Reading Penguin

Reading Penguin:
A Critical Anthology

Edited by

William Wootten and George Donaldson

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TO JOHN LYON

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR,
THE PENGUIN ARCHIVE PROJECT
(MAY 2008-APRIL 2012).

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PREFACE

In 2010, Penguin Books, founded by Allen Lane in 1935, was 75 years old. That same year, its children's imprint, Puffin Books, turned 70. To mark this anniversary and to discuss what is arguably the most significant British publisher of the last three quarters of a century, "75 Years of Penguin Books: An International Multidisciplinary Conference" was organised by the Penguin Archive Project and held in the Victoria Rooms of the University of Bristol from Tuesday 29 June to Thursday 1 July 2010. This anthology contains a selection of papers given at that conference along with an additional paper from an earlier half-day conference, commemorating and celebrating another significant anniversary in the history of Penguin Books, "Lady Chatterley and her Consequences".

The years following its foundation found Penguin the most read publisher in the United Kingdom and synonymous with the British paperback. Penguin made high quality fiction cheaply available to millions and, through both the serious non-fiction of Pelican books and the topical Penguin Specials, it democratised reading and played an important role in the nation's intellectual and political life.

For this study, recognised scholars from different fields examine the different aspects of Penguin's history, achievement and significance. Contributions have been carefully chosen in order to assemble a coherent balanced and wide-ranging study of its subject—although, given that subject's long and very various history one that is, inevitably, far from complete. A number of these essays regard Penguin, and the Penguin books they discuss, with a new and revealing level of close scrutiny, and most make use of the Penguin Archive. But here too are essays which employ wider contexts and perspectives in order to better understand a subject whose very familiarity can impede a proper estimate of its true distinctiveness and significance.

Again and again the contributors draw attention to the important role Penguin Books—and Penguin books—had in shaping lives and minds. More than one attests personally to the felt influence of Penguin on their intellectual development and their career as a scholar; and the case for the wider cultural and societal value of Penguin's role is also strongly made. At the same time, it is not forgotten that Penguin has always been a

business whose work has had to contend with and respond to commercial realities.

We have arranged these essays so that they tell aspects and details of a story that stretches from the origins of the paperback in Ancient Egypt through to the futures imagined by today's readers of Puffin books. In the opening essay, Simon Eliot tells the pre-history, and some of the history, of Penguin by placing its advent in the context of paperback and affordable books of earlier ages, and in so doing reassesses the perceived novelty as well as the real achievement of Allen Lane's publishing revolution. Alistair McCleery also uses wider contexts and perspectives of book history: in his case, to re-examine the place and significance of the most discussed of all Penguin's publications, that of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the trial which followed it in the context of that own book's prior and subsequent legal and publication history.

Penguin made clear that serious scholarship and large-scale publication could coincide. This achievement should be seen in the light of the many factors militating against it—not least the suspicion and hostility the addressing of a wide audience could provoke amongst an author's fellow academics. Relating how Penguin commissioned Nikolaus Pevsner to write such iconic works as *An Outline of European Architecture* and the Building of England series, Susie Harries elaborates on one of the most productive and celebrated relationships between Penguin and an individual academic. W.J. Lyons uses archival material to reassess one of the most controversial: the relationship between Penguin and the scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls, John Marco Allegro.

That relationship between publisher and scholar is given both a more personal and more general perspective by David Cannadine, who draws on the details of his own formative reading in order to assess how Penguin helped shape mass education and intellectual life in Britain in the middle years of the last century. From a literary perspective, Andrew Sanders offers a survey of, and personal tribute as reader and editor to, the range of English and European classics published by Penguin and the vision of European literary culture that Penguins represent. The history that lay behind the publishing of some of the classics mentioned by Sanders, namely the establishment of the Penguin English Library is then detailed by George Donaldson who draws on material in the Penguin Archive to relate the clash between Penguin's specified requirements for a general readership and the work of some of its recruited contributors.

Tom Boll casts fresh light on the actualities and nuances of literary translation through an examination of the difficulties faced by Penguin's translators and editors as they attempted to bring the Latin American poet

Palo Neruda into English. By examining how the poets of "The Group" formed Penguin's poetry list of the 1960s, William Wootten explores literary politics, anthologisation and Penguin's role in the popularisation of poetry. Andrew Nash looks at the ways in which Penguin's cover design and paratext helped shape and reshape readerly expectations, using the example of the novels of Muriel Spark.

Claire Squires brings Penguin and its history into the commercial world of the present, asking: "Why might a publishing company be interested in its past?" and explores publishers' anniversaries, and the celebration, commemoration, and commodification these involve. The book closes with glimpses of the future as Kimberley Reynolds contrasts the utopianism that characterized the children's books Allen Lane enjoyed and published in the Puffin imprint with the ecological dystopianism of contemporary children's authors.

75 Years of Penguin Books: An International Multidisciplinary Conference, 29 June-1 July 2010

Keynote speakers at the conference included Professor Sir David Cannadine, Professor Simon Eliot, Professor Kimberley Reynolds, and Professor Sir Christopher Ricks. An evening event, open to the general public, "Judging a Book by its Cover" included two lectures: Professor Phil Baines, on "Penguin (fiction), Pelican and Puffin: Cover and Image Before Art Direction", and Mr James Pardey on "The Art of Penguin Science Fiction". Conference Panels were on a wide range of topics: *Global Penguin*, *Penguin: the Popular Intellectual*, *The Art of Publishing: Penguin Design, Society and Specials*, *Reading Penguin*, *The Visual World*, *Penguin Marketing*, *Penguin and the Classics*, *Translation and Penguin*, and *Penguin and the Creation of Modern Children's Literature*. In addition, a panel of representatives of Penguin Books—Alexis Kirschbaum, Editorial Director, Penguin Classics; Stefan McGrath, MD, Penguin Press; Elv Moody, Editorial Director, Puffin; Jim Stoddart, Art Director, Penguin Press; and Simon Winder, Publishing Director, Allen Lane—provided a *Questions & Answers* session. The conference was attended by over a hundred delegates from Britain, Europe and further afield, including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand South Africa, and the United States of America.

The Penguin Archive

The Penguin Archive contains a wealth of material relating to the establishment and business life of Penguin Books, together with editorial files of correspondence with Penguin's authors and editors, scrapbooks, photographs, advertising material, design artwork, books, and objects on deposit from Penguin Books Ltd., as well as items that have been given to or purchased by the University of Bristol Library Special Collections. The Archive also includes papers relating to *The Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial, and the personal and working papers of two prominent female figures in the firm, Betty Radice (editor of the Penguin Classics series) and Eunice Frost (Penguin's first female director). The Penguin Archive attracts the attention of researchers in many disciplines and fields at national and international level, including historians of the book, biographers, social and political historians, cultural analysts and literary researchers. Appointments can be made to make use of the Penguin Archive, in the University of Bristol Library Special Collections, by email (<special-collections@bristol.ac.uk>).

The Penguin Archive Project

The Penguin Archive Project was a four-year research project at the University of Bristol, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Its aim was to investigate several lines of research within the Penguin Archive, held in the University of Bristol Library Special Collections. Commencing in May 2008, and completing in April 2012, the Project's primary areas of research included Modern Poetry, Penguin Classics, and Penguin Specials; and supporting investigations were conducted on Puffin Books, the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Trial, and other major themes. The Project team was led by Principal Investigator, Dr. John Lyon of the Department of English.

The research into Penguin Classics and into Penguin Specials was conducted by doctoral students attached to the Departments of Classical Studies and the Department of Historical Studies, respectively. The research into Modern Poetry was conducted by a Post-doctoral Research Fellow, William Wootten, attached to the Department of English. In addition to research activities, the Project's further aim was both to facilitate access to the Penguin Archive and to publicize its existence: in relation to the first of these ends, the Project Archivist, Rachel Hassall, was instrumental in preparing an electronic catalogue for the Penguin Archive (Online Archive Catalogue: http://oac.lib.bris.ac.uk/DServe/). The

Project organized a half-day academic conference on "Lady Chatterley and her Consequences", marking 50 years since the trial, on 30 January 2010, where the key-note speakers were Fiona Becket, and Alistair McCleery. It co-organised a Translation Colloquium on 8 December 2009, at which the plenary was Peter France, as well as one day conference marking 50 years since the publishing of A. Alvarez's *The New Poetry* and the beginning of the *Penguin Modern Poets* series on 16 March 2012 at which speakers included A. Alvarez, John Fuller, Edward Lucie-Smith, and Tom Raworth.

Penguin and Puffin Days, comprised of workshops and lectures on Penguin, Pelican and Puffin Books, were specifically designed to interest members of the general public as well as students and academics. Of similarly broad appeal was the Project's launch, which centred upon a reading by Penguin poet James Fenton. The Project's links with the local community and the general public, promoting the research conducted throughout the Project-period and raising the profile of the Archive itself, culminated in "Penguin Parade", an exhibition, curated by Katherine Hann, which was held in the Royal West of England Academy's exhibition galleries between 9 March and 22 April 2012.

A PREHISTORY FOR PENGUINS

SIMON ELIOT

Much has been said and written about Penguin's immediate precursors and post-event imitators: Tauchnitz from 1837 (not in English-speaking countries), Benn's Sixpenny Library, Albatross Modern Continental Library from 1932 and its later amalgamation with Tauchnitz, Methuen's Sixpennies, and so on. I did not want simply to replicate this existing work. For this reason, I concluded that the best thing I could do would be to place the arrival of Penguin Books in a much broader and longer historical context

However, before doing so I should begin where all book history should begin and end, with a reader. Not a generalised reader, not a convenient reader devised by a literary critic, but with a real reader at a precise time. This comes from a Mass Observation study conducted in June 1942:

> My husband usually buys the penguin books. They're cheap and easy to carry about and afterwards he gives them away to the Forces[1]

In other words: Penguins were cheap, portable, and disposable. In the mid-1930s Penguin Books brought together, in exceptional circumstances, three aspects that had been visible in book production for a considerable time: one, production on a large scale; two, a certain sort of reassuring flimsiness; and three, cheapness.

I shall discuss cheapness at some length but, at this stage, we should explore the idea of flimsiness. Whenever I mention this phrase in relation to Penguin Books I can detect an immediate raising of hackles in my audience: Penguins stand for so much that is good and noble, about democratising culture, and about celebrating—and perhaps partly realising—the hopes of many Victorian social critics such as Ruskin and Morris. And yet what I choose to pick out instead is the physical fact that many of the books, although they looked good, were not necessarily built to last, were on acidic paper that would react with the humidity in the air to brown and make friable those precious pages.

But I would like to put a more positive spin on things. I would argue that Penguin books are rather like late Georgian terraced housing put up by speculative builders. Georgian terraces embody many great neo-classical values and are remarkable machines for living. However, they were planned for about seventy years of life by which time they would have paid off the capital invested in them and generated some reasonable rental income. Beyond those seventy years the costs of maintenance increased and, to their original builders, they would have started to look like a liability. Fortunately for us, property values and a complete inability of twentieth-century architects to produce a convincing alternative, have kept them alive. Even the appearance of Penguins up to the 1960s is remarkably similar to a Georgian town house. They used a confident, endlessly repeatable design language that can both contain all sorts of occupants undertaking all sorts of lives, but also offer a coherent and measured front to the world. But they were flimsy, and most were designed, like a Georgian house, for a limited life.

In book production flimsiness is not a bad thing, particularly if, as was so often the case, it was associated with cheapness—cheapness being the thing that frequently brought about, that necessitated, flimsiness. Flimsiness conveys the idea of the impermanent, of the throwaway, of the transitory. All this sounds bad. But not necessarily so for someone who wants to experiment with reading, to try things out, to risk a book that might not work for them. Flimsiness and cheapness means you can risk going beyond your normal fare and trying something new. If it doesn't work, you can give it away or throw it away. It will not hang around to act as a Greek trophy reminding you of your failure or your error. It will not suggest how foolish you were to invest in something that was likely to be a failure. It encourages experiment by reducing the investment in it. Flimsiness makes risk cheap.

Here for instance, is another anonymous wartime reader of cheap editions recorded by Mass Observation:

> On the whole in these casual ventures I go no further than about 2/6 a book, and most of my reading comes from such editions as Penguin, Pelican, Evergreen, Everyman etc., all of which, note, have attractive covers and fair print for cheap books… [2]

It is the "casual ventures" phrase that is crucial: few in 1942 would have talked about "casual ventures" if referring to a novel at 7s6d or more, a novel in hardback whose very substantiality as well as price would be crying out "Justify the expense and play safe".

Flimsiness and cheapness make a thing accessible, and not just to the original buyer. Let me explain this by going right back to a period in book history where there were no books that we would recognise as such, no codexes with hard or soft covers. To a period dominated by the papyrus roll.

The history of the ancient Egyptian approach to sacred texts is a journey from the monumentally expensive to the flimsily cheap. The material form these Egyptian texts took, and the users they served, changed from period to period. In the fifth to eighth dynasties (c.2450-2040 BC) funerary texts were usually carved on the walls of burial chambers of kings and, later, of their queens–these were the so-called "Pyramid Texts".[3] Their location and their imperishable–and expensive–form (carving requires much more time and effort than painting or writing) suggests an elite text exclusively devoted to ensuring the survival of the king or his close relatives in the afterlife.

However, by the Middle Kingdom at the latest (c. 2025-1700 BC) these ritual texts had adopted a new form and had become what are now categorized as "Coffin Texts". As their modern name suggests, these were most commonly written on the wooden surfaces of coffins, though they could also be painted on tomb walls. Coffin Texts required neither masons nor large stone tombs, so such texts were available to a wider social range of users, including court and other officials.[4]

By the 17th Dynasty (1660-1550 BC) some funerary texts had migrated to a new sort of writing surface: the shroud. This shift in the material writing surface seems to have been associated with innovations in the content of funerary texts. The new version of the texts was given the–typically optimistic or, at least, hopeful–title of "Formulae for going out by day"; a collection which is now better known as *The Book of the Dead*.[5] By the 18th Dynasty these texts were appearing in a more portable form being written on leather or papyrus rolls placed with the body in the burial. By this time *The Book of Dead* had emerged in its classic form: a series of spells, ritual declarations and hymns (each constituting what is now called a "chapter") selected from a much larger collection, written on a papyrus roll in cursive hieroglyphs. It was a book designed not to be used by the living in this life, but by the dead in the next.

The *Book of the Dead*, being now on portable papyrus rolls, could be produced independently of, and prior to, the funerary preparations. Although all *Books of the Dead* were made up of selections from a "library"[6] of between 165 and 200 available chapters, there was commonly a core of chapters that could be found in virtually every version.[7] Texts become cheap enough to be, if not mass manufactured, at least to be off

the peg. It is clear that some *Books of the Dead* were produced by talented scribes on private commission, but others were manufactured on spec with gaps left for the name of the deceased to be filled-in later when the text was, presumably, bought off the shelf.[8]

If some papyrus rolls were finely penned and lavishly illustrated, many others were written roughly and at speed with poor spacing, or with the text drastically abbreviated or squashed-in to save space. In terms of length, *Books of the Dead* could vary from rolls over seventy feet in length to single sheets of papyrus. In one form or another, *The Book of the Dead* was produced for and used in burials right down to the Ptolemaic period, by which time it might consist, at least in cheaper forms, of a single chapter, scrubbily written for someone who might not have been literate.

These single-sheet versions were not prestigious, had no social or cultural value, but they were cheap and, one hopes, effective. In terms of flimsy and cheap texts, these must have been some of the first. However, religiously and ritualistically, they had a power that even the most important Penguin lacked: for through them their owners could unlock the afterlife.

Marcus Valerius Martialis, or Martial, was born in Bilbilis in North Eastern Spain around AD 40, but had settled in Rome by AD 64. He was to live there for the next 35 years. Like many bright, ambitious provincials he was determined to make a splash in Rome, but not through the traditional means of the law courts. His particular achievement was to have reinvigorated and re-defined the epigram as a literary form, using its concision and developing its final witty turn of thought as an instrument of social comment and satire. He could also use it as a vehicle for extravagant compliment, a useful tool for the literary man who was a dependent client, as the Roman custom was, on various wealthy patrons, including the emperor Domitian.[9] Here we have an example of literary innovation, the refurbished epigram, paying its way very quickly–if only in terms of gifts and invitations to dinner.

But beyond the occasional flattery of a patron, Martial's work had a potentially broader appeal to the literary culture of first-century Rome. Much literature then was still being written in the shadow of Virgil's *Aeneid*.[10] Its imitators were frequently turgid and almost always too long. The brief and witty epigram, with its constant reference to contemporary life, provided for many readers a welcome relief. Martial offered an easy, quick and amusing read.

The assumption is that Martial would have gained most of his early income from his patrons' gifts. However, once a reputation had been established, another source of income would have become available. There

is some evidence to suggest that by the first century AD a bookseller might pay an established writer for the right to be the first to copy a text—what was to be called in the Nineteenth Century "early sheets".[11] Moving fast, a bookseller, using mostly Greek slave labour, could produce hundreds of copies of a brief work for sale within a few days, thus stealing a march on potential competitors. There was, of course, no copyright legislation in ancient Rome.

Martial clearly knew a lot about the book trade, and was prepared to take a gamble. Book I of his Epigrams, published at sometime between AD 85-88, was short, so it was easily and quickly copied. Being short it would fit into small compass, indeed into something that would probably have resembled the parchment notebooks (*membranae*) already used for notes and jottings in the late Republic.

These notebooks would not be bound in anything more solid than its outer-sheet—a parchment-back, in other words. Not for his epigrams the dignity of the traditional papyrus roll but the everyday informality of a parchment codex: form and content beautifully matched. Cheap and cheerful and, as Martial himself adds, highly portable.

In Book I there is an early example of what one might call "product placement". In Epigram 2 the poet directly addresses his imagined reader and advertises the advantages of the new codex form:

> You who are keen to have my books with you everywhere, and want to have them as companions for a long journey, buy these ones, which parchment confines within small leaves. Provide cylinders for great authors: one hand can hold me.[12]

As you see, the portability argument, again. But not content with convincing the reader that here is a new sort of literature in a new sort of package, Martial also wishes to clinch the deal. The writer takes the reader by the hand and leads him through the city straight to the bookseller:

> So that you may not fail to know where I am for sale, and wander aimless throughout the whole city, with me as your guide you will be certain: look for Secundus, the freedman of the learned Lucensis, behind the threshold of the Temple of Peace and the Forum of Minerva.[13]

Here the writer and reader, the book and the bookseller, are brought into a vivid cultural and commercial proximity on a street in first-century Rome. It was a risky business: a genre still searching for status packaged in a parchment-back, a format associated with the trivial and the ephemeral: it was akin to issuing a first edition of a novel in Britain in the 1930s in

paperback. It looks almost like a counter-cultural act, and to an extent it was.

All the surviving evidence, which is not much, suggests that Martial's and Secundus's literary and commercial experiment did not succeed.[14] It was going to take another 300 years or so, and the emerging Christian canon, to establish the codex first as a counter-cultural form and then as the predominant one. It is possible that the early, frequently persecuted Christian sects adopted the papyrus-back or parchment-back as a cheap, easily hidden, easily transportable form that set its face firmly against the roll, which was used in both Roman and Jewish cultures. The flimsy and vulnerable book could be regarded as an objective correlative of the poor and despised who studied it or, at least, who had it read to them. A proper medium, perhaps, for an unusual message.

Neither the exact order nor the status of the books that were eventually to compose both the Old and New Testaments were fully settled until the large codex, or pandect, became an important form of the material book. While biblical books were each written on at least one separate papyrus or (later) parchment roll, or in small pamphlet-like codex, there was no need to put them in a fixed sequence. Before this they might simply lie on a shelf or be contained in a capsa—that is, a large drum that could hold a score or so of rolls.

This would allow them to be selected and read in any order, and valued according to the individual reader or the group or sect to which that reader belonged. In other words, until the fourth century, when Constantine's recognition of the Christian church made it respectable and later wealthy, different Christian groups would have used low status pamphlets, most having a binding which would be at best another sheet of papyrus or parchment. Until Codex Siniaticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and similar great books of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Christians would have pursued their obscure and puzzling religion by studying the equivalent of flimsy and ill-produced paperbacks.

Pursuing the theme of the cheap and flimsy book through history I want to jump to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and consider another cheap though not always cheerful paperback: the chapbook. A chapbook was usually a small paper-covered pamphlet frequently printed on one sheet of paper and folded to produce anything between 4-24 pages, it was usually sold for one or two pennies, or sometimes a halfpenny; it was bought commonly in the street or at fair from itinerant sellers (that is, not from formal book shops). They commonly reprinted standard stories many of which had their origins in late medieval or early modern times—such as "Robin Hood" or "The Seven Champions of Christendom"—but

could also encompass tales of strange events, crime narratives, monstrous births, collections of ballads, jest books, or works of simple and frequently tedious piety. They were commonly illustrated by one or more crude woodcuts. Similar versions of a chapbook might be printed over scores of years, if not centuries, and were produced by provincial printers—as well as by London publishers. The great period of the chapbook was perhaps the eighteenth century, but certainly the tradition started well before, possibly as early as the sixteenth century, and went on in some form through most of the nineteenth century.[15]

Another cheap and flimsy form was the broadside ballad.[16] This was a sheet, sometimes a very narrow sheet up to a yard long, which was printed on one side only and dealt with a number of subjects: the first were the "Street drolleries", including "cocks" or "catchpennies" which were usually wholly invented stories of murder and rape often sold by 'street patterers' who would cry out words such as "Horrible", "Murder", "Seduction", "Crime" as they ran through the streets to draw out the punters. The second were broadsides concerned with politics or—a particularly popular theme—the Royal family. The third were occasional ballads prompted by a particular, pressing current topic such as the death of Wellington, the opening of the Great Exhibition, the new Holborn viaduct, or the scandal and outrage of bloomers. The fourth were those ballads devoted to crime and its punishment, particularly public executions before 1868.

Many of these were multi-form affairs: there would be a prose account, there would be a lyric with or without music, there would usually be a crude woodcut, and decorative typography. You would get a lot for your halfpenny or penny.

We are reminded frequently by architectural historians that what has survived—in terms of buildings from the medieval or early modern period—are usually examples of the very best, the most remarkable, the most treasured of structures. And that all the rest—the ramshackled, the ill-constructed, the lean-tos, the hovels—all fell down, were pulled down or were burnt down, again and again. In other words, we lack the common and contemporary context of these few great surviving buildings.

So it is, one suspects, in the history of books. In relation to the total quantity of cheap and popular print actually produced from the 17th to the 19th Centuries, we have very little that survives. Very little of the ephemera, very few of the newsbooks and newspapers, only a smallish proportion of the mass of cheap printing in the form of broadsides, broadsheets and printed pamphlets that constituted the huge assemblage of cheap, popular literature of which chapbooks and broadsides were so notable a part, and among which the great and canonical works found a

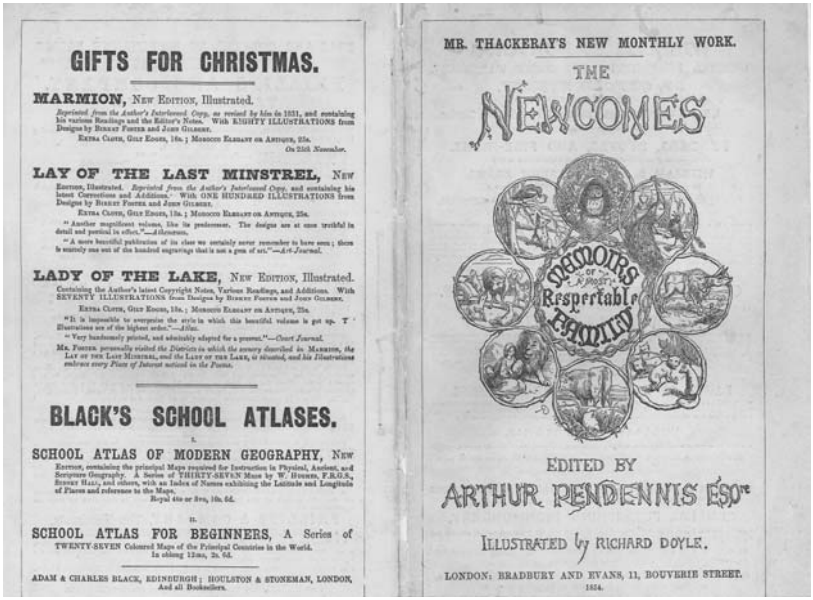
context. Cheap and ephemeral chapbooks, the paperback of the poorest, provided this context for many readers up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

The 19th Century witnessed the industrial revolution in print production. Certain chapbooks and certain broadside ballads were produced in 100,000s and millions of copies, many more than most early Penguins, but these were produced over years and sometime decades by hundreds of printers in the provinces and by London printers such as John Pitts or James Catnach working in the Seven Dials area on wooden hand presses capable at best of 200-250 one-side printed sheets an hour. The application of steam power firstly to papermaking in the first decade of the nineteenth century; and then to printing in the second decade—and the development of stereotyping and wood engraving from the early nineteenth century onwards—transformed book making and book-reading. It also transformed book binding. Before the nineteenth century many books were issued in sheets, or in crude publisher's casings designed to be stripped off by the reader's binder before the book was bound more decorously. The earlier 19th century saw the development of cheap and robust cloths that could go over cardboard to create a publisher's binding. From the 1830s and 1840s publishers' bound hardback editions became more and more common, particularly for novels and other popular genres.

However, the limp cover and the paperback remained a constant feature. This was particularly characteristic of text books at the cheaper end of the market. Of course, we are also used to thinking of Dickens and other Victorian novelists publishing their works in monthly or sometimes weekly paperbound parts.

Long before Penguin Books, paperbacks could be coloured-coded. However, this was not by genre, as with Penguins, but by author. Thackeray used to be issued in yellow paper covers, Dickens in a greenish-blue.

Paperbound part issue was not exclusively middle class, though the 1s part once a month was a middle class price and middle-class frequency. From the late 1830s onwards these novels were paralleled by part-novels for working class readers issued weekly at 1d. *Black Bess* and *The Mysteries of London* were examples of rambling prose narratives that could go on for as long as there was a demand for the story, some continuing for years in weekly paperbound parts.[17]



[Figure 1—Thackeray]

Dickens's novels were in the part-publication tradition (which covered everything from dictionaries and bibles to encyclopedias) rather than paperbacks. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, issued in fascicles between 1882 and 1928 is another example of this practice. However, one might argue that collected and bound or not, cheap reading was throughout the nineteenth century closely associated with floppy paper covers. Let us therefore put them to one side, simply as we do so remarking two things. Firstly is that they may not have been complete books, but they did set up readers to expect and cope with paper covers, to associate informative and recreational reading with a certain degree of tolerable flimsiness. Secondly, that part works, however flimsy, demanded a stern and stiff will on the part of a reader. Even a Dickens novel required the reader to acquire systematically month by month, and store safely, no fewer than nineteen parts over the span of more than a year and half to complete the novel. This at a time when there were competing attractions from Thackeray and Trollope, and a score of other less successful literary hopefuls, chopping up and spinning out novels over months and years. But that is as nothing, when one considers the *Penny Cyclopedia* published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in weekly penny parts

between 1833 and 1844 which built, if the reader had sufficient stamina and deep enough pockets, to no fewer than 27 volumes.

What of complete works published in paperback? 6d and under has been the key price in terms of popular books aimed at the literate but hard-up since at least the early 19th century. 6d was, of course, the price of a quarto edition of a single play in the late Tudor and early Jacobean period, it was the price of all those Shakespeare Quartos, which were themselves issued without a hard cover. And plays remained a cheap form of literature right through the 19th century. Here is an article from the *Times* on 22 October 1824 describing a sad accident:

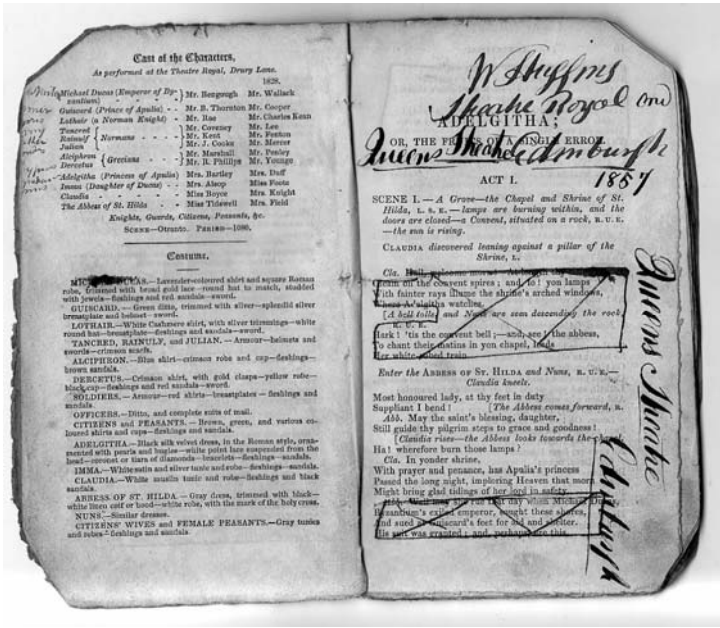
> …on the room-door being opened, a cloud of smoke issued, and the unfortunate woman was discovered sitting in a chair, her clothes reduced to cinder, and her person burnt in the most horrid manner. The wretched sufferer was conveyed to Guy's Hospital, where she lingers in a hopeless state. A play book lay near her, which it is supposed she was reading, and becoming drowsy, the candle set fire to her head.

Reading by candlelight posed many problems, not the least of which was fire. But what the poor woman was reading might surprise a modern reader—a play.

[Figure 2—Pizarro and Adelgitha]

In fact, small (commonly 15 cm x 9 cm), paper-covered, single plays usually priced at 6d or less were produced in considerable numbers in the 19th century. Some were canonical works (such as Shakespeare and the 18th century canonical dramatists) but the majority were plays recently performed in the major and minor London theatres. Indeed, many were advertised as "printed from the acting copy" offering descriptions of the costumes, a cast list and some of the stage business described.

Many would carry an engraving of a scene.[18] Some publishers would reinforce the educational or performative elements of drama by advertising, for instance, a history of male and female costume in parts,[19] or songs and pianoforte duets for home performance,[20] or portraits of dignitaries.[21]



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[Figure 3—Play text with ms additions]

From the 1820s and 1830s onwards many minor or specialist publishers were vying for playreaders' sixpences.[23] It is clear that these publications were used as acting texts, either by amateurs or professionals (as you can see from this unusual example) but it is likely that this use alone would not have justified a cheap 6d (later 1d) edition that would

have had to sell in its tens of thousands in order to make a reasonable profit. In other words, a significant number would have been bought for private or collective reading.[24] Given the short lines, and a new line whenever a new character spoke, the layout of a dramatic text was usually much easier (and much shorter) to read than a novel. Add that to the low price and portability, and one begins to understand the form's appeal—and appealing it was. Some publishers issued plays on a weekly basis, creating substantial series such as "Cumberland's British Theatre" (at least 336 titles by the 1830s) while "Duncombe's Acting Editions of the British Theatre" was offering at least 418 titles by the 1840s.[25]

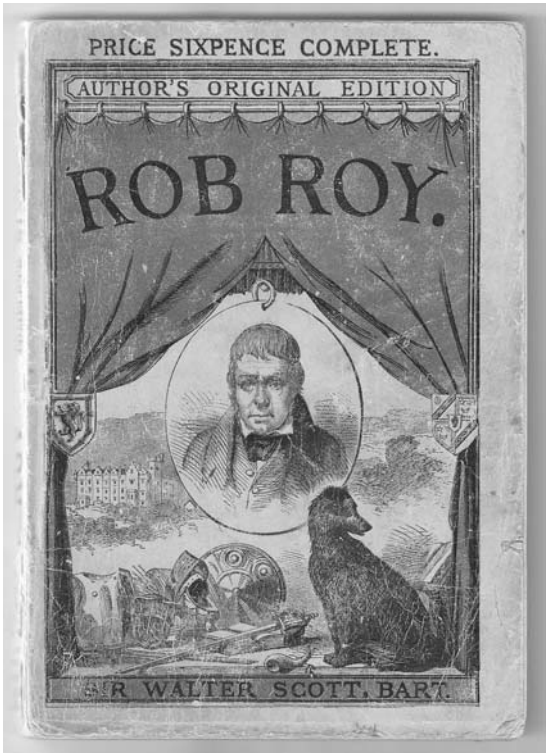
The actor-manager Thomas Hailes Lacy established a publishing house in Covent Garden in the mid-1840s. His enterprise expanded by gradually absorbing the lists of Cumberland, Duncombe, Webster and others. Printed in double columns and selling at most for 6d a copy, "Lacy's Acting Editions" were offering in all 1,485 plays by the time the New Yorker Samuel French took over Lacy's firm in 1873.[26]

The publisher of popular and cheap books, John Dicks, had begun issuing a play a week at 1d in "Dicks' Penny Standard Plays" (the first being *Othello*) by the early 1860s; by 1882 he was publishing two a week.[27] By 1892 there were over a thousand plays in the series.[28] Dicks was also influential in the predictably large field of Shakespeare publishing. In the mid-1860s he was issuing sets of two Shakespeare plays for 1d and, by 1867, was selling the complete works in cloth for 2s; that edition's sales of 50,000 copies was soon eclipsed by the paperbound 1s edition which sold some 700,000 copies.[29]

In the mid-1860s the inventive publisher and part-time pornographer, John Camden Hotten, was taking the paperback to a new level. In 1866 Hotten re-printed a number of Scott's Waverley novels, unabridged, paperbound, at 6d each. Hotten may not have been the first, but he was certainly one of the first, to offer complete novels at such a low price: printed on cheap paper, almost certainly on a rotary printing machine usually used for printing newspapers and magazines, and in double columns and in very small type.

From Hotten's advertisement in the *Publishers' Circular* of 17 October 1866, it was clear that this select range of Scott's novels represented a marketing venture that he was determined to promote vigorously. The advertisement announced that the publisher will provide "Show Cards, Posters, and Window tickets" to support the promotion. He certainly claimed great success for this series. Writing to a correspondent in January 1867 Hotten commented:

I have, as you may be aware, issued the *Waverley Novels* at 6d each. Up to this time we have sold nearly 50,000 of each novel.[30]



[Figure 4—Rob Roy]

The trouble with this claim is that there is very little to back it up. Ledger Book 1 in the Chatto & Windus archive, which includes much of the production information for Hotten's later publishing career, does indeed record production information for four of the six Scott titles mentioned in the advertisement. None of these pages, however records a print run of more than 10,000 copies, probably close to a minimum run for books with such a small profit margin. There may be missing pages but, as Hotten was claiming a 300,000 sale in six months or less, this is more likely to be a product of puffery than lost data.

But, for our purposes, this doesn't matter. Successful or not, in essence, what Hotten was doing was offering 6d paperbacks 70 years before

Penguins were hatched. More than that, he was, along with publishers such as John Dicks, identifying 6d as a critical price.

These 6d paperbacks were aimed at a mass market, and there were few specialist bookshops that could handle or cared to handle large quantities of cheap literature. Indeed, most books in the 19th century would have been sold in shops that were not bookshops. Books were commonly a side-line of outlets that sold newspapers and stationery, or fancy goods, or groceries, or even sheet music and musical instruments. Many would have certainly sold patent medicines of one sort of another, and the link between patent medicines and books goes back at least to the 18th century, if not before.

It was not just war-time Penguins that carried advertisements. Most paperback and paperback equivalents in the nineteenth century carried advertisements of one sort or another. In a really commercially successful part novel such as Dickens's *Bleak House*, the "Bleak House advertiser", as it was called, would be wrapped around the monthly episode so you had to plough your way through the ads to get to the story, and you would finish the part and be confronted by another 10 or 15 pages of pure commercialism. In Dickens's most successful part novels there were as many advertising pages as there were pages devoted to the novel, and Dickens and his publishers made substantial sums by selling advertising space.[31] Almost certainly some of those ads would be for Odonto tooth paste, Eno's Fruit salts, Pear's soap, Beecham's powders, and surgical trusses and corsets. Literature and disease, novels and ailments, frequently went happily together.

But most of these shops were small and dealt with a modest number of book buyers. The W.H. Smith railway station bookstalls were different—they dealt frequently in high-volume sales of newspapers, magazines and popular books to travellers, and the new reading class of commuters. Their stalls were ubiquitous but most were also small. Smiths soon developed an acute sensibility about what would and would not sell in sufficient quantities, and therefore what did or did not justify precious and limited display space on the stalls. This was made evident by an international event that occurred just a few years after Hotten's launch of his sixpenny paperbacks.

The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and its outcome shocked Europe: until that time the French army was confidently assumed to be one of the most powerful and effective military forces in the world. Its virtually complete defeat in a matter of six weeks, by a Prussian army whose equipment, organisation, and leadership were clearly superior, was a humiliation to France and a serious warning to other European nations. In