

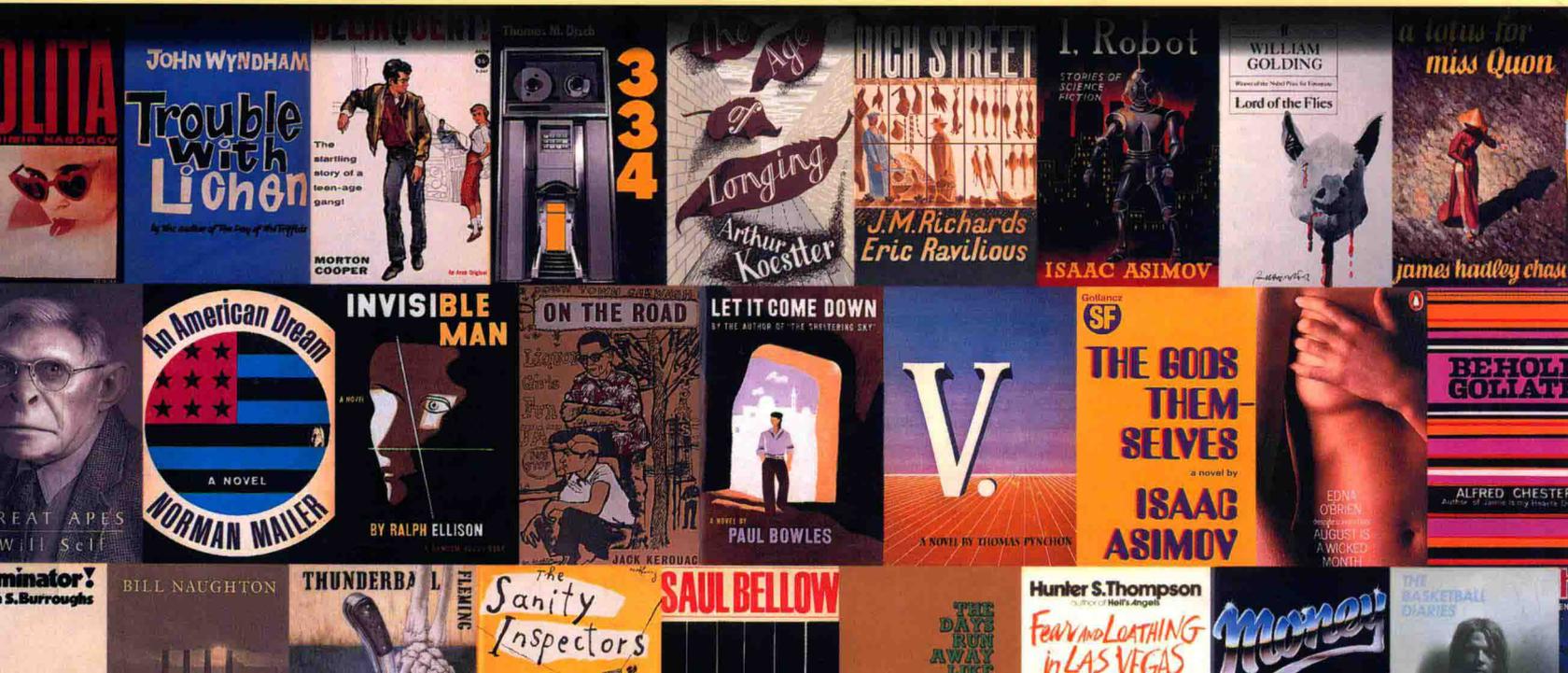


MITCHELL BEAZLEY

FRONT COVER

GREAT BOOK JACKET AND COVER DESIGN

ALAN POWERS



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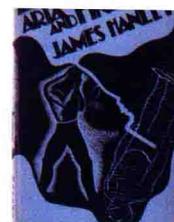
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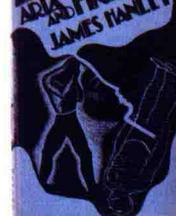
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The Evolution of the Book Jacket

Top: L. Couperus, *God en Goden* (God and gods), Amsterdam, Veen, 1903. Cover design by Jan Toorop.

Toorop was a painter and illustrator in Holland, influenced by batik designs from the Dutch colonies in Indonesia. This is a fine example of a book blocking in Art Nouveau style, for an author of symbolist tales. By 1912, however, this style had gone out of fashion, and Couperus requested his publisher to commission a book cover in 'anything but a modern style.'



Middle: Joseph Conrad, *The Rescue*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1920. Designer unknown.

The use of flat colours to make a poster-like image was popular in the 1920s, but this is a neatly composed jacket with a balance of text and evocative illustration.

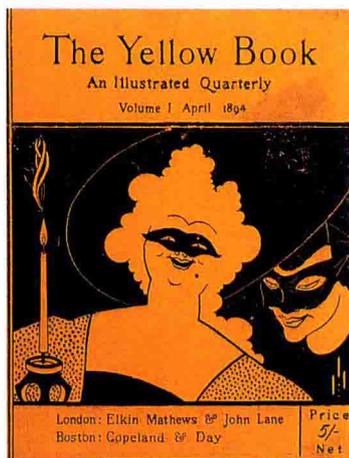
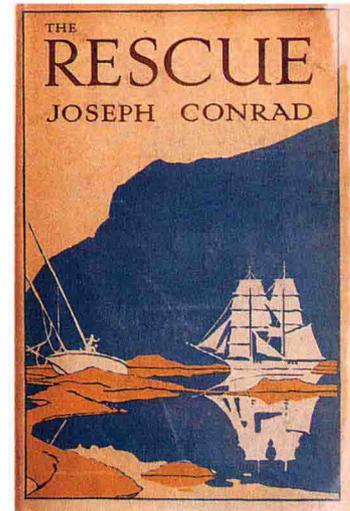
Bottom: Henry Harland, literary editor, *The Yellow Book*, An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume One, April 1894, London, Elkin Matthews and John Lane.

Cover design by Aubrey Beardsley. The quintessence of the 1890s, *The Yellow Book* was conceived on New Year's Day 1894 and launched four months later, with Aubrey Beardsley as Art Editor. When Oscar Wilde was arrested a year later in London, the newspaper headlines proclaimed, 'Yellow Book under his arm' as proof of decadence, and the publisher John Lane recalled, 'It killed *The Yellow Book* and it nearly killed me.' In fact Wilde, who was excluded from the contributors, said 'It is horrid and not yellow at all' – the second claim in defiance of the evidence.

A book jacket or cover is a selling device, close to advertising in its form and purpose, but also specific to a product that plays a teasing game of hide and seek with commerce. The reason for this ambiguity is that books have never been purely consumer goods. Many books have a built-in resistance to obsolescence, as a combined result of their physical form and content. People become attached to them and, perhaps, even after nearly two centuries of mass-production, some distant memory of their preciousness and scarcity in the pre-industrial age still clings to them.

The printed book, which is usually associated with scholarship and wisdom rather than with worldly transactions, has an aura that is perhaps one reason why books have been so slow to acquire any other form of decorative cover apart from the traditional binding. It may also account for a surprising lack of available information about book jackets. Even today, collecting book jackets is relegated to a class of trivia unworthy of the true collector. There are many detailed studies of book binding, but no standard work on the history of the book jacket. This contrasts oddly with the reality of book-collecting, in which twentieth-century classics achieve high prices – even higher if they include a jacket that is in good condition.

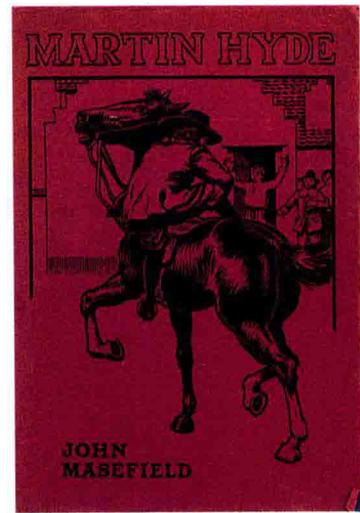
The scarcity of surviving jackets has its origins in the historical practice of removing and throwing away the cover after purchasing the book, a practice which itself reflected the low esteem in which jackets were held for many years. Keeping the jacket on a book would be like storing clothes in the carrier bag from the shop where they had been bought and, indeed, the aim of many jackets was no more than to keep the binding cloth underneath in good condition while the book was in the shop and then during transit to the purchaser's home.



Book jackets first appeared in England in the nineteenth century, in a culture that was still discovering the rules of consumerism. Their early evolution came about in fits and starts, constrained by cultural inhibitions that are now difficult to understand. When decoration was present on the outside of the book, it took the form of either blocking onto binding cloth, or pasting printed paper sheets onto the front and back boards. In both cases, the design content may have been very similar to a book jacket, and the blockings of books from the 1890s, in particular, are often charming and original. These books were evidently meant to be displayed face upward as

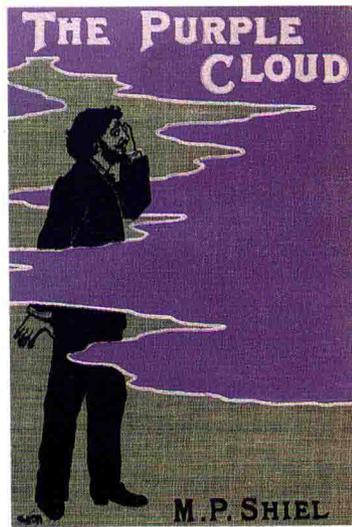
items of interior decoration, since the whole attention is given to the front board. *The Yellow Book*, an illustrated quarterly famous for its associations with Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, was one such example, and owning a copy was a badge of belonging to the avant-garde culture.

Only after 1900 did book jackets begin to become commonplace, and even then, the great majority consisted simply of a repetition of the blocking from the binding on a sheet of paper. There was possibly some additional information on the back, but little in the form of a promotional “blurb” or a summary of the content. When pictures were used on covers, it was often for more specialized types of book, particularly



Top: John Masefield, *Martin Hyde*, London, Wells Gardner, Darton & co., 1910. Jacket design by T. C. Dugdale. This historical romance by the future poet laureate is typical of children's books which pioneered the use of specially drawn illustrations for book jackets.

Middle: M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1901. Designer "W.J.R.". The author of this pioneering science-fiction was described in a review of an earlier book as "the Apostle of Breathlessness". Shiel (1865–1947) describes how a purple gas destroys all but two members of humanity. The front board and spine carry a blocked design suitable to the sensational quality of the tale. The novel was filmed in the 1950s as "The World, the Devil and the Flesh".

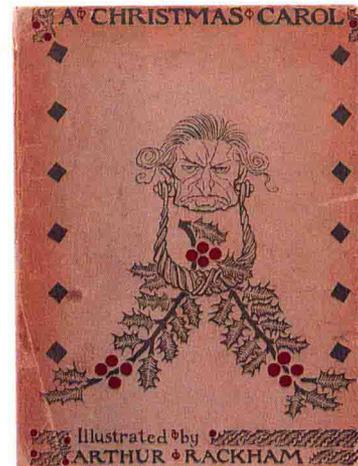


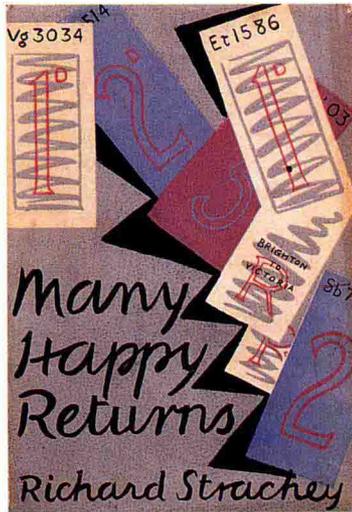
Bottom: Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, London, William Heinemann, 1915. Jacket design by Arthur Rackham. Rackham made his reputation as an illustrator of reprinted children's classics with *Rip Van Winkle*, 1905. This jacket only hints at the content of one of the best-known tales, and its use of the door knocker cleverly represents an invitation to enter the book.

the 1914–18 war was able to set back their further development until the 1920s. During this decade, advertising and the study of salesmanship both became more widespread, largely inspired by the economic buoyancy of the United States. Branded and packaged goods, as opposed to generic products sold by measure, were a growing feature among foods, medicines, and a range of household products from the 1880s onward. Books could learn from this practice, for not only could a publisher establish a brand image, but he could make different genres of book more easily identifiable for the convenience of the customer. Consumers, who were growing up in a culture richer in visual images than any before, and were experiencing motion-picture films for the first time, were beginning to take in visual images subliminally as well as to read text for information. In addition, colour was more readily available for printing.

for stories for children. Increased competition within the book trade before the First World War, however, created the first wave of designed jackets, and a writer in 1911 commented that “the exigencies of trade have caused publishers to tax their ingenuity to the utmost, and they vie with each other in presenting their wares in as attractive a form as possible. They are apparently convinced that a book, like a woman, is none the worse, but rather the better, for having a good dressmaker. To this end, they have enlisted artists of distinction to design book covers and end papers, and now it is quite a commonplace remark that, so far as certain classes of literature are concerned, ‘the cover sells the book’.”

This first wave of jackets was so relatively fragile that





Top: Richard Strachey, *Many Happy Returns*, London, Constable, 1933. Jacket design by Ray Strachey.

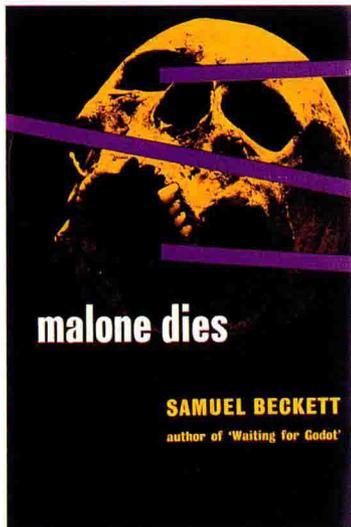
A successful design by the author's wife, using a collage effect with bus tickets and loose script lettering to match.

Middle: Tennessee Williams, *In the Winter of Cities*, Norfolk, Conn., New Directions, 1957. Jacket design by Elaine Lustig-Cohen.

Indirect suggestion through abstract formal design, seamlessly linked to the presentation of the book title.

Bottom: Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, London, John Calder Ltd., 1958. Designer unknown.

A striking use of photography with an abstract overlay to convey the shocking quality of Beckett's work which had recently burst on a surprised reading and theatre-going public, following the London production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955.



Before the First World War, artists often produced a painted artwork for colour printing, which involved an expensive making of "colour process blocks" whose reproductive quality was inferior to more skillful methods that involved "colour separation" by the artist. Whether by letterpress or lithography, covers drawn in this way could be printed more effectively to achieve a stronger visual impact, as can be seen in the work of designers such as Edward McKnight Kauffer, whose understanding of technical processes helped to boost his early career.

Such experience soon fed back into the art schools, where the distinction between "fine" and "commercial" art was breaking down anyway, partly as a result of the necessity for artists to earn a living in a sluggish market for pictures. In the 1920s and '30s, publishers, if they so

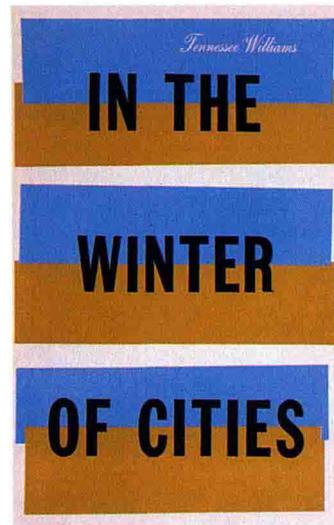
wished, could buy the services of some of the finest artists of the time for their covers, from

academicians such as Sir William Orpen and Sir William Nicholson (designer of William Heinemann's windmill logo), to brilliant youngsters such as Eric Ravilious, Edward Bawden, Barnett Freedman, and Rex Whistler.

In an age of publishing individualism, the look of the jacket much depended on the taste of the firm's directors. Richard De La Mare at Faber and Faber was one of the great patrons of the time, while Victor Gollancz employed Stanley Morison to create his long-lasting series of yellow typographic jackets.

In the United States, the typographic designer W.A. Dwiggins (1880–1956), closely attached from 1920 onward to the publishing firm of Alfred Knopf, brought a new gaiety to book covers causing, as a contemporary

wrote, "those slim vertical strips [of book spines] to crackle and vibrate and sing." Dwiggins's jackets stood out in the American market, which was mostly considered by writers of the time to be of a low standard, although it is possible that today we might value more highly the typical designs that contemporaries considered vulgar. Good American book jacket design rapidly asserted itself, so that by 1949, Charles Rosner could say that US jackets, especially those designed by Alvin Lustig for New Directions, showed, "an unlimited use of imagination", bringing the latest findings in visual communication derived from abstract art directly into the marketplace and into the home.



Top: John Fowles, *The Magus*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1966. Jacket design by Tom Adams.

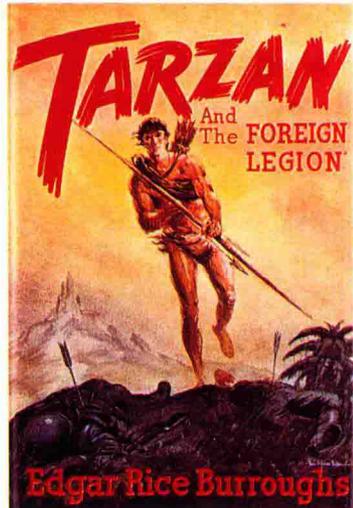
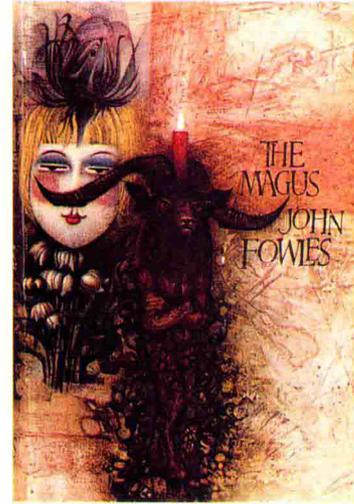
Tom Adams made his reputation with the jacket for Fowles's psychological thriller, *The Collector*, 1963. The jacket for its successor gives primacy to images from the novel, and the lettering is reduced in scale, although well placed against a blank field in the design.

Bottom: Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Foreign Legion*, New York, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., 1947. Jacket design by John Coleman Burroughs.

Composed as a magazine story in 1944, this was one of many sequels to Burroughs's most famous work, the original *Tarzan of the Apes*, 1914. No publisher wanted this tale of the Pacific War; so Burroughs published it himself, with a cover designed by his son.

The book trade in continental Europe remained strangely detached from these Anglo-Saxon activities. The typical French, Italian, or German book was issued in plain paper, as a half-finished if still readable product awaiting completion in the form of a bespoke binding, with a plain if stylish typographic wrapper. This throwaway elegance still affects book design in these countries, and it may be symptomatic of the Europeanization of English culture that a non-glossy, non-pictorial cover has become the latest phase in the cycle between restraint and excess, as seen in the latest house style of the publishers Faber and Faber.

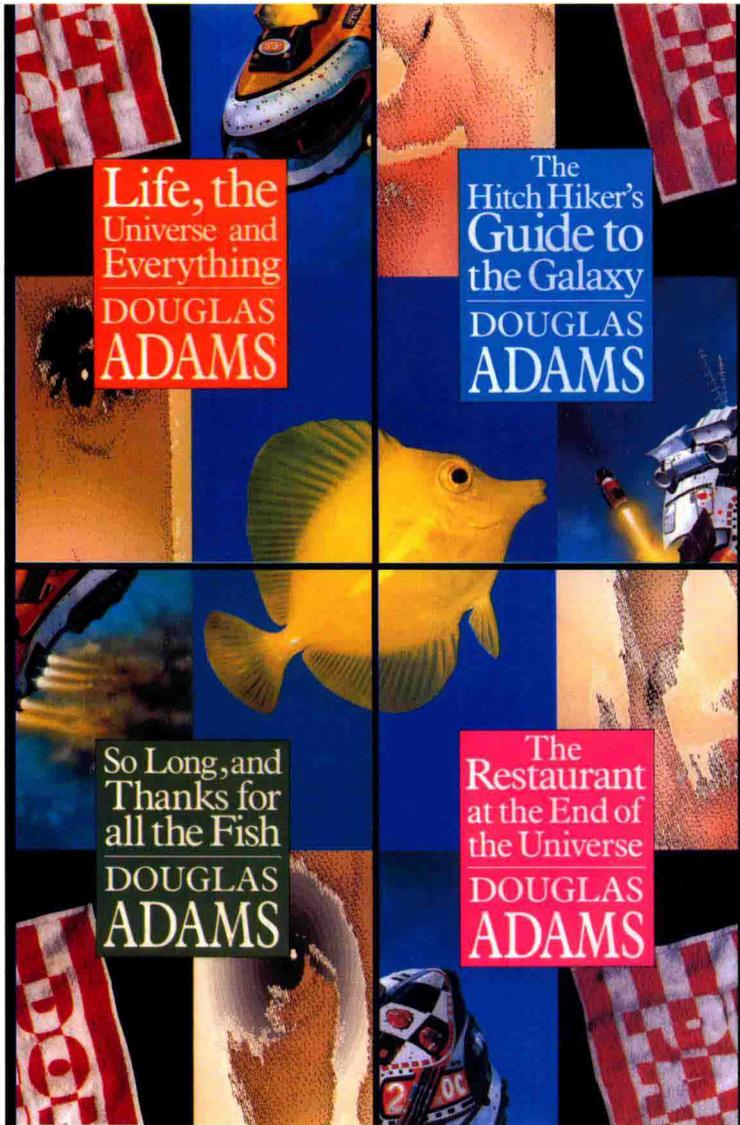
The launch of Penguin Books by Allen Lane in 1935 was the beginning of one of the largest changes in publishing since the invention of the printing press. Only the conservatism of the book trade, which amounted almost to a set of restrictive practices, had hitherto prevented books from being made and sold so cheaply, but the conditions of the Depression led publishers to take desperate measures. Lane's risk-taking intuition meant that all publishers, sooner or later, had to respond to the vastly increased market for book-buying that Lane had started to tap. The Penguin design, which involved devising a new brand and series



identity within a tight cost constraint, was based largely on the Albatross Library, a European series of English language reprints. The books went a long way toward repudiating the sensationalism of cover design associated with American "dime novels". Even among paperback publishers, however, a certain snobbery continued to prevail, with Penguin taking a decidedly upmarket position in Britain, while acknowledging that across the Atlantic conditions required adapting to a less sophisticated market both in terms of selection of titles and visual presentation. Throughout its many transformations, Penguin is one company that still has an immediately recognizable quality, and among the smaller paperback publishers, Black Sparrow produces books that are collectible for their covers if for nothing else.

In the publishing world of today, the distinction between hardback and paperback still exists, but more as a function of marketing than of production. Books may be launched first in hardback, in the traditional way, but most publishers issue their own paperbacks rather than selling rights to a specialist paperback publisher. A book with an established visual identity as a hardback will probably keep the same cover in paperback, although publishers who deal in reprints and imports are more likely to create an overall identity for their imprint.

The position of the designer in the book trade has changed too. The cover is usually still treated as a special stand-alone item, independent of the typographic design inside the book. The in-house designer will probably be involved in a strategy for the look of all the company's



Above: Douglas Adams, *The Douglas Adams Series*, London, Pan, 1987. Cover art direction and design by Gary Day-Ellison.

Proclaimed on the back as 'a trilogy of four', Douglas Adams's quirky tales of space travel are well matched by Gary Day-Ellison's interchangeable covers. Each split image can be assembled as a centrepiece by shuffling the pack, and the spines carry the number '42' in Lucher colour-test style dots, a number well known to contain the secret of the universe.

products, and there may be a freelance art director employed to commission individual artists within a consistent style. In most publishing houses, the dummy-prototype of the jacket (nowadays easily mocked up with a computer and laser-printer) has to be approved by the sales team, who have regular contact with retail buyers and claim to have a sixth sense for what will be commercially successful. If the book is a new one, the author may be asked for approval, but he or she is unlikely to be able to contradict the professionals. Producing successful book jackets is an inexact science at best, for the field is always changing. Some jackets achieve classic status almost instantly, however. It is hard now to separate Louis de Bernières's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* from the squiggly lettering and silhouettes of Jeff Fisher.

Jacket styles tend to go in waves. Like any product in a crowded marketplace, they need to stand out, and this can be achieved by speaking quietly amidst a lot of noise as readily as by shouting in a void. After the raucous clamour of the 1960s, high on the discovery of cheap colour printing, airbrushing, Letraset, and other excitements, the style of the 1970s was often deliberately reticent and supposedly nostalgic. There was undoubtedly a loss of creativity, however, and Mike Dempsey, a former art director for Fontana books, wrote of the way that designers had become "marionettes whose movements and wishes are tightly controlled." He summed it up as, "The bland leading the bland."

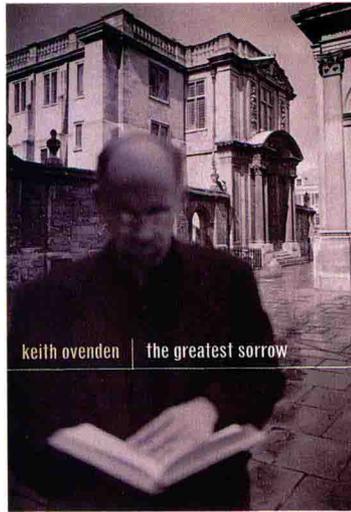
The illustrator and designer have an unprecedented range of tools at their disposal today for creating and manipulating images. Computers allow for an infinite

number of overlays and colour transformations, giving images the visual equivalent of an echo effect on a synthesizer. Profusion seems to be giving way to a renewed simplicity, with a preference for one strong image on a cover, possibly distorted or combined with text anchored in a flat coloured field which is often as bright as possible.

Perhaps a deep-seated love of books among those whose lives revolve around them has saved the book from succumbing to all the deleterious effects of marketing and promotion that might be thought to threaten it. Book buyers are willing to be charmed, but are not the kind of consumers who take kindly to being treated as fools, so some space is maintained, despite everything, for real imagination and creativity, and this pays off again and again. The threat of the digital book, which might at least offer the opportunity for designing a CD cover, seems at present unlikely to bring the age of Gutenberg to an abrupt end, and the information revolution, against expectation, actually seems to have assisted circulation both of new and of second-hand books.

Top: Keith Ovenden, *The Greatest Sorrow*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1998. Photographs and design by Richard Ivey.

Richard Ivey is a freelance photographer who has designed a number of book and magazine covers using manipulated and collaged images to interpret the subject matter. The novel concerns Philip Leroux, an Oxford philosophy don, and his relationship with a dead colleague, hence the Oxford setting and the melancholy absorbed figure.

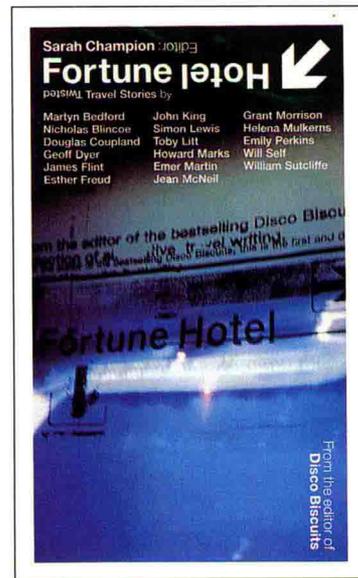


Middle: Sarah Champion, editor, *Fortune Hotel*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1999. Design by Ashworth/Sissons. Images by John Holden.

A collection of short stories with a confident handling of text and image on the cover:

beyond words, although even the worst, of which a few examples are included here, nearly always have some entertaining features.

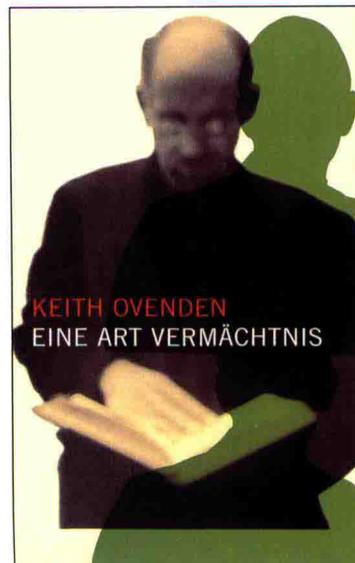
Book jacket design is accessible enough for an amateur to study, and examining a wide range of examples is an excellent training in what visual communication really means. The book cover is different to food packaging in its scope for conveying some depth and even contradiction. It is a kinetic art, which involves different viewing distances, and different sequences of handling as the front or the spine may be seen first and each needs to move the spectator into a physical engagement with the book. Tony Goodwin, who was manager of a bookshop before becoming fiction editor for Penguin,



wrote that “the whole mass of whispered mental associations which a cover will invoke are too complex, transitory, and varied to be conjured by the direct brutal frontal assault that tries to bully you into buying with an anecdotal realism.” The design of book covers helps to make a book something more than mere “information”, something that, even though it may have many thousands of identical siblings, still demands a relationship, something that when given, defines the values of the giver and recipient. The best book covers possess a form of hidden eroticism, connecting with some undefended part of the personality in order to say “take me, I am yours”.

Bottom: Keith Ovenden, *Eine Art Vermächtnis*, Munich, C. H. Beck Verlag, 1999. Photograph by Richard Ivey; Art Director, Leander Eisenmann.

Since the Oxford context would not be so recognisable to a German readership, the figure from the cover of the English edition is isolated with a shadowy presence, telling the story more symbolically.



LEE-ELLIOTT



**F.
GRIESE**

The Impact of Modernism:

The 1920s and 1930s

All the right conditions for the book jacket existed for years before it arrived. While modernism in design is often attributed to technical developments, the book jacket is largely a social phenomenon, a symptom of great changes in the structure of the world at the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – changes that are normally grouped under the umbrella term “modernism”. The word conjures images of Parisians hissing the first night of the “Rite of Spring” in 1913, Americans outraged by artworks at the Armory Show in New York in the same year, and Dadaists performing antics in Zurich cafés while old Europe tore itself apart on the Western Front during the First World War.

Book jackets of a kind that aimed to be more than the linear paper bags of the previous era sprang into life in this period. They were part of an awakening by the sleepy business of publishing to the new opportunities for communication offered by motor cars, cinema, cheap newspapers, and, within a few years, broadcasting. Although we talk of an information revolution happening in the last ten years of the twentieth century, there was also one of equivalent scale at the beginning of the century. Thus modernism in book jackets is a broader matter than avant-garde visual style – it is a genuine symptom of modernity as an unstoppable force, taking any number of forms.