britain as an oppositional identity

A full separation between the two publishers may still have taken place (minus the psychodrama) because of other, broader, cultural divergences. Book publishing carries its own sense of place and the correspondence between Macmillan publishers in London and New York throws up its share of variances in taste, judgment, and general perspective.

One finds traces of this in the company correspondence through the decades; in one example close to the 1951 sale, Brett took the view that they would have to offer less advantageous terms than usual to Charles Morgan for his essay collection *Liberties of the*

Mind, described by the author as being about “each man’s right and duty to think for himself”, because the book lacked unity and the essays were “pretty stiff reading” for the American reading public. Daniel advised Brett to pay what he felt best, but “if you are going to offer him worse terms, for goodness’s sake don’t upset him further by criticizing his book”.⁵¹

Knowing more about their personal histories, one can speculate about the impact of political differences between the two families. The Macmillan brothers were Conservatives but Morgan describes the company as inspired by the “Broad Church movement”, idealistic in a “humane” rather than fanatical form.⁵² We know more about Harold’s take on the world than Daniel’s but the two brothers were close; as a politician Harold was a committed Keynesian who supported government intervention in the economy and membership of what became the European Union, and as a publisher he was intellectually curious, described by one biographer as “almost certainly Britain’s best-read Prime Minister”.⁵³

Brett, on the other hand, was a staunch Republican⁵⁴ of a type fierce in its opposition to regulation and economic activity by central government. In the privacy of the Publishers’ Lunch Club in Manhattan, Brett described the wartime Armed Services Edition as “socialistic in nature”⁵⁵ and he appears to have thought the same of the entire Democratic Party administration of Franklyn Delano Roosevelt, and his New Deal. Nicholas Byam Shaw, a later chairman of Macmillan Publishers Ltd, describes the company correspondence he had seen from that period as “very much in the vein of the kindly and calming owner talking with a slightly hysterical person – I mean, okay, FDR might not be to everyone’s taste but he was hardly a socialist.”⁵⁶ And not long after the 1951 sale, London director Horatio (Rache) Lovat Dickson wrote back to the office from New York: “My phraseology begins to sound like George’s, and soon I’ll be talking about ‘licking Communism’.”⁵⁷ He was writing partly in jest,

but Brett's vehement political style appears to have added to the reasons why London found him personally challenging.

In the American context, however, Brett's politics were mainstream, and although the company could be accused of lacking daring compared to some rivals, its large and proactive departments were given a long leash. From a broader vantage point, Macmillan New York could argue that it was fulfilling its proper role, along with other publishers, in articulating a distinct literary identity for America. A debate about the nature of that identity is of long vintage, including differing judgements about the key departure points. From the perspective of the company's veteran editor Harold Latham, reflecting on a half-century in publishing in 1965, the articulation started during his own watch. "[W]e really began to come of age during this time," he writes in his memoir. Many American literary giants from an earlier period might just as well have been from "the old country", but from the start of the twentieth century...

there began to emerge writers distinctively American, with material differing in tempo, subject matter, outlook. Books of English origin and authorship which had been our stock-in-trade began to decline in appeal and circulation, and in their place came novels of the American scene and theme, and poetry, and books in the field of religion that reflected our way of thinking, our kind of people, and the philosophy of a new and younger civilization.⁵⁸

This evaluation may tell us more about how the Macmillan New York principals saw their role than it does about the literary market of the time. But we can note that the appeal made by Latham to a "distinctively American" literature strikes a more nuanced note than calls for publishing that is "wholly American".

What is of interest for the current study is the dynamic whereby American identity is defined *against* something and, in the case of American publishers who partnered with

London's Macmillan, against an entity specifically perceived as English, and therefore foreign and restrictive. Furthermore, a careful reading of accounts about American publishing, when tested against the correspondence of the period, suggests that this negative role may have continued to serve a purpose even in the entirely new circumstances of St Martin Press, the company established by London to replace the partner lost in the 1951 sale.

To support that hypothesis I draw on two examples from the later period: a publishing memoir and a work of history. In a book about "the golden age" of American publishing, published in 2008, the veteran insider Al Silverman devotes a chapter to St Martin Press. The negative stereotypes that he uses for the parent firm are striking. Silverman describes the Press as "born a *bastard*, conceived not by American parents, but by the sire of an *aristocratic* British family". George Platt Brett, who established the New York operation as an independent firm in 1896, is reported in the passive tense as having been "*told* that his company would become independent, though still under the *command*" of London (emphasis added).⁵⁹

The negative tone continues in the material he draws from an interview with Tom McCormack, who started his long reign as head of house in 1969 – I say "draws" because it is not always clear whether Silverman is paraphrasing McCormack or writing in his own voice. The account of the company's origins, as relayed by Silverman, is that it started as a mere distribution arm: "Thinking small, Sir [sic] Harold Macmillan, the future prime minister who now ran the family enterprise, made St Martin's Press a company that was, in effect, only a jobber for the books that came off Macmillan London's press".⁶⁰ The Press was only "allowed" to buy books and become "a wholly original American publisher" in 1956,

Silverman adds.⁶¹ Once again, the language of *wholly American* recurs, more than half a century after the earlier examples, and from a very different kind of publisher.

Negative or not, the account is inaccurate. During the period when St Martin's Press was established, the London company was under the direction of Daniel Macmillan, not Harold, and there are no grounds for dismissing Brett Jr's father George Platt Brett as a creature of the parent. The incorporation of an independent American business in 1896 was very much his own initiative, designed to profit from America's first international copyright law, the Chace Act of 1891, which required books to be typeset in the US to gain copyright protection.⁶² Furthermore, accounts of Brett Sr converge in describing someone who was "strong", "opinionated", "more than a little tyrannical" and "iron-willed".⁶³ The idea that he was "commanded" to do anything by London is a non-starter.

Even more substantively, the idea that St Martin's Press was conceived as a mere distribution arm is belied by the private – and until now unpublished – correspondence. From the start, London's strategy was to build new value in North America to "balance at some possible future crisis in Europe any difficulties that the parent company may have to face".⁶⁴ And from the start Lovat Dickson – a Canadian publisher who had joined the London board in 1940 – sought to achieve this by creating a proactive publisher that looked for original American authors. The problem was in finding the right team to take this vision forward in the fraught conditions that followed the break-up with Macmillan New York. It was a crisis that reached resolution only in November 1956 when New York sold off the entirety of its remaining stake in Macmillan Canada and withdrew its agency from that part of the old "Macmillan Triumvirate".⁶⁵

Competing narratives for St Martin's Press

Although sniping and mistrust⁶⁶ emerged soon after the initial euphoria about the share deal, the decision by London to set up a new company on their turf caught the Macmillan New York team by surprise. The initiative first enters the official records in February 1952, when Daniel Macmillan wrote to the Bank of England for permission to use foreign exchange in setting up a new American agency.⁶⁷ The money was approved in April, and Lovat Dickson visited New York in May to kickstart the process and break the news to Brett.

At first there was relief that he had managed to “keep George calm”.⁶⁸ But this was soon followed by a “palace revolution” of the New York staff⁶⁹ and the start of a war of attrition, prompting Brett to declare in an internal memo the following spring, “I do not think that our relations with Macmillan & Co Ltd could be worse.”

The memo, which concerns a fight over future publishing rights for the Irish playwright Walter Macken, is revealing about the mood in the New York management team. Macken was represented by Lovat Dickson at the London company, but New York Macmillan expected to retain first refusal in its territories. When a new contract from London proposed “ridiculously high terms” and removed the option for future books, Brett asked his editor J. Randall Williams to approach the author without London’s knowledge to win him over, declaring that it was “time for a showdown”. Williams, at that moment in London, was advised to visit Macken in Ireland, and “[g]o to town on thing and see if you can’t sell him the idea that he would like to change his mind and stick with [us] rather than having his next book published in America by an organization so new and so unfamiliar with the American scene” – a reference to the new rival in town, St Martin’s Press.⁷⁰

This was followed by four weeks of skulduggery, including a call to the author via the nearest public phone box, and a three-page cable from Brett that spoke of being “shocked

and deeply grieved” at London’s position, urging him again to go over their head. Eventually the bewildered author was forced to spell out his loyalty to London: “I find it difficult to explain how I feel about all this unpleasant business. It means, in fact, that I have to come down from the fence ... I have an agency agreement with Macmillans. If I were to sign a contract from you I would have to give them six months’ notice that I was abandoning the agreement. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to end my agreement with them.”⁷¹

Brett was known for expressing himself strongly, but the episode adds to other accounts of a similar nature that suggest the habit could have counterproductive results.⁷²

St Martin’s Press was set up against this backdrop of conflict, alongside uncertainty about its name, staffing, and premises. Considering the prevailing mood, it is conceivable that London put about the idea of the new company as a distribution-only arm as a means of placating Brett, but it would be a mistake from our later vantage point to take that at face value. The details emerge in Lovat Dickson’s letters to Ruth May, a longstanding local representative for the London firm who had been drafted in as a leading member of the new team in New York. In July 1952, he writes to acknowledge “[t]he hot weather, the extremely cramped conditions in which you have all been working, and the tensions over starting a new business”.⁷³ For the next three years, letters to May and others record Lovat Dickson’s efforts to manage such difficulties at the new company, alongside the firefighting that was still required to control the heat and flames rising from the old one.

The letters also demonstrate his continuing efforts to encourage greater editorial boldness by St Martin’s Press, an important aspect of the company’s early history that has not been publicly recorded before now. Such efforts begin well before 1956, the year that the Press was “allowed” to become a “wholly original American publisher”, according to Silverman.

On May 25, 1954, for example, Lovat Dickson wrote a stern note to the new manager Ian MacKenzie about what he considered a moribund book deal, saying: “We are most anxious that St Martin’s Press should not become in any way like the British Book Centre [MacKenzie’s former employer]; we are not booksellers, but publishers, and our job is to sell and publish new books, not to revive old ones on our agents’ lists.”⁷⁴ The following spring he reiterated: “I think you have been under a misunderstanding about the policy enunciated on your visit to London. The policy is based on our understanding that SMP cannot succeed as an Import House and must manufacture American books if it is to become an established organisation.”⁷⁵

In 1958 London was still urging MacKenzie to be bolder; in this case by setting up a college department. Eventually Daniel asked John Gray at Macmillan Canada to overcome MacKenzie’s resistance: “I find this difficult to believe as we have pressed this all the time, but he certainly seems to be approaching it from the wrong angle ... I hope you will be able to persuade MacKenzie to see sense.”⁷⁶

The historian John Tebbel offers more nuance than Silverman about the foundation of St Martin’s Press, but also slips into negative language about the British parent and demonstrates the same fixation on the more famous Macmillan brother – by that time immersed in affairs of state – rather than the one who was running the firm throughout that period. Tebbel describes MacKenzie as “an enthusiastic and energetic man” who tried to publish American writers but says “[h]is task was not an easy one. Stock in the company was closely held, but the majority belonged to the Macmillan family, whose head, Harold Macmillan, the former prime minister, was inclined at the beginning to hold the reins tightly.”⁷⁷ However, since the correspondence of the time does not support a view of MacKenzie as someone interested in developing a distinctive identify for the New York

house, the account relayed by Tebbel comes across as a post-hoc rationalisation by his source, representing a version of events that was preferable in hindsight.

Tebbel and Silverman may not have been able to test their work against the material used here. But the default negative *tone* of their accounts tells us something about the assumptions being made in American publishing circles in the years following the 1951 Macmillan sale. To make sense of the recurring language, I suggest that during this period it must have been useful at some level for an American publishing house linked to a foreign company to create a narrative that defined itself *against* that entity – retrospectively, where necessary – to authenticate its cultural role at home. And that the narrative may have found expression in a range of forms, not only the isolationism of the political right.

Public vs private business models

Accounts of any relationship run the risk of becoming a rationalisation after the event. The same applies to the legacy of the 1951 sale of London's controlling stake in The Macmillan Company New York, and the spin-off stories still told today. To a great extent the event has retained its relevance for a simple reason; the trademark dispute that it engendered reached resolution only recently. The delay, in turn, was amplified by the fractured nature of the American company's ownership as it moved through multiple mergers and acquisitions, including Robert Maxwell who bought Macmillan Inc in 1988. In that sense the last stage of the story offers a new set of insights by providing a contrast of business models; public shareholding vs private firm.

In his memoir Harold Latham repeats the widely accepted view that "George had a keen head for business",⁷⁸ and despite sadness about the London divorce he says the succeeding years "showed the wisdom of George's action" because sales increased "with the freedom

to sell our books anywhere in the world". But for all that, and despite the New York company's undoubted continued success, by 1960 Brett had lost control of the company to Crowell Collier Publishing, marking a period of increasing fragmentation. The UK-based Macmillan group, meanwhile, stayed in family hands as Britain's fourth largest publisher until 1995 when a controlling interest was sold to another family-owned company, Holtzbrinck.⁷⁹ Macmillan Publishers (the current company name) remains a large and recognisable entity worldwide.

Although London had its reservations about working with Brett, as a family firm it put great store by doing business on a personal level and made significant efforts to retain the link. There were drawbacks to this approach; one can argue that the assumptions built up over decades blindsided the two families and prevented them from thinking through the consequences of the deal in a more businesslike way. From the vantage point of today, the initial lack of awareness about the trademark risk is striking: as the company archive notes, despite the London company's long presence in the US the Macmillan name was never registered there as a trademark, and the 1951 sale agreement did not reserve its use to London. As a result, the New York publisher was able to assert common law rights, which were passed along to all subsequent new owners.⁸⁰

The first contemporaneous mention of the issue comes a year after the sale when Daniel Macmillan admitted to a Wall Street lawyer, "When we sold the greater part of our holding ... the question of the name was not mentioned and not referred to in the purchase agreement." In a follow-up letter he added: "We obviously do not want to take decisive steps about the new agency unless it is perfectly certain that [use of "British Macmillan"] can be done according to American law [but] I find it difficult to believe that there are any

insuperable obstacles.”⁸¹ The phrasing suggest a deeply held assumption that since the company was a family business, they *must* be entitled to use the name themselves.

At the same time, a commitment to business at a personal level also helped the London Macmillan to survive, despite facing similar market challenges to the New York firm. The business arguments that London made against the sale were also not without merit, particularly the aim of leveraging the reputation of “the Macmillan imprint” across the world, and the determined efforts of the New York Macmillan and its legal descendants to keep the name demonstrate a recognition of its market value.⁸² As an earlier account of the relationship notes: “Many of the authors who approached this large, well-organised operation, did so because the Macmillan imprint had a reputation for quality, but more especially because it offered unparalleled opportunities for simultaneous publication in Britain, with access to even larger markets in the English-speaking colonies through branch offices in Canada, Australia and India.”⁸³ In today’s language the arrangement could be described as a form of vertical integration, a common business strategy.

The alternate model, the publicly quoted company, offers its own strengths and one can see how the 1951 decision may have been the right one for New York at the time. But one may still make a critical evaluation of the course steered in the years that followed. Tebbel describes the Crowell-Collier takeover as something that happened through “remote and somewhat bizarre circumstances” and Brett’s loss of control on the Macmillan New York board as “an unimaginable event at the time”. But he goes on to identify weaknesses that made them vulnerable to a buy-out: a lack of capital to invest for competitiveness; a loss of ground to more aggressive trade houses; and the fact that, when going public, the Bretts “had neglected to provide themselves with enough shares to resist a takeover attempt”.⁸⁴ These are all conditions that arose under “wholly American” management.

Conclusion

This study has set out to attend both to material already publicly available that merits a more detailed reevaluation, and to three key episodes from previously unpublished letters and memos. I make the case that this material, and the treatment it is given here, helps to throw new light on a major and consequential event in publishing history, and to identify patterns of thought that continue to influence narratives about the episode.

The account, placed in its wider context, highlights not only the complex business decisions at stake but also the conflicted personal relationships between two major publishing families on each side of the Atlantic, and the ways in which cultural assumptions helped to frame both dimensions. Rational calculations affected the timing of the sale, while personal dynamics and broader social trends helped to drive the separation. Those trends include “soft” cultural factors such as the anti-foreign sentiments of the American reading public, which had consequences for “hard” profit and growth.

Overall, the analysis suggests that while a focus on what makes rational sense is necessary to a historical analysis, it is not always sufficient, because it leaves gaps and contradictions. If we attend to the way in which the different types of agency interact, assisted by the rhetorical toolkit outlined at the start, we can add further levels to the interpretation.

If we focus on individual relationships, for example, we can ask: Was the language of the Brett family perceived as “engagingly outspoken”⁸⁵ in an American vernacular, or unpleasant? Were the unspoken rules of English discourse perceived as respectful or opaque? The meaning of such perceptions is not usually restricted to the personal dimension, nor to formal stylistic concerns: they end up informing much broader judgments.

At a broader level we can hypothesize that rational actions had unexpected consequences, and less rational motivations may have gone unexamined. Thus, we notice that anti-British sentiments attributed to the wider public may have been shared by the New York management; or that Daniel Macmillan, devoted as he was to the long-term survival of the family firm, could not imagine a world in which a claim to the family name might need outside institutional support.⁸⁶ And we notice that while George P. Brett Jr was feted as a gruff, hard-headed businessman, he also let emotion sway his judgment and could be blindsided by the consequences of his actions.

The analysis also raises familiar concerns about sources. London offers more archival evidence than New York for the period in question, but the opposite is the case for personal stories. We know of American office gossip, for example, because Latham and Silverman transformed it into quotable evidence. This has a broader application because personal accounts by publishing professionals constitute a major type of source material in the field. A scholar working in publishing history is likely to face the challenge of managing an affective response to personal material; allowing enough of a connection to hear the voice and understand the point of view, without taking it on trust.

More generally, one grapples with absences. Theoretical debate about the “silence of the archives” is relatively recent but thoughtful practitioners have long understood the problem. Reiner Stach, biographer of Franz Kafka, writes that “the spontaneous, physical, and organic aspect of life, which is what [biographers] hoped to capture, has a tendency to suppress writing,” leading to silences in the “traces left for posterity”.⁸⁷ That is emphatically true of the present study. Despite the comprehensive nature of record preservation, one finds moments of exquisite discretion in letters from London where the correspondent references a confidential matter in the vaguest of terms, accompanied by the invitation,

“Let’s talk about this over lunch when you are next in town”. There are also silences created by rationalisations and exaggerations employed to achieve an ulterior goal, and the reading between the lines they entail which we re-experience when we encounter the texts again.

It is likely that some of the answers we still seek lie in interior thoughts and experiences that are currently difficult or impossible to access. Perhaps a future treatment of the story will apply a different range of techniques. Meanwhile, it is hoped the responses offered here stimulate thought about how to manage what we have, acknowledge what is missing, and find meaning from the whole.

Notes

¹ By 1950 a number of UK publishers were setting up shop in America for the first time, to take advantage of its increasing share of English-language markets; for example, Cambridge University Press opened a North American branch in 1949, and in 1950 Oxford University Press was incorporated under US law as private company. See Beth Luey, “The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry,” in *A History of the Book in America, Vol 5: The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America*, ed. David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 29-54.

² Besides the information provided later in this article, a full account of the legal issue up to 2001 can be found in the company archive (“Internal notes on the history of The Macmillan Company New York,” Robert Machesney, January 2001, The Archive of Macmillan Publishers, Basingstoke n.p.). The right to use the name in the US was regained in 2002, and “Macmillan Publishers now operates out of New York with a variety of imprints including St Martin’s Press”. However there continues to be confusion over its use “in the determination of current ownership of legacy titles bearing the imprint Macmillan”. (Alysoun Sanders, Archivist, The Archive of Macmillan Publishers, Basingstoke, email message to author, August 20, 2018.)

³ Relevant texts include: Elizabeth James, “Letters from America: The Bretts and the Macmillan Company of New York,” in *Macmillan: A Publishing Tradition*, ed. Elizabeth James (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 170-191; Harold Latham, *My Life in Publishing* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965); Ruth Panofsky, *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture*, (Toronto UP, 2012), 149-208; Al Silverman, *The Golden Age of Great American Publishers* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2008), 112-141; John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Vol IV The Great Change 1940-1980* (New York: Bowker, 1981), 118-129.

⁴ My work in the archives has benefited from the guidance of Thomas Lannon, Assistant Director at New York Public Library (NYPL), and Macmillan company archivist Alysoun Sanders for material now held at the British Library. It also draws on feedback received on work in progress at the Sharp conference in Amherst, July 2019, a Macmillan symposium at London’s School of Advanced Study in October 2018, and another at the University of Reading in June 2016. Finally, the work has received valuable feedback from anonymous peer reviewers.

⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, 50.

⁶ Susan L. Greenberg, *A Poetics of Editing*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

⁷ Alistair Horne, *Macmillan* (London: Macmillan, 2008), 593; Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 21.

⁸ To distinguish between multiple members of the Macmillan family active during the main period of the article, given names only are used, unless the person’s identity is not clear from the context. Since there is less potential for confusion about the New York Bretts, the style reverts to family name only.

⁹ Tebbel, *History*, 118.

¹⁰ *Publishers' Weekly*, "Macmillan of London Sells Control of New York House," January 20, 1951, 246.

¹¹ As of 1939, the New York company's territories outside of the US consisted of Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, South America, China and Japan; it also "acted as agents in the United States for many English publishers as well as for the parent house." See Charles Morgan, *The House of Macmillan (1843-1943)*, London: Macmillan, 1943, 164.

¹² For example, the New York company was one of the first houses to establish a separate children's book department, which won five Newbery medals under Doris Patee, and the textbook division was so large that it was divided into four divisions rather than the usual two (Tebbel, *History*, 119).

¹³ Morgan, *House of Macmillan*, 165, 166, 164.

¹⁴ Company secretary Rowland Clark to the Bank of England, 3 June 1949, memorandum, Letterbook 1, f346, Macmillan Archive, British Library (hereafter cited as BL MSS).

¹⁵ James, "Letters from America," 186. James's source is the former Macmillan archivist Robert Machesney, who consulted company archives at Basingstoke. The US company's financial details were also made available at the time of the sale through the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and were reported by *Time* magazine: see n17 below.

¹⁶ For the period in review, papers held in New York focus on individual authors rather than everyday business practice, and references to the share sale as such are rare. One example occurs a week after the public offering when head of publicity Virginia H. Patterson wrote to author Stuart Holbrook, "I suppose you have heard the news that The Macmillan Company is now American-owned, the majority of voting stock heretofore held by Macmillan & Company Limited having been sold to American interests on January 17". Holbrook replied that his wife Sibyl had gone and "bought 5 whole shares of McMLn Common, for a grand total of \$119. She threatens now to write Macmillan of New York, asking them to publish more of Velikovsky and Winsor" – a reference to two authors whose work had met boycott campaigns. See January 24 and February 12, 1951 in Box 56, Stewart H. Holbrook, Folder 1, Macmillan Company Records, 1889-1960, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as NYPL MSS).

¹⁷ *Publishers' Weekly*, "Macmillan of London Sells Control," 245. The report in *Time* provides more details, taken from the SEC registration which "gave outsiders their first peek" at the hitherto privately owned company. In the last ten years, the magazine reported, the company's gross had risen from \$6.8 million to \$13.2 million in 1950. Net profit that year was \$627,700 and dividends totalled \$1.50 a share. Macmillan "had been able to pay a regular dividend every year since 1898 by concentrating on the educational and textbook field, where the profit margin is higher than that for trade (i.e., general reader) books." *Time*, "Crofter's Crop," January 22, 1951, p90.

¹⁸ *Publisher's Weekly*, "Macmillan of London Sells Control," 245.

¹⁹ In his memoir Harold Latham reported office "whispers" that "it was a matter of the tail wagging the dog" – in other words, the New York company was keeping London afloat. (Latham, *My Life*, 245.)

²⁰ *Time*, January 22, 1951, p90.

²¹ "It seems inevitable now that the Congress will pass an excess profits tax, Heaven knows what kind of excess profits tax, and it might be that that would be so drastic it would be impossible to float this proposition at all." George P. Brett to Daniel Macmillan, November 8, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/44, BL MSS.

²² George P. Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, Jan 22, 1951 and Daniel Macmillan to George P. Brett Jr, Jan 30, 1951, Add MS 89262/5/44, BL MSS. James also describes the sale as "spurred on by the threat of changes in UK law relating to capital gains tax" ("Letters", 186) but no specific source is given for that detail. The same passage refers to the *Time* article, mirroring Daniel's language by describing it as "vulgar", but there is no mention of the potential inaccuracy.

²³ Brett tells the two brothers that according to New York stockbrokers, "this thing can only be done on the present market in this country. For instance, it could not have been done during the depressed market immediate after the Korean situation broke. And if something else occurs to shake the world, the market may again sour." George P. Brett Jr to Daniel and Harold Macmillan, August 31, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/43, BL MSS.

²⁴ Daniel Macmillan to George P. Brett Jr, October 12, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/43, BL MSS.

²⁵ See Eric Rauchway, *The Moneymakers: How Roosevelt and Keynes ended the depression, defeated fascism, and secured a prosperous peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 238-9; Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: 1883-1946: Economist, Philosopher, Statesman* (London: Penguin, 2013), 634.

²⁶ Latham, *My Life*, 246.

²⁷ James cites a letter to this effect from Harold Macmillan to George P. Brett Jr in September 1948 (James, "Letters", 186).

²⁸ October 31, 1946, Add MS 89262/4/3, f651, BL MSS.

²⁹ See Markets /5/5, Macmillan Co of NY/ Division of World, BL MSS. There has been confusion about the importance of the ECA as a factor in New York's push for London's divestment. In James's account the quota system is described as "all the more crucial to Brett because the New York company, being substantially British owned, was not able to participate in the special arrangements for trade with Europe made under the auspices of the European Cooperation Administration (ECA), which were creating vital new export opportunities for American publishers, especially in Germany" ("Letters," 186). However, while some statements in the archives can be interpreted in that way, details of the failed Amsterdam initiative suggest that the problem was an indirect result of the specific trade and currency rules applied to the Netherlands. Reasons for doubt also include a report of Macmillan New York's representation in Germany for the ECA (*Publishers' Weekly*, May 28, 1949: 2166). Finally, Brett is on record as being among those American publishers who favoured going it alone commercially in Europe rather than selling via the ECA, which had ruled that books (unlike other goods) could be sold only at cost. See John Hench, *Books as Weapons: Propaganda, Publishing, and the Battle for Global Markets in the Era of World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 255.

³⁰ Tebbel, *History*, 121-2.

³¹ Latham, *My Life*, 246. One would ideally prefer to find an additional source for this key claim, as all references to the issue derive from the same source, i.e. the New York management.

³² George P. Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, January 22, 1951, Add MS 89262/5/45, BL MSS.

³³ When the father, George Platt Brett, insisted "only the 'best' books" would now be imported from England, "there was a certain element of nationalism in all this which also led Brett to believe that it would be unwise to reveal the extent of foreign stock and control in the company" (James, "Letters", 178).

³⁴ A.S. Calvert, HBM Consul, Boston to The Macmillan Company New York, Boston office, October 2, 1939; George P. Brett Jr to A.S. Calvert and Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, October 6, 1939. 54877: Correspondence with Macmillan Company of New York Ltd, BL MSS.

³⁵ Tebbel, *History*, 119.

³⁶ Tebbel, *History*, 701; Jonathan Zimmerman, "Where the Customer is King: The textbook in American Culture." In *A History of the Book in America, Vol 5: The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America*, ed. David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 304-324.

³⁷ An example of the former comes with Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber* which was charged with obscenity in 1946, even after extensive revisions for modesty; the company was "deluged" with protests by religious bodies who "threatened to boycott Macmillan books in the future" (Latham, *My Life*, 69). The latter is illustrated by the Velikovsky affair, concerning the 1950 publication of *Worlds in Collision* by Immanuel Velikovsky, which reinterpreted events in ancient history based on speculation about planetary near-collisions. Academics rejecting the work as pseudoscience threatened a boycott of Macmillan's textbooks, and so the title was passed to another publisher and the editor, James Putnam, ended up losing his job. The affair sparked public unease about acquiescence to "polite blackmail" (Tebbel, *History*, 121).

³⁸ *Editors and Publishers*, January 6, 1951, 21.

³⁹ In 1952, the "small business" organisation, which turned out to be funded by large energy companies such as Standard Oil, was publicly criticised by Democratic Party President Harry S. Truman. See Norman Thomas, "Socialized Advertising," *New Republic* April 21, 1952, <https://newrepublic.com/article/82788/socialized-advertising>.

⁴⁰ Thomas (1952) quotes from one Emery advert: "In Russia the method [of socialist control] is by 'violence,' in Britain, 'nationalization' and in 'America, instead of actually taking over the means of production from private owners, our government has ... unlimited power to tax the earnings of businesses!'"

⁴¹ Harold Macmillan to George P. Brett Jr, September 15, 1949, Add MS 89262/4/3, f780, BL MSS.

⁴² See Letterbook 1, ff290, 305, 308, 311, 312, and 314, BL MSS.

⁴³ Rowland Clark, company secretary, to L.A. Lewington (Guaranty Trust Company of New York, London), October 26, 1950, Letterbook 2, f193, BL MSS.

⁴⁴ Harold Macmillan to J.G. Archibald, October 14, 1948, Add MS 89262/4/3, f782, BL MSS.

⁴⁵ Rowland Clark to Westminster Bank, June 3, 1949, Letterbook 1, f346, BL MSS.

⁴⁶ Maurice Macmillan to Harold Macmillan, September 9, 1949. Memo, "Imports from America", Markets /5/5, Macmillan Co of NY/ Division of World, BL MSS.

⁴⁷ Harold Macmillan to H.M. Treasury, November 8, 1950, Add MS 89262/4/4, f65, BL MSS. In the same letter, Harold comments on the general nature of the industry: "It must be remembered that publishing is something between a business and a profession. It is very personal in character, and this explains why hardly any publishing business in the U.K. or the U.S.A. survives for more than a generation or two. There is no plant,

there are no fixed assets – there is nothing but the power to make profits by financing the production and sale of books, itself a very speculative operation.”

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, “Obituary: George Platt Brett Jr.” February 15, 1984.

⁴⁹ George P. Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, October 19, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/43, BL MSS. Examples of Brett Jr’s “belligerence” crop up as early as March 1936. On that occasion, Daniel Macmillan wrote to complain that New York had cut royalties due to Charles Morgan “behind our backs, without consulting us in any way”, adding, “This kind of thing must never happen again.” Later the correspondence records a ruling that New York should never contact English authors directly. Explaining the clash to his father, now in retirement, Brett Jr blamed Lovat Dickson for having “bungled things terribly”. But this met a stern response from Brett Sr who wrote; “I am very sorry that you did not write me before allowing Latham to send that cable to Dickson about the royalty on the Morgan book [...] I am afraid you will hear of this matter for a long time to come.” See March 24, April 2, April 4, 1936 in Box 79, Charles Morgan: Folder 1, NYPL MSS.

⁵⁰ Daniel’s response is to thank him for “your very interesting and frank remarks” which he describes as “difficult to deal with in a letter, but when next we meet I should very much like to talk them over with you.” Meanwhile, he expresses gratitude on behalf of both brothers for Brett’s “long and devoted labours” and begs him: “for goodness’ sake do try to look after yourself, and don’t worry more than you can help.” October 27, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/43, BL MSS.

⁵¹ See July 14, September 20, September 26, 1950 in Box 79, Charles Morgan: Folder 1, Macmillan Company Records, 1880-1960, NYPL. The problem was not new: during World War Two, for example, C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* were “regretfully judged too clever and difficult for the [US] market.” (James, “Letters,” 183)

⁵² Morgan, *House of Macmillan*, 5.

⁵³ Horne, Macmillan, 594. In 1963, the year of his retirement from politics, Harold is quoted as saying, “I learnt books before I learnt people” (L.A. Siedentop, “Mr Macmillan and the Edwardian Style”, in *The Age of Affluence, 1951-1964*, ed. Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky (London: Macmillan, 1970), 25.

⁵⁴ Encouraging Brett to do what he could to sell Morgan’s book, Daniel Macmillan passed on Morgan’s suggestion: “it might be worth while to call attention to it among Right-Wing circles, such as the Republican party, of which I believe you are a member.” Box 79, Charles Morgan: Folder 1, October 4, 1950, NYPL MSS.

⁵⁵ John B. Hench, “The Publishers Who Lunch: The Social Networking of American Book Publishers,” *Book History* 18 (2015): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.2015.0003>. Hench’s source is the club minutes for April 1, 1943.

⁵⁶ In discussion with the author, September 26, 2017.

⁵⁷ Rache Lovat Dickson to Daniel Macmillan, May 24, 1952, Add MS 89262/5/47, BL MSS.

⁵⁸ Latham, *My Life*, 37-8.

⁵⁹ Silverman, *The Golden Age*, 114.

⁶⁰ The relevant direct quote from McCormack is that the “original 1952 St Martin’s Press ... was not originating any books,” which is an accurate reflection of events, as far as it goes (Silverman, *The Golden Age*, 116).

⁶¹ Silverman, *The Golden Age*, 116.

⁶² James, “Letters”, 176.

⁶³ Tebbel, *A History*, 119.

⁶⁴ Rache Lovat Dickson to Daniel Macmillan, May 24, 1952, Add MS 89262/5/47, BL MSS.

⁶⁵ The phrase is used by Ruth Panofsky in her account of the episode (*Literary Legacy*, 159-162).

⁶⁶ For example, a letter from Brett to London complaining about an “outrageous” practice is accompanied by a covering memo from Lovat Dickson to the company directors warning, “Some of his statements are not in accordance with the facts.” George P. Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, July 16, 1951, Add MS 89262/5/46, BL MSS.

⁶⁷ Daniel Macmillan to Westminster Bank, February 5, 1952, Add MS 89262/4/4, f109, BL MSS.

⁶⁸ The phrasing is a recurring one but it crops up in this specific context when Daniel writes to Lovat Dickson during a trip to New York: “You seem to be proceeding on quite the right lines, and I am very glad that you are managing to keep George calm, although I dare say this has not been altogether easy.” May 20, 1952, Add MS 89262/4/4, f128, BL MSS.

⁶⁹ Rache Lovat Dickson to Daniel Macmillan, May 24, 1952, Add MS 89262/5/47, BL MSS.

⁷⁰ George P. Brett Jr to Randall Williams, March 26, 1953, Box 67, Walter Macken: Folder 2, NYPL MSS.

⁷¹ See April 4, April 6, April 10, April 20, April 21, April 24, 1953 in Box 67, Walter Macken: Folder 2, NYPL MSS.

⁷² In the same period, discussing differences over Macmillan Canada, Lovat Dickson described Brett as “the type of man who gets a vicious satisfaction from cutting off his nose to spite his face”. See May 24, 1952, Add MS 89262/5/47, BL MSS.

⁷³ Lovat Dickson to Ruth May, July 8, 1952, Add MS 89262/4/4, f133, BL MSS.

⁷⁴ Lovat Dickson to Ian MacKenzie, May 25, 1954, Add MS 89262/4/4, f222, BL MSS.

⁷⁵ Lovat Dickson to MacKenzie, February 15, 1955, Add MS 89262/4/4, f258, BL MSS. In the same period, a similar strategy was adopted for Macmillan Canada with the difference that MacKenzie's counterpart needed no encouragement (Panofsky, *Literary Legacy*, 158).

⁷⁶ Daniel Macmillan to John Gray, November 11, 1958, Add MS 89262/4/4, f479, BL MSS.

⁷⁷ Tebbel, *A History*, 314. Additional errors in his account include the wrong year of death for Brett Sr (he cites 1931, the year of retirement, instead of 1936) and two different and incorrect years for the share sale, 1950 and 1952.

⁷⁸ Latham, *My Life*, 240.

⁷⁹ Decca Aitkenhead, "Farewell the gentleman publisher", *The Independent*, April 16, 1995.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/farewell-the-gentleman-publisher-now-read-on-1615867.html>

⁸⁰ See again Machesney, "Internal notes," 2001.

⁸¹ Daniel Macmillan to William Dwight Whitney, February 19, 1952 and April 3, 1952, Add MS 89262/4/4, f111 and f122, BL MSS.

⁸² Examples of such efforts include an episode from 1965 in which the people selling encyclopaedias door-to-door for a subsidiary of Crowell Collier Macmillan were claiming to be connected with the London company and therefore, with the former UK prime minister (Archive of Macmillan Publishers, "Internal notes," January 2001).

⁸³ James, "Letters," 179.

⁸⁴ Tebbel, *A History*, 124-5.

⁸⁵ James, "Letters," 171.

⁸⁶ According to anecdotal information, the lapse is explained at least in part by reports that Brett's frequent gloomy prognoses about business conditions may have been taken at face value, and so the US firm was expected to go to the wall. One cannot evaluate such a theory at this distance but evidence of Brett's gloom – possibly exaggerated to achieve his aim – is abundant. A small example occurs in October 1950, when he explains that he sought a share distribution rather than a private buy-out because the banks "would no longer be willing to lend me the vast sums involved, and especially if they knew the fears that are plaguing me for the continued success of the enterprise" (George P. Brett Jr to Daniel Macmillan, October 19, 1950, Add MS 89262/5/44, BL MSS).

⁸⁷ Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 266.