
The Penguin Revolution: A closer look at Penguin's modern approaches to cover designs and how these methods have influenced worldly views of reading and publishing today.

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Abstract

Three horizontal bands colour coded according to the theme of the book; green for crime, orange for fiction and dark blue for biography. This layout, and a combination of typesetting and the humble Penguin logo, have unified to create a form not only bold in its appearance but also a globally recognised design. Since their first publication in 1935, Penguin Books have gone through numerous changes in their book cover design, catering to the desires of the market and on occasion setting these desires, but due to effective brand image and a concentration on simplicity, this initial three band design has remained instilled in our minds. This article will demonstrate these changes in design and examine how Penguin Books created such iconic archetypes in book cover design from 1935 to today with close attention to series editions and their paratextual impact.

Key Words

Design; brand image; Penguin books; paratext; publishing; paperback

Introduction

Since their first publication in 1935, Penguin Books have been the scene of continuous innovation in publishing. Allen Lane, founder of Penguin books, recognised certain gaps in the contemporary publishing business and output thus sought ways of satisfying these unmet demands.. It is Lane's recognition of these opportunities combined with his ruthlessness and determination to make the most of these circumstances which undoubtedly led to his successes. This primary position within publishing was the result of struggle from the outset.

As with a number of notable publishers in the early twentieth century, Lane became a part of the trade through a familial link: John Lane. Although a very distant relative, the family whose name was originally Williams, recognised these ties and gave Allen the middle name 'Lane' to strengthen the connection. Once Allen was taken on board the family changed their name to just Lane. As co-founder of The Bodley Head publishing house, John employed Allen to work alongside him in 1919 and it took little time for Allen to become a valued member of the firm. Following John's death, Allen inherited the house in 1925 and immediately had to consider bringing about potential improvements due to its near bankruptcy at the time. Allen initially kept the house afloat by continuously bringing in new directors who each invested in the business. The Bodley house would become an increasing liability to Lane and Penguin, eventually racking up debts that would leave Lane no choice but to put the house into receivership.

In 1935 Penguin Books was founded and by the following year Lane decided to neglect The Bodley Head and focus his attention towards developing the new publishing house. He had recognised the need for books to be made readily available to a newly literate market currently un-catered for, cheaply available in places outside of traditional bookshops; specifically railway stations. This insight drew from his ambition to "put books into the hands of many who would otherwise never buy or read at all" (Feather 1988, 213). In order to achieve his goal Lane decided to produce large numbers of good quality books at lower prices in paperback form to be made available "through newsagents, bookstalls, railway stations and a host of other 'non-bookshop' outlets" (Feather 1988, 213). As a result, the mass-market paperback took exploded, allowing for reading to change from an elite occupation to be a common pastime for all classes in Britain.

Having now satisfied this need for a mass market for books, extending this market into all corners of Britain, Lane directed his attention towards the physical appearance of Penguin Books. He recognised that "as paperbacks evolved, so did ideas of how they should appear and how they should reach their intended market" (Baines 2005, 6), and as a result sought to respond to these changes in both remarkable and complicated ways.

Observing Penguin's Paratexts

A fundamental achievement of Lane was the familiarisation of the importance, not solely the quality of content within Penguin Books, but also the exterior presentation of these books. Philippe Lejeune similarly makes this connection describing the peripherals of a book as "a fringe of printed text which in reality controls ones whole reading of the text" (Lejeune 1975, 45). The term we work towards here is the *paratext*. Genette (1997) theorises the concept as the elements that come together to accompany the text and as a result create a book whereby one can enter, turn back and come to a final conclusion; in other words, the process of opening, revising and finishing a book would not be recognisable without its exterior elements. Constituents of this exterior include aspects such as author, title, price, preface, introduction, illustrations and several other possible ingredients which, depending on their formation, can determine the success or possible failure of the reception of a book reinforcing its importance.

Penguin's attention to the paratext of a piece of text meant a number of changes were due to take place in regards to the appearance of these books. To begin with, the very first Penguins were given dust jackets and "frequently reproduced the decorative pattern of the binding" (Deutsch 1969, 2). The front and rear flaps were also used however, mainly for the blurb and

author's autobiography bearing little relevance to the context of the book. It was common for the price to appear numerous on the dust wrapper, perhaps in order to highlight the relatively low cost to the consumers. Furthermore, Penguin made the decision to number each published book which was included on the spine of every volume. This was effective, intelligent strategic planning; as the inclusion of a number for each volume not only encourages book collectors to almost obsessively want every number available but also it aided booksellers to trade optimal numbers of books in store. As a result of this decision, the Penguin section of the bookstores would have been organised numerically and eye catching-ly presented for customers.

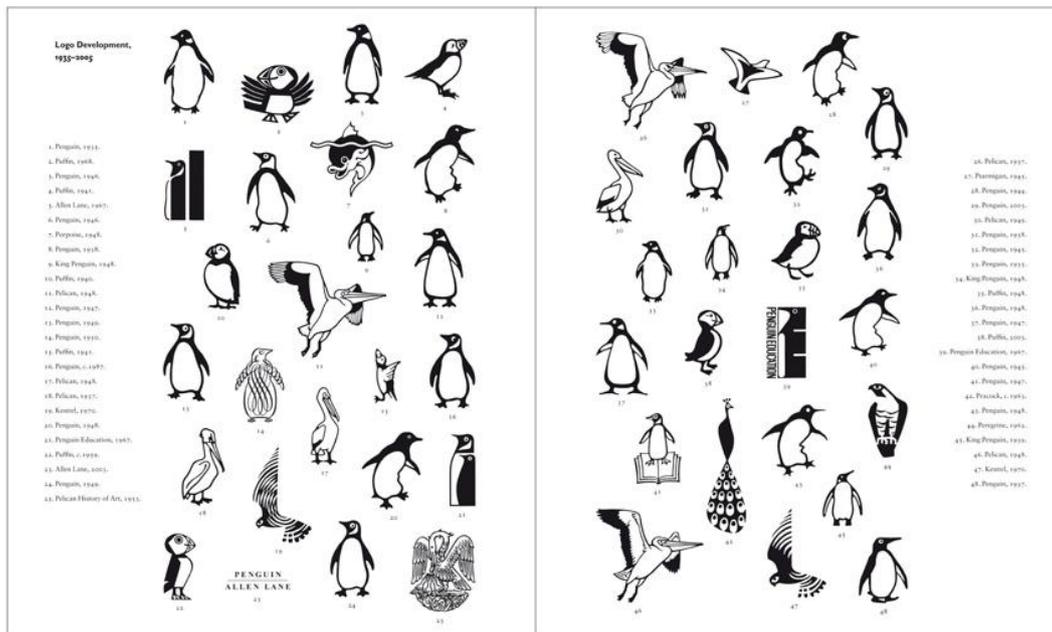
Before illustrations and extended use of colour was used on Penguin books, Jan Tschicold, typographer from 1946-1940 for the publishing house, changed the way printing took place. He informed each printer that they should have their own house rules and produced books of the exact standards which were desired by the publisher or author. This development in print soon led to the publication of Penguin's first illustrated book cover; important when recognising Penguin's desire to act upon changes in the industry as well as be a driver for these changes where possible. Consequently a new design of *The Cruel Sea* was released in 1957, displaying an apt illustration of an angry sea landscape. This was closely followed by the introduction of colour on their book covers in 1957.

March of the Penguins – understanding contexts.

In the 1930s the publisher's identity was amongst the most important aspects of a book's cover, taking a prominent position in several places. Thus the epitome and focus of the

company's brand, the Penguin logo, has undergone numerous changes in design over the last eighty years.

Lane's decision to settle on a dignified and professional design (three colour coded bands according to the theme), reflected his desire to avoid the public making connotations with regards to low quality books being produced due to the adoption of the paperback. Paperback books were in circulation prior to Penguins initial launching of them in 1935. Lane, however, was able to achieve the balance between low prices and accessible formats. As a result of this "the name Penguin and the word 'paperback' were – much to Lane's annoyance- virtually synonymous" (Baines 2005, 12). Once the overall design was set, it was time for the publisher to adopt its own name. Lane was sure he didn't want a name too serious to reflect scholarly imitations, but something playful which could be directed to every type of reader. After a lengthy board meeting, Lane eventually decided to settle with Penguin, "which seemed to fit the spirit of the enterprise perfectly" (Mackenzie, 1991, pp.253). Soon to follow, Edward Young – Penguins original designer – was sent to London Zoo to create a number of sketches and possible logo designs for the newly named publishing house. Over the next seventy years the flightless bird logo adapted gracefully with the changing market trends in the early years to more commercial design trends today. The achievements in the logo design were no coincidence but due to excellent in house designers beginning with Edward Young. Below is an illustration displaying the changes in the logo from 1935-2005.



Penguin's rise during the difficult years of World War Two and paper rationing was aided by happenstance. The original format size proved to be a perfect fit for the pockets of British soldiers' uniforms, A format: 7 1/8 x 4 3/8 inches - 181 x 111mm. As a result, Lane ensured vast quantities were shipped out to soldiers in need of distractions from the inevitable boredom that filled up a soldier's life in-between moments of mortal terror. In 1937 Penguin launched its first periodical, *Penguin Parade*, which was closely followed by the *Specials* which helped reinforce market primacy where publishers were now joining Lane in producing high numbers of paperback editions. Given the great upheavals at home and at the front, these periodicals were extremely topical reflecting political issues of the time echoing the strife of the world war. Furthermore, the war meant huge numbers of children were being evacuated from their homes. Lane observed this massive dislocation and as such launched Puffin Picture Books in 1940. "The picture books were noteworthy for their use of colour printing from auto-lithography and their larger format" (Baines 2005, 16) bringing a breath of escapism into young lives affected by conflict.

Marber on Crime

It is almost a truism that Penguin Books revolutionised the world of reading in the paperback form but credit is not due solely to Allen Lane's leadership but also to a number of individuals both he and his editors commissioned. A member of the Penguin team, now belated, recognised and praised, who transformed book cover design was Romek Marber. Born in Poland in 1925, Marber arrived in Britain in 1946 at the young age of twenty one after the War had come to an end. Germano Facetti, graphic designer and head of design for Penguin, recognised something special in Marber in 1961 after observing his previous work for *The Economist* and thus commissioned him to work on a cover for Simeon Potter's *Our Language* and *Language in the Modern World*. Impressed by his work on these covers, Facetti then requested Marber create an entirely new cover for Penguin's crime series. Marber's new design was so successful Facetti implemented the new strategy to blue Pelicans as well as orange fiction Penguin books almost completely unaltered and before long this new approach was standard amongst the entire list of books.

During the first year of Marber working on Penguin's cover designs, his skilful eye and contribution received next to no recognition. It was not until 1962 that Herbert Spencer, founder of *Typographica* magazine wrote a lengthy article where seven of Marber's crime covers were singled out for praise. Much to Marber's dismay however, he was attributed for the individual designs, but the overall format going across all borders of Penguin Books was accredited to Facetti. After a letter of complaint from Marber, Spencer corrected this mistake in the following issue making it clear that the new designs were all the work of Marber.

The Marber Grid

Marber's attention to Penguins leading brand image and identity undoubtedly aided his achievement in cover design. His ambition was always to maintain this identity that had been established over many years whilst considering that "Penguin Crime books are an integral part of this identity" (Eye Magazine 2004). The maintenance of the identity was the reason for Marber's decision both to retain the crime covers green colour but freshen it up to a lighter shade and keep the horizontal bands going across the books. The image took up two thirds of the cover space and the white band now occupied the top referred to Young's original design locating the white band in the middle; this was soon transformed when Marber made the entire cover green. Sans Serif Standard type font was used and after the capital, titles were all lower case which seemed to suit with the changing post-war period and the modernization of books. These elements constituted what is known today as the Marber Grid, changing book covers and design techniques forever as these decisions allowed freedom of placement with regards to title and author.

Marber's work would prove iconic. Eventually retailers were being forced to return books presenting the old designs and ordering the new ones to ensure sales were maintained. As a graphic image maker Marber was impressively able to illustrate novels with symbolic images that were both thought provoking and suitably threatening to evoke the menacing tone of the crime series content which provided effective contemporary identity. Unlike most commissioned designers, Marber was given no brief and as a result enjoyed his freedom to implement elements and illustrations where he personally, saw fit. His sole point of contact was through Facetti who informed him of his upcoming titles to design and read the Penguin manuscripts.

It was not until Marber began creating designs in larger batches that he lost passion for the job. He expressed that “When you do a lot of covers it stops being a matter of life and death. You are not so tight about them that you want to make every cover a masterpiece.” (Eye Magazine 2004). By 1964 Marber had left Penguin Books, replaced by Alan Aldridge but his work remains one of paramount cultural import. As described for an exhibition at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Brighton Gallery, his work's “Acute graphic vision, and distinct sense of modernity, served to enrich British design and design education” (Faculty of Arts, Brighton 2014).

Author as 'Brand'

From the 1960s onwards aspects of publishing become a little more complicated. Where book covers were once a means to express the contents of a book, this exterior ‘jacket’ can now be manipulated in various ways for several intended outcomes. Authors soon came to realise that their status in the realm of publishing can determine the level of sales for their books. In other words, the sender’s (in this case the author’s) “degree of authority” can define the texts “pragmatic status” (Genette 1997, 8).

Increasingly, there have been conflicts between author and publisher when both parties seek optimal recognition in the texts they work towards getting published. Of course, a publisher wants to be responsible for publishing respected authors, but they want more for their own name or logo to remain prominent on a book cover. This competitive nature can be seen in various cases in book publishing but what author and publisher have and always will share as a common interest in the desire for optimal sales for the book in process of publication.

Phil Baines (2005) demonstrates a case in his book titled *Penguin By Design*, whereby author publisher tensions have arisen at Penguin. The section entitled *A Failed Experiment* explains Graham Greene's desire to have his name on the cover of his books enlarged and no illustrations present as "Greene felt the books were selling well on the strength of his name alone" (2005, 175). Greene contacted Art Director David Pelham discussing his thoughts around his wanting to transform the covers to be purely typographic. Pelham disagreed and informed cover designer Derek Birdsall to call Greene in an attempt to persuade him to stick to illustrated covers. Greene was not convinced and the covers were converted to purely typographic as Greene had wanted and as a result Pelham informed Birdsall to design two typographic covers "which duly appeared in the bookshops" (2005, 175). Sales for the books dramatically fell and covers were reverted to their original illustrated design with both author and painting enlarged.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after close examination of the development of Penguin book covers it has become evident that the publishing firm have significantly influenced approaches to reading since 1935. Allen Lane, the editors and designers he commissioned proved to revolutionise reading and develop it into what it has become today: a form of escapism, an outlet for every kind of person and an educational resource. Furthermore Penguin's decision to alter their books' paratextual elements with the collaboration of Romek Marber has undoubtedly set the tone for book cover design across numerous publishing houses. This stands as a testament to their innovative and astute marketing of emerging popular fiction.

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