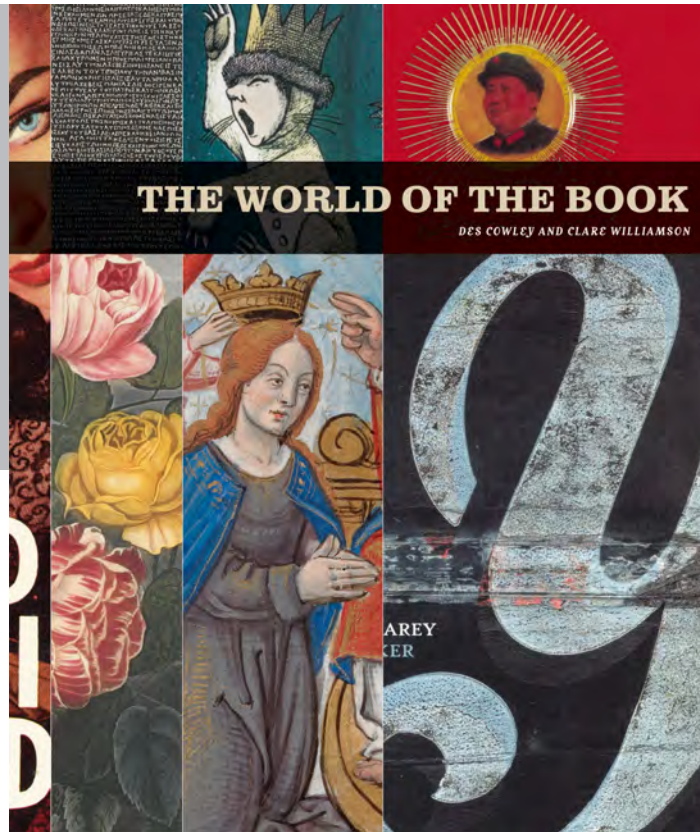


# The World of the Book

## Book Review

Every once in a while, a book that demands your attention appears. For designers, one has just been published.



Compiled from the Rare Books Collection of the State Library of Victoria, Des Cowley and Clare Williamson have presented in *The World of the Book* a captivating and relevant document of the history of great books and publishing innovations. An important aspect of the book is the authors' recognition of design and typography as essential elements of book production. While the subject matter clearly originated in many countries over several centuries, it draws strongly upon the collection of the State Library of Victoria.

### The medium is the message

When discussing the place of the book in the digital age, one is struck by the pertinence of critic and theorist Marshall McLuhan's influential and famous phrase 'the medium is the message'. First published in his photo-essay book, *The Medium is the Message* in

1967, the title's printing mistake was embraced by the author. McLuhan's volume contained prophetic concepts such as the global village and that the way content is sent and received would prove more significant than the content itself in the future. Furthermore to his assertion, the content of *The Medium is the Message* is in itself a piece of art, with the eye-catching graphic design of Quentin Fiore helping to convey McLuhan's powerful messages.

### A thematic approach

Cowley and Williamson's approach to the history of the printed word is thematic rather than chronological, which serves to strengthen the book's appeal and encourages the reader to learn more about early masterpieces of printing and design such as Gutenberg's Bible, *the Book of Hours*, and notably the work of Aldus Manutius. Printed in 1499, Aldus

Manutius's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphilla* is considered 'one of the finest illustrated books ever published'. Much of this credit is due to the typographical design by Francesco Griffo, Manutius' type designer. Unique to its time, the 174 woodcuts stand out from other works of the period in Germany, as they are drawn with clean lines and create a modern look with the use of white space. From the grid-based designs to manipulating type to take the form of a classical urn, this work has been described as a 'masterpiece of graphic design'.

### An innovative time

Cowley and Williamson describe the first half of the twentieth century as a 'period of innovation in the history of artists and illustrated books, as well as an exciting time for book design and branding. Writer and painter Wyndham Lewis' *Blast* magazine, despite

only surviving two issues in 1914, is regarded today as a great example of strikingly modern typography and design. Gertrude Stein encapsulated the expatriate Americans in Paris with the term the 'Lost Generation'. Her salon became a haven for avant-garde artists and writers such as Georges Braque, Ezra Pound and Ernest Hemingway, unable to find inspiration or a place to express their ideas back home. Those featured from her Paris circle in the 'word-portraits' of her 1934 book *Portraits and Prayers*, include Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Erik Satie. These 'portraits' have been described as the 'literary equivalent of cubist paintings', depicting a very subjective view of these great artists. The French tradition of livres d'artiste (books illustrated by artists) had a great influence over the magazine culture of the 1930s. *Minotaure* and *Verve*

**Anthony Burgess**  
*A Clockwork Orange*  
 Harmondsworth, UK, Penguin,  
 1972  
 Cover design by David Pelham  
 Courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd

magazines are recognized by Cowley and Williamson as setting this trend. The first cover of *Verve* in 1937 was specially designed by Matisse, and the magazine went on to feature articles by and prose by Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Andre Malraux, Jean-Paul Satre and Albert Camus, with illustrations by Chagall, Bonnard, Picasso, Georges Braque and Man Ray. The works produced by these artists were not passive illustrations of the texts; rather they [engaged] with words at the point of design, integrating text and images in new and innovative ways’.

**Branding: Penguin Books**

One of the most fascinating aspects of *The World of the Book* is the story of the brand development of Penguin Books and the reinvention of the paperback. Allen Lane’s creative reaction to the ‘lack of cheap reading matter’ available to him on his railway journeys was to produce books of quality for a small price. Retailing at sixpence each, the cover designs were ‘simple but effective: blue for biography, green for crime, and orange for fiction’ and intended to ‘be bought as easily and as casually as a packet of cigarettes’. Fitting easily into the average pocket or handbag, sales of the new Penguin books reached 150 000 after ten days and more than 3 million had been sold by the first year of production (1935). The design of the horizontal colour bands and the original Penguin logo are both attributed to Edward Young, an office junior at Penguin, who at only twenty-one years of age, was responsible for one of the

most effective and instantly recognizable brands. The Penguin design was reshaped as times changed and new heads of design were instated at Penguin, (something Lane had been adamantly against). Jan Tschichold was responsible for the development of the ‘Penguin Composition Rules’, which consisted of a ‘four-page document that detailed the design and typographic conventions to be used for all Penguin titles’, including a ‘flexible horizontal grid system that unified the look of the covers and spines of all the titles in the Penguin series’. Tschichold’s successor, Hans Schmoller was responsible for the vertical grid in 1948 which replaced the horizontal design, which allowed space for illustrations on the covers in the early 1950s. However, the first significant shift away from the minimalist 1930s design was due to Italian art director Germano Facetti in 1961 who employed the artistic talents of young designers such as Romek Marber, Derek Birdsall, Alan Fletcher and Roger Main. An outstanding example of the reinvention of Penguin’s branding was David Pelham’s striking cover design for Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* in 1972. Despite the more illustrative covers that followed, Penguin books has remained committed to the notion that typography is an essential element of book cover design. The fact that Cowley and Williamson dedicate a whole chapter of their book to Penguin Books reflects their belief of Penguin’s influential role in the revolution of the paperback, which continues to this day.



**An exhaustive collection**

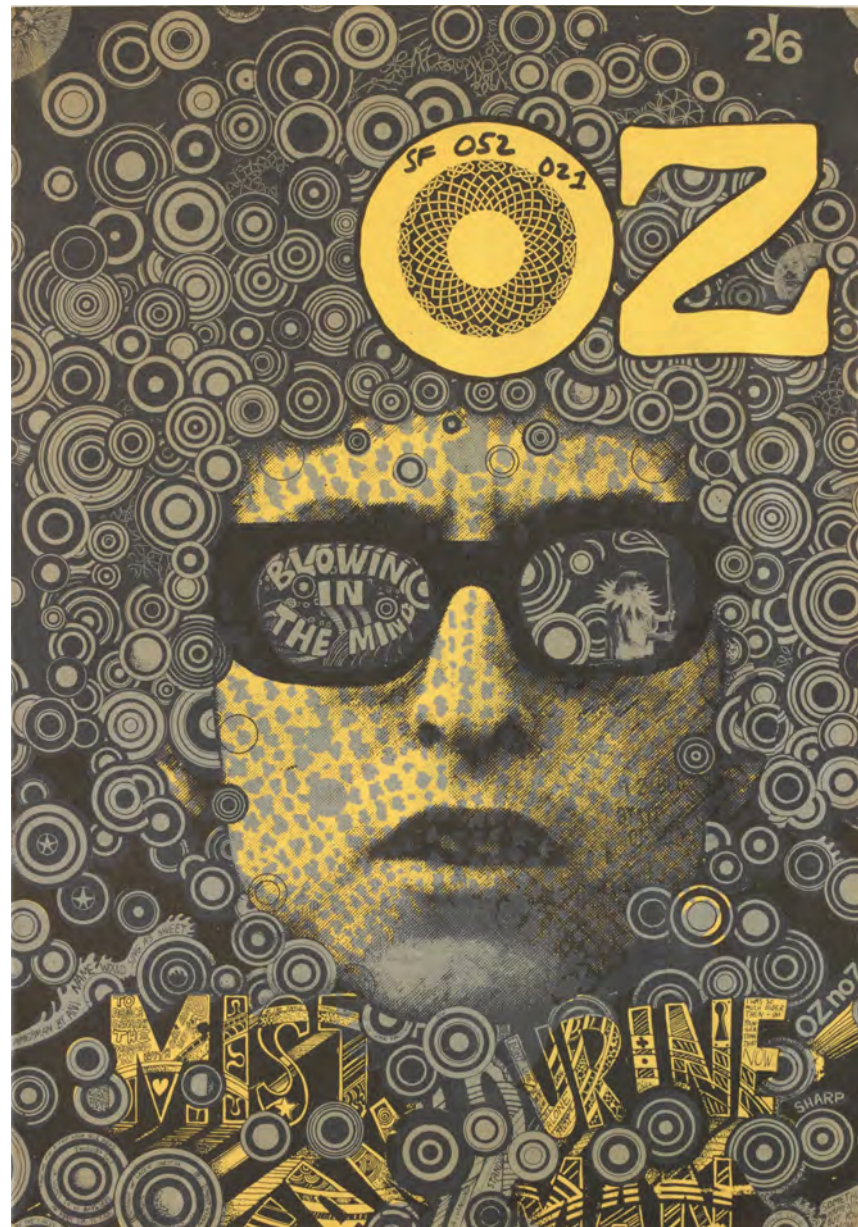
*The World of the Book* manages to encompass so much between its covers: early printmaking on tablets and papyrus to the development of the codex; scientific illustrations providing 'first hand evidence of the European's response to new worlds'; atlases, maps and books recording fantastic voyages to far away real and imagined places, particularly the mystery surrounding Terra Australis Incognita; natural history illustrations that served to render an ideal form better than a camera ever could; Japanese woodblock and brush painting; the art of bookbinding and private presses such as the Kelmscott Press; beautiful presentations of great literary works that changed the world; the art of children's books such as *Where the Wild Things Are* and representations of *Alice in Wonderland*; the Beat literature of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs; the conflict between literary and popular in the designs of comics, graphic novels and pulp fiction; the livres d'artiste and the influence of desktop publishing on contemporary

graphic design. As Cowley and Williamson demonstrate, the book is a commodity that has retained its sense of purpose through its function, aesthetic and desirability. The reports of the death of the book have been greatly exaggerated. *The World of the Book* is a fascinating anthropological journey into the history of the printed word, immersing the reader in its subject matter and inspiring one to learn more. Cowley and Williamson celebrate the medium of the book and successfully draw attention to its continued desirability as we move further into the digital age.

If books about books are your thing, this is not to be missed.

Kate McCurdy

*The World of the Book*  
 Publication date: November 2007  
 RRP: \$59.95  
 Format: 264 pp, HB, 270 x 230 mm, throughout  
 ISBN: 0-522-85378-1  
 The Miegunyah Press/Melbourne University Publishing

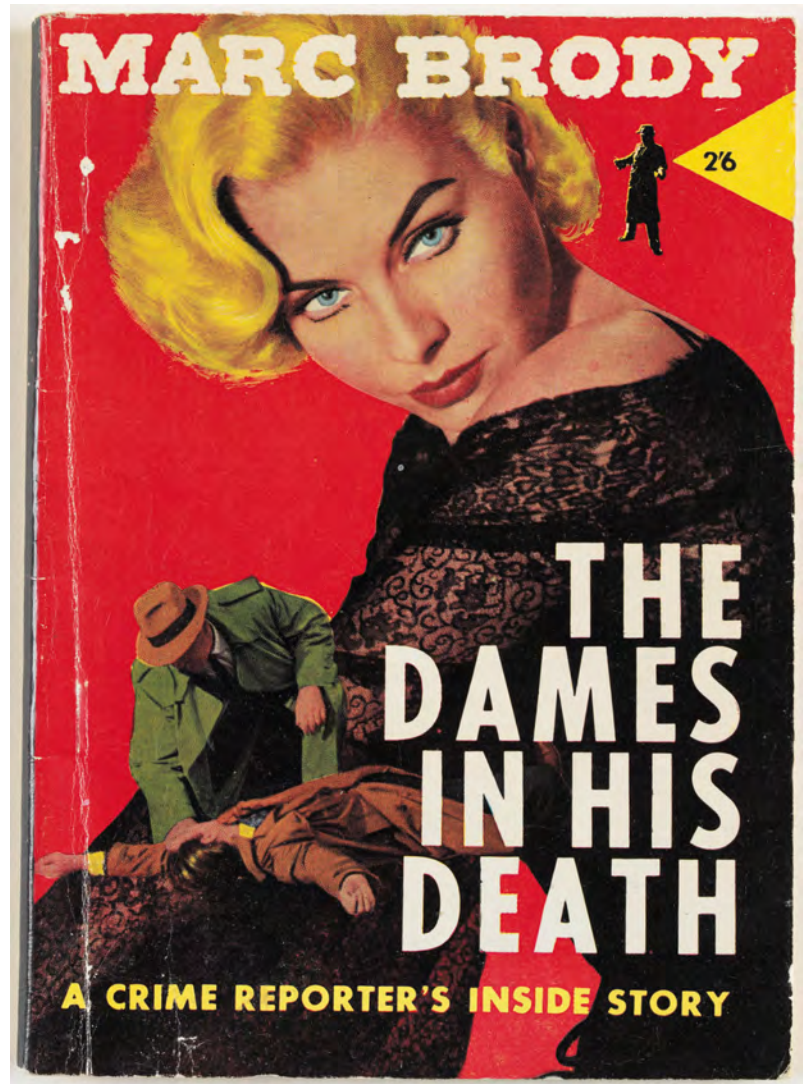


**Oz, no. 7** (above)  
 London, OZ Publications Ink Ltd, 1967  
 Artwork by Martin Sharp

**Ann Muir** (above left)  
*Harvesting Colour: The Year in a Marbler's Workshop*  
 Oldham, England, Incline Press, 1999

**Angela Cavalieri and Peter Lyssiotis** (left)  
 -1316  
 Melbourne, Masterthief, 2004

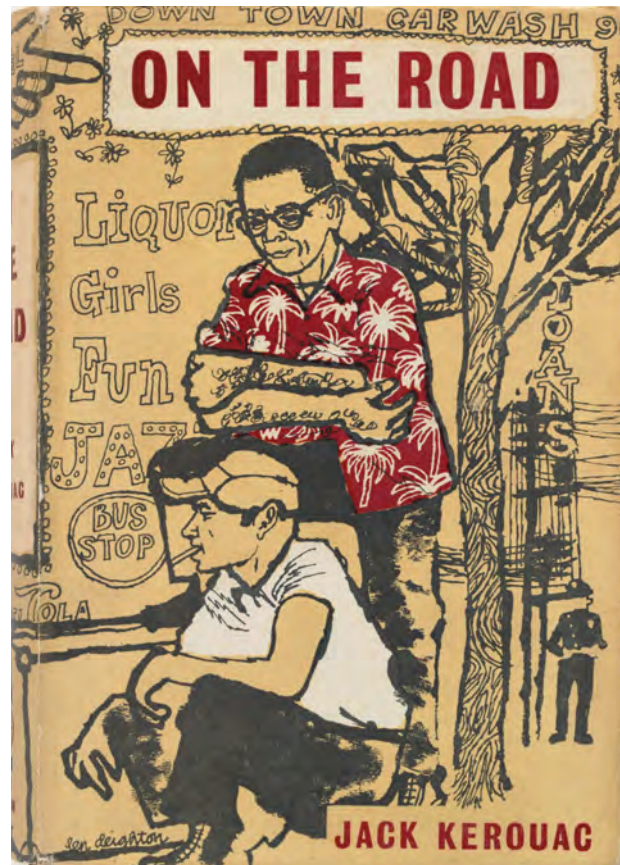




**Marc Brody** (right)  
*The Dames in His Death*  
Sydney, Horwitz, c. 1956

**El Lissitzky and Hans Arp** (below)  
*Die Kunstsmen 1914–1924*  
Erlenbach-Zurich, Eugen Rentsch, 1925

**Jack Kerouac** (below right)  
*On the Road*  
London, Andre Deutsch, 1958  
Cover artwork by Len Deighton  
Used by permission of Andre Deutsch





**Stephan Fridolin** (top)  
*Schatzbehalter*  
Nuremberg, Germany,  
Anton Koberger, 1491

**Maurice Sendak** (centre)  
*Where the Wild Things Are*  
London, The Bodley Head, 1963  
Used by permission of The  
Random House Group Ltd

**Midget Library** (right)  
Glasgow, David Bryce and Son,  
c. 1895

