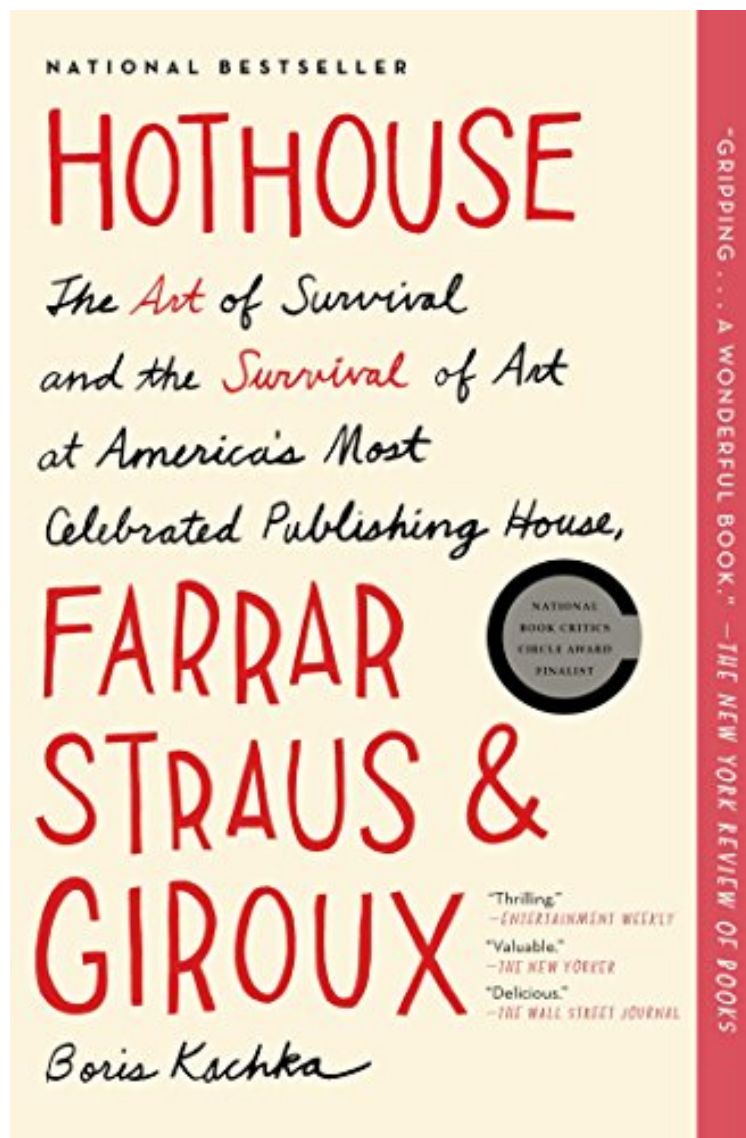


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Hothouse: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art at America's Most Celebrated Publishing House, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

Boris Kachka

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Boris Kachka : Hothouse: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art at America's Most Celebrated Publishing House, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hothouse: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art at America's Most Celebrated Publishing House, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must-read for book enthusiasts. Highly recommendedBy

Timothy J. Bazzett *HOTHOUSE*, by Boris Kachka. I wasn't sure if I'd like this book, an account of the history of one of the most prestigious publishing houses in America, Farrar, Strauss Giroux, in its many names and guises over the years. But I did like it; in fact I liked it a lot. Because I am a booklover, and this is a book just made for people like me. There are anecdotes and stories galore here, and I knew right away I'd have fun with this book, and began immediately jotting down the names of books and authors I've known of for years, but still haven't read. Now I have a stronger resolve to read folks like Jean Stafford and Robert Lowell, and maybe I'll even finally give *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition) another try. And Eileen Simpson's memoir, *Poets in Their Youth: A Memoir*, sounds delicious. Sontag? I probably still wouldn't understand her stuff, but then I did enjoy reading *Sempre Susan: A Memoir of Susan Sontag*, Sigrid Nunez's memoir of her time with Sontag, a book cited a couple times here, as Kachka has much to say about the close relationship Sontag enjoyed with publisher Roger Straus. And it brought back so many fond memories of FSG authors I have read, both recently and long ago - Flannery O'Connor, Philip Roth, Thomas Merton, Nelson Algren, Solzhenitsyn, and others. And, more recently, Jonathan Franzen and his disingenuous public "dis-ing" of Oprah. Plenty of people have already weighed in on *HOTHOUSE*, so I'm just gonna list a few favorite lines here. Like when editor Robert Giroux asked T.S. Eliot "Did he think it was true that most editors were failed writers? Tom supposed it was, but then so were most writers." I LOVED that! Or Giroux's coining of "the term 'ooks' to describe the 'not quite books' that dominated the bestseller lists and gift sections of bookstores." Or just the mentioning of newer old favorites of mine, like Oscar Hijuelos's *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love: A Novel* or Michael Cunningham's *A Home at the End of the World: A Novel*. Kachka didn't have to dwell on names and titles like these; their mere mention evoked pleasurable memories. And this is much of the charm of *HOTHOUSE* - all these names, all these titles, famous and obscure alike. Another section which touched me deeply was that last conversation between Roger and his son, Rog (Roger III), finally acknowledging that the son was not coming back to FSG, that he did not want to inherit the family business. And then the phone call in which Roger arranged to sell the company to a large German conglomerate, the end of an era in publishing. I was reminded of my own father reaching a similar realization, fifty years ago, that none of his sons wanted his family business, built up over a twenty-year period. And so he sold it. Selling the family business, problems between fathers and sons. It's sad, but it happens. I have only barely brushed the surface of the myriad stories in *HOTHOUSE*, but for book enthusiasts, this is definitely a must-read. I am not surprised to see a cover endorsement from Larry McMurtry, whose own memoir (which I also loved) was called simply *Books: A Memoir*. Highly recommended. (four and a half stars) - Tim Bazzett, author of the memoir, *BOOKLOVER* 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. I Really Have Enjoyed This Book By Eric Selby I know so little about the publishing business even though I am an avid reader. So when I read Robert Gottlieb's review of it in *The New Yorker*, I was intrigued. Fiction can be, for me, less appealing than a really well-written novel. But this book was one I didn't want to put down when I got started. The men involved--Farrar, Straus (especially him) and Giroux are very well depicted and, I assume, accurately so. But more than being just about the rise of an amazing publishing house, this is also about the writers who published with FSG beginning back to World War II years. And the backdrop of wealth behind especially Roger Straus, Jr. All in all, a great read. Highly recommended to anyone who is an avid reader and has an interest in publishing houses which seem, today, to be far inferior to the likes of FSG. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *Inside Story Of Prestigious NY Publisher* By Customer Interesting account of one of the finest houses to exist in NY publishing. I particularly enjoyed the biography of the firm's most ebullient, charismatic member, Roger Straus. When he is out of the picture on these pages, the narrative seems to dim. My main caveat with this book is the somewhat elitist, "literary" tone, as if that rarified hothouse air may only be breathed by the cognoscenti located within a five-block radius in Manhattan. Still, it was interesting to read of the discovery of major artists such as Sontag, Didion, Wolfe, Franzen. It's a window into another age when publishers released what they liked, based on quality and not focus groups.

Mad Men for the literary world. — Junot Diaz; Farrar, Straus and Giroux is arguably the most influential publishing house of the modern era. Home to an unrivaled twenty-five Nobel Prize winners and generation-defining authors like T. S. Eliot, Flannery O'Connor, Susan Sontag, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, Philip Roth, and Jonathan Franzen, it's a cultural institution whose importance approaches that of *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*. But FSG is no ivory tower—the owner's wife called the office a "sexual sewer"—and its untold story is as tumultuous and engrossing as many of the great novels it has published. Boris Kachka deftly reveals the era and the city that built FSG through the stories of two men: founder-owner Roger Straus, the pugnacious black sheep of his powerful German-Jewish family—with his bottomless supply of ascots, charm, and vulgarity of every stripe—and his utter opposite, the reticent, closeted editor Robert Giroux, who rose from working-class New Jersey to discover the novelists and poets who helped define American culture. Giroux became one of T. S. Eliot's best friends, just missed out on *The Catcher in the Rye*, and played the placid caretaker to manic-depressive geniuses like Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Jean Stafford, and Jack Kerouac. Straus, the brilliant showman, made Susan Sontag a star, kept Edmund Wilson out of prison, and turned Isaac Bashevis Singer from a Yiddish scribbler into a Nobel laureate—even as he spread the gossip on which literary New York thrived. A prolific

lover and an epic fighter, Straus ventured fearlessly, and sometimes recklessly, into battle for his books, his authors, and his often-struggling company. When a talented editor left for more money and threatened to take all his writers, Roger roared, "Over my dead body" — and meant it. He turned a philosophical disagreement with Simon Schuster head Dick Snyder into a mano a mano media war that caught writers such as Philip Roth and Joan Didion in the crossfire. He fought off would-be buyers like S. I. Newhouse ("that dwarf") with one hand and rapacious literary agents like Andrew Wylie ("that shit") with the other. Even his own son and presumed successor was no match for a man who had to win at any cost — and who was proven right at almost every turn. At the center of the story, always, are the writers themselves. After giving us a fresh perspective on the postwar authors we thought we knew, Kachka pulls back the curtain to expose how elite publishing works today. He gets inside the editorial meetings where writers' fates are decided; he captures the adrenaline rush of bidding wars for top talent; and he lifts the lid on the high-stakes pursuit of that rarest commodity, public attention — including a fly-on-the-wall account of the explosive confrontation between Oprah Winfrey and Jonathan Franzen, whose relationship, Franzen tells us, "was bogus from the start." Vast but detailed, full of both fresh gossip and keen insight into how the literary world works, *Hothouse* is the product of five years of research and nearly two hundred interviews by a veteran New York magazine writer. It tells an essential story for the first time, providing a delicious inside perspective on the rich pageant of postwar cultural life and illuminating the vital intellectual center of the American Century.

From Booklist John Farrar (1896–1974), a quick-to-anger "High Episcopalian editor," and Roger Straus (1917–2004), a wealthy, charismatic "Jewish prep-school jock," joined forces in 1946 to launch a New York publishing house. In 1955, Straus hired the immensely talented editor Robert Giroux (1914–2008), a working-class "Jersey City Jesuit." Journalist Kachka tells Farrar and Giroux's intriguing stories with zest, but Straus is the sun around which this scintillating history revolves. Possessed of "lordly benevolence and canny calculation," Straus ran a cosmopolitan, intellectual, if shabby kingdom where sex was the currency of the realm, a CIA connection opened doors to overseas writers, parties served as publicity campaigns, and the prestigious literary house of Farrar, Straus Giroux published a record-making 25 Nobel laureates. Writing with vigor, skill, and expertise and drawing on dozens of in-depth interviews, Kachka shares risqué gossip and striking insider revelations and vividly profiles the house's world-shaping writers, including Flannery O'Connor, Tom Wolfe, and Susan Sontag. Kachka's engrossing portrait of an exceptional publishing house sheds new light on the volatile mixture of commerce, art, and passion that makes the world of books go round. —Donna Seaman

From Bookforum For anyone with a sweet tooth for the book world or a thought and a care for American culture after the Second World War, Kachka's book is a brightly lit, well-stocked candy store. Its pages are stuffed with tales of book parties and Nobel Prizes, of Edmund Wilson meeting Susan Sontag at a dinner with Straus, of former employees looking back on their time there, of good ideas gone to the remainder bin and surprising ones to the best-seller list, of advances written off and royalties piling up for some of the best books of our time. Like other essential books about publishing, *Hothouse* is a rousing reminder that, virtually alone among the professions and trades, a publishing firm is called a "house" — and, to paraphrase Le Corbusier (a rare midcentury culture grandee that FSG didn't publish), what a wonderful machine for living a publisher can be. —Matt Weiland *A Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, and *IndieBound Bestseller*

"Exhaustively researched and sometimes gossipy . . . *Hothouse* is the hot book that book people are talking about, and understandably so." (Maureen Corrigan NPR)

"Gripping . . . [A] wonderful book . . . *Hothouse* is Pepys for our time, an unblinking account of publishing history as it was made by Roger's firm, the last of America's major independent publishing houses. Roger would have been thrilled to publish this fine book, including its frequent and deserved criticisms of himself." (Jason Epstein, *The New York of Books*)

"Riveting . . . Stellar . . . A vivid narrative . . . *Hothouse* fits nicely on a shelf next to entertaining business books such as Walter Isaacson's *Steve Jobs* or Michael Lewis's *Moneyball*." (*Dallas Morning News*)

"Valuable . . . [A] vigorous and often diverting trot through the history of an important cultural institution . . . No one has previously anatomized a publishing house in such depth . . . Farrar, Straus Giroux, moreover, is well worth anatomizing. It's had a larger-than-life central character, an amusing cast of secondary characters, and a history replete with drama. Most important, it has maintained an amazingly consistent level of quality." (Robert Gottlieb *The New Yorker*)

"*Hothouse* simmers with gossipy tales of publishing . . . and [is] blessed with real-life characters who could star in any sexy novel. . . . It's not a book just for intellectuals." (*USA Today*)

"Vivid . . . Witty . . . Immensely enjoyable . . . Kachka sets forth a strikingly unexpurgated history of FSG, impressively researched, rich in anecdotes and journalistically balanced." (Michael Dirda *The Washington Post*)

"Excellent . . . *Hothouse* is as engrossing as a biography of any major cultural icon." (Elissa Schappell NPR)

"*Hothouse* is a thrilling look at the heyday of the publishing industry . . . [and] the man who, as Kachka points out, shaped the postwar intellectual tone in this country through the sheer dint of his brazenness and charm." (*Entertainment Weekly*)

"Irresistible . . . Juicy history . . . A delectable story about the intersection of art, commerce, passion and personalities. . . . *Hothouse* feels like a party where you're surprised to discover

that you know—and admire—most of the other guests.” (Los Angeles Times) “What is it about literary types? Oh, the sex! Oh, the emotional drama! And, oh, what tremendous fun it all is to read about when we’re in the hands of a writer who knows how to spin a savory tale. So it is with Boris Kachka’s delectably gossipy *Hothouse*, a deeply researched, jam-packed, surprisingly hard-to-put-down history of the eminent publishing house Farrar, Straus Giroux that escapes lit-nerd ghettoization by the sheer force of its storytelling. . . . *Hothouse* is a ripping read.” (Laura Collins-Hughes *The Boston Globe*) “Colorful history . . . *Hothouse* isn’t a management book; it’s a narrative of large personalities at play. Yet out of it comes a clear account of how to thrive in a tough commercial environment. . . . Kachka tells the story of the house’s success in delicious detail.” (Paul Elie *The Wall Street Journal*) “Dishy . . . Entertaining . . . [A] vivid account.” (Mary Dearborn *The New Republic*) “A roaring chronicle . . . For anyone with a sweet tooth for the book world or a thought and a care for American culture after the Second World War, the book is a brightly lit, well-stocked candy store. . . . It’s also a superb business story, revealing how an enterprise became an institution. . . . [An] essential book.” (Matt Weiland *Bookforum*) “The truth about industry books is that they rarely interest those who live and breathe outside of the industry in question. In other words, people on the street rarely clamor for tours of the office buildings above them. The rare ability not only to lead the reader in, but induce him to want to stay and peer into the filing cabinets is what makes Boris Kachka’s first book *Hothouse* something of a masterpiece of business biography. . . . The real success of *Hothouse* lies in its telling, and Kachka manages a commanding momentum through decades at full wingspan.” (Interview) “A rough-and-tumble, heroic tale . . . Kachka takes us back to the black-and-white era when good old-fashioned hardy covers stood unassailably at the very heart of the culture. . . . I loved reading the spiky, spicy evocation of the company’s good old days.” (Jonathan Galassi, *New York* magazine) “Scintillating . . . Crammed with delicious anecdotes . . . [A] compulsively readable tale of the creation, triumphs and tribulations of Farrar, Straus and Giroux.” (Julia M. Klein *The Forward*) “Scintillating history . . . Writing with vigor, skill, and expertise and drawing on dozens of in-depth interviews, Kachka shares risqué gossip and striking insider revelations and vividly profiles the house’s world-shaping writers. . . . Kachka’s engrossing portrait of an exceptional publishing house sheds new light on the volatile mixture of commerce, art, and passion that makes the world of books go round.” (Booklist) “Essential reading . . . A lively and entertaining story any book lover will devour with relish.” (Harvey Freedenberg *Shelf Awareness*) “A juicy account of the postwar New York book world . . . Not your average beach read, *Hothouse*, out August 6, is one nonetheless—a Gossip Girl for those fascinated with the literary elite.” (Harpers’ Bazaar, Summer 2013) “Hot List” “Farrar, Straus and Giroux is the Versailles of American publishing. . . . But every palace has its intrigue, as Kachka shows us in this lively, witty account. . . . The extramarital (and often intramural) affairs conducted by publisher Roger Straus in the 1960s and ’70s were legendary—his wife called the company a “sexual sewers”—but the entire office apparently would have made Don Draper blush. Kachka dishes up these cold cases piping hot, but his research reveals an equally fascinating business story: How do you balance fine art and filthy lucre?” (Mark Athitakis, *AARP Magazine*) “Juicy . . . The New York book world, poised between scruffy glamour and crass commercialism, emerges in this lively chronicle of an iconic institution . . . Entertaining, accessible, smart, and thought-provoking, this is a book very much in tune with the lost literary milieu it re-creates.” (Publishers Weekly) “Lively history . . . A smart, savvy portrait of arguably the country’s most important publisher . . . complete with sex, sour editors, and the occasional stumble into financial success. . . . A smart and informative portrait of the mechanisms of modern publishing.” (Kirkus)