



Sara B. Franklin. 2024. *The Editor: How Publishing Legend Judith Jones Shaped Culture in America*. New York: Atria Books. xviii + 316 pp. US\$29.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-982-13434-1. Also available in paperback, ebook and audiobook.

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Even if you have never heard of Judith Jones, there is a good chance you have seen a depiction of her: swooning over a pot of boeuf bourguignon in the 2009 film *Julie & Julia*, or helping to bring Julia Child’s television program *The French Chef* to life in HBO Max’s comedy-drama series *Julia* (2022). Jones plays a supporting role in these fictionalized accounts, but in Sara B. Franklin’s *The Editor: How Publishing Legend Judith Jones Shaped Culture in America*, Jones is brought center stage.

Diplomatic, and with soft hand—a “lady editor,” as she was sometimes called—Jones took her green pencil to the works of such literary giants as Sylvia Plath, Langston Hughes, John Updike and Anne Tyler. Yet the Alfred A. Knopf editor is perhaps best remembered for being responsible for such culinary classics as *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961), *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (1973) and *The Taste of Country Cooking* (1976). An avid cook herself, Jones was passionate about making good food accessible to home cooks. Through a career that lasted from the 1940s to the 2010s, Jones not only published cookbooks, she helped create a distinct moment in American food history.

Written for a general audience (most chapters begin with fictionalized narratives of Jones’s life), Franklin’s monograph balances personal biography, professional career and cultural context. Beginning with Jones’s childhood in Manhattan and learning about food from the family’s Barbadian cook, the book traces the big moments (and big books) of the editor’s life. After a time spent in Paris, working at Doubleday’s European office and rubbing elbows with the likes of Gore Vidal, Jones returned to New York. While at Doubleday, she was responsible for picking *The Diary of Anne Frank* from the slush pile and convinced the publishing house to take a chance on releasing it in America. It was a decision that helped Jones land a job at Knopf, where she would stay for the rest of her career. At first, Jones worked on

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poetry and fiction, only starting to build an impressive cookbook list after a French gourmet cookbook—later titled *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, which Jones helped name—landed by chance on her desk.

Although cookbooks feature prominently in this story of Jones's life, food itself is not on the menu. Unlike Jones's memoir *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food* (2007) that closes with a selection of recipes, *The Editor*, as its name suggests, explores Jones's career in publishing, detailing along the way publicity tours, the influence of television on the book market, conglomerization and the rise of the celebrity chef.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is its insight into how women's work in the industry was fraught with difficulty and rendered invisible. In her early years at Knopf, Jones saw both Alfred and Blanche Knopf claim her editorial work as their own, and even after getting a number of bestsellers under her belt, her role was not always appreciated. Robert Gottlieb, who came on as editor-in-chief at Knopf in 1968, is quoted in the book as saying to Franklin, "I don't think most of [Judith's literary] writers needed, wanted, or appreciated editorial input" (121). Franklin's research—which draws on oral-history interviews, professional correspondence and Jones's personal papers—documents the opposite, showing an editor with a light but expert touch. Jones was committed to making books their best, and was known to cook alongside her authors, taking meticulous notes in the kitchen and even airmailing loaves of bread to Julia Child in their shared quest to find the perfect baguette recipe. And while not every book on the history of editing discusses motherhood, menstrual pain and hysterectomy, *The Editor* does; these circumstances not only shaped Jones's personal life but her professional career.

If there is any critique to be made, it is that, in trying to bring Jones out of publishing's shadow, Franklin sometimes swings too far the other way and puts her on a pedestal. There are a few attempts to take a more critical eye to Franklin's subject, a woman who came from a wealthy and well-connected background. Recognizing the "almost entirely white" circles Jones moved within for most of her career, Franklin makes note of how Jones, in her attempts to "translate" diverse authorial voices and make them palatable for white audiences, in fact "further exoticized authors of color and their food" (148). These very valid points feel like a breath of fresh air when they occur, adding complexity to Jones as a figure and making her three-dimensional.

Documenting the day-to-day work of any editor is no small feat. As Franklin notes, it is a role designed to be invisible, with "labor playing out behind the curtain [...] meant to be difficult, if not impossible, for readers to see" (xiii). What *The Editor* offers is a rare glimpse behind that curtain, and it is a book that will benefit readers wanting to know more about how (cook)books come into being and students getting their first taste of publishing studies.

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