A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE BOOK COVER

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ABSTRACT

A Cultural History of the Book Cover

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This dissertation offers a historical look at the book cover as a material object of particular significance. As a part of the bibliographical tradition, the cover binds the book not only to its reader, but also to the culture that gives it meaning. Consequently, by chronologically reviewing the book cover through a mix of historical and fictional accounts, this study had as its goal to affirm the difficulty of judging the book cover without knowing its social history. The first project of this study takes the elaborately decorated bindings of Medieval manuscripts as the origin point for the modern book cover and retraces the attitudes and approaches to the book cover through the accounts of printers, binders, readers and collectors. The definition of the book cover then emerges as the result of the discursive dialogue between the material and aesthetic concerns of the book paratext. The second project expands the scope of the study from book covers made for Bibles and religious texts to the mechanical production of commercially defined gift books and aesthetic volumes. Looking at the book cover both as an object and a cultural agent, the discussion focuses on challenges readers go through in attempting to bring the meaning of the cover under their subjective control. Finally, the third project focuses on the twentieth century and the development of mass and artistic forms of designing and reading the book cover. Here, special attention is given to the similarities and differences between two main forms of books, hardbacks and paperbacks, as they continue to collaborate and compete in producing the most effective cover paradigm. The final section presents a brief summary of the dissertation and concludes with a brief projection about the future role and functions of the book cover.

Keywords: book cover, bookbinding, cultural history, readers and reading, manuscripts, Book of Hours, the Bible, gift books, the Keepsake, William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, genre covers.

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Habent sua fata libelli [1].

- Terentianus Maurus

Introduction

It is fair to say that 2020 was a particularly challenging year for book publishing. While the developments surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic dominated the latter half of the year, with many book release cancellations, author–reader–publisher conflicts on social media, and continuous supply chain issues, the beginning of 2020 was equally eventful. Perhaps, one of the most controversial topics discussed in online book circles in February 2020 was the announcement and rapid cancellation of Barnes & Noble's "Diverse Editions" line. The project, which was prepared and promoted as Barnes & Noble's Black History Month tribute, involved the racially inclusive repackaging of 12 classical titles from the English language literary canon. According to the press release sent by Barnes & Noble, the main intention behind the initiative was to "address the inherent *whiteness* of the canon" and "ensure the recognition, representation, and inclusion of various ethnic backgrounds reflected across the country" (Hampton, "Why Barnes & Noble Swiftly Cancelled Its 'Diverse' Book Covers for Black History Month," 2020). Indeed, Nawotka notes that the main inspiration behind the "Diverse Editions" project was to reflect the maxim "What if your favourite literary characters reflected the diversity of America?" ("B&N, PRH Cancel Diverse Editions," 2020). (Figure 1)

[1]" Every book has a destiny," from *De Litteris, De Syllabis, De Metris* (1286)

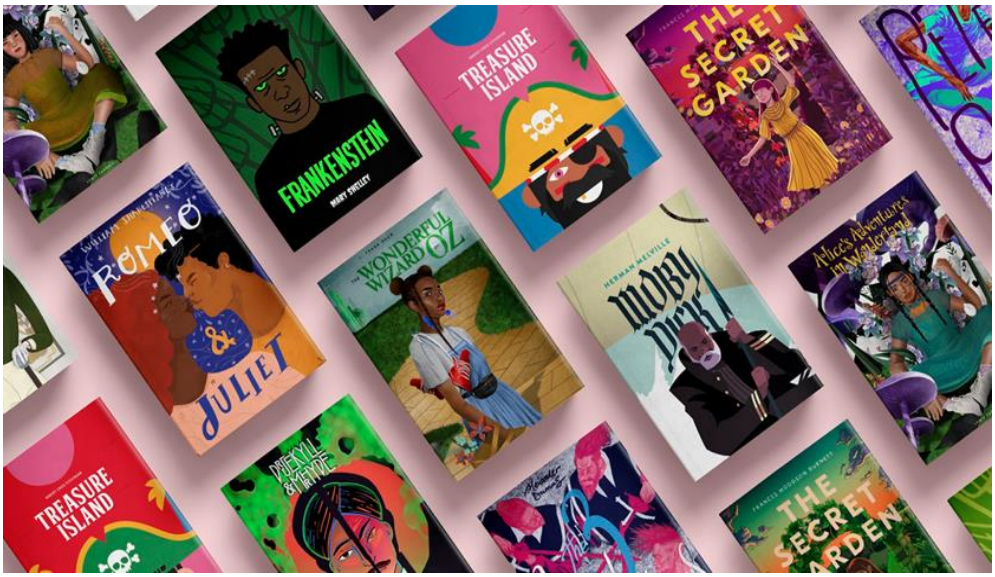

Figure 1: Barnes & Noble "Diverse Editions". Courtesy of TBWIA\Chiat\Day

Within days of the initial media briefing, this initiative received an overwhelmingly negative response by the public and the organizers decided to scrap the event and reverse the decision to publish books with these new covers. If the reaction by Barnes & Noble seems rash, it is worth noting that amid the backlash they were receiving, the organizers were being directly accused by critics of engaging in "literary blackface" (Hampton, 2020). A quick glance at articles reporting the cancellation can give us some idea about the directions the main conversation was taking. For example, Davenport documents a number of tweets that argue that the message of the selected texts fundamentally promoted the "white narrative" and that "slapping cartoon POC on books by white folks […] isn't diversity" ("Barnes & Noble Cancels Launch of Classic Novels with New Covers Following Online Backlash," 2020).

Following these accusations, Barnes & Noble chose to address the cancellation in a brief statement on Twitter on February 5, 2020, stating that these book covers "were not meant to be a substitute for black voices or writers of colour" and, at the same time, reiterating their commitment to "celebrate black history and great literature from writers of colour" (*Barnes & Noble*). While this specific incident seemingly soon disappeared from the

news, partially because of the information crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the intense discourse it was able to ignite reveals a lack of consensus about the definition and functions of the book cover. The most notable aspect of the "Diverse Editions" project was that it brought together many different participants of the book world, such as publishers, booksellers, authors, readers, and critics, who otherwise work separately from each other, and it created a public conversation that centred on the book cover. In this sense, when considering its social and cultural implications, this incident presents an interesting case study that can help us to discuss the modern book cover as a unique cultural agent in its own right.

To review this case, each line of criticism needs to be observed closely, with the foremost factor being the topic of equity and racial equality in publishing. In many ways, the Barnes & Noble incident represents the midpoint of an ongoing conversation about diversity that was exacerbated by the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, which criticized the publishing industry for its alleged lack of inclusivity (Tager & Shariyf, *Reading Between the Lines: Race, Equity, and Book Publishing*, 4-5). To understand the extent of this claim, it is important to examine statistical data from the industry. According to *Reading Between the Lines*, between 1950 and 2018, almost 95% of all published material was written by white authors, and 74.2% of the workforce of one of the biggest book publishers in America, Penguin Random House, was white (78%) (Tager & Shariyf, 8). Additionally, structural challenges within publishing institutions prevented non-white employees from contributing meaningfully to publishing decisions, including "business decisions as simple as how a cover is designed" (ibid.). It should be noted that these conditions are more indicative of the situation prior to the "Diverse Lines" controversy. The aforementioned report also notes that since 2020, several major steps have been taken at the administration level to get "employees and authors of colours through the door" (Tager & Shariyf, *Reading Between the Lines:*

Race, Equity, and Book Publishing, 14). In terms of distribution and marketing, the aim of the main line of action was to dispel the "diverse books don't sell" maxim, which was prevalent among many major publishers (52). Interestingly, the *Reading Between the Lines* report also argues that more than the race of the author, it is the uneven assignment of "dialled-up marketing campaigns" to select books that makes a significant difference vis-à-vis their reception[2] (ibid.). Accordingly, close ties between the publishers and sales departments and the booksellers hold special importance with regard to highlighting different titles.

It is important to note that the "Diverse Editions" project was highly collaborative in conception and delivery, demonstrating not only an awareness of the issues concerning equity and inclusion but also an intentional attempt by Barnes & Noble to address the aforementioned concerns. The initiative was conceived as a close collaboration between publishers Penguin Random House and booksellers Barnes & Noble, while its promotional lead was given to an African American-led advertising agency TBWA\Chiat\Day (Nawotka, 2020). Similarly, it was reported that the promoters commissioned seven artists from "ethnically and racially diverse" backgrounds to create the cover designs (ibid.). Despite this, the project was ultimately deemed disingenuous with regard to the type of racial representation it was aiming for. For instance, the main line of argumentation mounted against Barnes & Noble was about the titles that had been selected. Barnes & Noble's promotional material made a boastful claim that the project entailed "twelve American classics that reimagined protagonists as people of colour" (Hampton, 2020). As is evident from the readers' reaction, the decision to highlight classics in the public domain (over half

[2] Indeed, the report illustrates the scale of uneven marketing budgets by referring to Peter Hildick-Smith, former vice-president at Penguin Random House, who notes that out of "several hundred books put out, only thirty titles" regularly received "full support of budget and manpower" (Tager & Shariyf, *Reading Between the Lines: Race, Equity, and Book Publishing,* 52).

of which were written by British authors) over contemporary and classic works by Black authors was seen as a "marketing gimmick" (MechaRandom42; 6:35) or as a ploy by Barnes & Noble to avoid paying the cost of copyrighted works by authors of colour (Maggie's Book Shelf; 4:00–4:32). Many commentators also chose to counter Barnes & Noble's initiative by curating their own lists of reading material they considered *diverse*, featuring works by authors like such as Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Octavia Butler, and Alice Walker (Burton, "Must Read Books for Black History Month," 2020). Indeed, the selection of titles was one of the main issues that Barnes & Noble attempted to address in their statement, noting that the intention had always been to "help drive engagement with these classic titles" (Barnes & Noble). While this alone does not explain why Barnes & Noble decided on that specific catalogue, it was noted in an early memo that one of the main selling points of the "Diverse Editions" project was the company's recruitment of cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology to "scan more than 100 public domain classics" to identify the books "that did not specify the race or ethnicity of their main characters" as these were "deemed suitable for the promotion" (Nawotka, 2020). It is clear that this was meant to ensure the impartiality of the decision-making; however, in light of the social tension around the topic of racial representation, it is easy to see why readers and critics interpreted Barnes & Noble's efforts as a poor justification for avoiding full commitment to the definition of diversity.

Indeed, the divide between the past and the present seems to be what was driving the central discourse here. A quick look at some response pieces about this project can help contextualize this issue. According to Hampton, the "Diverse Editions" line exhibits a lack of nuanced understanding of the history of the United States, which is significant in both the historical and contemporary sense. She argues that the main flaw of this initiative was its treatment of classical works as devoid of any racial or social history: "the project assumes

that stories written by, and about white people are somehow racially neutral and that you can just slap a black or brown face on them and declare them diverse" ("Why Barnes & Noble Swiftly Cancelled Its 'Diverse' Book Covers for Black History Month," 2020). Hampton's emphasis on the term "diverse" as a category representative of contemporary social politics is significant. Other critics, such as Constance Grady, also emphasized this point by suggesting that the "Diverse Editions" covers were inspired by the broader cultural shifts that compelled publishers to declare 2020 "the banner year for diversity" (Grady, "Barnes & Noble Cancels Its Diverse Editions Series after Accusations of 'Literary Blackface'," 2020). From this perspective, racially diverse covers can be seen as a part of a broader cultural trend to cast non-white actors in traditionally non-inclusive cultural properties, such as the James Bond franchise (ibid.). In other words, the covers of the "Diverse Editions" line were perceived by online communities as emblematic of the movement wherein the past is renegotiated and reinvented with the social, cultural and aesthetic norms of the present day.

Indeed, the inspiration behind the cover designs was also considered as a direct homage to the recent trend of adapting traditionally white-perceived characters as people of colour. The first major instance of this was the casting of Noma Dumezweni as the character of Hermione Granger from JK Rowling's Harry Potter series in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Nawotka, 2020). It is fair to say that the reception to this initiative was extremely divisive, with many vocal supporters on both sides of the debate arguing whether colour-blind casting[3] is an effective form of diverse representation. This may lead us to speculate

[3] Despite the fact that Rowling herself supported this initiative by offering the following statement: "There is no reason why Hermione should be white. The books don't explicitly mention her race or skin colour, and she is often portrayed as black in fan art (Ratcliffe, "JK Rowling Tells of Anger at Attacks on Casting of Black Hermione," 2016), fan reactions to this project remained mixed. While the group sympathetic to this move noted that there should be "no aesthetic rules" to casting decisions about "another evolution of the Harry Potter Story" (Essien, "Was Hermione Black? Overcoming White Bias in Literature," 2019), other fans like Mimi Mondal highlighted the racially problematic aspects of Harry Potter series and rejected this choice by stating that "characters are not a colouring book" (*The Book Smugglers' Quarterly Almanac,* 2016).

that, perhaps mixed reaction would have been expected, or even intended by the organizers, but the fact remains that the "Diverse Editions" covers was met with overwhelming opposition with almost no public support.

It is also interesting to note that many books chosen for this line (specifically titles such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) are culturally iconic narratives that have already been explored in different media. The conflict here seems to stem not from the organizers inviting the readers to reimagine the narratives but, rather, from the way the "Diverse Line" covers approached these canonized texts by reinterpreting them exclusively within the current cultural paradigm. In other words, the disparity between the dated text and contemporary cover emphasized the externality of the latter to the reader, which seems to be why the new covers were seen as deceptive rather than descriptive. As a by-product of this, the direct application without integrating the covers with the texts caused concerns about the depiction of certain character archetypes as racial stereotypes. For example, many critics noted the shortcomings of race-swapping by expressing their displeasure with the covers of *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville featuring "an African American Ahab", *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson with a "Sikh character in a turban", and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley "depicting the monster with black skin", among other instances of insensitive representation (Nawotka, 2020).

The social discourses that emerge from the "Diverse Line" in terms of performative activism are valid reflections, as is evident from the criticism discussed above. However, it should be noted that in regard to the aesthetic theory of the book cover, it would be incorrect to categorize Barnes & Noble's redesigned classic covers as outliers to the tradition. It is an understatement to say that the book cover can assume many forms and designs. According to Charles Rosner, book covers can be broadly divided into pictorial and typographical categories; the former addressing popular taste, while the latter affirming the intellectual

maxim of the book as a symbol of learning and education (*The Art of the Book-Jacket*, 6). For Rosner, typographical covers are preferable not only because of their cost efficiency ("printers will already have in their possession a variety of typefaces") but also because of the ease with which they can be adjusted and "improved when still in the proof stage" (ibid.). The illustrated approach, conversely, poses greater difficulty for the publisher because these covers are often judged against the interpretative style of the designer and the question of reference. What this implies is that when attempting to *visualize* the text, readers can also experience an uncomfortable gap between what they conceptualize and what they actually see. Despite this, the main advantage of the pictorial cover is that its "display potential" can greatly benefit publishers and booksellers (*The Art of the Book-Jacket*, 7). Interestingly, when discussing illustrated covers, Rosner posits that the choice of cover visuals (which, according to him, usually reflect "an incident or character in the book") should be made with the display component in mind, as only this will allow the book "enough weight" to compete with other titles in the bookstore (ibid.). Overall, the emerging idea of the book cover from this perspective is that it provides a visual composition that conveys the general idea of the book, informed by its textual and material circumstances. This is particularly true for mass fiction publishing, wherein the cover is used as a specialized medium through which the book is given formal representation (of the genre, author, style, and mood of the text) that defines the setting in which it will be located and *seen* accordingly.

If we focus on the classics as an independent genre, we can see certain established cover trends emerging. As John Walsh argues, the classics substitute one of the toughest segments of the book market not only because of the wide price range, from very cheap to very expensive editions, but also due to the vast number of editions in circulation that are being challenged by the vintage book trade, as well as the recurrent redesigns owing to new adaptations and continued academic interest ("Old Book, New Look: Why the Classics Are

Flying off the Shelves," 2016). Among many popular variations, the classics are often re-covered featuring portraits and paintings representing the period to which they belong, as well as some more sombre versions meant specifically for academic readership. However, as Walsh concludes, the design of the classics' cover is directly contingent on the target audience chosen by the publishers, as a classic with period paintings on the cover can be intimidating to the general reader, while covers with "clever imagery" (referring to the classical portraits) or those that appear to be more aesthetically harmonious with interior design objects, such as mugs, rugs, or even wallpapers, are more favoured for books meant as collectibles or intended for private display (Susanne Dean, qtd. by Walsh, 2016). Walsh concludes with this note, quoted by private "old-school craftsman" publisher David Campbell: "Beautifully designed things sell better than badly designed ones" (ibid.). While Walsh's piece is highly informative in terms of providing insights by industry professionals and valuable statistical data about the impact of redesigned covers inspired by film and television adaptations[4], it ultimately perpetuates a widely held misconception about the predictability of the book market and the segments that operate within it. This point is also reiterated in PEN America's *Reading Between the Lines* report, which notes that publishers often make self-motivated guesses about the potential success of certain titles rather than relying on valid marketing studies, which, in fairness, seldom exist (Tager & Shariyf, 53). The report also furthers the idea that this kind of subjective decision-making often works against the authors of colour whose books have to compete with those of their white counterparts. In a way, the decision to publish and how to publish are a part of a complex process with many personal and cultural implications. Indeed, Michael Lane in his engaging study titled *Books and Publishers: Commerce Against Culture in Postwar Britain* examines

[4] For reference, the identified increase is measured by 10% in the classics' sales that directly result from new television versions and what Walsh calls "clever marketing", which encompasses targeted design and clear objectives by the publishers.

the concept of publishers' self-image not only as book producers but also, and more importantly, as experts of literary and cultural taste which is realized through what they select to be published under their patronage. Lane notes that the image of the publisher as "a recognized cultural arbiter" emerged in the 1920s when a big majority of the practitioner of this craft were "men of letters" in "full Renaissance rigour" (7). Lane calls this mode "traditional publishing", which he differentiates from "modern publishing", a popular mode that began to take root in the 1960s and 1970s when small publishers began to be absorbed by multinational publishing corporations, where the decision-making was delegated to professional editorial teams and central control groups rather than individuals (44–45). While expanding on the theoretical differences between traditional and modern publishers, Lane identifies the following as the true watershed point between two groups that exist side by side in the book market:

> Publishers seem to draw a radical distinction between publishing good books and publishing for profit. Although this distinction's far more clear [sic] in theory than in practice, it is nonetheless highly relevant to the classification of books. Publishers have very clear ideas about the potential profitability not primarily of specific books, but of categories of books, and the dynamics of the different types of publishing house [sic.] that are part of the publishing scene in general pivot around this distinction. (*Books and Publishers*, 14)

While this may sound like a redundant detail, it is important to keep in mind that in an industry like publishing, abstract concepts such as "genius", "elite", and "creative talent" hold strong sway in the formation of public and professional opinions (41). While Barnes & Noble's role as a bookseller is discussed widely in many critical opinion pieces, the statement released by the organizers alludes to a bigger role played by the booksellers which is revealed

in their emphasis on “driving engagement with these classic titles” (Barnes & Noble). This suggests a degree of intentionality on their part that surpasses the role of not only a retail vendor or distributer of books but also that of an agent who actively takes part in shaping reading cultures. From this perspective, it can be argued that their attempt at modern initiatives, such as diverse covers for the classics, was driven by their self-envisioned role as a cultural authority in the book world. Furthermore, despite the critical stance taken against the book covers, this project proves that for Barnes & Noble, the book cover is the primary medium through which it establishes and sustains its role as cultural arbiter in topics ranging from, but not limited to, access, diversity, and inclusivity. This affirms the role of the book cover as an active channel in the book sphere through which cultural discourses are observed and furthered. Thus, if we accept the role of Barnes & Noble as a surrogate publisher in this instance, it can be argued that addressing its social maxim about helping young readers of different backgrounds visualize “themselves on the cover” (Veith, “Diverse Editions Cancelled as ‘Literary Blackface’,” 2020) is the only way for the organizers to absolve themselves of the accusation of commercializing “social activism”.

It is important to assess how these designs ultimately led to impressions of “commercialized diversity”. In terms of the book cover design, one recurrent description used by readers, authors, and critics alike stands out quite prominently – the claim that Barnes & Noble selected diverse images and simply “slapped them on” the cover (Hampton, 2020). This expression signals a certain aesthetic dissonance between the design and the frame of the cover, bringing forth a mental image where the book cover begins to flake and come apart in front of our eyes. It can be said that the separation between the cover image and the cover frame acts as a destabilizing force, untethering the cover from the book. Rosner notes that when the cover is pushed beyond the cultural context of the book through its jarring design, it becomes “noisy” (*The Art of the Book-Jacket,* 10). In other words, as the cover becomes

more about "publicity" and less about the book, its *presentation* function overpowers its *representational* function (ibid.). The outcome of this process is that the reader's constant awareness of the non-representative cover means that reading takes place only with full knowledge of the disunity between the cover and the book.

The conflicting paradigm through which the book cover is seen in this case study is indicative of the unique nature of book covers that sets them apart from other forms of visual media, such as cinema. When considered in tandem with the greater cultural discourse, the main question to ponder here is this: why were the inclusive covers featuring characters visually reimagined as people of colour met with such harsh criticism? The answer to this question lies in the semiotic complexity of the book cover, which has developed over many centuries. As a material object, the cover is envisioned as the protective and decorative shell of the book. From the cultural perspective, it is even harder to locate the role and function of the cover in the discourse, as its primary function and authority in relation to the book is subject to change. For example, while the Barnes & Noble executives clearly reframed their stance on the cover by affirming that it cannot be *a substitute* for authorship, the planning and investment in a costly project of reimagined covers such as this, as well as the intensity of the negative reaction it subsequently garnered despite being only "an addendum" to the book, prove that the book cover is perceived differently from other forms of packaging. Ultimately, the underlying conflict here is related to the representative function of the book, where the cover is seen as "a bridge between the text and the world" (Mendelsund & Alworth, "What a Book Cover Can Do," 2020). By uniting *the inside* and *the outside* of the book, the cover allows the browser to "read" the book from a distance. It is this ability to undermine the physical distance between the form of the object and the eye of the subject that frames the cover as an active participant in visual communication.

While the production of the book cover is usually handled by one member of the design team, its cultural meaning emerges in the process of cooperation. Indeed, Marco Sonzogni argues that book covers embody the "cultural assumptions of their designers, of their authors and of the readers of the text (*Re-Covered Rose*, 4). This places the cover at the cusp of the mass public and the individual, where it has to balance its form between demonstrating the uniqueness of the book and remaining recognizable. This liminality allows the cover to connect the reader not only to a single book but also to book culture.

When we establish that the book cover is never without a purpose or function, in this respect, we can consider the following: if the cover does not represent the book, it needs to at least realign it. It is apt to consider this in the case of the "Diverse Editions" project. Because it was cancelled before its launch, it is exceedingly difficult to predict how these covers would have been received by the general public or whether they would have been effective in creating new readers by addressing them in a personal manner. However, one important fact that can be gleaned by studying the reactions to this project is that a large majority of those who were adamantly against it were not first-time readers of these books. Italie's assertion that "few would argue that Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* or the title characters of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are fitting for a tribute to black history" ("Barnes & Noble Suspends Reissues of Classics with New Images," 2020) supports this observation. This statement implies that readers opposing the "Diverse Editions" covers were already familiar with the textual content and that their interest in these books was therefore not perceived solely through their value as reading material. The complexity of book covers is an important factor to consider, because while the book is a singular object existing in many copies, its users are many, and its uses can be highly subjective. This reveals an interesting dynamic about book covers that complicates them beyond Rosner's ideas about display value: reading is but one of many forms of engagement that readers experience with books. For instance,

book browsing and collecting are also important activities for which the cover is a deciding factor in bringing the book closer to its potential owner. It is important to keep in mind that the book cover usually interacts with an audience that is considerably wider than its target group. Thus, it can be said that the negative response to the "Diverse Editions" line demonstrated its lack of appeal to returning readers who perceived it as an act of misrepresentation.

This begs the following question: how are covers composed? Sonzogni identifies two forms of connectivity when it comes to book covers: the bond between the text and the cover, and the link between the cover and the reader (*Re-Covered Rose*, 4). Here, the conveyance of the message occurs with the help of what Sonzogni calls "intersemiotic translation" which entails the "interpretation of verbal signs by non-verbal signs" (5). Applying this model to book covers, then, means exploring one medium (textual, material) with the help of another (visual, ideological). This is an effective formula that allows the cover to be studied through the Saussurean concepts of signifier and signified. Furthermore, Sonzogni suggests that the translation model allows the perspectives of the author, reader, and designer to be balanced with market dynamics to help produce a semiotic reading of the cover whereby intention can be assessed against impact (ibid.). While Sonzogni's approach allows for a brilliant survey assessing the effectiveness of different *simple, complex,* and *hybrid* covers produced for Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, this approach does not offer a meaningful model through which the book cover can be studied as a cultural object. This can also be seen in the case of the "Diverse Editions" covers. When considered from the semiotic angle, the tension between the inclusive covers and the selected classic titles cannot be formulated through the signifier–signified paradigm because the main criticism here is not about the *illegibility* of the emerging sign (inclusive cover). Furthermore, while the connection between the text (signified) and the *translated* cover (signifier) may seem arbitrary in this case, the intimate

way in which the cover envelops the book eliminates the comfort of the natural distance between the signifier and signified. Once associated with the book, the cover seeks to explain itself in relation to the text to which it is materially bound, rendering the cover closer to a symbol than a sign. Saussure confirms this in his definition of *symbol*, which, according to him, "is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot" (*Course in General Linguistics*, 68). The close integration between the text and the cover is symbolized in the book object, which requires both parts to actively engage with each other. The book, unlike cinema or other forms of visual arts, appears to be a closed circuit wherein the meaning is rationalized within the confines of each object.

Once we establish the book cover as a symbol, its historic development plays an important role in establishing how the book cover creates and communicates meaning. In this sense, I aim to examine the book cover and its historical development as a way to formulate a working definition and theory that seeks to define what the book cover is and what it does for the book and the reader. However, as Foucault warns, the historical approach has a tendency to transfer "documents into monuments of the past" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge,* 7–8). In my historical review, I perceive the book cover not as an ossified relic but as an object empowered by the cultures of the past that reacts to and interacts with the cultures of the present and future. In this regard, I aim to identify and study the moments of *discontinuity* in which the book cover developed and changed in a unique way, forging a different path for itself. Foucault identifies discontinuity as a point of "threshold, rupture, break, mutation or transformation" (6), and in this regard, I intend to challenge simplistic views which overdetermine the cover as a commercial tool (i.e: "cover sells the book") by juxtaposing its complex subjective and objective qualities with the material realities of the object. The case

studies and theoretical discussions in this thesis all represent critical points in cultural history where the book cover was both materially and culturally transformed as a result of intense technological and social shifts in society. In this sense, the book cover I aim to locate in history is the one that *carries* the book – not only the material weight of the book, but also the cultural transformations which are embedded in the history of the book.

Considering all these points, I set out to discover the history and function of the book cover within culture and society. The history of the cover, like the history of the book, has been recorded throughout many technological and cultural revolutions through which the cover has been materially and semiotically redefined across many centuries. The cover did not simply emerge as a fully developed object in its present form. The conditions of book production, distribution, and consumption kept the cover in a constant state of change, which corresponded to the shifting social and cultural norms of each period. As the cover developed, it, in turn, shaped the reading culture and society around the aura of the book. Consequently, it only makes sense that the great multitude of books made in different forms and for various purposes would generate numerous cultures and histories. As McGann argues, the history of literary and aesthetic objects is always "a matter of plurality" rather than a factual default ("History, Herstory, Theirstory, Ourstory," 196). By temporally reorienting the history of the book cover, I intend to capture the moments of great change and development in the history of the book cover, identifying when it began to resonate closely with the changes that were taking place in culture. Consequently, my thesis offers *a* history of the covers, among many other possible historical readings. The role of the book cover can be analyzed as the fulfilment of its artistic and material capacity by different agents, such as printers, binders, stationers, booksellers, and readers, who contributed equally to the growth and development of the book sphere. As a result, my central argument in this project is that the inner structure of the book cover can be more meaningfully studied solely via an

archaeological reconstruction of its history, culture, and connections to society rather than deterministic readings of the cover where it is posed solely either as a protective or commercial tool.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, the first of which will attempt to formulate a working definition for the book cover by reflecting on the existing theories of critics, cover designers, as well as analytic approaches from the book history**.** In line with the aims of this chapter, it is important to establish a working definition of the book cover because it not only shows how the cultural history of the crafted bookbinding forms a continuous progression leading to the printed cover, but it also helps fill the gaps in the aesthetic theory of the book cover as an object informed by both material and cultural symbols. The definition of the cover then will emerge by contrasting the bibliographic approach of book history where the cover is noted as a material form, with Genette's paratextual approach which explains the cover only in relation to the textual content of the book. In this chapter, I will argue that, rather than studying the book cover separately for its physical and cultural significance, a complete definition of the book cover should accommodate both material and aesthetic realities prevalent in the culture. From this perspective, the study will follow a chronological pattern in exploring major transformations in the history of the book cover, starting with the Middle Ages. A special focus will be given to understanding how the development of Bible bindings helped establish the cultural vernacular of the book cover. The attention given to Bible bindings is particularly important because, Bible as one of the foremost forms adapted to print form, embodies the full scope of transformation that took place in manuscript culture with the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1436. Ultimately, the aim of this chapter is to shed light on the ways in which changes in production and utilization helped alter the importance and role of the book cover. The third chapter will address the emerging reading cultures that directly informed the

book covers and their visual communication. Here, I will track the impact of three major movements – the Reformation, Renaissance, and Romanticism – as the book cover continued to develop alongside its readers and the reading cultures that were prevalent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. As the mechanical production of the book gained a strong momentum in the following century, many significant changes took place that impacted the aesthetic and material form of the book cover. These shifts are covered in the second project which offers a detailed review of the book culture and covers of the nineteenth century. Starting with the Industrial Revolution, this period is remarkable for its heavy automatization of printing and distribution. The first chapter in this section focuses on the Exhibition movement of the early nineteenth century, and the second chapter on the British Arts and Crafts movement that gained momentum in the latter half of the century. The discussion of William Morris and his Kelmscott Press will provide a jumping-off point for analyzing the role of book covers in literary discourse, which I will review in the last chapter of this project through an examination of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* This chapter will review the *Decadent* influence on the book covers which became particularly emphasized with the ideal of "art for art's sake", leading the way towards the Modern book cover. Taking the lead from here, the third and last project will continue this discussion and extend it to the impact of modern art and the artist on book covers. I will analyze this period through a case study of the Hogarth Press, where the close collaboration between sisters Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell produced some of the most poignant but revolutionary examples of cover art. The emergence of graphic design as an art form and the impact of the two World Wars in the twentieth century helped usher in a unique reading culture that will be discussed in this chapter. Following this, the second chapter offers a bridging argument from the early Modern period to the contemporary day by reviewing the book cover through two main book forms – hardbacks and paperbacks that defined the book culture of the twentieth century. The

chronological reading of the book cover becomes particularly important in the final chapter, as the focus will be on the contemporary period in the history of the book cover, which will be discussed alongside literary and cultural concepts such as genre conventions and aesthetic homologies. Here, by talking about the aesthetic impact of the book covers in enforcing reading culture, I will argue that, within the contemporary paradigm of the book, the book cover is not only *seen* but also judged differently. Thus, by reflecting on the history and internal cultural logic of book covers, this study will conclude with a look into the future of the book cover in the age of the immaterial book and intensive digital reading.

Project 1: An Archaeology of Book Covers

Chapter 1: What is the Book Cover?

This chapter offers a series of suggestions and insights into the book cover, its nature, form, role, and functions. The discussion opens with a cultural analysis of the book cover by closely observing how we talk about the cover. By locating the cover in language and history, I aim to formulate a definition that encompasses both material and aesthetic aspects of the cover based on its dynamic cultural form and functionality which historically evolved and changed alongside the book. Building on existing accounts from the discipline of book history which discusses books as embodied material forms, I will attempt to expand on our understanding of the book cover. With the cover defined, I will move to a close reading of theory and discourse to answer this question: What exactly does the book cover do? For this, I will refer to Gerard Genette's concept of paratext that offers the most analytical, albeit incomplete, theory about the functions of the book cover. As the cover is often discussed as a manipulative medium with a singular intention to *sell* the book, I will attempt to recontextualize the visual *appeal* of the cover by discussing it as an aesthetic, active and mass medium rather than a marketing tool. To localize the discussion, I will explore the functionality and implications of the cover through the relations that exist among the agents operating within book culture, such as publishers, authors, as well as cover designers.

D.F. McKenzie opens his monograph entitled *What's Past is Prologue* by talking about a "teaching device" he often used where he would bring an "utterly blank book" to the classroom and ask his students to deduce as much as they could about the book and its subject matter using the material clues such as the thickness or thinness of the paper pages, "lightness or openness in the type" and the "bulk" of the book, etc. (3). Overall, this is an important experiment that demonstrates the scope of the bibliographic analysis, as well as

effectively communicating McKenzie's argument[5] that "every book tells a story quite apart from that recounted by its text" (8). However, it should also be noted that, other than a passing remark about the difficulty of making deductions about the book that has "no boards and no jacket to supply any other clues" (4), McKenzie has surprisingly little to say about the book cover. The explanation for this may be in the opening sentence where he generally describes the book as "blank", implying that no physical clues are present, also on the cover, to facilitate a conversation. Because there is no clear description given even about the *absence* of the cover design other than this, it is quite impossible to visualize this book. But if we take McKenzie's word on this object being a "book" (3), then it certainly must have a cover. The very definition of the word *book* compels this assumption:

> A portable volume consisting of a series of written, printed, or illustrated pages bound together for ease of reading. In modern use the pages are typically printed and made of paper, and are usually trimmed to a uniform rectangular or square shape, sewn or glued together along one side to form a flat or rounded back, and encased in *a protective cover*, but other materials and construction methods may be used. ("book", OED Online) [emphasis added]

The first thing notable in this definition is how the book is presented as an object made of many separate parts that are, ultimately, "bound together for ease of reading". Furthermore, while this description tells us specific details about the form of the book (uniform rectangular or square trim of its pages; or flat or rounded back), the form of the cover is only alluded to by the use of "encased in". Defining a book cover from this is exceedingly difficult unless we

[5] It should be noted that what McKenzie is doing in *What's Past is Prologue* is, in fact, the continuation of his main theory which he "the sociology of texts". Through this concept, he argues against the divide between textual and bibliographic criticism, positing that the often-reflected "social realities" (*Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 15) and the material "embodiment" of the texts (*Typography and Meaning*, 236) are fundamental categories in understanding the role and function of books in society.

settle on the idea that the cover provides an essential protective function to the book. While *Oxford English Dictionary* does not offer a definition for the compound "book cover" other than instances of its formal usage (dating back to the seventeenth century), the entry on the keyword "cover" can give us some clues, which reads like this: "that which covers; anything that is put or laid over, or that naturally overlies or overspreads an object, with the effect of hiding, sheltering, or enclosing it; often a thing designed or appropriated for the purpose." ("cover", OED Online). It is notable that this definition offers a more specific the location of the cover ("put or laid over"), indirectly affirming its protective function ("hiding, sheltering, or enclosing it"). When specified as the book cover, then the object in mind constitutes the very outside physical layer of the book that comes in between the inside (of the book) and the outside (world). The in-between nature of the cover also allows us to see it as a mediator between two parties that helps to position the book within the cover while simultaneously positioning the cover within the book culture.

Even without a clear title or ornamentation, the visual nature of the book cover can be more revealing than addressed verbal communication. We can study this idea more closely in visual art by observing how the symbolic and cultural aspects of the book cover are communicated through the painted form of the book. Vincent van Gogh's "Still Life with Bible" (1885) is one of these paintings that reveals more than what is painted on the canvas (Figure 2). The painting centres on two books depicted side by side – one open and one closed. According to the Van Gogh Museum, the "hefty Bible" in the painting with illuminated pages belonged to Van Gogh's father who was a Protestant minister. The other, smaller book bound in a yellow cover is identified as Van Gogh's battered copy of Emile Zola's 1884 novel *La Joie De Vivre* (*The Bright Side of Life).* The written entry on the museum website lovingly describes the yellow-covered book as "a kind of 'Bible' for modern

life." Accordingly, juxtaposed with the other Bible, "the books symbolize the different worldviews of Van Gogh and his father" (Van Gogh Museum).

Figure 2: "Still Life with Bible" by Vincent van Gogh (1885).
The Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam.

In his notes, Van Gogh mentions his interest in exploring the "effect" of the colours used in the painting – the yellowed pages of the big Bible, the "lemon yellow" cover of the Zola copy, as well as the imposing black background that reduces the room where the table is set into darkness (ibid.). The inclusion of Van Gogh's book in the painting adds an intimate feeling to the painting, which is highly regarded by art critics for its biographical details. Camplin and Ranauro note that the composition of these two books together signifies a deeply personal period in Van Gogh's life and career when he underwent a crisis of faith following the death of his father (*The Art of Reading*, 60). What is most remarkable about this painting is that it tells a private story of objects with no present subject: the characters are

books. Once noticed, the yellow cover[6] which once signified salacious, erotic literature in France, and later, Decadence and homoeroticism in Britain, becomes a ground of impending crisis between different moral and cultural traditions. Camplin and Ranauro note that the painted Bible is just as telling: “Open at Isaiah, with its powerful sense of sin and the need for repentance: no joie de vivre allowed” (ibid.).

It is interesting to speculate in what direction this pairing functions: does the Bible work to absolve the social stigma attached to yellow covers, or does the yellow cover work on the reader by taking moral authority away from the Bible? Considering the personal nature of the narrative, it is safe to suggest that only Van Gogh knew the exact answer to this question. However, what can be said is that by bringing together two competing symbols – one representing the higher life and the other everyday life, the painting introduces a deep inner conflict against a dark background with two “Bibles” working to outgun each other.

The book is seldom without intention. Its physical presence both comforts and *pricks* the viewer by urging them, first, to notice it and then, daring them to know more about it. Camplin & Ranauro observe that many war paintings from the English Civil War prominently feature the battle-wounded Bibles belonging to the soldiers (*The Art of Reading*, 11). They theorize that the artistic intent behind these painted Bibles is to elicit empathy from

[6] It is apt to briefly discuss the cultural meaning of “yellow book” (Genette, *Paratexts*, 24-25) or “yellow-back” (Rota, *Apart from The Text*, 221). Genette notes that "at the beginning of the twentieth century", in Zola's home country France, "yellow covers" were used exclusively for "licentious" literature (24). To prove how strongly "the colour of the paper chosen for the cover can indicate [the] type of book", Genette conveys an anecdote from French poet and art critic Michel Buton who reminisces an incident that took place during a train journey in Britain where a member of the clergy confronted Buton's friend and admonished her for carrying a book bound in the yellow paper: "Madame, don't you know that God sees you reading that yellow book!" (*Paratext*, 25). Similarly, Rota confirms the public appeal of yellow-backs in the second half of nineteenth-century Britain, particularly among train commuters (221-224). Other than playful disparaging their aesthetic uniformity, which bookbinding historian Michael Sadleir called "stiff and ugly", there appears to be no mention of a similar moral complication in Britain in this period[6] about buying or reading these books (Rota, 225-226). When considered alongside its cultural history, it is fascinating to review the yellow book as a symbol and mirror of social life and cultural shifts taking place in society.

the onlooker, given the humanizing nature of the book, particularly the Bible, as a personal object (ibid.). It is interesting to note that the same effect exists in "The Still Life with Bible" as well, where understanding Van Gogh's personal symbolism with the books helps us to see a new side of him as a passionate reader whose yellow book, with its curled and dirtied pages and the worn-down paper cover carries the signs of heavy reading. However, Van Gogh's painting also gives us clues about the different functions that these covers perform in relation to the book. Whether it is the books or their covers that pull us into the narrative of the painting can be debated, but we cannot deny that it is the cover that compels us to notice, see and *read* the book. In essence, Van Gogh's yellow cover embodies late nineteenth-century concerns about the book cover when the cultural discourse inevitably included aesthetic objects infused with moral connotations that imposed a symbolic gravity over their surroundings and owners.

One book positioned open, the other closed, the painting shows two different forms of communication elicited through the book cover. The Bible not only appears imposing but also takes the central position in the painting. While its binding[7] is hidden from sight, it is present in the way it supports the heft of this large volume with full endurance, metallic book corners protectively marking its edges. In the company of the illegible painted pages of the Bible, the comparatively small, closed yellow book does more *talking*, providing insight into

[7] While both cover and binding are terms referring to the outer layer of the book, it should be noted that the transition here from "cover" to "binding" when talking about Van Gogh's Bible is intentional. Historically, the convergence of these terms occurred after the print book became the dominant book medium, as well as the mechanization of the bookbinding practice in the early nineteenth century ("Bookbinding", University of Pittsburgh Archives & Special Collections). The usage of "binding" here refers to the traditional mode of book production that "describes the material that is used to make the upper (front) and lower (back) covers". The material here can refer to "various papers, cloths, hides, and even metals". Some of the most widely used bindings are smooth calfskin, pigskin, or Morocco leather bindings to lend the book durability, as well as a rich aesthetic definition ("Guide to Understanding Bindings", AbeBooks). Paul Needham's exhaustive description of vellum and fabric bindings in *Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600* also reflects the details highlighted here. Cover historian Andrew Haslam also adds that, while pig skin bindings were preferred for their sturdiness and "less pliability", among other materials used, goat skin bindings were preferred for their softness to touch (*Book Design*, 230).

the social, cultural, and personal aspects of the history of the book told by its cover. It can be said that, while the Bible imposes authority, the paperbound book looks unaffected by this, safe under its thin yellow cover, tradition against modernity embodied through material and aesthetic codes. Undecorated and drab, the yellow cover represents a personal aesthetic choice and readerly taste. Together, these books connote two interlocutors - father and son, a bound religious text and paper light Naturalist[8] novel.

This painting also offers us a glimpse into the diverse forms the book covers can take. In "Dust Jackets, Dealers and Documentation," Tanselle meticulously catalogues various types of book covers that existed prior to the twentieth century, ranging from cloth and leather bindings to paper-bound books (these later would be called paperbacks), paper wrappers, and "printed jackets", slip-cases, and other detached coverings", as well as the critical work done about these forms (45). While it is worth studying each of these material, cultural and aesthetic forms for their craft techniques and technological variance, it should also be noted that studying them separately may imply a more pronounced difference in functionality than what is true. From a theoretical standpoint, this separation also can be very arbitrary[9]. For example, despite the fact many of these cover forms continued into the twentieth century, Genette's analysis of the modern book cover practically makes no distinction between these two forms other than providing more details about the specific object he is addressing, i.e "printed cover" (*Paratexts*, 23) and "bindings" which are often accompanied with "their jackets" (30), etc. This distinction disappears when he is talking

[8] Encyclopedia Britannica defines Naturalism as a literary movement of the late 19th and early 20th century that continued in the tradition of literary Realism, "aiming at an even more faithful, unselective representation of reality, a veritable "slice of life", presented without moral judgment", with a more defined emphasis on "scientific determinism" compared to Realism.

[9] The same can be said about the historians focusing exclusively on book bindings of the pre-Modern period as well. For example, Paul Needham, in *Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600* uses both binding ("there is no tooling whatever on the binding") and cover ("the decorator of the covers was himself a bookbinder") on the same page (page 280) when talking about the outer layer of the book.

about the functions of the cover, which he concludes to be mostly "promotional" (32). In other words, while the enthusiasts and technicians of the cover are keen on deliberating on different material forms that the book cover takes, as far as their cultural role is concerned, these two forms are often undistinguished. Another reason why this approach is less than ideal is the fact that establishing clear historical divisions about the prevalence or inferentiality of different forms of book covers is exceedingly difficult. If we take the nineteenth century as the period when paper covers finally gained a stronger edge to leather bindings, the historic records show that, indeed, bindings and paper covers coexisted side by side for many centuries ("Guide to Understanding Bindings," AbeBooks). It is not surprising, therefore, that there exists a metaphoric continuity[10] between bindings (particularly "cloth bindings" popularized in the 1830s due to their cheapness and colourful variety) and paper covers ("dust jackets" or "book jackets", designed as protective paper covers to protect the book boards starting with the 1800s) as they anthropomorphize the book by likening the book cover to clothing items. By viewing bindings and paper covers as concurrent forms, we can construct a new study of the book cover where both the material and aesthetic concerns of different forms of book covers and their functionality can be discussed in parallel to each other. Saussure calls this "evolutionary" mode of analysis diachrony (*Course in General Linguistics*, 81). As Saussure's object of study is language, he notes that by shifting the focus from the normalized grammar or the structure at a specific period in time, diachrony instead aims to study the dominant phenomena alongside the events taking place with individual

[10] Thomson offers meticulous documentation of this by addressing the mentions of nineteenth-century French bookbinder Charles Meunier as a "clother of dreams" to Pène du Bois's lamenting of monotonous cover trends of the nineteenth century as "banal livery uniforms rather than a fitting dress" ("Aesthetic Issues in Book Cover Design, 1880-1910," 232). Later, a similar analogy continues in reference to paper covers or wrappers. Petroski, for example, in advising book collectors about ways to collect and treat books, notes that, despite the fact that "many books are dressed in jackets whose designs are hand-me-downs form older children of the author or cousins, especially successful ones, in publishing house, there is many an only child in the book population and new families are constantly being started. For these, the dust jacket often is tailor-made" ("Dust Jacket Dilemmas," 329).

speech groups (91). In other words, the diachronic study focuses on active cultural players and contextualizes the object and all of its extant forms within the same social paradigm in order to generate a theory of progression and change (98). This is particularly important for us, because not only have book covers, throughout history, been materially and aesthetically diverse, but they have also been objects with significant social and cultural dimensions. In what follows, this study will opt to use "book cover" as an umbrella term to refer to all forms of external layering of the book, except for instances where the material and aesthetic concerns of the discussion require the use of more specialized terminology (i.e. binding, dust jacket, etc.) to address specific concerns associated with them.

The main object of this study defined more clearly, we can now move to discuss the functionality of the book cover, for which, Genette's expansive work on *paratexts* offers an excellent starting point. Genette's approach to the book is bibliographic in its premise as he includes all bibliographic codes such as "an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations, etc.", under this new category:

> The paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. (*Paratexts*, 1)

In other words, as the Greek prefix "para-" implies, paratext is everything that is around the text, the complex web of meanings within which the text is *encased*. From this, we can extend this argument to suggest that the main function of the cover is to embody the book form and position it in relation to the material world and culture.

Similarly, the functionality of the book cover is discussed thoroughly by both book cover designers and design critics as well. For instance, Drew & Sternberger propose that the cover is "a book's first communication to the reader, a graphic representation not simply of its content, but of its point in history (*By Its Cover*, 8). This provides the working ground for other design historians to position the cover as an object of its present moment and the design

past. As this definition suggests, the cover allows the book to engage the reader by conveying the right coordinates about the book's place in culture and history. Andrew Haslam, on the other hand, characterizes the cover not only as a cultural signifier but also as a manifestation of social interactions between the reader and the publisher by suggesting that "the cover is a promise made by a publisher on behalf of an author to a reader" (*Book Design*, 160). While this explanation puts a strong emphasis on the social role of the book cover, it also shows the complexity of communication that happens between the institution of publishing and an individual reader, with the former also acting "on behalf of" the author of the text. For Haslam, the success of this interchange is when the cover "serves as an enticement to open the book or to purchase a copy" (ibid.). Building on Haslam's idea of "enticement", Mendelsund & Alworthy elaborate on the complexity of the cover's interaction with the onlookers and readers by suggesting the following:

> Book covers will do just about anything to get noticed. They will flirt, shimmy, wink, stare, shout, make promises, or break the fourth wall. They might frighten, or titillate, obfuscate, or illustrate, introduce characters or obscure them, set the stage or set the mood, change your perspective or save your time. They can be colourful or not. They might vibrate or explode. They might be decorative or challenging. They can be literal or abstract, commercial, academic, generic, or genre specific. They might be intentionally confusing or unintentionally confusing. Some covers are bespoke, others are boilerplate. Some tell us about the text; others tell us almost nothing at all. (*The Look of the Book*, 9-49)

This definition mirrors Mendelsund & Alworth's earlier conversation about the book cover where they suggest that the reader envision the cover as "a bridge between the text and the

world" ("What a Book Cover Can Do," 2020). According to them, by uniting *the inside* and *the outside* of the book, the cover then allows the browser to "read" the book from a distance. Indeed, it is this ability to undermine the physical distance between the form of the object and the eye of the subject that frames the cover as an active participant in visual communication.

Book designer Chip Kidd frames the "visuality" of the cover differently. He suggests that it is the cover artist's task to "give form to content" while maintaining "a very careful balance between the two" (The Hilarious Art of Book Design, 2:54). The distinction made by Kidd is significant because by reversing the role of the designer and the object, he argues that it is the designer who then has to act as a bridge by fulfilling the role of "an interpreter and a translator" (11:46). It can be noted that, while Kidd borrows from Mendelsund & Alworth's idea about the cover as a point of connection between the reader and the designer, he attempts to directly theorize how exactly the cover makes its presence known to the reader. For Kidd, the designer manages to *engage* the reader by formulating the cover as a riddle. In other words, borrowing on both denotative and connotative codes, the appeal of the book cover is in the way it can be constructed as a riddle that, if not entirely solved, can at least *involve* the reader. Indeed, Kidd explains the working mechanism of the cover riddle like this:

> Looking at book jackets is like watching TV without the sound. It's like being in a bar, or at the gym, and watching that situation, even the most benign photograph of a smiling kid can spell disaster. You instantly imagine the worst-case scenarios (*Chip Kidd*, Vienne, 16).

By applying Kidd's suggestion above on two different book covers that were constructed using similar design aesthetics, we can see how this riddle-based communication works in practice. Figure 3 presents two covers designed using iconic illustrations that generally convey the genre (thriller; murder mystery) using tonal cues such as the three-colour palette, within which a narrative arrangement is presented with the help of symbolic codes

borrowed from their respective texts. On the left, the cover for Patricia Highsmith's *A Suspension of Mercy* (Virago 1972) offers a simple illustration of a rolled, black carpet with what we might assume is a dead body inside, including the detail of red high-heeled shoes. While its colour palette is noticeable (particularly the red background), it is composed in muted tones as the title of the book appears to be painted in white print letters on top of this background. In comparison, the cover for Cyril Hare's *An English Murder* (Faber & Faber 1951) uses a simpler rendition of the title that is stylistically integrated into the composition, giving the cover a flat, poster-like look.

Figure 3: "A Suspension of Mercy" by Patricia Highsmith (Virago, 1965) and "An English Murder" by Cyril Hare (Faber & Faber, 1951). Courtesy of the publisher.

It can be suggested that the central signifiers used in these covers not only position these books within their respective genre category but also manage to communicate specific details about the text that can be easily understood by an astute browser. For instance, the prominent use of white colour on *An English Murde*r cover helps to create a visual tension between the peaceful, undisturbed landscape and the spilling red blood threatening to sully

everything, as well as performing a specific task by directing the reader's attention to the well-established trope of the classic murder mystery known as "snowed-in" (Goodreads). While neither cover introduces us to the cast of characters from the book, book covers imply their presence *inside.* In the case of *An English Murder,* this is communicated by way of the ominous red coming from the windows of the houses, suggesting the murder taking place inside, while the fragmented illustration of a woman with only her legs and shoes visible on the cover of *A Suspension of Mercy* does this by showing us the aftermath of murder. The latter cover also urges the reader to see beyond what the scene directly shows us: the intentionally feminine pose of the legs of the corpse wrapped in a carpet suggests a different, fetishistic element to the story besides the expected murder-thriller plot. The function of red generally supports this reading: while the dripping action of the red on *An English Murder* is clearly a reference to the murder suggested in the title, the red sky on the cover of *A Suspension of Mercy* adds to the narrative an unnatural, psychedelic tone, communicating a stronger psychological undertone for which Patricia Highsmith is known. These covers can be analysed in other ways and with probably different observations by each reader depending on their familiarity with the genre categories and literary conventions. However, the purpose of this experiment remains the same: to demonstrate that the function of the cover is to facilitate a form of communication that balances visibility and legibility. I suggest that it is this duality of the cover that is often interpreted as its "selling" function.

While this formulation allows us to appreciate the visually informed construction of the book cover, the subjective nature of the proposed engagement is understandably a cause for concern. Most famously, Genette warns his readers of this by characterizing paratexts in general and the book cover in particular as a passage rather than a finished medium: "More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, […] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back (1). While it may seem

as though in this explication of paratext as a space of transition and exchange Genette is simply elaborating that the paratextual communication relying on negotiation and dialogue, in his conclusion of *Paratexts,* he directly suggests the following:

> The effect of the paratext lies very often in the realm of influence – indeed, manipulation – experienced subconsciously. This mode of operation is doubtless in the author's interest, though not always in the reader's. To accept it – or, for that matter, to reject it – one is better off perceiving it fully and clearly (409).

To understand why Genette distrusts the paratext practically as a grey zone, it is important to discuss the metaphor of the "threshold". It can be assumed that he uses this concept to simply differentiate the text from non-textual entries that reside outside of it. Particularly in talking about the cover, Genette identifies the addressee of the "cover and its appendages" as the "public at large" (25). Almost every example Genette discusses in his short chapter is dedicated to disruptive covers: "garish illustrations" of the movie tie-in covers (28), or French books with "mute bindings and jackets" (30), as well as the misleading connection between the narrator and author of *Recherche* which its publisher orchestrated by presenting pictures of a progressively aging Proust on each volume (31). Overall, it can be surmised that Genette's dissatisfaction is with both material and aesthetic modes of the cover, suggesting that for Genette the paratext is more of an impediment than a medium of communication. McGann, interestingly, associates Genette's proclivity to dismiss paratext as a disruptive passageway with his inclination to posit linguistic or textual communication over other forms of engagement:

> The text/paratext distinction as formulated in *Seuils [Paratexts]* will not, by Genette's own admission, explore such matters as ink, typeface, paper, and various other phenomena which are crucial to the

> understanding of textuality. They fall outside his concerns because such textual features are not linguistic. But, of course, all texts, like all other things human, are embodied phenomena, and the body of the text is not exclusively linguistic. By studying texts through a distinction drawn between linguistic and bibliographical codes, we gain at once a more global and a more uniform view of texts and the processes of textual production. Body is not bruised to pleasure soul. (*The Textual Condition*, 14)

In other words, for Genette, entrusting the representation of the text to material and aesthetic codes of the paratext inevitably means compromising textual integrity. When we consider the mass medium of the cover which he identifies, his hesitation becomes even more clear. As Alworth notes, considering the aesthetic and material visibility and legibility of the cover as too forceful, "Genette urges us to speak not of judging, but of nudging a book by its cover" ("Paratextual Art," 1127). What this suggests is that, because he could not identify a central source of power, such as that of the textual author who controls the linguistic code of the text, for Genette, the reader is always at risk of being swayed every which way by the paratext. Indeed, Genette's anxiety about the paratext was so serious that he devises his own terminology to discuss the effects of wayward paratext, which he called the "Jupien Effect".

The term "Jupien Effect" was inspired by Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, published in 1913. The parallel Genette is building upon here is Proust's characterization of Jupien who, despite being the life companion to Baron de Charlus, is only referred to as a "subordinate" manservant (*Time Regained*, 184). While often being chided for his "lack of prudence" by his "cross" lover, Proust makes it clear that the Baron also depends on Jupien in more than one way and more importantly to manage his male brothel on his behalf (ibid.). Furthermore, Alex Watson argues that Jupien's role is central in the narrative as he allows

Proust to explore the "clandestine world of Parisian homosexuality" as the foil to aristocratic heteronormativity: "Jupien is a minor character who nonetheless embodies some of the major changes in the narrator's social world and mental landscape" ("Historicizing the Jupien Effect," 70). In other words, it is the liminal position that Jupien occupies in the novel that gives him uncomfortable power over both the high circles where his lover and employer reside and the Modern urban life to which he belongs. Genette uses the Jupien Effect to describe instances in which the paratext becomes an impediment to the text, and by extension, to textual interpretation (*Paratexts*, 409-410). When we orient the "Jupien Effect" towards the book cover, it is easy to see that Genette is pointing at the ideological intrusion of the book cover into the meaning of the text by altering its contextualization and manipulating its reception to the text's detriment. It is interesting to note that, with Genette's famous warning to authors, "Watch out for the Paratext!" (*Paratexts*, 410), his conceptualization of the Jupien effect reveals not a dismissal of but a concern about the paratext. I argue that this concern mainly stems from Genette's concern about the social and cultural dynamics that dominate in book spaces, as well as within the publishing industry. This theory will be discussed, firstly, through the idea of bookish serendipity, as well as the divide between the roles performed by authors and publishers.

Catherine Sheldrick Ross calls "serendipity" those instances whereby the book comes into the reader's attention either through its cover or its premise ("Making Choices: What Readers Say About Choosing Books to Read for Pleasure," 17). When the book cover is viewed as a threshold, this concept then implies the possibility of the right time and right place for every book inviting in its reader. However, as Ross shows, the role of the paratext as a system of meaning is fundamental in allowing the reader to notice and select the said book. In referring to the 1984 Book Industry Study Group survey, Ross identifies that only for a quarter of readers, the cover marks the most important indicator when browsing for

books, while even within this category, there's further splintering between the synopsis support of the back cover with the aesthetic communication of the front cover (15). Among other parts of the book paratext, titles, genre identifiers, award status, and price rate can factor strongly whether a browser decides to inspect the book closely (ibid.). This suggests that far from "selling the book", the cover works together with other paratextual codes to allow the reader to approach the book.

Interestingly, Ross notes that the main criterion that allows for "encounters with the books happen serendipitously" are paratextual details that lead the readers to feel a degree of familiarity (17). While the survey results place the book cover ranked only third on the scale of importance under author name and specific genre indicators (ibid.), it can be observed that, that the book cover, due to its dual mode of communication through visibility and legibility, carries a higher potential to arrest the eye of the browser by elements that they may find familiar. Ultimately, Ross' findings frame the threshold of paratext as a rich medium where the readers and publishers can establish communication via paratextual codes (“Making Choices: What Readers Say About Choosing Books to Read for Pleasure,” 19). What this means is that the communication initiated through the book cover carries the potential to turn into a serendipitous encounter with the reader. When we look back at Chip Kidd's concept of riddle covers, this concept becomes clearer. As Vienne explains, by designing covers that "engage the readers’ intelligence and imagination” (10), Kidd “empowers them [the readers] by demanding they take control of the communication (*Chip Kidd,* 14). Therefore, far from hassling the readers to purchase the book for their sake, the book cover is most effectively employed when it is allowed to reach out to the reader with an initiation question which, if successful, can turn into a dialogue.

Another case review may help us to understand Genette’s worries, as well as confusion about the limitations of the paratext. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1925 novel *The Great*

Gatsby is often seen as one of the most effective representations of the Jazz Age in the United States. The cover design for *The Great Gatsby* is an integral part of the legacy of this book as a historical and cultural object (Figure 4). While its composition is arresting, the concept used for the cover is quite simple. The deep blue colour with a cityscape on the lower half of the cover depicts the glitz of the urban setting at dusk. The main piece of the design, however, is the abstracted facial silhouette hovering in the sky, with sad and teary eyes staring at the reader. The inspiration behind the composition can be found in the book, in reference to an oculist's giant promotional poster:

> The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic — their irises are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently, some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground. (*The Great Gatsby*, 64-65).

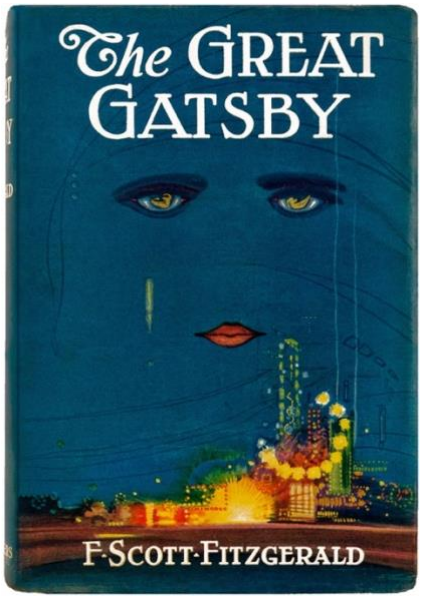

Figure 4: "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Charles Scribner's Sons). Cover art by Francis Cugat. 1925.

This obvious mention of the subject of the illustration, however, does not prevent the readers from making their own discoveries about the cover. For example, Barron argues that when studied closely, it can be seen that the demure eyes floating over the city contain "a pair of nude women", perhaps alluding to "Gatsby's objectification of Daisy" or possibly depicting the eyes of a husband looking at the evidence of his wife's infidelity ("The Great Gatsby Book Cover: What's Behind Those Famous

Eyes," 2021). The original cover offers a complex layering of signifiers where the bespectacled eyes of Dr. Eckleburg[11] are juxtaposed with the bright red lipstick and magenta eyeshadow, as well as the wispy strands of hair of the illustrated female subject. It is interesting to note that in many modern reiterations of *The Great Gatsby* cover, the motif of staring eyes is either directly retained or explored in different ways. The best example of this is Chris Brand's cover for the Modern Library edition of the novel (Figure 5) featuring "a 20's car emerging from the darkness, its headlights peering out of the cover like the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg" (Grady, "The Great Gatsby Has One of the Most Iconic Covers Ever Printed. How Do You Redesign It?," 2021). This cover offers a more steampunk interpretation of the floating face symbol; however, the emptiness of the cover is just as effective when considered in relation to the allusions in the novel to the loneliness and the isolation of urban life juxtaposed with wealth. Furthermore, the new cover design is also more clearly masculine than the original design, perhaps this time in real reference to either Gatsby himself or Tom Buchanan and the fatal car accident that sets the climax of the novel in motion. More specifically, it can be suggested that by observing the development of and alterations to cover symbolism, one can also observe the ways the cover paratext can evolve alongside the book. In the case of Brand's cover for *The Great Gatsby*, the emphasis on the male-coded signifier allows us to deduce that the contemporary reading of the novel is more interested in exploring the undercover actions of the novel's male leads rather than the gender-performative reaction of the female characters.

Despite the possibilities of individual readings, overall, the case of *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a convincing example of how certain aesthetic symbols come to permanently embody the book. Indeed, the most significant aspect of Chris Brand's cover for *The Great*

[11] Perhaps connoting the male gaze.

Gatsby is that the new design not only references the iconic visual imagery[12] from the book, but also it recalls the aesthetic composition of the original cover. However, the way the new cover brings together the "familiarity" of the source material with a new artistic interpretation where the traditional illustrative mode is replaced with a photorealistic image connoting the Modernity and contemporaneity[13], gives the book a new pathos thought which it can proudly introduce itself to both new readers and collectors of *The Great Gatsby.*

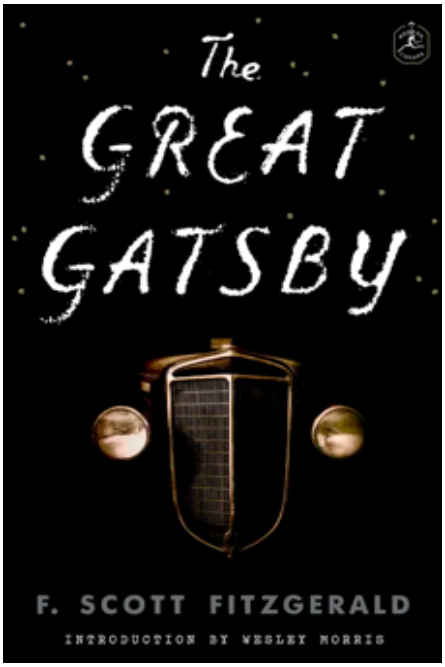

Figure 5: "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Modern Library Edition). Cover art by Chris Brand. 2021.

[12] The collaborative nature of Fitzgerald's and the artist Francis Cugat's cooperation is often noted by critics. According to Barron, Fitzgerald saw Cugat's 1924 painting "Celestial Eyes" and intentionally included it in the novel, affirming that "he had written [the cover] into the book in the form of Dr. Eckleburg's billboard ("The Great Gatsby Book Cover: What's behind Those Famous Eyes?," 2021). Conversely, it is also worth mentioning that in another account of events, the cover for *The Great Gatsby* is explained as the direct result of the continuous collaboration between Cugat and Fitzgerald. Citing the similarity between the themes both artists were interested in, Kriticos argues that the lasting impact of *The Great Gatsby* cover is the result of how "different art forms can interact with one another and colour our interpretations in deeply meaningful ways ("Stories Behind Classic Book Covers: The Great Gatsby," 2017).

[13] Veronique Vienne notes that one of the borrowed techniques used very commonly by Chip Kidd is to use photography to re-tell "the stories told - fiction and non-fiction - all seemed more contemporary, endowed with an edge realism" (*Chip Kidd*, 13).

The Great Gatsby represents one of the more famous stories about the direct involvement of the author in the cover creation process. Cases of this level of involvement are indeed rare in book cover history, however, they are not impossible. While Genette firmly places the cover within the "main site of the publisher's paratext" (23) in contrast to the author who is "responsible for" the text (9), it is exceedingly difficult to identify how he imagines the distance of the publisher from the author, in particular. Indeed, as Juliet Gardiner argues, one of the main shortcomings of Genette's theory is how, in arguing in defence of the "author's purpose" (*Paratext*s, 407, he often conflates these two roles:

> Genette's frequent failure to account for the distinction between the author and the publisher, his tendency to see the publisher as the enabler, indeed the continuation, of the author's intention, and paratexts as the vehicle, signals an untenable, essentialist fixity of meaning for the text that is at odds with his recognition (above) of the fluidity of paratextual signification. ("Recuperating the Author: Consuming Fictions of the 1990s," 258)

Indeed, Genette is mistaken about his approach to publishers and authors on two counts. Firstly, paratextual art is a social practice; and even when unsuccessful, the book covers are the results of often lengthy and complex series of negotiations, conflicts, and compromises. However, on this count, Gardiner's account is also incomplete. While she opposes Genette's absolutism about the book cover "representing the interior of the book: its content, what has been written – as far as possible, its unique nature", she distinguishes the intention of the publisher from authors only as being positioning the book in the market by finding "analogy with books of the same genre, the futurity of its appeal" (259). This categorical divide overlooks the cases when the representative function of the book cover is similarly motivated by the textual narratives.

Secondly, as we demonstrated in the discussion of Ross's analysis of serendipity, Genette ignores that not only the name of the (popular) author, but the author as a paratextual category through which books are selected and categorized. Foucault provides a thorough discussion of the formation of author-function through which texts are given aesthetic and cultural continuity:

> The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence. Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others (“What is An Author?,” 305).

When viewed through its author-function, we can see that the category of author itself can become an aesthetic code on the material form of the book cover. The interesting aspect of Foucault's theory is that the author-function is activated with or without the acknowledgment of the author, relying solely on the reader's capacity to see, read and connect the paratextual codes.

The main argument in the foregoing is that the cover functions in a multitude of ways, offering both material and aesthetic engagement to the reader. The following chapter will track the origins of the material and aesthetic dimensions of the book cover starting with the twelfth century by offering a deep look into the world of Bibles and their readers.

Chapter 2: Material and Aesthetic Concerns of the Medieval Books

Alberto Manguel observes that, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, even God was not above consulting the holy book Torah, when he created the world from the fire (*Packing My Library*, 142). The association with divine authority makes the book an object of infinite power and intimate creation. While the tablet form and scroll books were important media in allowing humans to record history and memory, it can be argued that the book owes its long legacy and cultural authority to its durable and recognizable form which became established with the folded codex. Peter Stochieff notes that, as early as the seventh century, the codex book would be bound in a heavy wood or leather material to keep the pages inside from deforming, as the parchment paper was highly susceptible to the elements ("Materials and meanings," 78). In other words, covers and bindings serve a crucial function to the book by extending the temporal limitations of the material and form and impacting its capacity for survival.

This chapter marks the beginning of a chronological study of the book cover at the height of manuscript culture during the Middle Ages. Therefore, in the following pages, I will discuss the role of the book cover in transforming the book into a cultural and religious symbol of wealth and faith. This period is marked by two great changes in book production, the first of which took place as the centralized production of the manuscripts in monasteries was challenged by the non-religious, scholarly interest in adapting the book as a medium for disseminating knowledge. Marcel Thomas calls this the transition from the "Monastic Age" to the "Secular Age", which took place in the twelfth century ("Manuscripts," 147). The coming of print represents the second major technological development that put an emphasis on reading and learning. While the role of the bindings is seldom the focus of historians writing about these shifts, by offering this cultural discourse, I intend to give the book cover the attention and spotlight it deserves by discussing not only how the exterior of the book was

directly impacted by these changes, but also how the cover contributed to major shifts that shaped society, history, and culture.

Across this period, one book shows a historic persistence. The central argument in this chapter concerns the Bible. Often referred to as "THE book"[14] by book historians, the Bible historically had been the favourite object of adoration and aesthetic experimentation of its producers and users. The main contribution of the Bible to the book arts was in the ways that it emphasized the social importance of the book with a distinct aesthetic symbolism. Because of this, the widely recognized form and legacy of the Bible make it stand out as an important reference point in the history of the book cover through which we can observe how the material and textual content of the book can be explored through the aesthetic form. Furthermore, because Bibles were so prevalent, observing them also allows us to note the economic, technological, and cultural developments in manuscript production in action.

The previous chapter introduced us to the main discussion of the materiality of the book as it is recorded in the history of the book. However, as we shift the focus from the text to the book itself, a new perspective beyond material embodiment is needed to interpret the bibliographic codes, such as paper, ink, binding, typography, etc., most of which are, according to Davidson, cultural in nature: "Yet changing aesthetics – the vicissitudes of taste – are of particular interest to book historians because they provide an important point of intersection between studies of the book and other aspects of social and intellectual history" (3-4). Moylan & Stiles support this approach by arguing that the category of "literacy" also needs to be expanded to include not only "textual competence, but material competence, an ability to read the semiotics of the concrete forms that embody shape" (*Reading Books*, 2). The discussion of Bible bindings will allow us to see what Davidson and Moylen & Stiles

[14] Etymologically, the word "Bible" derives from the Greek "*βιβλία"*, which means *"the books"* (Oxford English Dictionary).

propose here in action. Therefore, this chapter will employ both material and aesthetic approaches in order to understand what role the bindings of the Bible performed for its users within cultural discourse.

Before we begin to discuss the conditions under which the Bible bindings developed during the Middle Ages, it is apt to first describe the cultural context that led to these changes. Poleg notes that, until the twelfth century, Bibles mainly appeared in many volumes of different sizes and lengths, although some commonality existed about their form: "large and expensive manuscripts, written in four or five volumes, their size and price befitted a communal ownership, and marks of use frequently indicate readings for choir and refectory" ("Paratext and Meaning in Late Medieval Bibles," 124). Susannah Fisher also corroborates this point, but she offers more specific details by describing the decorated bindings of the pre-twelfth-century books. She notes that, specifically during late Antiquity, the most common decoration given to Bible bindings were the cross and the five-part schema ("Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings," 298). When we consider the richness and grandness of these volumes, it is not surprising that their covers are also talked about as "treasure bindings", representing an almost millennium-long practice in Christian book tradition (Needham, *Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600,* 21).

While it is understandable why their richness and exuberance marked with “brilliant gold and shimmering gems” often take the main stage when discussing the early Middle age bindings, it should also be noted that these bindings also featured "iconic and narrative decoration" complementing "the spiritual nature of the contents, as well as the magnificence of the patrons" (Fisher, "Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings,” 296). However, as the depicted scenes often had no connection with the text itself, Fisher concludes that rather than "illustrating the text of the manuscript", the intention behind these visual narratives was to "set the stage and cue the participants in a culture where the

oral/aural means of communication predominated" (297). The mention of "participants" is important. Needham notes that, while in early Antiquity these "jewelled bindings" would have been owned by individuals[15], eventually these books “almost invariably” became synonymous with the monasteries and other church institutions, where the concurrent use of symbols on the bindings mirrored closely the aesthetic style of crucifixes, eucharistic vestments, and the alters (*Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600,* 22). This list can be expanded by adding an inventory of objects of domestic nature, such as “chalices, lamps and spoons” which, according to Fisher, were an important part of the “liturgical furniture” (“Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings,” 298; 304).

While this gives us a vivid idea of how elaborate the aesthetic harmony was expressed through the Bible bindings, it is also important to note that the selection of decorative material was closely impacted by the political and economic dynamics taking place in the background. For example, as Miller & Huber suggest, the frequency of exquisitely carved “wood covers” in surviving volumes, while showing a strong “experimentation with material” and treatment of bookbinding as “high art”, were a matter of adaptation rather than a choice (*The Bible: A History: The Making and Impact of the Bible*, 218-219). Fisher confirms this point and argues that the decorative experimentation with the expected cross and five-part schema on these unconventional bindings were selected often to replace other materials which had become harder to obtain, such as ivory from Byzantium, thereby leading to the variance in artistry and adaptation ("Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings,” 306). Other changes were also afoot in the form of manuscripts. While the paper remained a rougher and more fragile alternative to parchment leaves, this made the book a much lighter object compared to its weighty predecessor that dominated during the

[15] For instance, Fisher discusses at length the material richness of the ninth-century *Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram*, owned by Carolingian emperor Charles the Bald, whose binding contained both a cross and five-part schema on the binding (“Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings,” 295).

Antiquity (Thomas, “Manuscripts,” 148). However, as Thomas continues, the material variance is only one manifestation of shifts in book production, a more impactful transition being the movement of the book production away from "monasteries and ecclesiastical establishments" and closer into the scholarly circle which began to appear after the founding of universities and development of learning and laity in the twelfth century ("Manuscripts,” 147).

The changes in book production translated into the content and form of the Bible through both material and aesthetic means. As Poleg argues, the whole paratextual system of the Bible was changing with the new book production techniques as *a new form* of the Bible began to develop, informed by the growing academic demand to study the Biblical texts ("Paratext and meaning in Late Medieval Bibles,” 108). Accordingly, Poleg characterizes the *new,* scholarly Bible like this:

> Beyond portability and cost, [the pandect Bible] revolutionized the way Bibles have been read ever since. Whereas the earlier, heavier, multi-volume Bibles were consulted primarily in large monastic libraries, single-volume Bibles were now also taken on the road, to be read without additional volumes of exegesis and theology. The new Bibles became self-sufficient books, volumes that could function as the first and last port of call for biblical study. […] While the layout was uniform, the addenda (keys, glossaries, tables, diagrams, tracts, etc.) were varied and versatile, accommodating Bibles to personal tastes and rendering them invaluable for the medieval classroom, pulpit, or lectern. ("Paratext and Meaning in Late Medieval Bibles,” 112)

In other words, it should be expected that this new *interiority* would influence the exterior of the study Bibles. It is worth remembering that, with the transition to the Scholastic Age, the producers of these new volumes were no longer just religious authorities, but their ranks also included many craftsmen from the artisan class who saw book production as a trade (Thomas, "Manuscripts," 149). As Petroski summarizes, the bindings of books during the Middle Ages continued to be "elaborately decorated" (*The Book on the Bookshelf,* 57). Miller & Huber also observe that most Bibles during the Middle Ages were bound in "fine leather, etched with intriguing patterns, floral motifs or some other artwork" (*The Bible: A History: The Making and Impact of the Bible,* 219). This highlights an important aspect of the book cover theory prevalent during this period. As Fisher explains, the grandness and lush decoration of Bibles were not just meant to visually confirm the aristocratic or moral status of their owners. As reading continued to be a public ritual, these volumes were also intended to make their presence *known* and *felt* to everyone attending the sermons, including the "illiterate and laity" ("Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings," 304).

It is interesting to note that, as the book entered universities and libraries, its spatial signification was not abandoned. As Needham notes, one of the main developments in the Medieval books that impacted their aesthetic form was the disappearance of book clasps from the bindings (*Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600*, 54), which were intended to "protect its contents" (Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, 30). It would make sense to interpret this as a symbol of the power structure imposed by the church leaders to sustain their moral authority over books and reading. In this sense, the disappearance of clasps may signify a liberation of reading, however, this was not entirely so. As a result of growing scholastic interest, changes took place in the way books were arranged in relation to their surroundings. The creation of book-specific furniture to accommodate growing book

collections in this period not only indicates a settling uniformity in the form of the book but also testifies to the growth in the number of books owned by university libraries and individual patrons that needed to be organized and kept safe. Petroski notes that an earlier example of the widely used book furniture in British cathedrals during the fourteenth century was the "elaborately carved" book chest, fastened with locks and opened with a single key" (*The Book on the Bookshelf*, 42). It is possible to see this kind of chests as direct descendants of the Antiquity chests. Fisher describes them as “precious forms of liturgical furniture where the expensive volumes would be locked at the end of the sermon (“Formulating Viewer Response: Early Medieval Treasury Bindings,” 304).

Despite this, Petroski notes that the bulky size of book chests quickly became cumbersome, not only because library collections began to expand (*The Book on the Bookshelf*, 48) but also because of the problems caused by single key access (60). The solution was found during the fourteenth century, when books, rather than being stored vertically, were placed on the upper shelf of the lectern horizontally, attached with a chain (Petroski, 79). It should be noted that the book chain was used not only in libraries. Noted by Miller & Huber, the chaining of the Bibles to church pillars was done so as to prevent anyone from thinking about "running off with them.” (*The Bible: A History: The Making and Impact of the Bible*, 219). As this demonstrates, the intent behind book chains seemed to be mainly preventative protection.

However, it is important to discuss the status and role of the bindings in settings like libraries and monasteries where books were gathered in great numbers. As Christopher Hamel notes, there exists a very clear hierarchy between the surviving manuscripts belonging to the Middle Ages solely based on their material conditions. Whereas the Bibles and law books were made and bound in expensive animal skin to ensure their durability, manuscripts deemed to be of lesser importance were produced using more “modest”

materials for the cover (*A History of Illuminated Manuscript,* 11). Petroski observes that the binding of the book in this period seldom contained any identification of the book title or its author (*The Book on the Bookshelf,* 35). The material and aesthetic richness seem to be directly associated with how the volumes would be stored. Indeed, Petroski reports that books with expensive covers decorated with precious stones "would not be shelved with the more common books", and instead placed in "trays, table-cases, or drawers" (59). This suggests that, at least for the institutional patrons of the books, the material conditions of the binding were still being used as a display object informing not only of the status of the patron but also the exclusiveness of the books.

The emergence of individual readers has been associated with the transition from the Monastic Age to Scholastic Age. Indeed, Thomas talks about a new "reading public" which emerged at the end of the thirteenth century:

> A bourgeois class was appearing alongside the nobility and the clergy, equally capable of developing a literary culture. Lawyers, lay advisers at Court, state officials, and, later on, rich merchants and town citizens - all needed books, not only in their own subjects like law, politics, or science, but also works of literature, edifying moral treatises, romances, and translations. This kind of material was not intended for clerics, although they were sometimes the authors, and usually, it was in the vernacular. ("Manuscripts," 151).

Indeed, between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, among the most dedicated patrons of the books were "the king, princes or great noblemen" who would obtain "de-luxe editions" with great pleasure in exchange for "a dedication" by the author (Thomas, 152). Similarly, the members of the aristocracy who personally identified with more secular texts also adopted a tradition of gifting highly decorated, exquisitely bound religious manuscripts with

beautiful illuminations to the monasteries and churches to show their patronage of the arts and their strong moral standing (Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscript*, 53). The bifurcation of the reading practices, however, does not mean that public reading was on the decline. A large variety of heavy and luxurious Bible manuscripts bound in gold and gem-covered bindings are very revealing about the reading habits of this period. As Hamel suggests, the weight and look of these Bibles indicate that they were designed to be used exclusively for public readings in churches where a member of the clergy would read from the text, reemphasized by the highly prominent display of the book on the lectern (*A History of Illuminated Manuscript*, 111).

Under the new economy of book production, the royal patronage of books and the interest among the upper classes to associate themselves with the symbolic virtue and morality that the book resulted in the aesthetic boom of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Hamel notes that among Henry VIII's favourite gifts for his brides were elegantly bound books that included a miniature portrait of the pair (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 96-7), often coupled with the recognizable Tudor rose (123). In general, these type of books were often meant for female readers, and the embroidery applied on the covers signified this gender difference. The same books, when meant for respectable male readers, would be covered in red Morocco leather, which quickly became the visual symbol of the "good book" (Hamel, 95). As these books with elaborate bindings became a highly coveted possession among the women in the Tudor court (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 123), the personal value assigned to them was also significant. The popularity of these decorated Bibles as New Year's gift at the English court shows that the *rich* cover was an integral part the esteem they were importing on the reciever (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 127).

Particularly in Britain, the height of book aesthetics was the invention of specialised Bibles called "golde gifts" or "booke of golde" (Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a*

Mirror of Society, 126). These sixteenth-century portable Bibles often belonged to members of the female aristocracy and were worn on the body of the patron-reader as a piece of jewellery. Despite their unusual look, Foot explains that these copies were indeed regular Bibles bound in “luxury covers” (ibid.). It is also important to note that these books made many appearances in portraits in the second half of the sixteenth century (Foot, 63), which shows the symbolic importance of the decorated books in conveying the morality, virtue, and education of the sitter. More to the point: the painting medium shows that it was not just the material definition, but the aesthetic definition (the look of the book) also had become an important detail to consider. The portrait of Lady Philippa Speke painted in 1592 is one of the better-known examples of the “girdle books” or decorated Bibles worn by the reader included in a portrait (Figure 6). With the depiction of elaborate French-style farthingale and gold jewellery (Gogm, "Grand Ladies"), as well as the Rosewell family insignia on the top right, the painting stands as an exuberant and direct depiction of the aristocracy in Tudor England. However, it can be argued that the addition of the decorated book complicates this easy reading. When the painting is studied closely, the eye is drawn to the gold-coloured book which is attached to Lady Philippa with a red string. The richness of the decorative cover assigns a history to the sitter by signifying the respect and importance she was paid by simply being in possession of such an exquisite volume. However, placed diagonally opposite the book is the Latin inscription on the top left-hand side of the painting: “Non gloriae. Sed memoriae”, which translates into English as “Not for glory. But for

Figure 6:“ Lady Philippa Speke (neé Rosewell)” by an unknown painter (1592). Private Collection.

memory." Coupled with the Bible physically attached to the sitter, the inscription helps to balance the representation by showing the presence of moral erudition and thus, *humanizing* the subject. The cultural and aesthetic intricacy of these expensive bindings shows that the book between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been transformed into a significant and recognizable symbol of material and moral worth among the aristocracy. Because of this, the emergence of the print book following Gutenberg's invention in the 1450s needs to be carefully studied in order to understand how these social and cultural dynamics were negotiated.

As one of its immediate outcomes, Miller & Huber note that, "the printing press entered the scene and generated more books for less money, lower-income people started buying books. They could not usually afford the elegant cover artwork, so the covers became simpler, lighter and more practical – making Bibles less a showpiece and more a source of guidance and inspiration." (*The Bible: A History: The Making and Impact of the Bible*, 219). The shift in the description from "rich, gold bindings" to "elegant covers" is notable. While the concerns about the print technology and its impact in making the book a "common object"[16] is explored at a greater length in critical discourse, it is equally important to highlight the aesthetic shifts caused by the print book. For example, Eisenstein observes this conflict particularly among the aristocratic classes by recounting an episode where the famous Florentine book merchant Vespasiano da Bisticci commented on the distasteful vulgarity of the printed book which made its way to the Duke of Urbino's previously

[16] As the foremost expert of the print culture, Eisenstein historicizes the cultural crisis caused by the print through different changes that the print technology had caused in society. Her main argument is that, in many ways, the printed book materialized the fears of its opponents who saw the exclusivity of the book being eroded by the reckless practitioners of the print. While there existed another line of argument focusing on cheaper production and lowered quality of the print book in relation to the handwritten manuscripts, Eisenstein notes that these fears were effectively countered by the Humanist scholars who instead highlighted the shortcomings of the manuscript production, such as its origins during the Roman times as a slave-fuelled industry (Eisenstein, "Defining the Initial Shift: Some Features of Print Culture," 240), but the reading quality of the paper book still left a lot to be desired.

renowned private collection which was famous for its “beautifully bound books” (“Defining the Initial Shift: Some Features of Print Culture,” 234).

The public concern about the new technology was so great that even Gutenberg decided to produce his Latin Bible (later known as Gutenberg Bible) in two versions: in paper and parchment forms. While the two were rendered indistinguishable because of their generic bindings, the paper Bible did significantly worse in sales in comparison to the parchment-printed copies which resembled a manuscript more closely than it did a print book (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 209). The turn of the tide in favour of the print book would not come until the middle of the fifteenth century with the political changes that took place on the map of Europe. More specifically, the collapse of the Byzantine Empire following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks caused an upheaval in manuscript production which had to relocate its centre from the Eastern Empire to Venice (Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 134-136). Furthermore, the fear of further invasion created a short period of heightened interest in religious texts (Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible*, 196). In many ways, the emergence of the Book of Hours as individualized prayer books can be studied as the culmination of these events.

According to Hamel, the first Book of Hours was printed in London at the close of the fourteenth century (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 13). Miniature expert and manuscript historian L. M. J. Delaissé calls Books of Hours “the late medieval best-seller” (qtd. in *Book of Hours and Their Owners*, Harthan, 9). Hamel also highlights the rich decoration of these illuminated and illustrated volumes, also noting their domestic nature which was a daily companion of its owner (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 13). The origin of this visual exuberance was not simple. Harthan asserts that the Books of Hours, which were being compiled without the approval of the Church, were meant as "personal prayer books of the laity", "used by men and women who lived secular lives" (*Book of Hours and Their Owners*,

9; 11). Overall, there seems to be a consensus between Hamel and Harthan's accounts about the bindings and ornamentation of Books of Hours. Hamel's reading focuses on both the durable and aesthetically individuated nature of the Book of Hours bindings (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 13). Harthan also notes this, but he takes his analysis one step further by suggesting that: "decorated with greater or lesser elaboration according to the wealth and position of the owner. No two are like" (*Books of Hours and Their Owners*, 9). It is clear that, for Harthan, the cultural and social status of these is very significant, which he directly associates with the role of the owner/reader.

However, this should not mean, for Harthan, the aesthetic form of the book was only dependent on the social class of its owner. While critics like Joan Evans see these books as the main "cause and consequence of the development of castle chapels" (qtd. in *Book of Hours and Their Owners*, 31), Harthan opposes the proposed aristocratic associations by suggesting that Book of Hours provided "every class of the laity from kings and royal dukes down to prosperous burghers and their wives with personal prayerbooks. All literate people, and even some who could not read, aspired to own one." (ibid.). However, when we look at the inventory that Harthan provides, it is very easy to spot the frequency of royal titles among them. This may certainly stem from survival bias, however, when we read him closely, it seems like Harthan is not rejecting the perceived associations between the aristocratic use of the Book of Hours to signify "vanity and influence", but rather he is hesitant to see this as the primary cause for their popularity (*Book of Hours and Their Owners*, 32;34). In other words, for Harthan, social status was not the root cause behind the decorativeness of books, as he sees them as active participants in social relations. While Manguel's observation that the richness and decoration of these volumes depended on "who the customers were" and "how much they could afford to pay" (*A History of Reading*, 129) is apt, the pages Harthan dedicates to writing about various and richly bound Books of Hours given as wedding gifts or

passed as provisions upon the death of their owners (*Book of Hours and Their Owners*, 33) leads us to think that, for him, the care given to their aesthetic form shows the personal importance given to these books that were seen by their owners as legacies.

Book of Hours is one of the distinct categories of books with very high preservation rates (Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscript*, 168). Survival is an important bibliographic factor that has been studied closely through the critical work done by Barker & Adams. Accordingly, they locate the survival within the "socio-economic conjecture" of their model where the book, not just its text, is shown to be directly impacted by both intellectual, social, and aesthetic influences (“A New Model for the Study of the Book,” 14-15). When we orient this reading to Book of Hours, then we see that it is through their binding that both the material and cultural survival of these volumes have been ensured. Indeed, Barker & Adams confirm this by suggesting that "the place that books had in the social values of the time is expressed in the frame built to hold them" (“A New Model for the Study of the Book,” 21).

I argue that when we look closely at the bindings of the Book of Hours, we see a social ritual being performed through the material and aesthetic symbols. For instance, Reinburg notes that, particularly for women, Books of Hours with their "embellished bindings and covers" were not only luxurious gifts but also a lasting symbol of "emotional and spiritual bonds uniting friends or godmothers and goddaughters" ("'For the Use of Women': Women and Books of Hours,” 236-238). Similarly, Harthan observes that among many leather bindings, we can also observe a good amount bound in "silk or velvet" bindings, garnished with "gilt and jewelled claps" and "corner-pieces made by professional goldsmith" (37). There are even records of safekeeping "boxes" to protect the sewn bindings (ibid.). These descriptions certainly evoke an earlier discussion presented in this chapter through the aesthetic forms and storage methods of the Bible during the Antiquity and

Middle Ages. The references to Books of Hours in visual art with religious contexts[17] show this parallel more clearly, offering us an insight into not only their cultural significance but also the referential inspiration behind recognizable, well-ornamented bindings.

The aesthetic and material conditions of these preserved volumes are also notable. Indeed, Harthan notes that only a minority of books that survive to this day carry their original bindings:

> The bindings found today on Books of Hours usually date from a later period than the text inside. After a century or more of use, the chemisette and original cover became worn out and were discarded. The volume was then rebound as an act of piety by descendants or successors of the first owner and put away in a drawer or cupboard to be forgotten for many years. (*Book of Hours and Their Owners*, 37).

This proves that simplifying the bindings of Books of Hours into display trinkets clashes with the cultural context against which they existed. These books carry the signs of all three stages of survival described by Barker & Adams, which are: the "creation and initial reception", followed by a period of "intensive use", and the final stage where the book is deemed "desirable as an object" ("A New Model for the Study of the Book," 32). Indeed, Harthan provides a list of observations, including "bindings are rubbed, the introductory Calendar section lost, edged of the pages thumb-marked, stained with wax spots form lamp or candle, torn, and blank page s and even margins used for additional prayers copied out by later hands" (32-33), all of which show that these books were not only valuable possessions but also truly personal objects used by their owners/readers daily.

[17] Harthan particularly notes Jan van Eyck's "The Adoration of the Holy Lamb" where the "green chemisette binding edged with gold from which four brown tassels hang at the corners" (37). It can be suggested that the use of the book here acts as a supporting symbol for the religious narrative of the painting. This suggests that the external form of the Book of Hours was not simply an extravagant mold for the display of aristocratic wealth, but rather an important aspect of the book in communicating both its material richness and moral messaging.

Barker and Adams's model also helps us realize that the survival rates of Book of Hours are not simply a statistical fact that helps us to discuss the aspects of literary or textual content, but survival is also important in contextualizing how the cultural and aesthetic legacy of the book is shaped by their readers. The following chapter will discuss a number of models of readership and book collection that existed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries by looking at the book bindings and covers across the Renaissance, Reformation, and Romanticism.

Chapter 3: Reading through Covers

This chapter tracks the scenes of reading and readers as the print book gained a stronger momentum in transforming the book and its aesthetic form. As reading continued to be a class-significant activity expanding mainly within the ranks of aristocratic and bourgeois classes, the book cover responded to the cultural and aesthetic changes accordingly. This chapter identifies the late Renaissance, Reformation, and Romanticism as the main periods within which reading as a cultural and aesthetic activity flourished, gaining a new, but still recognizable cultural and economic dimension that became crucial in the Industrial Age. Accordingly, this chapter will track the concept of the "reader" between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and discuss how our idea of bookbinding is informed by the changing norms of reading as a cultural and aesthetic act.

Robert Curtius notes that the prominence that was bestowed upon the codex-book with the dawn of Christianity was only the continuation of pagan traditions of Antiquity whereby the Homeric texts were consecrated as the first record of civilization (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 310). With the arrival of the Renaissance, the book lost some of its religious connotations, but instead, it assumed a new symbolic meaning under the influence of Humanism which signified intelligence, order, and, once again, civilization (Curtius, 322). This transition is well recorded in literary culture as well. According to Curtius, Dante's *The Divine Comedy* - a foundational text that effectively shaped the literary culture of the Middle Ages - carries the traces of this legacy wherein the 'hero' of the story is a student, a learner of books (Curtius, 326).

The book has often been discussed in relation to the human body, however, the associations between the book cover and the face remain one of the most evocative metaphors that have a long history. According to Curtius, in the English language, one of the earliest examples of metaphoric allusions to the book cover as the face of the book was

offered by Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* (Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 335). The line reads:

> "This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
>
> To beautify him only lacks a cover." (*Romeo and Juliet*, I; 3)

Here Shakespeare presents a parallel between a person and the book by interiorizing the "precious love" in both *subjects*, while the cover that protects the book in the same way it cloaks the lover from onlookers is meant to "beautify." Conversely, this example also offers a Romanticized image of the book as a site in which love and beauty are united very tightly, similar to how binding is bound to the book. The concept of wholeness is an important factor in understanding the implications of equating the book cover to a human face. On the one hand, this posits that the book cover is open to constant cultural interpretation in the same way that the human face is interpreted and "read." This equation is further reinforced by the material structure of the book. The cover is physically attached, either sewn or glued, to the rest of the book, which marks this bond as stable and permanent as that of skin to flesh. Most importantly, likening the book cover to a face solidifies the unity of the book by making it possible for the cover to share in the spiritual *deep* reading of the book.

In an essay titled "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face*",* Georg Simmel provides an important philosophical study of the face as a semiotic field. Simmel frames the face as an important expression of subjectivity by arguing that the aesthetic form of the face informs the onlookers about the inner unity of the subject (231). To put it differently, the face identifies and empowers the subject through its symbolic form. Simmel's approach assumes the face is not only a semiotic field that can be read as a text but also a symbolic form that embodies the spiritual and material necessities of the subject. For Simmel, the fact that the fragile neutrality of the face can be "destroyed" any minute with facial reactions is what reaffirms the authority of the subject:

> The primary evidence of this fact is that a change that is limited, actually or apparently, to one element of the face—a curl of the lips, an upturning of the nose, a way of looking, a frown— immediately modifies its entire character and expression. Aesthetically, there is no other part of the body whose wholeness can as easily be destroyed by the disfigurement of only one of its elements. (231).

The transformative capacity of the face is exemplified by the aesthetic possibilities of the cover, the defined space which is constantly rearranged to create new symbolic meaning. However, because the book cover is a symbolic object, its meaning is not fixed in denotative linguistic codes. This allows for shifts that can cause "disfigurements" in the way the book is seen or received by the readers. In this sense, the cover as a material and visual object remains tied to the larger culture to position itself in relation to the reader. When the book remains *evasive* to the reader, what is lost is the *spirit* of the book, because as Simmel argues, the "unmistakable personality" can only be affirmed through symbolic legibility:

Conversely, in the sixteenth century, the depiction of the reader lost in the book took on a more visually signified form. The image of St. Jerome in his library had become a popular subject in the sixteenth century. Henry Petroski highlights the chaos of books common in many paintings of St. Jerome as an artistic vehicle to characterize a reader of this period:

> As with those of St. Jerome, Renaissance depictions of scholars' studies seldom show books arranged in such a way that all of them are oriented the same. Typically, some books would be shown with their fore-edges out, others would have the top or bottom out, and still, others would be leaning against a wall or a horizontal pile of books showing off a decorated front cover. This haphazard arrangement is

> how one would expect books to be found around a desk and on the shelves of a working scholar. Because there typically would not be that many books in a private library, the scholar could be expected to know each of his books by size and thickness, by colour and texture of binding. Thus, there was no need to mark books or arrange them in any systematic way, because any of a score or so of volumes could be located in an instant. (*The Book on the Bookshelf*, 119).

Despite sitting at the centre of these painting surrounded by the chaos of objects, Renaissance reader appears to be in full control of their material surroundings. In the midst of this interiority, the emphasis put on the form, colour, and binding of the books also work to affirm the intimate bond between the reader and the book. This description is particularly revealing when contrasted with the comments from Renaissance collectors who, unlike St. Jerome's visually ordered study, struggled to identify the books in their vast collections from their "size and binding alone" (Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, 120). However, it is also notable that, despite the visual richness of his described study, St. Jerome is not depicted reading or interacting with books, but rather sitting amidst the books. Whether open or closed, the book seemingly possessed the power to identify the subject as a reader.

When talking about the aesthetic concerns of the sixteenth-century book, it is important to note the effects of the Reformist movement on the reader as a cultural agent. One of the main changes caused by the Protestant schism was the division of the book from the visually signified world of public reading. Indeed, Pope Gregory the Great's famous speech about images being "words for the ignorant" is frequently quoted in scholarly works to characterize the role of image and seeing in the act of reading (Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*, 5). Furthermore, the image was often referred to as the material proof of the divine magic upon which the Church of Christ was built. This idea

highlights two main aspects of the image as it relates to the book cover: on the one hand, the image, by giving form to ideas and concepts, acts as symbolic evidence of manifested authority. On the other hand, unlike the text, which carried very heavy social and cultural connotations about its users, the image did not put preconditions of literacy or learning upon its viewers. According to Manguel, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the image served a much wider audience of church visitors than the select group who were the readers of God's word. Because of this, the visuality played an important role in materializing divine ideas such as "grace, beauty, and refinement" for the public readings that took place within the walls of the Church (*Reading Pictures*, 283). The Protestant Reformation, however, saw images and icons as the distortion of the authority of God's word. The implications of the Reformist push against the image were manifold: while it put the text as the direct interlocutor of the reader beyond the interference of the church patrons, this doctrine also assigned to the reading of the text rather than the image a total supremacy over the communication between God (ibid.). Indeed, I suggest that the Reformation presents an interesting period in the history of the book wherein its symbolic meaning began to be redefined under the heavy expectation of readability.

To put it differently, the Reformation caused a hierarchical approach to different forms of reading and readers, positioning the textual and visual reading opposite each other. The extent to which this was accepted by the readers of the age is debatable. It can even be argued that the political undertones of this schism were stronger than cultural. Nonetheless, the Protestant verdict about the images exhibited both in churches and in books was clear: the icon was a "vain" and "profane" ornamentation that attempted to supplant the divine superiority of the text by the treacherous means of deceiving the eye (Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*, 6). In the period of iconoclasm, the church walls that contained images were whitewashed and the layman's Lutheran Bible lost its

illustrations and decorated binding (3). Nonetheless, the visually simplified book did not make reading any simpler than it had been before.

It follows that the aesthetic form of the book was directly impacted by the political situation that dominated in the aftermath of the Protestant schism. Britain, in particular, experienced an astonishing range of changes and improvements in cover designs towards the beginning of the seventeenth century. The arrival of the Huguenot refugees from France as the result of the persecution of Protestants in Catholic France impacted the bookbinding craft across the channel (Marks, *The British Library Guide to Bookbinding: History and Techniques,* 66). While in her "The History of bookbinding as a Mirror of Society" Foot notes a superficial exchange of "general patterns" between Britain and France (15), later when she is analyzing the work of Huguenot bookbinder Jean de Planche that belongs to the sixteenth century, she notes that the exuberance of gold-tooling and "hatched[18] tools", she concludes that the binding possesses "a distinctly French look" ("The British Bindings in the Henry Davis Gift," 116). It is possible that by the *Frenchness* of the binding Foot is referring specifically to the ornamental tooling as the gold-tooling was perceived to be the specialty of Venetian bookbinders (Diehl, *Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique,* 35). It should be noted that this is not the only instance of interaction between binding styles and methods hailing from different countries. Foot notes that the bourgeois patrons of binderies would actively collect and document design examples from their travels to the Continent (Foot, 101). While the cultural discourse on the national design styles did not gain momentum until the nineteenth century, as the result of the exchange, a distinctly "English style of gold-tooled bookbinding" began to emerge in the seventeenth century (Needham, *Twelve Centuries of Bookbindings: 400-1600,* 270).

[18] *Hatching* is defined as follows: "The technique of producing a series of fine closely laid parallel lines used to fill open tools or compartments in the tooled designs of bindings" ("Language of Bindings")

The reading culture of the seventeenth century needs to be discussed closely. It is noted that, following the Reformation, the culturally favoured mode of reading shifted from public to private. In many ways, the Reformist "solitary reading" is referential to the "silent reading" practice of the earlier Christian tradition. As Manguel notes, reading had been considered one of the primary faculties of a literate individual, alongside thinking and speaking, since the early Middle Ages (*A History of Reading,* 47). However, it should be noted that the Reformist reinvention of the solitary reader is different from the image of the Medieval reader. Unlike the Lutheran emphasis on interpretation and deep reading, reading in the Middle Ages was a materially conditioned event. Using St. Ambrose of Milan as the ideal silent reader, Manguel conceptualizes reading as a deep, absorbing engagement that renders the material world invisible:

> The reader has become deaf and blind to the world, to the passing crowds, to the chalky flesh-coloured façades of the buildings. Nobody seems to notice a concentrating reader: withdrawn, intent, the reader becomes commonplace. (*A History of Reading,* 42-3)

This characterization of the reader is intentionally suggestive. When talking about the material world which the reader abandons to "withdraw" into a book, Ambrose describes the result as a form of sensory incapacity in which the subject is utterly oblivious to the difference between "passing crowds" or "flesh-coloured buildings." In other words, the reader becomes *unseeing* and *unhearing* of people and structures which remain outside of the book. This description emphasizes the materiality of the book by depicting it as a physical structure into which the reader can cross. Furthermore, Ambrose identifies the book as the main agent which demarcates the lines between a world *outside* that is abandoned and another place *inside* into which the reader retreats.

The presence of the reader is critical in silent reading, as it is only by the sight that the reading can be confirmed.

Martin Luther's advocacy of the importance of the private reading of the Bible and the power of interpreting God's word by every individual created new, *solitary* reading (Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 17-18). Accordingly, this led to the growing perception that the text possessed a power of "self-interpretation" which could be accessed through devotional re-readings (Calinescu; qtd. in Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 20). The reason behind the wide acceptance of Luther's meditative reading was that it relied on the underlying symbolic authority of the book as a vessel of learning and emancipation. Littau notes that, while silent reading was not directly caused by the transition to the print medium, nevertheless, she suggests that "the shift towards reading in solitude must be attributed to a technology which, on the one hand, made this possible and which, on the other hand, was also readily adopted by the emergent [Lutheran] theology" (*Theories of Reading*,17). Davidson offers a similar reading to Littau, by pointing about the "the Reformation was, in one sense, invented by Gutenberg's printed book (*Reading in America: Literature & Social History*, 18). While the emphasis in both of these accounts is placed on the "print book", it should be noted that the Reformist Bible often travelled across the borders as printed sheets rather than a bound object. For instance, Hamel notes that the early Protestant Bible was brought to the British Isles unbound to avoid being confiscated by the authorities who aimed to control the "import" of the book (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 240). With the "re-making" of the Bible and its readers, we can also observe a new patronage system being introduced. Bentley notes that it did not take long for Henry VIII to recognize the power of the book and under his rule, the Bible was officially translated from Latin into English, as the Reformist dictum demanded, and reprinted, its printing rights were given

only to crown-approved publishers ("Images of the Word: Separately Published English Bible Illustrations 1539-1830," 104). What is interesting about the new English Bible is that, in its second edition, the book was printed with an elaborate dedication to the king and was sent to replace other Bibles in all churches across England. In other words, as Hamel put it, the printed book had become the symbol of the state (*The Book: A History of the Bible*, 241), which meant that its meaning was also controlled by this new source of authority.

Because the reader's silent and solitary bond with the printed text became a norm in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, it can be assumed that state control over the Bible and its production spelt, despite Luther's best efforts, also the loss of freedom of the reader. However, when we look at the intricacies of book production during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we can see that the reader was still a strong agent within the book culture. For example, Bentley summarizes that despite the best efforts of the crown to retain its control over the translated English Bible, printers and booksellers, with the help of illustrations managed to fly under the radar of copyright (Bentley, "Images of the Word: Separately Published English Bible Illustrations 1539-1830," 106). In other words, to avoid any issues, the printers used new patterns and scenes for their own editions of the Bible, sometimes very boldly deviating from the textual depiction of the selected scene (112). The artistic variety that was available in the book market, in turn, invigorated the readerly choice about which version to purchase, reclaiming the book once again from state control and giving some power and validity to the choice of the reader.

While my focus in this chapter is mainly focused on the aesthetic and cultural interpretations of the Reader between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, it should be noted that books between this period continued to be "items of luxury consumption"

serving “urban and academic elite” (Buringh & Van Zanden, “Charting the ‘Rise of the West’,” 441). Because of this, many critics prefer to balance the impact of the book on society with literacy rates. On this topic, Blanning notes that until the nineteenth century, the literacy rate among adults in Europe remained under 50% (*The Eighteenth Century Europe 1688-1815*, 3). Indeed, Buringh & Van Zanden note that in the sixteenth century, the literacy rate in cities was around 23%, while in the countryside this figure was only 5% (“Charting the ‘Rise of the West’,” 433). Despite the slow rate of spread, the literacy rates continued to improve until the eighteenth century, and the main driving factors behind the spread of reading skills (albeit very slow) before the nineteenth century are identified as urbanization (Blanning, 3; Buringh & Van Zanden, 433), and Protestant Reformation (Ogilvie, “The European Economy in the Eighteenth Century,” 99; Buringh & Van Zanden, 435). In terms of the main buyers and readers of books, Buringh & Van Zanden note that until the early Modern period when the “books came within the reach of the lower middle classes”, the main consumers and readers were members of “the class of merchants and professionals who became the main consumers of the product” (“Charting the ‘Rise of the West’,” 441).

As the commercial scope and production line of the printed book became more defined and organized in the eighteenth century, the impact of the social and commercial relations that readers had with their printers or binders became more notable[19]. According to Howsam, the conditions that led to this were not only the division of labour within the print show to meet the intensified demand for reading matter, but also the expanding involvement of the reader in the creation process of the

[19] Eisenstein dates the origin of the specialization taking place in bookbinding to the sixteenth-century print culture, when a group of binder-craftsmen split from the stationers and printers (Eisenstein, "Defining the Initial Shift: Some Features of Print Culture,” 238), setting the bookbinding on a different trajectory from print and distribution of the book.

book ("The Study of Book History," 5). The main outcome of this new reality was that, despite the personal nature of reading, the reader was now connected to other readers through a shared aesthetic language. When we refer to bookbinding historians, their accounts seem to associate this with the movement of the binders closer to "markets", "towns and cities", and ultimately, to "booksellers and stationers who provided most of their custom (*The British Library Guide to Bookbinding: History and Techniques*, 13). Diehl, on the other hand, notes that it was the development of "bibliophiles among the leisure classes" that helped to develop the binderies and strengthening their role in and contribution to the developing book aesthetics (*Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique*, 38). According to Foot, the main evidence for the growing role of binders as independent artists involved in the creation of the book was the explosive variety of the covers that encompassed all design sensibilities of the seventeenth century.

The commercial and cultural institutions books continued to change in the eighteenth century. Alongside the expansion of the reading subjects to include "classics, law, history, and religion, as well as humanist texts"[20] (103). The range of subjects mentioned here shows that the readers of the new century were engaging with a wider set of texts than in previous centuries. Indeed, as Habermas notes, the development of public and private libraries in this period shows that reading was progressing not on "the spur to improvement and enlightenment, of progress from lesser to greater literacy, from ignorance and barbarism to democracy, humanitarianism, and virtue. (*The Structural*

[20] In the reading culture of the eighteenth century, it is important to note the impact of the Enlightenment movement on the rapid production and dissemination of the reading matter. As Robert Darnton notes, the proliferation of illegally printed volumes during the political turmoil of eighteenth-century Europe was directly inspired by the Enlightenment with its emphasis on scientific and humanist texts (*The Literary Underground*, 134). Darnton also adds that, alongside the works of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, many "popular and vulgar" texts were also in high demand (*The Literary Underground*, 141). Alongside the production of newspapers, these points not only show a big diversity in the reading taste of the time but also reveals improving literacy rates which allowed new readers to engage with political and literary texts.

Transformation of the Public Sphere, 181). Indeed, the rise of the public sphere that began in the coffee houses and reading salons (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 30) are important developments showing the expansion of the world of books and readers.

When talking about the reading culture of the eighteenth century, it is important to note the difference here between the readers[21] and "discriminating bibliophiles" that emerged during this period (Diehl, ibid.). The latter is characterized not only by their aristocratic libraries but also by the special care and attention they gave to their building and preserving their collections. The following two depictions of collecting and storage help to depict the possessive dedication of the bibliophiles exhibited toward their books:

> Anne de Montmorency locked her books behind glass-fronted shelves to protect the bindings from the exposure to light.
>
> -
>
> John Blacker's books are kept pristine because he was the only person using them in the privacy of his room, even his family was not allowed to read them. (Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society*, 109)

Readers, on the other hand, occupy a similar, but different category. While the separation from bibliophiles might imply a casualness to the relationship of the reader with the book, it is important to note that the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was the period when the reader still took a direct part in buying, binding, and collecting their books. Therefore, the

[21] Graff notes that the modern understanding of literacy with all of its "liberal" connotations is often associated with the Enlightenment movement in Europe and with "ideological origins of Western society (*The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*, 82). In this sense, Habermas' emphasis on the unique role of reading in the formation of the public sphere can be seen as the extension of the idea where the reading slowly began to take on everyday, political, individual, and public, as well as personal forms.

proposed divide here should be imagined between the patrons of "trade bindings[22]" and collectors of de-luxe bindings.

When we try to provide an overview of the bookbinding culture and the role of the readers[23] in the eighteenth century, it becomes clear that two contesting interpretations[24] are present: on the one hand, Michael Sadleir theorizes that the reader was the absolute authority over the bindings of the books they purchased, which he justifies economic dynamics within the trade: "It is difficult to understand a publisher in 1781 going to the expense of having labels designed and engraved for a binding which very few book-buyers of the time would ever consider worth preserving" (*The Evolution of Publishers' Binding Styles, 1770–1900,* 24). Bennet, on the other hand, shows that, by the end of the seventeenth century, "over eighty percent of books [were] sold 'bound', a percentage which turns up in other records with enough consistency to reveal an established practice in the book trade" (*Trade Bookbinding in the British Isles, 1660-1800,* 6). It is important to note that, while Bennett exclusively focuses on the British book trade, Sadleir's analysis, despite tracking the "evolution in England of publisher's binding" (1), covers a wider geographical zone, extending into French and American book design as well.

It is interesting to note that, when they are read together, Sadleir's and Bennett's accounts represent two forms of book ownership: the former describes to us a collector taking

[22] Stuart Bennet defines "trade binding" as a book "sold ready-bound" from the bookseller (*Trade bookbinding in the British Isles, 1660-1800,* 7).

[23] Coined by Rold Engelsing, the term "Lesenrevolution" explains the changes in the reading style of the European public starting in the middle of the eighteenth century when readers began to move away from intensive readings of the same religious text to extensive reading of the mass-produced books which dominated the marketplace for printed matter. While the exact parameters and timeline of "Lesenrevolution" remain divisive (particularly by Robert Darnton who noted the impossibility to quantify this type of change), it remains an important concept that helps us envision the changes in the relationship between the readers and books.

[24] Thomas Kinsella also makes this suggestion first in his review of Bennet's book, "*Trade bookbinding in the British Isles, 1660-1800",* but, while his comment offers a comparative observation about bookbinding as a trade, my focus here is to encompass the implications of this duality on our understanding of the eighteenth-century reading culture.

an active role in aesthetically defining their library, while the latter's interest is in the passive consumer who trusts the bookbinder and the bookseller to provide the reader with a "ready-bound" book (9). In other words, the difference between these readers would be the interest each carried in either being impressed or impressing others. Perhaps a third category can be imagined in which these two archetypes are united. John Brewer, talking about the perilous economy of eighteenth-century book publishing for authors and booksellers, highlights the critical role of patronage which allowed authors, publishers, and booksellers to distance themselves from the stigma of producing and selling profit-oriented, or "hack" books ("Authors, Publishers and the Making of Literary Culture," 323). Within the book culture writ large, not only the trade of writing but also the meaning of the book and its binding had become inseparable from commercial activity. Despite the best efforts by the binders and readers to disengage the social role of the binding from commercial activity, the growing world of the book necessitated for the cultural value of creative work to be understood in terms of its market viability (Brewer, "Authors, Publishers and the Making of Literary Culture," 324). For authors, in particular, this had become an extremely difficult arrangement in a market full of books to read. Indeed, the development of the epistolary form of interaction between the readers and authors (Habermas, 48), as well as the creation of *Romantic* categories like "creativity" and "talent" in relations between the authors and booksellers (Brewer, 321) can be seen as attempts to re-personalize the book.

The category of "patron", in this sense, calls the tradition of reader involvement in the creation, collection, and display of books. Then, pre-bound books, or if we borrow from Sadleir's terminology - *publisher's binding*, had to gain not only an *impressive* but also an expressive function in order to subvert this danger. As the book sphere slowly grew and changed throughout the late seventeenth and early to the mid-eighteenth century, the signs of a wider shift could be noted more vividly. Due to growing production, books now existed in a

larger community than before, which caused problems with their shelving and identification. As Petroski notes, the bland, nondescript bindings complicated this problem at the bookseller's shop, where the stock became almost impossible to manage (*The Book on the Bookshelf*, 267). What this meant for the eighteenth-century reader was a call for more fine-tuned awareness of the relations within the dynamic world of the book. With the undeniable effect of the market economy on the book trade, the book cover and reading absorbed this uneasy dynamic between individualism and consumerism into its aesthetic form.

Thus, the transition into the nineteenth century took place at a point when the aesthetic form was closely associated with commercial interest. The next chapter will offer a detailed review of how the creative and commercial dynamics of the book cover changed in the Industrial Age of the nineteenth century.

Project 2: The Book Cover and Society

The nineteenth century from its early decades marked an important turning point for book covers both materially and aesthetically, which compelled one of the more influential bibliophiles of the end-of-the-century - Henri Beraldi - to name this age "the renaissance of bookbinding" (qtd. in Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts,* 229). To understand the reason for such high accolades, it is important to review the book cover within larger social, technological and cultural contexts. In essence, the origin point for the changes that define nineteenth-century book cover tradition can be traced to these two main developments: the mass mechanization of book production, and the expansion and secularization of reading practice. As Thomson argues, the changes from this point onwards were all interrelated: the new printing technology made it easy and quick to produce books with relatively cheaper methods, a development that led to the proliferation of bound reading matter in the book market, and this, in turn, accelerated social anxiety around moral consumerism and material objects in relation to Romantic subjectivity (*Aesthetic Tracts,* 1). As a result, much of the nineteenth century book cover discourse is focused on the connection between the consumption of books as material objects, and moral judgement of the aesthetic display (ibid.).

The emergence of new urban spaces as the result of the Industrial Revolution turned major manufacturing cities, with their ever-growing number of book shops, into effective hubs for book culture (Feather, *A History of British Publishing,* 93). Feather notes that, while there were "at least 1000 bookshops in England and Wales" at the closing of the eighteenth century, in the following years, the number of bookshops had increasingly grown "until even most small towns in the British Isles had a bookshop of some sort" (ibid.; Norrie; *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century,* 78-84). The growth and centralization of the book trade in densely populated industrial centres, in turn, created new reading

practices whereby the reader became an integral player in book culture. In turn, the role of the reader, who until now was the sole patron of the aesthetically and materially distinct book cover tradition, was challenged by the widespread practice of mass-produced, pre-bound books. Commercially more affordable, the industrial book was defined by its aesthetic uniformity and its marked loss of material quality, which served as a foil to books with handcrafted bindings that were preferred by wealthier patrons, widely recognized as *collectors* (Nixon & Foot, *The History of Decorated Bookbinding in England,* 103). The growing distance between reading and collecting, between mainstream, cheap cloth case bindings and aristocratic gold foiled, calfskin covers became a prelude for the late century revolutionization of the book cover.

Under the influence of the Industrial Revolution, Britain, where large-scale technological production originated, experienced a succession of cultural and artistic movements, all of which extended to the book culture as well. The most impactful movement that emerged as a reaction against the loss of production quality and wasteful consumerism was the British Arts and Crafts Movement, led by William Morris. His concept of the *Ideal Book* is celebrated as a major development of the book arts, both in terms of design and craft. It is fair to say that the *Ideal Book* has since left a permanent mark on the history of the book cover.

The following chapter 1 is dedicated to the industrial book and the transition from utilitarian materialism to utilitarian aesthetics within a consumption-driven economy. My analysis focuses on the theoretical material generated in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851, which brought the industrial and craft manufacturers to public prominence. As Forty suggests, because consumption-oriented production was one of the few areas that recorded consumer reactions, by studying the manufacture of books, one can make important observations about consumer behaviour and changes in the public response to consumer

objects as well (Forty, *Objects of Desire,* 17). Particularly, the gift books of the nineteenth century brought together artistic innovation and commerce. The significance of *The Keepsake,* however, was not only its adherence to the great gift book tradition. These books were also renowned for their entertaining short stories and poems. While upholding the general aesthetic sensibilities of the literary annual genre that made a strong emphasis on the display value of books, such as silk bindings and lavish ornamentations, *The Keepsake* bindings crafted by renowned artists like John Leighton and others represent an interesting attempt by bookbinders to balance the ongoing social discourse on identity, nationality and taste with heavily commercialized aesthetic vogues of the day. In order to contextualize these dynamics, the following two chapters will initially review the cultural and historic impetus for the commercial design and then shift the focus to the *Keepsake* annuals and discuss the role of these highly decorated annuals played in educating the middle classes about taste and beauty.

Chapter 1: The Nineteenth Century

It is fair to say that, in terms of its material form, the nineteenth-century redefined the book in every way possible. According to Feather, the Industrial Revolution disrupted more than three centuries'-worth of old and established methods of printing which originated with Gutenberg, by altering not only the material basis of book production (e.g., in terms of the papermaking and type-founding), but also by transforming the handcraft of the book trade by adapting printing and binding methods to machine-operation (*A History of British Publishing*, 86). Another important factor to consider is the rapid succession of these changes. In the early decades of the century, the pace of mechanical innovations quickly overtook social and cultural discourses around these changes. If one were to attempt to illustrate this specifically for the book cover, the timeline of mechanization would look like this: the expansion of lithography[25], which was crucial for the development of illustrated book tradition following its invention in the late eighteenth century; the advent of the iron press in the 1800s; and finally, large-scale mechanization of binding practices, which began in the 1820s (Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 89-91). These changes were individually impactful but, even more, had a combined effect that dictated the terms of the new publishing. As, Reithmayr notes, the introduction of the Imperial Arming Press in 1832 optimized the engraving process of cloth bindings, and the development of new cloth materials such as striped and patterned cloths, despite being minor improvements in themselves, signalled an unprecedented shift in the material and aesthetic concerns of the book cover ("Beauty for Commerce: Publishers' Bookbindings 1830 – 1910"). Ultimately, these changes made it possible for bookbinders to redefine its aesthetic form against quickly emerging social discourses around consumption and display. In other words, the cover of the book was now a part of a visually signified

[25] Originally invented in Germany in 1738, but its wide-scale adaption by British publishers is dated to 1801.

world of mass-produced objects in which its purpose and meaning were defined not just by individual buyers who bound books in accordance with their taste, but rather by larger cultural discourses. Interestingly, this reading is also corroborated in the titles of contemporary critical works dedicated to the nineteenth century book culture. For instance, while the 2002 exhibition about the nineteenth century British book bindings, curated by Andrea Reithmayr and University of Rochester, was named, very effectively, "Beauty for Commerce", alluding to the growing industrial production and mass consumption and market trends which shaped the general taste and book buying, Betsy Butler's critical analysis of the nineteenth century American book bindings takes the title of "There Ain't Anything in This World That Sells a Book like a Pretty Cover", suggesting that, by and large, the cultural relationship between the books and readers had a pronounced and undeniable commercial dimension to it.

It can be argued that commercialization and commodification of book binding and book aesthetics were the direct results of the division of labour and ongoing mass mechanization. Indeed, it is important to understand the scale of transformations taking place in publishing, which, until the nineteenth century was a cottage industry operated mainly form small, local shops and practices. Feather notes that, with the adaption of steam press operations in mid-nineteenth century Britain, it became necessary to move production into open factories to respond to heavy labour demands (*A History of British Publishing*, 92). This move marked the transformation of printing into a fully-fledged industry; however, the relocation of production facilities from former trading centres such as London, where manufacture and trade had existed side-by-side since the early days of the industrial economy, to new industrial cities also meant the separation of manufacturing from commercial trade (*A History of British Publishing*, 93). In other words, the Industrial shift created new regional competitors in the book trade who were more interested in adapting and

utilizing all the benefits of machine production instead of following the traditional and laborious methods in printing and binding that were more prevalent in former centres of the book trade.

Another important factor which significantly impacted the book cover discourse of the nineteenth century was uncertainty about the status of bookbinding. Mirjam Foot, in her essay titled "It's Pretty, But Is It Art?", meticulously documents the linguistic basis of descriptors such as "craft" and "art" as they were used to talk about the bookbinding practice. Historically, the terms "art" or "fine art" were used interchangeably with the term "craft" to denote practices which required specialised skill or training (Foot, *Publishing the Fine and Applied Arts*, 1). However, eighteenth-century developments in cultural philosophy complicate this interchangeable use. Foot notes an alternative definition for "art" in various sources (e.g., Chambers '1728 *Cyclopedia;* Johnson's *Dictionary 1755,* etc.), where it is defined as "a system of rules, which, being carefully observed, render undertakings successful, advantageous and agreeable" (qtd. in Foot, "It's Pretty, But Is It Art?," 2). However, Foot's evidence of the mixed application of both "art" and "craft" to the practice of bookbinders, who often engaged in both, challenges an easy categorization and shows that the division between these two fields was descriptive rather than definitive. Indeed, the vast bibliographic history of book covers shows that the book cover can function as an agent of both imagination and of tradition.

In light of this discussion, it becomes clear that the mechanization of binding practices and the emergence of industrial binding further complicated the malleable status of the cover-binding among the practitioners of the craft. Historically, the craft of binding had often been considered in close association with the art of illumination not only because both elements were added after the book was already printed but also, because they were collaborative elements defined by the binder and the owner of the book rather than the printer

(Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 15). This can be reviewed as one of the main reasons behind the aesthetic divergences when it came to book covers. Conversely, the invention of industrial binding - also called case binding - consolidated bookbinding activity into the manufacturing process, putting a greater emphasis on the material as the defining aesthetic referent (*A History of British Publishing*, 92). As cloth covers began rapidly to replace leather covers, the former of which were understood as a cheaper alternative for the latter, the uniformity of the cover was finally achieved (*A History of British Publishing*, 91).

It should also be noted that, despite the general mechanical uniformity, binding continued to reflect artistic variations of different significance. For example, a new trend of gold embossed cloth covers, which emerged in the 1830s in England, and ornamentation with traditional and natural motifs such as lyres and flowers in the 1840s existed side by side with generic edition bindings (Reithmayr, 2002). Similar variations could be observed in the American book trade as well. For example, the use of illustrated vignettes from the text of the book or the application of patterned cloth instead of blind covers was quite popular among the publishers operating in urban centres like New York and Philadelphia. Reithmayr confirms these developments as significant stylistic additions which helped nineteenth-century binding "to achieve a better balance" both in terms of ornamental composition and within the formal proportions of the book (Reithmayr, "Beauty for Commerce: Publisher's Bindings, 1830-1910).

These were significant developments for the book cover which showed its capacity for quick adaptation and innovation. But after the 1830s, public opinion about machine-produced edition bindings and overall industrial design was generally negative. The flooding of the inner sanctums of Victorian households with machine-made domestic objects and the proliferation of pre-bound books in the consumer market brought forth a fear about the erosion of the cultural authority of the book. Initially, this was associated with the material

conditions of mechanically produced books. Thus, the attention given to material quality became a prelude to the 1840 exhibition movement in Britain which aimed to reclaim, among other forms of craftwork, bookbinding from being ravaged by industry (King, *Victorian Decorated Trade Bindings, 1830-1880*, xi). The immediate reaction to this was the introduction of aesthetically more pliable materials such as papier-mâché and the development of specialised typographic and decorative details such as expressive lettering and gold embellishments (Reithmayr, "Beauty for Commerce: Publisher's Bindings, 1830-1910"). However, it is notable that, these innovations did very little to alleviate all concerns.

Outside of the perceived standardization in bindings, whether the mechanization of the craft was truly detrimental to design practice in the 1850s remains unclear for various reasons. For example, Forty notes that while design technology was indeed oriented towards producing uniformity in mass-produced objects, technological expansion was also the driving force behind the design variations (*Objects of Desire*, 13). Furthermore, it is also possible to argue that the degree to which the mechanization of the bookbinding process had been achieved was vastly overestimated, as the complete mechanical takeover of different crafts actually took much longer than many scholars have previously theorized (ibid.). Forty argues that, at this time, not only design but also manufacturing was still heavily reliant on manual labour or manually operated machine labour (*Objects of Desire*, 43). Thus, in order to dispel public misconceptions about machine production, as well as to help improve the quality of design of machine-made objects, the organizers of the Great Exhibition set out to bring together a vast array of everyday objects in their exhibition catalogue (Giedion; qtd. in Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 43).

The Great Exhibition catalogue notes that, to represent different aspects of domestic crafts, the organizers decided on 214 objects to be shown to the visitors, among which the book bindings were given a special prominence (Luckhurst, 491). This move is significant for

two reasons: firstly, the categorization of book covers as items to be displayed shows the significance of the binding in highlighting the personal and domestic nature of the book in nineteenth century discourse. Secondly, this also adds an interesting complication to the role that binding played in culture as an object of consumption. According to Forty, the biggest variation in nineteenth century designs could be observed in the market of personal consumption goods such as furniture, wallpaper and clothing, as producers saw these objects as having the most obvious potential for design and personalization (*Objects of Desire*, 87). This suggests a connection between industrial production and aesthetic design as it pertained to consumption. Forty also argues that the producers of such artefacts were innately oblivious to the historical progression of material and aesthetic meanings and the transformative power of social and cultural agents (*Objects of Desire*, 8). Therefore, when looking for a direct cause of the aesthetic and material stagnation that was occurring in the 1840s, a special prominence needs to be given to the impact of consumerism on mass produced goods. Nowhere is this more evident than in the introduction to the catalogue of the 1851 Great Exhibition:

> It is a universal complaint among manufacturers that the taste for good Art does not exist in sufficient extent to reward them for the cost of producing superior works: that the public prefers the vulgar, the gaudy, the ugly even, to the beautiful and perfect. (qtd. in Luckhurst, "The Great Exhibition of 1851," 419)

Despite its indirectness, this paragraph shows an attempt by the organizers to define ideological phenomena such as *taste*, *beauty, vulgarity,* and *perfection* in relation to mass material objects. While absolving mass manufacturing from its perceived detrimental impact on design, the importance of this paragraph lies in the stress it puts on the dynamic between demand and supply. Furthermore, it should also be established that, what's being discussed

here is not simply individual consumption. As Luckhurst points out, the reference point of the exhibition was the formation of "public taste" through material consumption:

> We are persuaded that if Artistic manufactures are not appreciated, it is because they are not widely enough known. We believe that when works of high merit, of British origin, are brought forward they will be fully appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed. We believe that this Exhibition, when thrown open gratuitously to all, will tend to improve the public taste. ("The Great Exhibition of 1851," 419)

The parallel between the *public* and *works of high merit, of British origin* is evocative. It is a well-documented fact that one of the primary inspirations behind the 1851 Great Exhibition was to resolve the growing concerns about the national design aesthetics, which proved a weakness for England in global competition (Luckhurst, 414). Viewing in this light, it can be observed that, the organizers of the Great Exhibition were also attempting to add a social and patriotic dimension to the act of consumption which would serve to absolve the class-based stigma about the industrial production. Furthermore, the use of the phrase "artistic manufactures" is also important as it frames the mass-produced objects and aesthetic craftsmanship innate to the national spirit of the British Empire. When reviewed in tandem with the previous statement from the catalogue, for the organizers, the training of public taste began by teaching individuals on how to separate ugly and vulgar pieces from objects of beauty and refinement that befit the character of the nation.

The consecration of nationalistic decoration as the artistic calling of the century effectively gives the material aesthetics of Industrial design a social cause. Forty, reviewing this point in the context of general commercial design in the nineteenth century, offers an example from the pottery industry, which experienced a dramatic growth in this period, not only because of any significant demographic or aesthetic changes but also because of the

newfound popularity of tea in British society as a result of colonial expansion (*Objects of Desire*, 18). Similarly, a curious incident involving a direct response from the producers of book covers could be observed in America in this period. Betsy Butler's comprehensive study identifies the decade of the 1860s as an interesting anomaly at a time in which the Gothic revival trend[26] dominated book cover design between the 1850s and 1880s. More specifically, instead of traditional geometric and architectural motifs embossed in opulent gold and stamped into patterned cloth bindings, the designs on American bindings in this period were solemn and dowdy, with unmarked brown or dark green cloth covers and little to no ornamentation ("There Ain't Anything in This World That Sells a Book like a Pretty Cover," 24-25; Reithmayr, "Beauty for Commerce: Publisher's Bindings, 1860-1869"). Butler explains this phenomenon as a patriotic reaction to the American Civil War of 1861-65, representing the national mourning over the division of American people and unnecessary bloodshed. In comparison, Reithrmayr notes that, in the 1860s, in Britain, due to the prevalence of the chromolithography[27] and onlay techniques, cheaply produced colourful cloth bindings were dominating the popular taste as more affordable imitations of more expensive leather bindings (ibid.). Furthermore, while in Britain the framed centrepiece of the Cosway-style bindings[28] mainly featured "book's title, or a golden facsimile of the author's signature", in America, these images mainly alluded to "martial and patriotic themes". The quick reappearance of colourful bindings with ample gold decorations in American in the 1870s not only serves as the evidence of this thesis, but also demonstrates the celebratory

[26] The Gothic Revival style of the midcentury shows itself particularly in high ornamentation and "lavish gold-stamped designs" of the 1850s (Butler, 24), which was replacing sober, "better balanced", simple designs of the 1840s with its dominant binding style of ruled border leather bindings and patterned cloth bindings (Reithmayr, "Beauty for Commerce: Publishers' Bindings, 1840-1849).

[27] Originally invented in France in the late 1830s.

[28] According to Abebook's "Book Collecting Guide", "Cosway bindings" are richly framed and ornamented bindings containing "a small portrait(s) embedded in their covers". Named after Regency period portrait painter Richard Cosway, these bindings are considered among "traditional leather bindings" style.

mood in society at the end of the war, which played a fundamental role in nation-building process in the United States (ibid.).

While this comparison offers an analogue to the emerging national groupings of book bindings, the formation of clearly delineated and cohesive national styles relied directly on the effective promotion of the social value assigned to prevalent aesthetic forms. It is not surprising that the first attempt to introduce and discuss this new paradigm publicly was made at the Great Exhibition of 1851. King notes that over six million visitors attended this event with great enthusiasm and the positive reception of this initiative enabled a direct communication between the main industrialists and craftsmen of the age and regular people. This, in turn, ushered a revival of many crafts, including those associated with the book trade (*Victorian Decorated Trade Bindings, 1830-1880,* xi). While individual participation was a great impetus for the Great Exhibition, the agenda discussed by the organizers clearly indicated their intentions to be equally educational and informative. Thad Logan records a corroboration of this intent in a review which appeared in the 1851 edition of the *Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue*, describing the Great Exhibition as "a lesson in taste" for consumers from the middle and working classes (Ralph Wornum; qtd. in Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 46). To emphasize their point, this paragraph was included in the introduction of the catalogue to forewarn the attendees:

> The visitors of these objects will require not to glance at them merely but to study and examine and learn to appreciate them. These specimens are not all of the best, nor even all good, and the visitor must discriminate for himself. Let him praise in the right place, let him blame in the right place, and the object of our exhibition has been attained. (qtd. in Luckhurst, "The Great Exhibition of 1851," 419)

On the one hand, this statement urges the visitors to reject passive observation in favour of active sight, while on the other hand, it positions the collection of the Great Exhibition as a case study to train individual visitors in design appreciation. The method offered here is straightforward: only through a reflective visual study can the individual "discriminate" between good and bad. In this new paradigm, *taste* for aesthetic form plays a crucial role in creating an association between the beauty and the uses of the object. This shows a clear departure from the measurement of *utility* that focused on the *goodness* of the thing. Here, we see a clear shift whereby the aesthetic taste is seen as an ability to identify beauty, which in turn, signifies the moral achievement of consumerism. Furthermore, it is notable that the Great Exhibition catalogue represents a clear critical push to establish a direct correlation between ideas like beauty and taste, the latter of which carried a heavy implication of consumption through sight or reading when applied to cultural products (Williams, *Keywords*, 249). While the origin of the use of *taste* as a method of "discriminating between good or bad" dates to the eighteenth century (*Keywords*, 247), the shift in the aesthetic function of taste shows a clear departure from a passive sense in meaning to active intellectual engagement, which Williams also notes (*Keywords*, 248).

The outcome of this process was the integration of the ideological values of aesthetic form, expressed through beauty and taste, into the middle-class moral code of consumption. Interestingly, the mass scale of these processes coupled with the *Utilitarian* ideal of aesthetic uniformity actively created the ideal of an aesthetic consumer who, unlike the active, masculine ("let him praise" … "let him blame") decoder sketched by the Great Exhibition catalogue, was, in practice, a passive, appositionally feminized agent of consumption. In fact, this passive mode of consumerism often had a domestic undertone, linking it to female consumers whose engagement with the aesthetic and material worlds was tightly controlled by the governing moral codes. One expression of this phenomenon was the emergence of gift

books with excessively decorated, high quality silk covers. Often forgotten by book historians because of their mainly female readership and overt decorative functions, these books led a clear line of resistance against the near-constant moralizing of the book and its cover[29].

[29] Indeed, gift books and literary annuals have been widely critiqued and analyzed by literary scholars. Mouraõ notes a few of these works, among them: L.E.L., Glennis Stephenson's 1995 study on how the gift books aesthetically recreated the "middle-class domestic identity" they were made for ("Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self- Historicization," 108), and Sara Lodge's 2004 study about the cultural association between literary annuals and memory (111). It is clear that a vast majority of the critical work in this field is aimed at dispelling descriptors like "vapid" (Tennyson; qtd. in Mouraõ, 109), "picture books for grown children" (Southey, qtd. in Mouraõ, 109), and "gilded flies" (*Monthly Chronicler 1839,* qtd. in Mouraõ, 109) which have been historically associated with gift books. Mouraõ's own reading of the gift books does not reject the clear commercial intent behind the gift book genre and aims to locate these annuals as the evidence of the economic and cultural transition that took period between the Romantic and Victorian periods in the 1820s-30s (108). In my analysis, I continue with this approach to gift books as objects of both aesthetic and commercial value as it pertains to the development of the book cover.

Chapter 2: *The Keepsake*: Material against Aesthetic

Gift books or literary annuals of the nineteenth century were among the most visually distinctive commercial book forms, chief among them *The Keepsake*'s. Printed specifically in October to precede the holiday gift-buying rush, *The Keepsake* was considered an investment. Cheaper than a three-decker novel, it made a perfect personalized gift alternative for the middle to upper classes (Manning, "Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 45).

According to Logan, gift books were a combination of the Renaissance commonplace book and eighteenth-century table books (*The Victorian Parlour*, 126). Often scattered around the house, these books were aesthetically ornate periodicals offering light entertainment to female readers, as well as showing off the learnedness and sophistication of the lady of the house (ibid.). Displayed in central locations, they were visually distinctive objects, some of them specifically chosen for their bindings (Logan, 2). This reiterates the main reason for their popularity among middle-class readers who bought and exchanged these books as *works of art* (Feldman, *The Keepsake for 1829,* 7). Similarly, Harris suggests that these annuals were part literary journals, part Continental almanacs (which also served as gift books) ("Borrowing, Altering and Perfecting the Literary Annual Form," 10-11), part German "taschenbuch" or pocketbooks for their small size (13), and part album or scrap books for collecting memories. The array of functions and uses for the gift books shows that they were not simply for reading (Harris, 17-18). From their literary and pictorial content to their distinct red silk covers, gift books, in general, and *The Keepsake* in particular, changed the mid-century book culture by creating an archetype of a commercial venture which managed to supplement its material value with socially charged aesthetic codes for women.

In terms of their technical innovation, *The Keepsake*, as Cindy Dickinson notes, were among the first books to be adapted fully to machine-made leather and cloth edition bindings, and machine-made decorations in the 1830s ("Creating a World of Books, Friends, and

Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825-60," 55). Initially meant to be bound in paper covers, these books could also be found in bindings made of expensive crimson silk because of the favourable economic conditions in the British silk industry at the time (Feldman, *The Keepsake for 1829*, 15). Shortly after its first experimental use, red silk had apparently become such a *hallmark* requirement that the editor of *The Keepsake* – Charles Heath – at one point had to buy "four thousand yards" to meet the extra demand for "fifteen thousand copies" (Feldman, 15; Manning, 49). The effect of the uniform binding distinguished with ornamental decoration is an important development in the ways that mass production permeated and changed the upper-class habit of book buying (Butler, "There Ain't Anything in This World That Sells a Book like a Pretty Cover," 23).

The use of coloured silk is an interesting detail that can be explained in several ways. Accordingly, Manning highlights the importance of achieving a certain look of opulence with the silk ("Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 45). The connotations of luxury and uniqueness seem to drive this theory as silk was not an expected binding material for mass production. In general, it seems that silk as a material performed an important social function by indicating the national and aristocratic origins of the design and binding to the potential customer who might consider gifting a certain edition. Indeed, Feldman suggests that the association of *The Keepsake* with coloured silk appealed to social and patriotic sentiments (*The Keepsake for 1829*, 15). While patronizing a failing British industry seemed to generate a positive public image for this venture, ultimately, the use of British silk also aimed to establish *The Keepsake* as a purely British enterprise. Furthermore, the framing of *The Keepsake* by its first editor William Harrison Ainsworth as "a gift from [Royal] Tunbridge Wells", which was a well-known tourist location in the south of England, further emphasizes the intention here to associate the "elegant lightness" of these books with the national character of Britain (Manning, "Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 44). With this in mind, it can be theorized that

the role of the binding to connote social and cultural value is what made *The Keepsake* a popular publication throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Another factor to keep in mind is that their high social value was symbolized by the unfitness of the "evocative", "feminine-coded" red colour silk as a binding material for books meant for everyday use (Feldman, 15). Indeed, I argue that it was the aesthetic exchange value of these books that fuelled their popularity as items to purchase and gift, rather than their material properties.

Dickinson best explains this by using the concept of "economy of sentiment" - a term borrowed from Isabelle Lehuu, which explains the way mass-produced gift books clearly signified an exchange of "social currency" while retaining their unique aura. The addition of "decorative inscription plates" allowed the buyer to personalize the gift book to the needs and sensibilities of the intended receiver ("Creating a World of Books, Friends, and Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825-60," 57) (Figure 7). In other words, gift books sublimated the exchange of commercially defined materials with aesthetic codes that symbolized high cultivation and taste. To discern the significance of this statement, it is important to contextualize the uses of consumer objects in daily life. Victorian parlours where *the Keepsake*s were exchanged, displayed, read, and talked about provide an engaging setting in which these everyday dynamics can be observed.

Figure 7: The Embossed Inscription Plate from "The Keepsake 1831".

Thad Logan notes that starting with the 1850s, the parlour room became a highly contested area of subjectivity and morality (*The Victorian Parlour*, 1). This was not just driven by the proliferation of consumer goods in the market as the result of industrialization, but also by the growing use of aesthetic signifiers to communicate middle-class morality. The parlour was considered to be the heart of the household, the private world of family repose

cut off from the world of work and market. As a result, different approaches to its decoration came to highlight the subjective differences between individuals and families who inhabited these spaces. Furthermore, the historical origins of the parlour define it as a middle-class alternative to aristocratic drawing rooms (Logan, *The Victorian Parlour,* 12). The social nature of activities reserved for parlours emphasize its class significance. As a space in which guests were welcomed and family rituals, such as reading aloud or playing parlour games, were enacted, the parlour represented the symbolic passage opening into the public sphere (Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 29-31). These factors, which locate the parlour at the cusp of private and public, social and personal, demanded a special attention paid to its visual decorations, which Logan defines as a "constitutive rather than optional" part of parlour culture (ibid.).

Despite having a wider reading audience, *The Keepsake* was firmly set in the realm of feminine audiences because of the association between gift books and the decorative and domestic setting of the parlour. This is a particularly telling point as it reveals the ways in which *The Keepsake* was impacted by the cultural dynamics of the femininity of the parlour. A close review of design and household magazines of this period shows that women were cast as the primary supervisors over the decoration of the parlour. This assignation of duty was partially driven by the gender politics of the day that effectively subjugated women at home with a limited social role. Logan surmises that it was a part of women's moral duty to aesthetically reshape the house as a family haven visually distinct from the realm of work (Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 35). It is interesting to note that, while the house delineated the space without or outside the influence of work for the male inhabitants of the household, for women it was a domain of work and learning. In other words, the significance of the parlour as a place of intention and display showed the aptitude of the women of the household in keeping up with the rapidly changing material and aesthetic trends of the day.

However, not every aspect of the house was under the aesthetic jurisdiction of women. For example, Logan notes that, in a bourgeois household, while the acquisition of furnishing objects, fabrics for clothing and curtains, as well as all other ornamental items was reserved exclusively for women, taking care of food and other ordinary household provisions was perceived as the duty of servants (ibid.). This division of duties suggests a difference in the cultural value assigned to certain objects such as books. The quick progression of fashion trends and the introduction of new industrial objects meant for domestic use in the market made it necessary that ladies of the household remain up to date with the latest aesthetic vogues and their social importance. The taste in domestic items was controlled by a strict tier system which, by itself, was stratified in gendered subcategories. For instance, while Renaissance- and Romantic-style mahogany and rosewood furniture was seen as the best parlour selection to complement the feminine authority over this space, for the dining room, library and study, which were perceived as masculine spaces, darker and Gothic-style furnishings were more acceptable (*The Victorian Parlour*, 41-43). Despite being seen as an ultimate expression of feminine subjectivity realized through aesthetic appreciation, even the number of items in the typical parlours was a topic of intense public discourse. For instance, quoting Mrs. Orrinsmith of *Art and Home Journal*, published in 1878, Logan surmises that one of the main requirements of parlours was the multiplicity of objects, with everything in pairs to signify the communal, social aspect of the space (ibid.). This account challenges the argument that sees the participation in consumer economy as a testament to women's liberty to choose in the nineteenth century society. It becomes clear that, in spite of being one of the most socially prestigious feminine spaces under the jurisdiction of women, the parlour and its decoration required only a passive engagement from female consumers by compelling them to follow the established norms governing aesthetic objects. This rationale was, in turn, transferred to gift books as well, as women, again, despite being cast as active agents seeking

to develop their worldly knowledge and taste, were seen as passive gift receivers. However, one interesting difference between social norms imposed on other domestic objects and gift books was the exchange criteria for the latter being more moralizing than gendered. Cindy Dickinson clearly defines who could expect to receive a gift book for a special occasion:

> Gift books were frequently exchanged among family members: Fathers and mothers gave gift books to daughters and sons, brothers presented them to sisters, uncles and aunts gave them to nieces and nephews. Sons and husbands were gifted book givers, as were sisters, cousins and even grandparents. Gift books were even appropriate for relatives who joined the family through marriage. ("Creating a World of Books, Friends, and Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825-60," 58)

The education of the taste of those who were considered junior members of the middle-class household was necessary to ensure the propagation of the moral values and collective memories of the family. Furthermore, Manning explains this necessity by using an economic paradigm, arguing that against the masculine, income-oriented market economy, the formation of the feminine, consumption-oriented domestic exchange acted as a balancing force which aimed to affirm middle-class identity ("Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 67). This point paints an interesting but equally complicated image of gift books. These books represented the height of design innovation and beauty, making them stand out from other mass-produced objects. However, the stylistic mixing and decorative mishmash that was used to achieve commercial visibility here opposes the Victorian order which dictated a visual cohesion in the parlour, as was discussed above. Therefore, when talking about gift books and literature annuals, we need to note that these volumes not only served as symbolic carries of class and wealth, but they also present an individualized resistance to standardization.

The social importance of gift books was emphasized by their naming pattern as well, which is worth discussing. Similar to their cover aesthetics, the titles given to these books mostly follow overtly feminine, but abstract conventions. On the one hand, it can be suggested that Rudolf Ackermann's "Forget Me Not" or other annuals such as "Friendship's Offering" or "Remember Me", as well as "The Keepsake" all emphasize the scrap album convention (Harris, "Borrowing, Altering and Perfecting the Literary Annual Form," 3). Extra empty pages at the end of these books were meant to encourage their leisure-class owners to engage in collecting excerpts from selected prose they found particularly evocative and decorative assortments as tokens of memory (Feldman, *The Keepsake for 1829*, 10). According to Harris, these paratextual materials formed an extension of the text, offering women a social role beyond being passive *receivers*, instead allowing them to become active *makers* of the text. In this regard, the external beauty of the book set a standard for its owner to pursue interaction with the book beyond reading. On the other hand, Feldman notes a whole array of names such as "The Gem", "The Ruby", "The Pearl", "The Opal", etc. that were used to differentiate non-holiday-oriented gift books from the annuals (*The Keepsake for 1829*, 8). The association of books with gems was arguably meant to convey value and spark feminine interest, the latter of which was transferred to the red colour of the bindings of *the Keepsake*. Unlike the covers of the holiday-themed annuals which often featured Christmas-themed ornamentation (Amos, "Meaning and 'Material Reality': Jane Morris ' Keepsake Books," 109), these books had a more formal and statuesque look, with gilt and marbled material to complement the gem theme (Dickinson, *Creating a World of Books*, 55).

It is interested to see how the publishers of the gift books translated both of these motifs (the gift book as a storage of memory and participation and the gift book a valuable object with gem-like value and vibrancy). One of the most effective examples of this are the bindings created by John Leighton for *The Keepsake* which showed a great complexity of

aesthetic inspirations. Leighton's style, which often brought together Renaissance-inspired decorations with contemporary and Oriental motifs, quickly gained a notable fame, allowing him to reprise this success for at least nine bindings (Figure 8). It can be observed that, despite their ornamental beauty, Leighton's designs also exemplify a confusing mix of styles and inspirations. The general disregard for the material limitations of the coloured silk which lacked permanence, and the use of Oriental ornaments such as "vase bowls", grape and vine leaves (King; M79) show that the editors were not fully dedicated to creating a *British product*. Indeed, the focus seems to be on achieving a "beautiful" marketable product by maximizing the aesthetic form of the book (Manning, "Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 68). This shows that, despite being a part of a tradition, the bindings of the gift books had become an experimental medium where the aesthetic capacity of the book was being explored to its full extend.

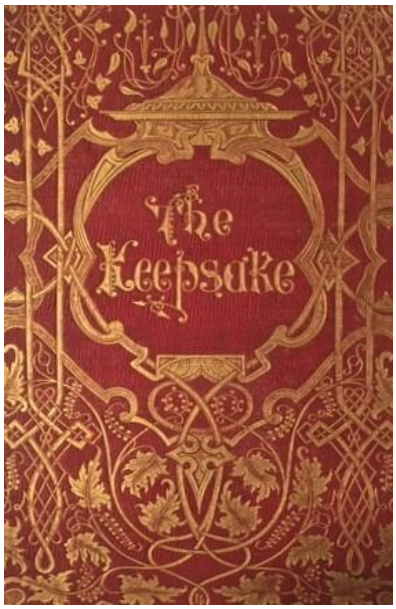

Figure 8: The Front Cover for "The Keepsake 1856", designed by John Leighton

The aesthetic beauty of the book was pursued with the content of the gift books as well. In this regard, we can see both the textual and iconic content striving for grabbing the attention of the gift-buyers. On the one hand, the engravings used in the gift books were a a big selling point, especially for *The Keepsake*. Feldman notes that the editor of *The Keepsake* - Charles Heath, who was a son of an engraver himself -- paid close attention to securing prominent engravers to produce the images that would accompany the stories (*The Keepsake for 1829*, 7). The engravings featured in gift books ranged from religious images of the Madonna and the Child, as well of cherubs and angels, to "poetical illustrations." (ibid.). The images were made with a hybrid method of machine technology and steel-plate engravings (Feldman, *The Keepsake for 1829*, 13). The inspiration behind these visual accompaniments

was clearly the immense popularity of Victorian serializations that featured illustrations with each instalment. According to Harvey, the expectations for these engravings was so significant that the writers were directed by the publishers to produce "at least two striking scenes [to be] adapted for graphic illustration" (*Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators*, 8). While the shared commercial interest behind both of these projects is undeniably present, the demand for engravings was also led by the desire in readers to see certain characters and situations (Harvey, *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators*, 9). The integral nature of the illustrations and engravings can be seen in ways that they were impacting the tradition of writing and genre too. Contrasting the novels of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, Harvey notes that it was the demand for illustrations that made it a rule for the Realist fiction to pay closer attention to the individuality of characters and their descriptions (*Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators*, 177). What this suggests is that the textual content of the nineteenth century novel had already grown responsive to the social norms of the Realist genre that required elaborate scenes to show as much as they told. The disagreement between Dickens and his illustrator Cruikshank about Oliver Twist's appearance in the illustrations offers a new perspective to conceptualize the collaborative nature of the nineteenth century novel (*Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators*, 200), as well as the role of the illustrator and designer in the production of meaning.

However, this is not to say that the editors paid less attention to the textual content, namely the poems, stories and essays that populated the pages of gift books. The importance of the both the text and the image is evident when we look at engravings used in *The Keepsake*'s as well. While diverging stylistically from those for serial novels which seemed to favour the elaborative function of the visual accompaniments and close integration with textual reading, the gift books engravings were produced as art pieces, loosely relating to the text, but making no significant contribution to textual reading. A good example for this is the

engraving used for Mary Shelley's contribution to *The Keepsake for* 1834, "The Mortal Immortal." Markley notes that the design was made by one F. Bacon, which was based on a separate painting, titled "Bertha", of an unknown woman ("Mary Shelley's Short Fiction and Her Novels," 116) (Figure 9). It is also noted that, the invention of the story reflects Shelley's inspiration from the portrait, which means that the image preceded the text in this case. While the story is centred on a masterful literary reflection on the dangers of reckless science and immortality, unfortunately, the form in which it was printed in *The Keepsake* fails to express the full potential of this work. Depicting a minor scene from the story of a chance encounter between lovers – Winzy and Bertha in the company of Bertha's elderly, rich guardian - the image offers very little to elaborate on the premise of the story. Interestingly, Markley notes that this depiction is very unusual for *The Keepsake* engravings, which often only featured a single female figure ("Mary Shelley's Short Fiction and Her Novels," 116), dressed in what Manning defines as at the height of middle-class fashion ("Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 68). The classical setting and ambiguous visual composition of the image here speak of two competing narratives: the central conflict of the story in which Winzy is the protagonist, as the details about Bertha's upbringing which acts as the indirect impetus for the main story to unfold. While keeping the theme of woman-centred illustration, the use of this specific engraving results in a noticeable lack of cohesion on the page. Furthermore, as this effectively fails to amplify the aesthetic effect of the story by conjoining these two narratives, the independence of both the textual

Figure 9: "An Illustration for Mary Shelley's 'The Moral Immortal'" by F. Bacon. The Keepsake 1834.

and iconic narratives shows that the visual content was just as significant for the book as the textual matter.

Despite bringing together a representative body of work from highly regarded authors and thinkers of the day, *The Keepsake* remained under attack by critics. For Tennyson, it was the pictorial content which made these "vapid books" unfit for readers (Ruthven, 2021). Similarly, Wordsworth and Robert Southey, both of whom contributed several works to these annuals, separately implied that the gift books lacked the critical edge that adult material should have had. It is possible to explain these attitudes within the overall dynamics of the publishing industry. For instance, Manning suggests that it was Southey's disappointment over the lack of sales of his own poetry collection ("Wordsworth and The Keepsake," 48) and Wordsworth's principal differences with the editors (Feldman, 24) that enflamed their critical point of view of *The Keepsake.* However, according to Harris, the main reason behind the disparaging reviews of the gift books was their predominantly female readership ("Borrowing, Altering and Perfecting the Literary Annual Form," 1). Indeed, discussion of *The Keepsake* was often followed by a wider commentary about the dangers of the book to the reader. In Jane Wilde's 1855 review for *Dublin University Magazine* 45, the first echoes of a certain "sickness" and "overwhelming desire to read and own and receive," can be heard - a condition that will be fully diagnosed as 'bibliomania 'later in the century (Wilde; qtd. in Harris, ("Borrowing, Altering and Perfecting the Literary Annual Form," 1). The echo of this is evident in the preface of *The Keepsake* for 1828 as well, where it is distinctly noted that what sets *The Keepsake* apart from other literary annuals is the union of "literary merit" with "all the beauty and elegance of art" which generates a strong "persuasion" in general public about the value and worth of their "youngest" issue (v-vi). Furthermore, as Mays notes, the critics were worried that, reading too much could also "Orientalise" the mind, and turn women into "desultory readers" ("The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals," 177).

Indirectly, these are the early signs of a growing public concern about reading increasingly becoming an individualized activity rather than a socially controlled performance of leisure. *The Keepsake* was particularly important in this respect. In terms of the book form, its main achievement was normalizing the regular book size for gift books instead of continuing with the smaller size pocketbooks (Mouraõ, "Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self-Historicization," 107; Manning, "Wordsworth and The Keepsake," 45). Previously conceived as portable Bibles, the small-size book alluded to a feminine subject in need of constant reminders of moral dogma. The normalization of the book size for *The Keepsake* marks a resistance to gendered books, albeit a commercially motivated one. It is also important to note that, despite its mould-breaking design, *The Keepsake* was not interested in political advocacy. Accordingly, it was very common that the radical content it featured from thinkers such as Coleridge would either be watered down or juxtaposed with pieces from politically conservative writers such as Southey in the same edition (Manning, "Wordsworth and *The Keepsake*," 55). In other words, the ambivalence of its social functionality is another reason that exacerbated the critique mounted against these volumes.

Ultimately, looking at forty years of *The Keepsake* production, it becomes clear that *The Keesake* failed to achieve the creation of "an ideal reader from common reader" (Mays, "The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals," 182). While they occupy an important role in the legacy of gift books, as individual books they are remembered as private, aesthetic objects used to locate taste and private sensibilities within the moral bonds of family and society. Despite this, the main achievement of gift books was the integration of art and literature within one object. Furthermore, the creation of a new ritual of artful reading needs to be mentioned. It can be argued that at the root of these issues stood a noticeable lack of critical understanding of the cultural potential of the book and book cover. This gap was

filled in the last decades of the nineteenth century by the leading thinkers of the British Arts and Crafts movement, who aimed to liberate the critical discourse of the crafts from machine-led determinism. The following section discusses the essential ideas of this movement and its aesthetic agenda that emphasized the creation of a *complete* book.

Chapter 3: The British Arts and Crafts Movement

Naylor explains the sociocultural reasoning behind the British Arts and Crafts movement as "a crisis of conscience" (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 7). Among most famous names that helped to canonize this movement as an active agent in cultural and aesthetic discourses in the second half of the century were John Ruskin, William Morris, and T.J. Cobden-Sanders among many others. The name and mission of the movement were coined in 1887 by bookbinder and designer - Cobden-Sanderson, who summed up its project like this:

> The movement, passing under the name of "Arts and Crafts", admits of many definitions. It may be associated with the movement of ideas, characteristic of the close of the last century, and be defined to be an effort to bring [crafts] under the influence of art as the supreme mode in which human activity of all kinds expresses itself at its highest and best, […]; or it may be associated with the revival, by a few artists, of hand-craft as opposed to machine-craft, and be defined to be the insistence on the worth of man's hand, a unique tool in danger of being lost in the substitution for it of highly organized and intricate machinery, or of emotional as distinguished from merely skilled and technical labour. (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 3)

Positioned against the technical and dehumanized process of machine-led industry, the Arts and Crafts practitioners aimed to revive all forms of crafts under the umbrella of *Art.* Cobden-Sanderson saw arts and crafts as inseparable, as both brought skilled work together with emotional labour (ibid.). While this type of framing positions the Arts and Crafts Movement against the Industrial Revolution, in essence, its premise emerged as a natural reaction to the exhibition movement of the 1840s that culminated in the Great Exhibit of

1851. According to the main organizer of this event, Henry Cole, mass mechanization represented a perfect opportunity to modernize the traditional design and craft work (King, xi). However, the criticism from another organizer, architect Owen Jones, shows that this was not a shared goal among all members. Indeed, Naylor notes that Jones was particularly dissatisfied with the lack of "principle and unity" of the exhibition catalogue, which presented handcrafted and machine-made objects mixed together. Jones argued that by ignoring artistic cohesion, the overall impact of the exhibition was relegated to promoting "novelty without beauty" or "beauty without intelligence" (qtd. in Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory*, 20). The use of "beauty" in this statement is important as it signifies the non-material qualities of the artistic activity which were now being eroded by the mechanical impositions on arts and crafts.

Cobden-Sanderson mentions that the call to form the Arts and Crafts society was taken with the "New Gallery Exhibit" of 1888 in London, which offered a vast collection of samples representing traditional arts and crafts prior to the Industrial Revolution (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 5). Inspired by the "old things, long since done… put into new relations, & upon a higher plane," the movement aimed to revive the arts both materially and ideologically as they had historically existed, as well as reclaiming the integrity of the artist in relation to the art they create:

> And that work, which for the world had lost all association with human initiative & solicitude, was to be made to resume that intimate relation, and the workman himself to be recalled into the assembly of those who are consciously striving to the acknowledged end. The workmen contributing to the creation of a work were to be thenceforward named its author, and to have their names inscribed

> upon the great roll of the world's ever visible record. (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 6)

It is important to note that the approach taken by the Arts and Crafts group to advocate for the unity of arts and crafts was to organize a series of lectures and talks given by prominent members such as William Morris ("On Tapestry"), Emery Walker ("On Letterpress Printing"), Cobden-Sanderson himself ("On Bookbinding") and the presiding president at the time, Walter Cane ("On Design") (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 8). The critical material generated as the result of these academic engagements reveals that, at least initially, the Arts and Crafts movement was more invested in creating a theoretical canon for both fine arts and lesser arts (mainly, crafts), which they perceived as parts of a whole.

With a clear agenda, the practitioners of this movement were focused to bring attention to the "tastelessness of mass-produced goods and the lack of honest craftsmanship" in order to emphasize the need and yearning for craftsmanship and artistry (Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 176). By positing the individual subject at the heart of art and crafts, both in terms of production and consumption, the new movement aimed to shift the focus from object-centred morality to subjective expression (Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory*, 8). In other words, the intention with the Arts and Crafts movement was to challenge the social moral code and centre the crafts around the idea of individual's *spiritual and physical well-being* over the mass conformity. For the Arts and Crafts practitioners, the domain of beauty and *goodness* was nature (Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory*, 23). As Lambert-Charbonnier notes, a simple process was developed by Ruskin, whose works played an instrumental role in the Arts and Crafts movement, which urged the individual to use their eyes to transfer the beauty of nature into art through their hands ("John Ruskin, William Morris, and Walter Pater," 1). The bodily unity and complete

physical engagement with this process of creation define Ruskin's criticism of industrial machinery, which he saw as a harmful force that fractured the subject:

> We have much studied and perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labour, only we give it a false name. It is not truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men: divided into mere segments of men - broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin, or the head of a nail. ("The Stones of Venice," *The Collected Works of John Ruskin,* 196)

The rejection of the tautological norms of the design schools (mainly, the South Kensington circle in Britain which was known for its strong adherence to rules and formulas (Young, "Commercial Art to Graphic Design", 220)) over the crafts and the freeing of imagination was Ruskin's solution to redeem work (Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory*, 25-26). The result of machine production in the arts and crafts was the erosion of the artist and the disappearance of the maker, which enabled the producers to imbue the object with social values they aspired to convey.[30] The worker could only overcome the industry through "honesty of expression, material and workmanship." This shows not only Ruskin's dislike for Industrial society, but also his aim to connect art to the artist by "revealing [its] man-made origin" (ibid.).

Time and time again, Ruskin uses the idealized model of the church to show the difference between building and architecture and emphasizes the unity between the detail and

[30] Removed from the object is not only creative excitement, but also the pleasure it should impress on the viewer, which has been replaced by judgement. Ruskin's idea of pleasure and repose ties the senses directly to the experience of pleasure, as opposed to judgement, which celebrates the mastery of the mind over matter ("Modern Painters," 26-27).

base as the source of individual and spiritual value (*The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory*, 27). One way to interpret this is through the discourse on ornamentation: while Ruskin highlights the *formative* impact of the aesthetic ornament as an essential part of the art, he also positions it in relation to the object itself, wherein the material form shapes ornaments in accord with internal unity. Morris, in turn, reiterated this point in an essay, highlighting the importance of harmony between material and art:

> Furthermore, those of you especially who are designing for goods, try to get the most out of your material, but always in such a way as honours it most. Not only should it be obvious what your material is, but something should be done with it which is specially natural to it, something that could not be done with any other. This is the very raison d'être of decorative art: to make stone look like ironwork, or wood like silk, or pottery like stone is the last resource of the decrepitude of art. ("Art and the Beauty of the Earth," *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 169)

The unity of craft with its "natural" material, here, repeats Ruskin's postulation of nature as the source of morality and goodness. However, Morris takes this argument further by suggesting in his essay "The Lesser Arts" that the accordance with nature is the basis of the aesthetic value of crafts: "Everything made by man's hand has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature and thwarts her" (*The Collected Works of William Morris*, 4). Therefore, in the same way that nature excited a feeling of the *sublime* in the Romantics, providing the main inspiration for both Ruskin and Morris in their aesthetic theories, the nineteenth-century artist was responsible for awakening the eye of the viewer with art.

Thus, it is no surprise that the addressee of Cobden-Sanderson's treatise on the movement is the "the artist or craftsman" (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 5). Upholding the concept of "natural beauty" as opposed to the Industrial doctrine of "utilitarian beauty", the theory of the Arts and Crafts movement offered a unique look at everyday objects and the artists in relation to them. G.T. Robinson's lecture "The Note on Fictiles"[31] contextualizes the ideal bond between the object and its maker as "telling" of each other, where art is an ode to the intellect and craft an ode to skill (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 13). The suggestion follows that mass industrialization caused a rift between these two interconnected faculties when demand for the skill of the craftsman suppressed the creativity of the artist. While directly tied to the division of labour, the reaction against the divorcing of the skill from art became the main driving force behind the Arts and Crafts movement to which its practitioners sought a lasting resolution. Seeing the past as a worthy teacher, Morris' way to resolve this issue was by readapting medieval forms and teaching in Modern crafts. This approach provides the theoretic and aesthetic basis for the British Arts and Crafts Movement. The following section reviews the extent of Morris' theory and practice in book arts by discussing closely the Chaucer volume created by his publishing house – the Kelmscott Press.

[31] Oxford English Dictionary defines the term "fictiles" as following: "Moulded into form by art; made of earth, clay, etc. by a potter.", which in simpler terms refers to pottery and clay work. Cobden-Sanderson notes that the importance of Robinson's lecture on fictiles was in the latter's pioneering attempt in bringing together the art of "domestic life" with the craft of "fictile vases he created from [the] common clay". In the lecture, Robinson uses the unity of "beauty with use" as a metaphor for the unity art and the artist, as he argues: "'The craftsman and the artist should, where possible, be united; or, at least, should work in common, as was the case when, in each civilization, the Potter's Art flourished most, and when the scientific base was of less account than was the art employed upon it."(*The Arts and Crafts Movement,* 13-4).

Chapter 4: A Case for the Kelmscott Chaucer

The Kelmscott Press, established in 1891, represents one of the most important turning points in Morris' professional career in regard to his critical contributions to the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Located next door to Morris' Kelmscott Manor in West Oxfordshire, the Kelmscott Press is celebrated for several valuable volumes produced here in limited quantity during its seven years of run, until 1898. As this chapter will discuss it more closely, Morris envisioned the Kelmscott Press as a beacon of book arts and crafts in the age of mass production and mass consumption. Indeed, bringing together the domestic and professional aspects of Morris' life, the Kelmscott Press was an ode to the pre-Industrial period when printing was still a cottage industry. Furthermore, as an embodiment of Morris' social and artistic work, the Kelmscott Press represented his dedication to traditional and medieval aesthetics. It is fair to say that all fifty-three books produced here were highly architectural and distinctly ornamented objects. Indeed, the illustrator for the Kelmscott Chaucer, Edward Burne-Jones, notorious called this volume "a cathedral of a book" (Harrington, 6:16) (Figure 10). Peterson argues that the reason behind Morris' founding of the Kelmscott Press was his desire for *a socialist utopia*, which Morris explored at length in his later works. In other words, a private press was Morris' resistance to the Victorian books which he deemed as "ill designed" and "inferior" due to mechanization (*The Ideal Book*, xx). In terms of design aesthetics, the legacy of the Kelmscott Press is more definitive, from its use of linen paper (instead of acidic wood-pulp paper which had a

Figure 10: "A Pocket Cathedral: 'The Kelmscott Chaucer'" (Maryland University Libraries). Designed by T.J Cobden-Sanderson. 1896.

propensity to lose its white colour with time (ibid.)), to the techniques of production and ornamentation, books produced by Morris are the material manifestation of his *Ideal book.* Defined in terms of their uniquely fifteenth-century type, wide-page manuscript illustrations and illuminations, and the quality of the craft work, Kelmscott Press books represent relics of an aesthetic utopia of pre-Renaissance glory of the arts and crafts (*The Ideal Book*, xxiv).

Published in 1896, the Kelmscott Chaucer embodies Morris' approach to aesthetics, concepts, and ideas that evoke medieval sentiments. Myron Groover, for instance, notes that as a part of his project to evoke the Medieval revival, the Chaucer volume was given a set of clasps to keep the book closed[32]. Similarly, the use of a colophon at the end of the book to identify the publisher[33], as well as the readjustment of the language of the text to achieve an "anachronistic pastiche", ("The Whole Scheme of the Book," 14:13) show his dedication to his goal to create a pre-Industrial book in the Industrial age by aligning the form of the book with its content. A similar reading can also be generated about the binding work of the Kelmscott Chaucer. The bindings were made of white pigskin, a material notoriously difficult to tool ("The Whole Scheme of the Book," 40:40) but chosen as an homage to the pre-Modern manuscripts, which would often be bound in animal-hide materials rather than the tan leather typical of the nineteenth century. Douglas suggests that the front design on the cover is directly copied from one of Morris' own books – the 1478 Coburg Bible (Peter Harrington, 5:25). Similarly, among the main decorative patterns, Thomson notes the use of architectural lozenges and stylized shapes of vine leaves, grapes and other floral motifs as the centrepiece of the cover design (*Aesthetic Tracts,* 31). It is significant to note that Morris'

[32] A practice which became obsolete with the transition from medieval vellum – printed books to paper books. Groover explains that the clasps of medieval books were used to squeeze the vellum pages into shape, as they had a propensity to dry when left exposed to air. Groover also notes that this detail is entirely decorative and added by Morris to emphasize the "medieval-ness" of the Kelmscott Chaucer.

[33] Colophons or title pages began to be inserted at the beginning of books in the eighteenth century. The end placement, again, was intentional by Morris to reference pre-Industrial printing.

adoption of medievalist aesthetic principles carried a double significance for him. Representing elements of the Gothic revival and the Romantic emphasis on nature, the Kelmscott Chaucer cover combines in itself a perfect harmony of material and aesthetic form. Thomson explains the impact of this approach by suggesting that the binding "appears both highly ornate and elegantly simple." (ibid.)

While it is informative to compile a list of Industrial design elements such as the quality of paper and ink, or the typographic and decorative balance, I would argue that these points, when discussed individually, distract from Morris' general thesis, which is centred on the material and aesthetic unity of the book. Interestingly, when considering the book cover, neither Ruskin, nor Morris clarified their intentions about the binding. For instance, while Morris' fascinating essay titled "The Ideal Book" (1893) provides very clear allusions to the role of the cover in the general structure of the book, his interest in this manifesto is very clearly in the recreation of the Medieval book by adjusting the typographic and physical quality of the books. It is in Morris' examples of the unfortunate but permanent association of bad ornamentation with the book, or the restlessness of small books demanding to be pressed open with a hand to be read and to be pressed down with domestic objects to be closed ("The Ideal Book," 72), that we see his vision for the cover as an integral part of a book. What is also notable in arriving at the *ideal* cover by this method is the fact that, rather than putting the book on a mantle for its display value, Morris' description attempts to define its form in relation to human body; the hand holding the book open, eyes following the lines. For Morris, the book was meant to position itself naturally in relation to the body in order to free the mind to enjoy the pleasures and beauty of reading (ibid.). So, in order to allow the book to fulfil its capacity, Morris believed that there needed to be a direct, harmonious correlation between its aesthetic form and its natural function.

The binding of the Kelmscott Chaucer was a joint project between Morris and the Doves bindery, which was owned by T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. Despite its high value today, Peterson notes that, for Morris, the cover of the great Chaucer was meant to be a provisional arrangement until the reader could get it rebound according to their own taste. Indeed, in conversation with Cobden-Sanderson, Morris was controversially noted to mention that he favoured "rough and cheap" bindings, even anticipating the invention of some sort of binding machinery to end the worries of the publisher (qtd. in Peterson, *The Ideal Book,* xxx). When reviewed in light of his close attention to the minute details and ornaments of the Chaucer volume, this comment may sound contradictory. The unconventional nature of this suggestion needs to be noted as books meant for the reader's binding would often be offered in plain boards rather than a full leather material and ornamented design. Indeed, Morris' dismissal of the Chaucer binding can be contextualized within his aesthetic philosophy which he believed in both as a medievalist and as an avid reader. Despite the book's expressive decorations, several experts (Adam Douglass, Myron Groover, etc.) note that the pigskin binding was ultimately a "temporary" cover for the Kelmscott Chaucer. Its white colour was prone to damage and discolouration, and the sheer size of the book rendered the binding material too weak for reading it without a bookstand (Harrington). Ultimately, Morris expected the reader to personalize the binding when they purchased their own copy of the book (Peterson, *The Ideal Book,* xxx). The intention here is, once again, to normalize and even dramatize the practice that was quite prevalent for the pre-Industrial period, when the reader's choice of binding was applied to create the final form of the book. By putting his book and its fate in the hands of the reader, Morris was, in a way, showing that the function and effectiveness of the book can only be revealed with it is being used by its reader rather than sitting on a parlour table.

Despite their wide-spread artistic acclaim, neither Morris' book nor his publishing was was safe from negative critiques, the most well-known of which was offered by sociologist Thorsten Veblen. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen called Morris' "historical return" social propaganda and, discussing the limited accessibility of the Kelmscott Press books, he accused Morris of attempting classicism:

> The Kelmscott Press reduced the matter to an absurdity - as seen from the point of view of brute serviceability alone - by issuing books for modern use, edited with the obsolete spelling, printed in black letters, and bound in limp vellum fitted with thongs. As a further characteristic feature which fixes the economic place of artistic bookmaking, there is the fact that these more elegant books are, at their best, printed in limited editions. (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 163)

This critique needs to be fully contextualized in order to understand where Veblen was coming from. Thomson explains that Veblen's scepticism of the Kelmscott catalogue was a complex mix of positive and negative comments rather than a complete dismissal of Morris ' projects (*Aesthetic Tracts*, 5). Indeed, both men shared a common social view which highlighted the functionality of artistic design and the necessity for improvements to the working conditions of craftsmen and factory workers (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 5). However, the main point of contention between them appears to be centred on the utility of machine production. For Veblen, industrially-produced objects with their precisely executed designs and aesthetic uniformity were frowned upon due to their associations with the "common", and not because of their lack of artistry (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 160). The Kelmscott books, according to Veblen, failed in both of these criteria. Firstly, despite their original intention, the emphasis put on their archaic and unusual mode of production

transformed these rare books into status symbol for those who could afford them (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 164). Secondly, the uniqueness of the Kelmscott books did not always lie in their perfect form, but rather the visible signs of imperfection. As Thomson expounds, the artistic value of the Kelmscott books was generated solely from their "crude" and "inept" handicraft manufacture which stood out starkly in contrast to the industrial uniformity of other books at the time (*Aesthetic Tracts*, 5). In other words, the Arts and Crafts books were an example of what Veblen calls conspicuous waste – a concept used to explain the objects of luxury purchased by the leisure classes solely because of their social value (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 112).

When contrasted with positive reviews of the Kelmscott Chaucer, it becomes obvious that what for Veblen was the main shortcoming of these books, specifically their imbalanced social significance, was, in fact, the artistic inspiration that impressed the admirers of the Arts and Crafts circle. Among the reviews collected by Peterson, commentaries from Morris ' colleagues particularly stand out. F.S. Ellis – Morris' collaborator on typography – highlighted the perfect harmony of the text, image and ornament, an effect which Morris achieved by planning the double spreads as a whole rather than separately (qtd. in Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris' Typographical Adventure*, 228). Burne-Jones' review, on the other hand, singles out the Kelmscott Chaucer as "the *finest* book ever printed" – a point which was later repeated exactly in a review in the journal *Athenaeum* (1896). The use of superlatives here is significant to note. While suggesting the individualistic nature of Morris' book design, the review also emphasizes Morris' intention in creating unique objects. This point was confirmed once again in the American Literary Exhibition Catalogue (1976), where the Kelmscott Chaucer is referenced as "the [second] *greatest* ikon, the other being the Gutenberg Bible" ([sic], qtd. in Peterson, *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris' Typographical Adventure*, 228). Then it is true that,

while these books were indicative of a conscious reaction against the mass mechanization of the book. However, Morris' insistence and attention to the transformation of the book from a ready-made consumer product into a reader-oriented aesthetic object that was conveyed by the simultaneous richness and temporality of its binding allowed for the book to balance its broad reach and mass status with visual significance. In this regard, the establishing of the book as an aesthetically valuable form was one of Morris' greatest achievements.

Thomson defines the Kelmscott Chaucer also as an "aesthetic tract", a term which she borrows from Sarah Whitman, who was one of the early practitioners of the Arts and Crafts style bindings. Combining in itself both psychical and artistic form, a book is made into an aesthetic tract when it is made not only for reading but also for display purposes (Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts*, 32). The duality of its functionality needs to be emphasized here. Dominating its space both materially and aesthetically, the Kelmscott Chaucer demanded its readers to position themselves in relation to the book. Sitting was not an option to read this book, its size demanding a lectern on which to open it (Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts*, 31). Despite this, the Kelmscott Chaucer was not just a museum piece to be set aside as a decoration. Its unique typography possessed the power to entice the reader to study the elaborate design and print more closely (William Orcutt; qtd. in Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts*, 32). The effort exerted to keep the binding tight due to the weight of the book was rewarded with the tactile pleasure of holding a book made of beautifully rendered materials unique for its day. This is one of the definitive instances where the book and its aesthetic form both take active part in the reading of the book.

Morris' radical experimentation with the Chaucer volume both in terms of its aesthetic and social value became a big driving force behind the critical discourse on the book cover in the late nineteenth century. Ideas about beauty, functionality and reading in general began to be challenged by more radical approaches to the aesthetic philosophy which resisted the

moral foundations that Ruskin and Morris established for the nineteenth-century avant-garde. Cobden-Sanderson summarized these trends like this:

> But art today has no eyes, no devotion & so for art there is no great object, and for the great object no art. Nor does the great artist, as does the great opportunity, sojourn in our midst. Such art and artists as there are, are there any? [sic] are but engaged in the conscious cultivation of art for art's sake, or of beauty for beauty's sake, pending the great transformation which, meanwhile, is no affair of theirs. (*The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 28)

The Decadent movement, as it is recorded particularly in the works of Oscar Wilde, continued the development of the aesthetic discourse of the book, this time not through its perfect harmony or moral idealism, but through the dangers of aesthetic beauty and deception of material form. Cobden-Sanderson's comment about the lack of opportunities for great artists is important when considering the erosion of individual patronage for the binderies, which he associates with changing views about art and beauty. Emphasizing the charm of the artificial and cultural over the inner beauty of nature, the Decadent philosophy employed private reflection as a method of art analysis. Books, being widely available and aesthetically diverse, lent themselves easily to this purpose. Among other forms of readings that appeared, the position of an Aesthete-reader is an important one as it also offered a cultural critique of everyday life in the late Victorian period. Viewing books both as objects of exquisite beauty and immense danger, Oscar Wilde in his writings about the book cover offers an interesting foil to the Arts and Crafts idealization of the book. The next chapter will follow this lead and discuss the peculiar role of books in Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

Chapter 5: The Readerly Cover in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

While the first half of the nineteenth century saw the co-option of the industrial book in service of collective morality, by the end of the century, the book itself had become a symbol of aesthetics, individuality, learnedness, and taste. The main cause for this shift was the lasting impact of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Great Britain, which sought to unite aesthetic and material conditions through a moralizing doctrine of *good taste*. Thus, it is not surprising that in the cultural discourse of the late nineteenth century, the book is envisioned as a difficult object to understand and trust.

On the one hand, the materialist approach of the Arts and Crafts movement compelled readers to think about the book and its utility in its historical context and seek the aesthetics of the *ideal book* in previous centuries and past traditions. As a result, the book was not perceived as solely a static reading tool, but also as a medium of style and self-expression burdened with the aesthetic doctrines of the past and present. The main reason behind the rigid rules governing books and book covers was the expansion of mass reading beyond the sphere of the aristocratic class. According to Feather, a community of everyday readers that first began to emerge in the eighteenth century had effectively defined Britain as a "print-dependent society" following the Industrial Revolution (*A History of British Publishing*, 85). This made the book an important object for competing ideologies attempting to lay claim to its form and content. While Utilitarian[34] discourse emphasized the importance of the book

[34] According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the Utilitarianism was developed in the works of thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill as a reactionary movement to egoism. Overall, the wide social reach of the Utilitarian philosophy posited the importance of "happiness and pleasure" for the wide society over "unhappiness and pain". The central idea here is to ensure the satisfaction for the masses over an individual's interests. In this sense, particularly, in arts and literature, the Utilitarianism can be seen as a reaction against the individualistic tendencies of the Romantic movement which preceded it and the Aesthetic and Decadent movement that will follow thereafter. More importantly, the Utilitarianism also relied heavily on the concept of "intrinsic goodness" (Driver, "The History of Utilitarianism"), which became a main discussion point for the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. While the Utilitarian thinkers aimed to categorize both everyday material

through its material servility to the user, the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as the Aesthetic movement of the nineteenth century, also attempted to improve the reader's agency over the book through aesthetic codes and symbols. More specifically, the Decadent movement challenged the imposed morality over art and crafts by aiming to shift the standing of the subject in relation to the objects that flooded the private and public spheres. However, it can be argued that the discussions of this topic had begun well before the Aestheticist movements of the late nineteenth century took hold. The position of the book and book cover both as material objects and cultural symbols allowed for this discourse to take place in a variety of platforms; literature and the visual arts being one of these fields. The most famous and lasting example of this concerns the origins of the phrase "judging the book by its cover", which is often associated with George Eliot's 1860 novel, *The Mill on the Floss.* Despite its metaphoric connotations in contemporary usage, in its native context, Eliot uses this phrase not to dismiss the cover, but instead to address the complex relationship between the book cover and the reader. The discussion is framed in the novel as cautionary words shared by Mr. Tulliver in a conversation with his daughter about the difficulty of reconciling form with content:

> I thought they'd be all good books... they've all got the same covers,
> and I thought they were all o 'one sample, as you may say. But it
> seems one mustn't judge by th 'outside. This is a puzzlin 'world.
> (Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 62)

This statement embodies the social realities of the second half of the nineteenth century, a time in which objects and their meanings were often contested in intense, critical

objects and abstract ideas like goodness or beauty based on their innate capacity for goodness, for the followers of the later movements, beauty should not be seen as an agent of goodness - a means for achieving the satisfaction for the masses, but an end in itself for an individual purpose. Wilde's works continue this line of thinking.

debates. As the novel implies, *bad books* do not always appear to be covered in "bad covers", the same way *good cover* does not mean a *good book*. The moral complexity of this suggestion signals that, more than their predecessors, the citizens of the nineteenth century were more wary about the disunity between the aesthetics and material as it pertained to discourses around reading and book collecting. Wilde's iteration of this conflict is particularly notable because he not only explored the extent of this separation but also managed to forge his own aesthetic language to achieve this.

In tandem with this, the discussion of the role of the reader in book discourse is also interesting when reviewed in the context of the book cover. It is no coincidence that the reader's adopting of the cover as an expressive medium happened at the same as the book cover was experiencing the most artistically vibrant period in its history. The emergence of the late-century bibliophile as someone who appreciated the external beauty of the book, specifically its cover, shows that the aesthetic form of the cover remained a critical topic among the proponents and opponents of the book. A fictionalized account of this discourse is embodied in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, published in 1890. While reception of the novel was not uniform, ultimately it allowed Wilde to explore the doctrine of "life imitates art" which he introduced in the revised preface of the novel. In this context, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* acts as a prophetic cautionary tale for a culture obsessed with beautiful books. By exploring of the powers of the book cover, Wilde shows the impacts of the aesthetic object on the subjectivity of the reader by chronicling the life of its protagonist, Dorian Gray, within the framework of his passions and obsessions with objects. I intend to explore how Wilde uses the characterization of Dorian to comment on the characters of bibliophiles and bibliomaniacs who both found and lost themselves in their books. This chapter will explore how the book, through its cover, can provide solace for and provoke its reader at the same time.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel set against the backdrop of the contemporary life of late Victorian England. The contemplative nature of its narrative, which closely follows Dorian Gray's life, allows for an interesting character study of a nineteenth-century Aesthete. In sharp contrast to Dorian Gray's increasingly selfish and immoral actions and the crisis he finds himself in as the evidence of his alternate life begins to manifest itself in his portrait, long passages dedicated to Dorian Gray's impressions of people he encounters and objects he obsesses over give the story a strong resonance for its audience fascinated with material culture. However, Dorian does not simply embrace materialist doctrine. His transgressions of the rigid norms of material culture in this regard also constitute an essential part of the readerly response to him.

Robert Mighall analyzes *The Picture of Dorian Gray* essentially as a story of Gothic doubles. Similar to Stevenson's 1886 novel *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Wilde's novel contrasts Dorian Gray's public persona (signified by his beauty and youth) that is talked about at parties with the private, asocial, secret life he lives in this home among his beloved objects. Books play an important role in exploring Dorian Gray's double life. Among Dorian Gray's many different interests and hobbies, Wilde highlights his proclivity for reading and collecting books. Among many other taste-defining episodes, Wilde describes in detail his enquiring after a certain "vellum-covered book" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 106). Furthermore, Dorian is always aware of the bookshelf in the dark attic where he spends his nights in the company of the enchanted portrait (118). Central to the plot, the infamous yellow book Dorian receives from Lord Henry, which fundamentally changes the course of his life (120) is presented as the culmination of Dorian's character as an Aesthete-reader. Both as a reader and a collector of expensive volumes, Dorian Gray projects a complex mix of affection and obsession towards the books he procures. I argue that this duality is another layer of *double life* Wilde explores with Dorian Gray's character. In fact, Gray's claim to

being a nineteenth-century Aesthete[35] is solidified through his episodes of externalized bibliomania and internalized bibliophilia.

Chapter 11 of the 1891 edition is one of the longest entries in the book. Narrated as a streaming monologue, this section marks a mid-point break in the action to convey Dorian Gray's deliberate pursuit of various Aesthetic experiences. More specifically, Wilde's characterization here relies heavily on Dorian Gray's response to various immersive experiences, his ever-growing collection of rare objects, culminating with an Aesthetic critique of everyday life. Here, Wilde combines historical reflection with moments of personal insight on numerous material objects to characterize Dorian Gray's willingness to reject and transgress the social norms of his day. It is no coincidence that the narrative almost exclusively focuses on the role of the book both as a private and cultural object in relation to Dorian Gray's actions and habits. Indeed, Wilde leads his readers into this introspective episode in Dorian Gray's life by introducing the *yellow book* at the end of the previous chapter.

Despite being a central motif in the novel, the yellow book arrives and stays in Dorian Gray's library in complete anonymity, remaining unnamed in the novel with the only textual description centred on its cover:

> On reaching the library he found that it was just after five o'clock, and that the tea had been already brought up. On a little table of dark

[35] "Aesthete" is defined essentially as a "a person who understands and enjoys beauty" (Cambridge English Dictionary). While the archetype of the Aesthete is seen as the by-product of the capitalism of the late nineteenth century, the idea of Aesthete suggests a separation and "detachment" from the dominant ideology. Indeed, it is suggested that the lifestyle of an Aesthete, which often caused a fascination and discourse among the public with its eccentricity, acts as a form of resistance by itself. The resistance centred on the ideas of beauty and aesthetics can be seen as a direct challenge against the moral dogma of the Utilitarian ideology that saw beauty as a means to a greater end. Wilde's 1883 pronouncement that beauty and *goodness* are inherently conjoined ideas not only conveys the significance of the aesthetic form once again but also posits that beauty and aesthetic are what all artists interested in making "something useful" ("An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement, V&A Museum).

> perfumed wood thickly incrusted with nacre, a present from Lady Radley, his guardian's wife, a pretty professional invalid, who had spent the preceding winter in Cairo, was lying a note from Lord Henry, and beside it was a book bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the edges soiled. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 119)

In an attempt to identify the yellow book, which carries a major plot significance, Wilde scholars have generated a long, comprehensive list of critical works and real-life references found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For example, Thomson argues that the yellow book in the novel is based on Joris-Karl Huysmans '*A Rebours*, which Wilde read in 1884 while on his honeymoon (*Aesthetic Tracts*, 83). However, in a letter to Ralph Payne dated 1894, Wilde rejected this suggestion asserting that "the book that poisoned, or made perfect, Dorian Gray does not exist; it is a fancy of mine merely" (*Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 116). As the real identity of this book is unknown, it becomes prudent to study its cultural and aesthetic cues. The colour of its binding is the first lead given to the reader.

The yellow books, or penny dreadfuls as they were also called (Cachin, "Industrialization," 300), had retrospectively become the symbol of cheaply made literature of the nineteenth century. According to Weintraub, however, the erotic and subversive connotations of the yellowbacks in the British Isles date to the public scandal that arose as a result of Wilde's involvement in the gross indecency trial at which he was condemned to prison ("The Yellow Book: A Reappraisal," 137). In fact, it is fair to conclude that the only realistic real-life allusion to a yellow book would be to Aubrey Beardsley's Aesthetic-cult classic magazine *The Yellow Book*, which specialised in works representing the Aesthetic and Decadent philosophies. Weintraub reports that the incident behind the association of *The Yellow book* and yellow covers in generation was the result of a curious coincidence. Wilde being sighted on the day of his arrest with a copy of *The Yellow Book* created the myth in

Britain about the erotic connotations of the colour yellow with the book ("The Yellow Book: A Reappraisal," 145). In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that Wilde's use of the yellow book as a direct allusion to the *foreignness* as he was borrowing the allusions and references to the movements that dominated in the continent at the time. However, what is most notable about the motif of the yellow book is that Wilde not only used it to signify the "otherness" of his characters like Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, but he also managed to create a new aesthetic symbol within the literary narrative that conveyed the readerly gaze.

Readers may note that the appearance of the yellow book in this novel represents a personal turning point for Dorian Gray. Wilde's description of this episode is intentionally evocative:

> His eye fell on the yellow book that Lord Henry had sent him. What was it, he wondered. He went towards the little pearl-coloured octagonal stand, that had always looked to him like the work of some strange Egyptian bees that wrought in silver, and taking up the volume, flung himself into an armchair, and began to turn over the leaves. After a few minutes, he became absorbed. It was the strangest book that he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 120)

From his slouching posture to the book's unbreakable enchantment that almost results in him forgetting about his social engagement (121), the deep, immersive reading described here is often characterized by the scholars of nineteenth century reading culture as bibliomania. For instance, Leah Price defines bibliomania as a collective term given for

social and medical ailments associated with extensive book reading that manifested itself in idleness, rejection of social life, book hoarding and deteriorating eyesight. (*How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain,* 3). Despite being centred on physical ailments of the body ("a flabby stomach and eye and brain disorders" (Littau, *Theories of Reading,* 5), bibliomania was seen equally as a sickness of the mind. Raven notes that the sedentary activity of book reading was also explained as "literary opium" to sedate the reader ("From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries," 165). At this early stage, the diagnosis of the obsessive reader-collector is often followed by the patient's disengagement from social life and persistent lack of interest in society. Furthermore, in displacing the individual from society, bibliomania is also characterized as the reader's growing interest in the visual signification of his library. Wilde describes Dorian Gray's library as a "large octagonal chamber on the ground floor that, in his newborn feeling for luxury, he had just decorated for himself" (87). At another point, when Dorian is having his breakfast in his library, Wilde uses this as an opportunity to expound on Dorian's library, noting "a small round table close to the open window", as well as a "luxuriously-cushioned couch" (92). The library, which also serves as a social place where Dorian meets with his visitors (41), resembles the Victorian parlour both in function and decoration. However, as Logan notes, the difference between the library and parlour was not just the asocial nature of the former, but also the female-dominated display-oriented aesthetics of the latter (*The Victorian Parlour*, 31). It can be argued that Wilde's play with using feminine-coded semiotics to redefine a masculine space is an intentional part of character-building strategy for Dorian. Gray.

Indeed, Wilde's adoption of the library as a visual space is not without precedent. Raven suggests several domestic portraits of libraries in which "a large, free-standing bookcase laden with beautifully bound volumes features centre-stage ("From Promotion to

Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries," 188). Dorian Gray's library seems to be decorated very similarly to many eighteenth-century English libraries of aristocratic patrons, which included devices to be used for reading, such as ornamental book stalls and lamps; a hearth where wood fire would provide light and warmth; as well as an elaborate display of spirits that ultimately identifies this place as a safe space where one could "pause and discuss" in good company (Raven, "From Promotion to Proscription," 198-199). This mix of the private and public space, where the book is an active participant in social interactions, is one of the main indicators of how eighteenth and nineteenth century societies thought of the book as a part of their social and private lives. However, it should also be noted that, within the context of the *fin de siècle*, it is clear that bibliomania, or *the fever of the century,* was often perceived as visceral, hyper-fixated reading ("the novel reading disease" (Peter de Bolla; qtd. in Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 5)). Particularly, French novels were considered to be deeply immersive and "debauching" in this regard. The importance of these elements can be noted in the glimpses of Dorian Gray's inner reflections as well:

> The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediaeval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious

of the falling day and creeping shadows. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 121)

The visions described here are also included in the list of what could be seen as symptoms of bibliomania. One interesting parallel drawn by nineteenth century social critics was between the deep stupor and loss of control induced by reading and the fast-moving train which turns the view of the countryside into a blur. Because of this, the mechanically inclined reader, similar to the train-riders, failed at registering their surroundings and could only passively observe the natural scenery (Mays, "The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals," 171). The criticism here seems to stem from the idea that novel reading was detrimental to critical thinking by demoralizing the reader and fragmenting his body (fast moving of the eye over the text juxtaposed with a lethargic, unmoving body), a condition which was more often associated with women than men. Indeed, May notes several denotative uses of the adjectives such as "sensual, simplistic, unbalanced" in relation to both "desultory female readers" and "Orientalized male readers" ("The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals," 174-177). The historic context for reading and books is important to note. In opposition to these depictions of the "common reader", nineteenth century social attitudes favoured "ideal readers" who selectively engaged with books with a clear intention to cultivate one's mind [36] (181). This mode is clearly reversed in the novel. It can even be argued that the focus here is not the book, but the dangers of excessive reading.

It is no surprise that, despite other aesthetic pursuits, it is Dorian Gray's personal, active engagement with his books breaks this pattern and reveals him as an Aesthete in search

[36] Dorian is a complex reader. On the one hand, Wilde uses his masculine selectivity and feminine-coded passion for novel reading to contextualize his homoerotic inclinations and liminal position as an aristocrat and a social. outcast. His cold disinterest in his old, "dog-eared" schoolbooks and other ornamental books he obtains later is not analogous to the deep passion he exhibits for the yellow book which becomes his guide to lead an aesthetically defined life. However, Wilde did not rush to define this form of reading as "educational", nor Dorian an "ideal reader" to cure him of the symptoms of early bibliomania.

of sensations. Wilde's reference point for this is Walter Pater, whose works can be heard as an echo in *Dorian Gray.* More specifically, Pater's controversial propositions for an aesthetically fulfilled life in the rescinded conclusion of his book *Renaissance* describes Dorian's selective fascination with books:

> At first sight, experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflection begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence, the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosened into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer. (*The Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, 59)

Depicting his Aesthete seeking experience rather than outcome, Wilde, here, offers his version of the "art for art's sake" theory. However, it can be observed that, it his characterization, Dorian Gray's love of books is not posed as an accomplishable goal but a constant pursuit. Wilde also envisions Dorian, like many other aristocratic men who came before him, as a proud member of the society of *bibliophiles*.

According to Thomson, one of the social outcomes of the material proliferation that defines the nineteenth century was the development of consumer taste for rare objects (*Aesthetic Tracts*, 6-7). Indeed, the use of "rare" or "deluxe" as a descriptor seems to resonate with the language of the Great Exhibition, and its use of "beauty" as the main motive of moral consumption (Georges d'Avenel; qtd. in Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts,* 7). In this case, despite being an amateur pursuit of the middle- and upper- class men, bibliophilia was a strictly regulated activity in trendsetting. Delineation of bibliophilia from socially frowned-upon bibliomania was exacerbated by the emergence of specialised book clubs, such as the

Grolier Club (1884). In their statement of intent, the members of the Grolier Club had a clear assertion about how their interest in books was different from the base obsession espoused by the bibliomania of the age:

> They are true booklovers, and not mere book hoarders; they are bibliophiles, not bibliomaniacs; they love a book for its intrinsic beauty, not for its accidental rarity. (Brander Matthews; qtd. in Thomson, *Aesthetic Tracts,* 7)

Indeed, the general picture drawn here stands in stark contrast with Michael Sadleir's description of a mid-century bibliomaniac – a frustrated aristocrat surrounded by books (*The Evolution of Publishers' Binding Styles 1770-1900,* 79). One perceived distinction between these two concepts was the involuntary, backward, passive, and feminizing nature of bibliomania as opposed to the calculated, intentional, progressive, active, and masculine practice of a bibliophilic book enthusiast. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Wilde observes this differentiation as well. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, the complexity of Dorian's tastes is fully explored as Wilde notes Dorian's transition from an observer of dominant trends from the safety of his parlour and private library, to him seeking to learn the skills of an intentional collector who loves his objects so much that he feels the "natural instinct of terror about [his] passions" (125), the one who appreciates "mysticism, with its marvellous power of making common things strange" over adhering to aesthetic norms (128). At the zenith of his pursuit of beauty and art, Wilde tells us that Dorian's frenzy to pursue the art of tapestry and embroidery" (132) slowly turns into his hunting down certain books bound in "tawny satin or blue silk" that he "sought to accumulate" (133). Dorian's dedication *to conquer* and collect "these treasures [..] in his lovely house" (134) can be seen as a call-back to Dorian's earlier move "to procure" his books from Paris booksellers (123). The parallel between two acts shows that Dorian as a citizen of the nineteenth century was no longer interested in blindly

following the vogue of the age and be influenced by the conventions, but he was on the path of becoming someone who rather *fought* passionately to create a deeply personalized space reflecting his *Aesthetic* tastes. It can be suggested that this type of characterization serves a very particular function in the novel. Wilde's replacement of the socially uneasy elements of obvious bibliomania that would signal passive consumption with Dorian's bibliophilic inclinations and intentional pursuit to collect his books from far and wide - outside of national boundaries and social codes, presents a complicated image of a bibliophile which, ultimately, serves to shelter Dorian Gray's position in society. Furthermore, Matthews ' criticism of "accidental rarity" is also significant. The implied preference for another form of "rarity" which would be intentional and not coincidental enables the bibliophile to locate their passion for books neatly in the contemporary discourse. Wilde explores aesthetic rarity here through Dorian Gray's unique taste for vibrant coloured leather bindings, which are made aesthetically rare as Wilde establishes their association with Dorian Gray's mood. In other words, rather than being *accidentally salacious* – thus culturally problematic, Dorian Gray's choice in leather bindings show an important degree of intentionality and individualism.

In the novel, Wilde also expounds on fin-de-siècle *ennui* in relation to one's possessions. Despite being a source of pleasure and experiment, the book, by its influence over him, also exhausts Dorian to the point of causing him to accede to lethargy. Rather than serving to exalt his happiness, the book for Dorian performs a clinical function. As Wilde moves to dub this book as "poisonous", it begins to induce in its reader "a malady of dreaming" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 121) which eventually turns his *desire* to *forgetfulness* (134). The novel's rejection of moral beauty inevitably creates a duality in the narrative which is rectified by Dorian Gray's growing interest in the book as a collection of parts. This is evident not only in the fragmented way in which he reacts to the pages or

sentence structure of the book, as noted above, but also in the ways that he refers to the book in his later reveries. There is an interesting pattern of references to Dorian Gray's infamous book, ranging from "poisonous book"[37] to "wonderful novel" (138)[38]. The separation of signifiers between "book" and "novel" enables Dorian to adjust his impressions between the form and content. In turn, the adjectives he uses to refer to the former posits the "book" as more dangerous than the "novel", thus more intriguing to him. However, a notable fact here is that the attraction for Dorian Gray comes from the juxtaposition of both elements in one book. The published reviews of Wilde's novel at the time seem to have picked up on this theme too. The review of *Dorian Gray* in *Daily Chronicler*, in particular, uses evocative language to create an association between the book and the avant-garde cultural mores of the time:

> Dullness and dirt are the chief fears of Lippincott's this month. The element in it that is unclear, though undeniably amusing is furnished by Mr. Oscar Wilde's story… It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents - A poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic doors of moral and spiritual putrefaction. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 217)

It can be argued that the reference in his novel to the French Decadents is very much intended by Wilde. Several times throughout the book Wilde employs book covers to comment on a larger cultural discourse around internationalism. Standing in stark contrast with the mid-century expression of nationalism through moral consumption of locally designed and locally made objects, which still dominated in Continental Europe despite the growing influence of Empire and Orientalism, Dorian Gray's aesthetic tastes for eclectic,

[37] Also referenced as "yellow book", "strangest book" (120) and "curious book" (245).
[38] Also referred to as "a novel without a plot" (120).

foreign-made objects are less ideologically defined. According to Thomson, the push for *Romantic Nationalism* (Wendy Kaplan) in the nineteenth century was fuelled by both industry and economy, seeking to empower the local production, that was being threatened by machine competition, through establishing a series of national and moral norms for aesthetic taste (*Aesthetic Tracts, 10)*. One example of this is the ban on illustrated books in France under the pretext of "bad taste and industrial spirit" can be seen as an attempt to curb the popularity of British publishing which had adopted lithography and engravings long before the Continental countries had done so (ibid.). A similar attitude can be observed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when Lord Henry compares one of his recent romantic interests – a lady who "devoted herself to the pleasures of French fiction, French cookery and French esprit" (167) – to a "bad French novel" (169). However, for Dorian, these national signifiers carry little moral weight. What this suggests is that, despite positioning himself in opposition to the social norms, Lord Henry's challenge of the dominant morality was well within the established discourses that prevailed in Britain. Dorian, on the other hand, takes his *Aesthetic* rejection of the norms even further. Wilde notes that the passion he developed for the foreign objects were meant to foster his "forgetful" mood, to allow him to escape the shadow his deformed portrait cast on his life (134). In other words, Dorian's pursuit of beauty and form compelled him to concoct his own symbolic definitions rather than relying on the existing dynamics within the society. Dorian, more than a rebel, was on the path of becoming a *prophet* of the Aesthetic philosophy.

Dorian Gray's appreciation for the Continental crafts is evident in his books as well. Thomson notes that the predominant approach to book covers in France in this period was predicated by the role of the book, which was contested by both nationalistic and aesthetic discourses (*The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920*, 230). Considered to be a part of the interior decoration of the household, limited edition books were viewed as art

objects ("objets d'art"), very much in keeping with Dorian Gray's passion for assorted treasures (*The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920,* 231). This is one of the instances in which we can see the direct impact of the British Arts and Crafts Movement not only in Britain, but also in the continent where a new generation of bookbinders drew their aesthetic inspiration from the very object they worked – namely, the book. The interest in expressing the symbolic meaning of the book through its form soon led to major changes in the way the book cover was perceived. According to Thomson, the critical turn in French cover design began with Henri Marius Michel, who developed the "aboutness" of the cover in relation to its contents (ibid.). In other words, for Marius Michel and his followers, each book cover required an individualized design in keeping with the moods and style of the text. Much like William Morris, in order to bring out the richness of the colour in the covers he executed, Marius Michel was also inspired by traditional French motifs, which he used as his main symbolic imagery (Thomson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920,* 233).

However, it should be noted that, the idea of colour-coding book covers did not originate in France. As early as 1848, English publisher Joseph Cundall commented on the confusing mix of colours used for leather bindings, suggesting that "every book should be decorated as far as possible in accordance with its contents" ("Ornamental Art in Bookbinding"; qtd. in Thomson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America,* 237). Indeed, Dorian Gray's aesthetic principles exhibit a closer identification with the French method than the English, which, unlike the latter, lacked a clear consensus about which colours best befit which books. For example, Michel himself was one of the biggest opponents of Cundall's contextual colour-coding. Thomson notes that, instead of basing the colour signification of the cover on the genre of the book, which was functional only within the national borders of each country, Michel was more inclined to use book-specific inspiration as the baseline for

creating bindings ("Aesthetic Issues in Book Cover Design 1880-1910," 235). Better yet, in order to overcome regional differences, Michel drew up his own author-centred colour coding method whereby certain colour bindings would be reversed for the French classical canon (237). Accordingly, Michel reserved blue and orange bindings for works of poetry, as was evident for his binding design for "*Les Orientales*" by Victor Hugo. The use of heraldic emblems and national and natural symbols such as fleur-de-lis, which were among Michel's favourite motifs for poetry (Thomson, 237; 242). The emergence of the revealing symbolism employed for book cover design is an important step in the development of the early Modern book cover. Indeed, Thomson characterizes these shifts as the impetus for the commercial exploitation of the cover by publishers for its mass potential ("Aesthetic Issues in Book Cover Design 1880-1910," 243). However, it is worth noting that, unlike the material significance of the cover, the disparities between design styles not only across national boundaries but also within similar cultural and linguistic regions kept the design variations mostly experimental (ibid.). It is interesting to note that, among many valuable collectibles that Dorian gathers far and wide, Wilde notes his silk-bound books "wrought with *fleur de lys*" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray,* 133). While the book itself is not named, its aesthetic and material details given by Wilde could have allowed the reader of the time to imagine an *Orientalist* poetry collection.

Despite the abundance of Decadent objects in this novel, it is fair to suggest that there are no useless books in *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* Wilde uses books very selectively and purposefully to urge Dorian into sensation either through *ennui,* intrigue, or coercion. In Chapter 14, Wilde intentionally sets another scene of aesthetic crisis against the quiet background of Dorian Gray's private library. This scene occurs earlier in the novel with a short remark from Dorian about a Gautier volume he has leafed through in the company of Basil Hallward: "I remember picking up a little vellum-covered book in your studio one day

and chancing on that delightful phrase" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 106). While the title of the book is, again, not specified, Dorian Gray's keen memory of its cover's properties suggests his sensitive eye for book covers. Gray's strong awareness of the binding material is also significant: vellum is an interesting detail which Wilde uses to contextualize Dorian Gray's reference to the aesthetic function of art as a distraction from the humdrum of a daily life shaped by constant consumption. Parchment materials such as vellum were effectively replaced at the end of the nineteenth century by leather and cloth materials because of their fragility when exposed to temperature changes and humidity (Fitterer, "Leather & Vellum Bookbindings"). Here, the combination of the smooth, sensitive vellum cover with the portable and personalized book ("beautiful things that one can touch and handle," 107) symbolizes the *Aesthete*'s resistance against mass culture.

Later, another Gautier book appears in the narrative, and it has a more prominent plot significance. The physical form of the second book, which is in Dorian Gray's possession, is defined with more care and attention than was the case with the first book:

> He frowned, and, getting up, went over to the bookcase and took out a volume at hazard. He was determined that he would not think about what had happened until it became absolutely necessary that he should do so. When he had stretched himself on the sofa, he looked at the title-page of the book. It was Gautier's "Émaux et Camées", Charpentier's Japanese-paper edition, with the Jacquemart etching. The binding was of citron-green leather, with a design of gilt trellis-work and dotted pomegranates. It had been given to him by Adrian Singleton. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 156)

This passage seems to be in direct response to the previous scene, in which Dorian confidently embraces art in order to escape from the external concerns imposed by society.

Here, however, the oppression Dorian feels is deeply internalized. In a sense, Wilde challenges Gautier's concept of "*la consolation des arts"*[39] by creating a situation in which the subject-object relationship is explored through the breakdown of inner concertation rather than distraction from the outside. The tension of the scene is rendered clear through Dorian Gray's yearning to be carried away from his reality by engaging with an aesthetically intriguing book. Wilde highlights Dorian Gray's forceful attempts[40] to pay attention to the grand Mediterranean romances in Gautier's poems, but in the end, the book fails to engage Dorian fully: "But after a time the book fell from his hand. He grew nervous, and a horrible fit of terror came over him" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 158). In other words, the book conclusively rejects an easy pleasure and instead forces him to remember the murder of Basil Hallward. To understand this, we need to take a closer look at the book itself.

The aesthetic conditions described in this passage are complex and layered. The mention of green leather and floral ornamentation in tandem with "Japanese paper" is a source of tension similar to Dorian Gray's inner turmoil that results in his inability to read at peace. Thomson notes that the rise of interest in Japanese motifs and *Japonisme* in general in the second half of the nineteenth century was a reaction to the perceived sterility and *parochialism* of western aesthetic design[41] (10-11). It is not surprising that Japanese graphic art, with its artificial and *exotic* look, appealed the most to artists representing the avant-garde movements in Britain, namely the Pre-Raphaelites and later, the British Arts and Crafts Movement. The influence of this trend is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is also noted. For

[39] The phrase that directly translates into "the consolation of the arts" signifies the essential function of the art as a respite and protection from the distraction of life (Eels, 2016).

[40] "He sighed and took up the volume again, and tried to forget" (158).

[41] The influence of international exhibitions between the 1870s and 1890s in Britain and Europe at a time such as this allowed artists to experiment with the mixing of non-western arts with European conventions to achieve new and exciting forms. Japanese art, in particular, became an impetus for moving away from Realism in visual arts through methods such as asymmetry, flat colours, and rejection of the central perspective (Thomson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920*).

example, Mighal identifies several instances of the *Japanese effect* in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, most prominently in the interior décor of the painter Basil Hallward's art studio (232). Mostly importantly, discussion of Japanese art also comes up quite frequently in Wilde's own critical work. In "The Decay of Lying", Wilde argues that the *Japanese effect* is best observed in one's own country rather than in Japan, because the stylistic methods used by Japanese artists are starkly different from how Japanese people and culture actually appear (*Intentions,* 55-56). In other words, rather than being referential of a specific time and place, the artificial and exaggerated nature of the *Japanese effect* was seen by the artists and critics as an imaginative method to represent the own points of view. This maxim provides a big incentive for the Decadent movement, which favours cultural forms over natural forms. In the Gautier volume, we can see an intentional juxtaposition not only between cultural and artificial elements evoked by *Japanese* paper and European leather, but also between national motifs such as gilt trellises and Oriental motifs such as dotted pomegranate designs. Moreover, the colour palette used for the binding also adds a palpable immediacy to the aesthetic crisis. In general, the citron-green leather binding, with its evocation of tropical, warmer climates, seems to have been a rare trend in Britain. Furthermore, the use of Gautier's couplets in the original French in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* seems to suggest that the publishers wanted to make the allusions more explicit for the French audiences.

The curious shade of yellow-green can also be viewed as the continuation of Wilde's Decadent inspiration, which suggests yellow and green are the colours of "decay and bruising" (Burdett, "Aestheticism and Decadence"). However, it should also be noted that, despite the clear allusions to *Frenchness* and the French art movements, Wilde, again, seems to be reluctant to point to any specific tradition but instead aims to offer a personal commentary about culture by offering the following explanation to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*:

> Finally, let me say this – the aesthetic movement produced certain colours, subtle in their loveliness and fascinating in their almost mystical tone. They were, and are, our reaction against the crude primaries of a doubtless more respectable but certainly less cultivated age. My story is an essay on decorative art. It reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism. (*The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde,* 436)

The avant-garde inclination Wilde demonstrates aligns strongly with the critical work developed by the members of the British Arts and Crafts movement, specifically William Morris and T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. Wilde makes many references to the works of both artists when discussing book covers in his essays and letters. Considering this, it is important to locate another source of inspiration for the green cover.

In terms of the design aesthetics, the closest analogy to Wilde's description is among the works of T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. Published in 1865, Swinburne's poetic drama *Atalanta in Calydon: A Tragedy (*1865) was bound in green leather with floral and pointillist ornamentation (Figure 11). Thomson also notes that, in an exchange with a fellow designer Herbert Horne, Cobden-Sanderson stressed the "allusive symbolism" of this cover, explaining its colour and decorations, such as flowers and seeds, as a sign for *the passion for life* and youth (238-9).

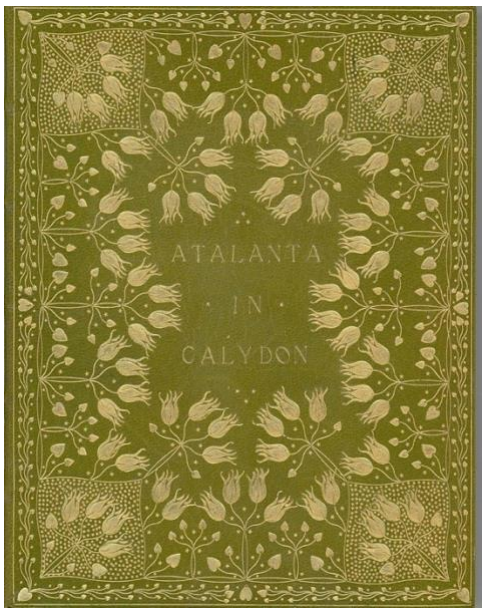

Figure 11: "Atalanta in Calydon: A Tragedy" by Algernon Charles Swinburne. (The British Library). Designed by T.J Cobden-Sanderson. 1865.

In this sample, Cobden-Sanderson achieved an impressively strong visual composition by combining material and style in the service of an expressive design that is *purely ornamental.* This

approach seems to be firmly rooted in his belief in the unity between beauty and "the genius" of the book:

> No one can produce a right design for a book who knows nothing about the book. The book must itself, in some sort of cooperation with the designer, dictate its own decoration ("Cobden-Sanderson's 1893 interview for *the Studio*"; qtd. in Thomson, "Aesthetic Issues in Book Cover Design 1880-1910," 238).

Wilde's position on this matter is more ambivalent. Despite approving of Cobden-Sanderson's methods, he ultimately disagreed with him conceptually on the expressive function of the cover, noting the following: "The beauty of bookbinding is abstract decorative beauty. It is not, in the first instance, a mode of expression for a man's soul" ("The Beauties of Bookbinding", *The Essays of Oscar Wilde*, 282). In his later commentary, however, we can see a change in Wilde's position about the art of bookbinding. In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde warned his reader about the dangers of *reading* art which is simultaneously surface and symbol (4). The liminality of the book cover, in this sense, as it blurs the lines between the normalcy of *Naturalism* and the avant-garde resistance of the *Aesthetic* and *Decadent* movements, allowed Wilde to use it as a symbol to comment on the culture writ large. The same way that it fails Dorian, art cannot act as a distraction from life because its purpose is not to aestheticize life, but to exist for its own sake. In so arguing, Wilde masterfully shifted the discourse from object back to subject by proclaiming that "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 4). The intention behind decoration, thus, projects itself onto the subject who reads and decodes it according to his personal taste.

This concept is exemplified in the way Wilde employs the Gautier volume. Responding to a review in *Scots Observer* (1890), Wilde famously joked about "some

ghostly publisher" gifting a copy of *Dorian Gray* to Goethe "in the Elysian fields" alongside a Gautier volume. While Wilde did not elaborate on the ideal cover for his own book, he suggests that the Gautier book would be best fitted with "powered gilt asphodels" (*Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde,* 84). This description aligns directly with the book he puts in Dorian Gray's hand in the passage mentioned above. The symbolic association between "gilt asphodels" and "gilt trellis-work", the allusions to "Elysian fields" (also called "fields of asphodel") and to pomegranates — the symbol of Hades – all emphasize the Decadent legacy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where the book is used both as a shield and a weapon.

The mention of Goethe by name is also significant, because the ending of Wilde's novel that culminates with Dorian's death at his own hands when he attempts to destroy his portrait once and for all resonates strongly with Goethe's impactful depiction of Werther's suicide. In this sense, similar to Goethe's lasting legacy in developing a literary expression for the Romantic ideal of individuality, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remains relevant for its subversive cultural commentary. Setting scenes of murder, betrayal and ceaseless *ennui* in the private, peaceful quarters of Dorian Gray's house is one example of this. However, Wilde is most meticulous when he recounts socially upstanding activities such as the bourgeois habit of collecting decorative household objects, which the 1880 Cassell's household guide defined as *the sign of prosperity, wealth and repose* (Lipscomb, 2:25), as a way to characterize Dorian's moral corruption. Indeed, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the motif of the poisonous book itself became a prophetic declaration for the Decadent age when the Victorians discovered that the objects they were collected for their Aesthetic value and beauty were actually poisoning them. Here, of course, it is apt to mention the wide use of a vibrant green colour (Scheele's Green) in parlours for wallpapers and other objects of interest that contained high concentrations of arsenic. Similarly, Umberto Eco's use of the same motif of the poisoned book for his 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose* shows

that the best way to challenge the reader is to combine a weapon and a book. As an effective plot device, this still requires a fair degree of suspension of disbelief who inherently remains unsuspecting of the book compared to other objects.

In terms of book covers, Wilde's exploration of the new forms of reading in direct association with aesthetic covers became even more important in the twentieth century. On the one hand, the development of new graphic art disciplines and the Modernist movement pushed the limits of the book cover and its cultural role to a new level. On the other hand, the expansion of reading as the result of socio-political changes made it necessary for the book form to adapt to the needs of a visually aware reader. The next chapter explores the artistic transformation of the book cover in the twentieth century from the perspective of authors, readers, publishers and, for the first time, the artists designing book covers.

Project 3: The Modern Book Cover

Ellen Mazur Thomson argues that the main success of the Aesthetic and British Arts and Crafts movements was their discursive legacy in establishing a social paradigm through which the impacts of industrialization and mass consumption could be discussed (*The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920*, 32-3). However, by the early years of the twentieth century, the conversation around arts and crafts began to shift away from the social and aesthetic avant-gardism of these movements and towards a new artistic doctrine. This shift was inspired by the works of the late-century Decadent critics advocating for "art for art's sake". Particularly in Britain, the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist exhibitions of the 1910s played a significant role in generating a desire among the artists and thinkers of this period to react to the shifting aesthetic trends.

The push for the *new*, in turn, necessitated a reconsideration of the established roles of art in society. For example, Roger Fry argued that the interpretation of art and aesthetics as a mode of morality advanced by Ruskin and others had created a precedent for the public to associate good art only with the Realist representation of nature (*Vision and Design*, 25). By asserting that "ordinary people have almost no idea of what things really look like", Ruskin meant to critique the dogmatic naturalism of art and the public reaction to non-Realist art categorically as "untruth" (ibid.). Fry's suggestion was to rectify this truism by embracing the post-Impressionist approach and returning art to the realm of emotion (27). These are significant arguments against the social normalization that the arts and crafts had begun to undergo in the nineteenth century. As the moralizing ideas about the art still prevailed in this period, any attempts to conceptualize art in the early Modernist period inevitably reignited debate about "good art." Rainer argues that this concept is reflected in the Modernist discourse as a response to the mass or popular culture that arose as the result of industrialization, which was seen by the proponents of the Modernist art as "encroaching,

inauthentic, formless and feminine" (*Institutions of Modernism,* 2). Accordingly, the description of "high art" as non-traditional, authentic, and autonomous was meant to establish the new movement as the opposite of mass culture.

Within art circles, it was agreed that the difference between the public and the artist compelled such a division to protect art from commodification and commercialization. When reviewing his work, for instance, it becomes apparent that Fry himself considers the masses to be utterly untrained to use their "gift of sight" to perceive the varied forms and colours the artists of the twentieth century were creating. Therefore, the appreciation of Modern art was either lost to the *man of the street,* or the interest in art was expressed only for the purposes of collecting "curio's" (*Vision & Design,* 49). The suggested division here is between an object which was produced for consumption, and art, which heavily relied on imagination. From the social angle, modern art was perceived as a form of defence against the imposing urban life which dominated both space and time with heavy restrictions. In this regard, the separation of artists from the masses was important in establishing artistic bohemias such as Soho, Chelsea and Bloomsbury, the latter of which Fry himself was a member. Cooper argues that these "social and artistic laboratories" where the cultural elite specialised in different art forms and worked in isolation from everyday life were the basis for the market economy which became an important part of the Modernist project (*Modernism and the Culture of Market Society,* 4-6). This was evident in the development of art criticism in the twentieth century as well, which sought to highlight the "experimental and innovative" as a form of imaginative and spiritual triumph (Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society,* 30). Fry's work, in this regard, is particularly significant. He posited the artist at the heart of progress and mastery, and by so doing, challenged socially defined aesthetic beauty with artistic beauty and "disinterested feelings" (*Vision & Design,* 45). By further deduction it becomes clear that by rejecting the aesthetic merit, artists and critics aimed to protect the Modern art from

commercial and consumerist connotations while identifying the artist as the prophet of the new age. However, as both Rainer and Cooper suggest, the divide between the capitalist market and Modern art was less clear in practice. The graphic arts were one of the few areas where the divide between high and low; consumerist and artistic; mass and elite was intentionally blurred.

Iskin's 2014 study of urban posters offers a good example to assess the growing role of the graphic art and design as a Modern art form. She notes that, in the early twentieth century, the poster was widely considered to be a low art form not only because of its connection with the Naturalists, who largely depicted the lives of the working class and *ordinary* citizens, but also because of its hybrid art form that combined icon and word for the purposes of consumption (*The Poster. Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s*, 50). Hidden in this critique is the emphasized role of posters as a mass visual medium that employed urban spaces as a site for open display (193). Furthermore, due to their simple graphic style that combined the flat surfaces of Japanese design with stylized Aestheticist motifs, posters were seldom considered as an art form (*The Poster. Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s*, 63). Despite this, the pronounced majority of poster makers were mainly trained artists who saw a bigger opportunity for work in the field of commercial art than in traditional fine arts. Here, we see the subversive nature of the graphic arts that aimed to transgress the delineation of styles and audiences enforced by the early Modernist movement. Indeed, according to Rainer, the Modernist avant-garde emerged at a time when the artists cut off from the patronage system began to react to the "institutionalization of high art" by assuming the overlooked forms of popular culture (*Institutions of Modernism,* 2-3). The outcome of this was both artistically and socially significant. Cooper notes that innovation in the arts was driven by the Modern artists who dabbled in both high and mass art forms, which allowed them to develop a sense for the capitalist market while working

constantly to challenge the established norms and concepts of commercial art (*Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*, 29). In this regard, one of the main developments of poster art was achieved by the Modernists through their improvement of its visual narrative. While the innovation of this method is remarkable, this new mode of visual communication was not quick to gain a widespread approval. One of the most vocal critics of poster art in Britain, Charles Hiatt, for example, explained his dislike of posters by highlighting their busy and confusing visual arrangements that "dazzled the tired eyes of the traveller" (qtd. in Iskin, *The Poster. Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s*, 176). However, at the turn of the new century, this problem was actively resolved by the artists involved in poster art in Britain who improved the visibility of the composition by producing higher quality images and limiting the textual components to achieve more persuasive "fast impressions in the minds of the passing viewers" (Iskin, *The Poster. Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s-1900s*, 179). The emphasis on visibility and legibility of the compositions and designs is an important factor to keep in mind when we consider how the dynamics of the capitalist market which ruled the graphic art was being negotiated with the demands of the art imposed by the Modernist elite.

While the first half of the twentieth century is considered to be a period of great aesthetic proliferation of the book cover art, a similar collaborative and inimical dynamic between the commercial and artistic forces, mass and elite audiences could be observed in the form of the book as well. The following chapter explores the notion of "the artistic cover" in the published inventory of Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press. My main interest in this chapter is the process of production and reception of the book cover designs created by fellow Bloomsbury artists and Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell for Virginia Woolf's books. The analysis here will focus on the domestic mode of production of the Hogarth Press which embodied cultural values of both the Modernist movement and the private press movement of

the previous century. The chapter will also discuss the unique approach to the book cover taken by the Hogarth Press, the lacklustre reception of Bell's covers and Woolf's refusal to change the covers in response to this pushback. The relationship between Bell's paintings and Impressionist art and samples of her graphic design will also be discussed. In this regard, I will attempt to reflect on Bell's covers as hybrid aesthetic forms and discuss them both in terms of their artistic merit and cultural legacy in affording Modern book covers greater visibility and prominence.

Chapter 1: Designers, Publishers and Critics: The Case of Hogarth Press

The unique mix of its public and private functions marks the book cover as one of the most distinct mass art forms. As discussed in previous chapters, the reason for this stems from the established perceptions about the book as a *sacred* object. Books have been the main tool of self-improvement and education since the rise of Humanism and later the Enlightenment (Powers, *Front Cover*, 6). The uneasy balance between the book as a consumer object and a symbol of value, knowledge and meaning has been transferred to the book cover as well. Because of its protective and aesthetic functions, which have been discussed extensively in this thesis, the developments of the book cover were often inspired by the book in terms of its material and textual basis. The liminal existence of the cover results not only from the tension between its ideological and material history, but also from its refusal to be recognized as a stable form until the twentieth century. Under the influence of the industrial and capitalist economy, the discourse around the book cover was developed with an expectation that the cover would remain superficially disconnected from all commercial operations while, at the same time, embodying the book and representing its *truth* for the masses.

The modernization and specialization of the book cover took place both technologically and artistically. Not only did the book cover of the twentieth century look different, but it was also produced differently, the result of which was the separation of the craft of printing from the art of the cover. Furthermore, publishers' growing interest in the book cover as a mass communication medium compelled them to utilize technical innovations with the help of trained artists. Grouped as book designers, these artists played a significant role of mediation between the publisher and the public. One of the best examples of the close relationship between publishers and designers is the example of the Hogarth Press, which was established by Virginia and Leonard Woolf in 1917.

From the press's conception, the Woolfs envisioned it as a private printing venture focused primarily on publishing books written by Virginia Woolf and a few other select members of the Bloomsbury Group. During its twenty-nine years of activity, the Hogarth Press quickly became a centre player in Modernist book culture. Laura Marcus argues that one of the main facts about the Hogarth Press, which set it apart from other independent publishers, was the great diversity of its published catalogue, which ranged from works of poetry, fiction, essays, and literary and art criticism to psychoanalysis ("Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press," 128). In this sense, the Hogarth Press is also important in understanding the development of the Modernist canon both in literature and the arts.

Furthermore, the Hogarth model also offers an interesting contrast with William Morris 'Kelmscott Press, which is often considered to be the progenitor of the independent press movement in nineteenth-century Britain. Morris defined his purpose in founding the Kelmscott Press like this:

> I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty, while at the same time they should not dazzle the eye, or trouble the intellect of the reader by eccentricity of form in the letters. (*The Ideal Book: An Address*, 74)

What is emphasized by Morris here is the material excellence of the book, which, it should be noted, did not excite the same passion in the Woolfs. One of the main pieces of evidence for this is the medium through which William Morris and the Woolfs explained their intentions for their publishing presses. The essay where Morris outlined his expectations for the press also acts as a professional manifesto wherein he publicly announces his aim of reviving the fifteenth century medieval book tradition. Conversely, a big majority of the background details about the founding of the Hogarth Press comes from the Woolf's personal letters and journal entries, where they discuss the small investments and modest goals they

envision for their homebound press (Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press*,"*124). This suggests that, while the Woolfs took their work seriously, their intention was less about engaging in a critical discourse and more about creating a creative outlet for the likeminded artists and critics who shared their beliefs. The Hogarth Press was a professional opportunity for Virginia Woolf to provide an important function for all Bloomsbury Group members, as she joyfully recorded in one of her letters: "We are thinking of starting a printing press, for all our friends 'stories" (qtd. in Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press*,"*125). For Leonard Woolf, however, the Hogarth Press carried a more personal significance. Southworth notes that in its earliest days, Hogarth was essentially meant to be a hobby for Virginia Woolf to practice the craft of printing as a distraction from her failing health and the stress associated with her writing ("The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts*,"* 149). This leads us to deduce that, Leonard Woolf also saw the Hogarth Press as a form of a artistic expression, a professional hobby even, that could engage Virginia Woolf and alleviate some of the private concerns that occupied her.

Despite the personal nature of its production facility, this was not to say that the Hogarth Press considered the book as an aesthetically insignificant object. It is often suggested that the Hogarth Press was inspired by Roger Fry's Omega Workshop which was launched only 4 years earlier, in 1913. The stylistic traditions of the Hogarth Press were fundamentally impacted by Fry's works in several ways. Southworth argues that the *feminine* domesticity the Hogarth Press was very similar in style to the production facilities of the Omega Workshops which combined "feminine quality with *masculine* professionalism" ("The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 150). The gendered divide in this statement is notable. The role of women in publishing remained complicated during the British Arts and Crafts Movement. The main reasons for this were not only the labour-intensive production conditions that resulted from the rejection of printing technology, but also the inherited Pre-

Raphaelite view which perceived the feminine subject essentially as a passive muse (Amos, "Meaning and 'Material Reality': Jane Morris 'Keepsake Books," 116). This paradigm was clearly thwarted in the Hogarth household, so much so that, as has been anecdotally recounted, Virginia Woolf sewed the pages and the binding of the first thirty-two-page Hogarth book in her dining room in Richmond (Southworth, "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 149). This cozy scene of Virginia Woolf working busily on the early Hogarth books to be delivered to the bookseller is quite informative in terms of locating the aesthetic concerns of the earlier works put out by Hogarth Press.

Similarly, the integration of the printing activity into the Hogarth House where the Woolfs lived is a significant detail. As discussed in previous chapters, the Victorian household was conceptualized as a tightly controlled and aesthetically defined feminine sphere in which women were expected to engage in leisurely activities that would inspire strong moral education and communal bonding. In this respect it is important to note that the physical labour that the Woolfs, particularly Virginia Woolf, performed in this domestic realm by producing books by "young, unknown writers" (Southworth, "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 145), including those by feminist critics such as Willa Muir and Margaret Llewelyn Davies (Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press," 128), embodies the Modernist reaction against Victorian society. The unique nature of the arrangement of the Hogarth Press did not secure the Woolfs from what Virginia Woolf called "stinging" criticism (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 16). While the Woolfs admitted to the "clumsy" and "crafty" looks which frustrated them by spoiling the illustrations and binding, the gender component in this case should be highlighted in relation to capitalist economy (Isaac, *Virginia Woolf, the Uncommon Bookbinder*, 5). This provides an important context for the uneasy relationship between the Woolfs and the critics that existed from its early days on the aesthetic preferences of the Hogarth Press, and the Bloomsbury Group in general.

Cooper writes that, despite their traditionalist and historical basis, many of the Modernist artistic circles, starting with the British Arts and Crafts Movement, relied on the undeniable power and authority of the art of the past which had been pushed aside by industrial uniformity (*Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*, 13). However, as the patron-based traditional arts came to an end, with the new urban revolution, the value of the former systems was incorporated directly into the capitalist project. Cooper sees Modern capitalism as the perpetuation of these conservative values whereby traditional norms are preserved and recreated (15). In other words, patriarchal or categorical superiority was not a capitalist invention, but instead was incorporated into the capitalist project as viable commercial interventions. The project of the Hogarth Press becomes clearer if we recognize that the production of the select, well-defined books symbolically differentiated the works of the Bloomsbury intellectuals from the cheap, ineffective mass art and literature that garnered popular status. Considered in this light, the visual expression of the books plays an important role in solidifying this conservatism which, as Cooper postulates, was aimed not to gatekeep but simply to "preserve" (*Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*, 26). Therefore, the the visual form of the Hogarth books was tasked with an important mission to reflect and convey this Bloomsbury ideal.

The Woolfs' disregard for typographical experimentations and more significantly, their rejection of "de-luxe" editions, is also significant (Beechey, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 15). Indeed, it is apt to suggest that, while being a deliberate decision by the Woolfs, the reason for this was also the production limitations that the Hogarth Press was experiencing. Indeed, it is well documented how the Woolfs had to turn down publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses* due to its voluminous size (Zakaria, "A Publisher of One's Own"). Consideration of the aesthetic design of their books was performed with similar care. As was already mentioned, Virginia Woolf was not a

trained binder and obtained her knowledge in bookbinding from the graphic design books that she avidly read (Southworth, "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 146). In this sense, the personal and artistic inspiration behind the Hogarth Press was an inseparable part of the visual from that came to be associated with the Hogarth catalogue.

Southworth also notes that one of the primary reasons for Leonard Woolf in founding of Hogarth Press was to celebrate the "immaterial inside" of the book ("The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 145). However, this does not mean that consideration of the cover was completely ignored by the Woolfs. Indeed, as both Beechey and Southworth note, the Woolfs wanted their books to "look nice" with a caveat that the "lure" of the cover would remain under the control of the text (*The Bloomsbury Artists*, 15; "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 145-146). Southworth notes that, one of the main questions that occupied Virginia Woolf was "How far the decoration of a binding should be influenced by the contents of a book?" which she borrowed from Douglas Cockerell's binding manual "Bookbinding and the Care of Books: A Textbook for Bookbinders and Librarians (1901)". Cockerell was a renowned binder associated with T. J. Cobden-Sanderson's Doves Bindery, and because of this, it is assumed that Woolf's inspiration about achieving "beauty" was directly inspired by the British Arts and Craft's ideas [42]. Southworth concludes that the early paper bindings was intended for this purpose; in other words, to allow Virginia Woolf experiment with a more pliable material that would not strain the limitations of Woolf's "creative", but "not particularly gifted" binding skills ("Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 147). The answer to the question above, however, remains unclear. While the conclusion arrived by some critics who note the prevalence of simple bindings in the Woolfs'

[42] Indeed, in "Bookbinding and the Care of Books", Cockerell urges the binder-craftsmen to strive for "a certain appropriateness" when "making the cover beautiful", that will allow for the personal creative range of the binder to shine though (31).

personal library (currently held at Washington State University) as the evidence of Woolf's preference for more "practical rather than purely aesthetic" style (ibid.), Isaac recalls a letter Virginia Woolf penned to Violet Dickinson in 1902 where she mentions receiving certain beautifully bound books that "delighted [her] soul" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 1*,57; qtd. in Isaac, 7). When considered in this light, I surmise that, the early simpler designs by the Hogarth Press were probably more directly inspired by Virginia Woolf's skill set as an amateur bookbinder rather than her personal taste in bindings.

Either through the publisher brand or artistic approach, the goal for the Hogarth Press seems to have been to create unique designs that would help their books to stand out from other titles in the book market. It can be seen that putting this idea into practice was more complicated than simply conceptualizing these approaches. For instance, Roger Fry argued that the foremost goal for a book designer was to bring together the "essence" of the book with its appearance (qtd. in Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press," 126). Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, drew from personal experience as a reader and collector to pin down what made the book special. Issac offers an observation pointing towards Woolf's admiration for books as objects, which he notes that Woolf personally configured to preserve a strong visual diversity in her personal library (*Virginia Woolf, the Uncommon Bookbinder*, 7). In addition to this, Isaac also notes that Woolf's library was not a hidden, protected place with doors or glass frames. In fact, it was left accessible and open, welcoming her observation and random interaction with books as they called on her (8). From this, we can surmise that Woolf herself did not shy away from pushing the expected limits on material and aesthetic form when it came to book design. For example, in order to create a unique visual look, Woolf tried to establish a design pattern for the Hogarth books by experimenting with wallpapers for the endpapers and covers (Isaac, *Virginia Woolf, the Uncommon Bookbinder*, 14). Indeed, even before Woolf's artistic treatment, the Hogarth catalogue was known for the

beauty of the end pages and covers which would be handpicked by Woolf herself from various heavy paper materials and colourful pattern wallpaper that was available to the public (*Virginia Woolf, the Uncommon Bookbinder*, 15). As the ultimate evidence, when considered in light of Woolf's admiration for her art and style, it can be argued that the involvement of Vanessa Bell in the design process of the Hogarth books from 1918 onwards shows Woolf's determination to give their books the best chance of success in their journey to readers.

Before analysing the cover conventions of the Hogarth Press created by Vanessa Bell, it is important to establish the artistic basis of the Bloomsbury Group which informs their cover art as well. Johnstone notes that, while the broad conceptual theory of the Bloomsbury arts was informed by G.E. Moore's ideas on moral or "good" beauty, Fry's works on aesthetics and design, which emphasized the importance of self and senses, particularly sight, is what inspired the works of the Bloomsbury group (*The Bloomsbury Group*, 46-51). It was also Fry's admiration for post-Impressionist art that introduced the Group to Modern and abstract art. Rejecting the moral judgement of art, Fry strongly believed in the lasting impression of art over the subject which led to imaginative exaltation (*The Bloomsbury Group*, 45). The role of the artist, in this regard, was critical in capturing the "reality" that lay behind the art (37). It can be argued that the Modernism of the Bloomsbury Group resembles the avant-gardism of both the British Arts and Crafts movement and the Aesthetic movement not only in its belief in "art for art's sake", but also in its elitist conceptualization of art as an exclusive realm belonging to the artist. Marcus explains this by noting the introduction of the Post-Impressionist and Italian Futurist works in Britain, where the aesthetic pleasure of new Modernist art forms was seen as a province of a "chosen few" who engaged in aesthetic criticism ("Bloomsbury Aesthetics," 169). While in conflict with mass book production, aesthetic selectiveness was an essential Modernist element of the burgeoning graphic arts as well. The success of this model was noted by Leonard Woolf, as well, who acknowledged the

role of the aesthetic definition of the covers in the early success of the Hogarth books and went as far as claiming that quite a few graphic styles that dominated the market at the time were originally conceived by the Woolfs for the Hogarth Press (Beechey, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 15). The aesthetic supremacy and inspiration of the Hogarth productions came under a closer scrutiny once again when Vanessa Bell began to collaborate with Virginia Woolf for her books. The following paragraphs will discuss the impact, reception, and legacy of "the sisters' arts"[43] in close detail.

While being one of the most famous artists to have done so, Bell was not the only Bloomsbury member to create book covers for the Woolfs. However, what sets Bell apart from the others is a certain "of the period (twentieth century)" look that, according to art critic Benjamin Harvey, marks one of the early signs of the "modern aesthetic" being adopted for book covers ("Lightness Visible: An Appreciation of Bloomsbury's Books and Blocks," 89, qtd. in Southworth, "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 154). Despite this, her work as a book cover designer is seldom acknowledged as a part of her artistic legacy. Southworth notes that Hogarth owes its "house style" to Bell, who created the iconic and recognizable visual renditions of her sister Virginia Woolf's books that helped the Hogarth books to stand apart from other publications. The collaboration between the two sisters was, notably, both domestic and informal, having started with Woolf's request to have Bell's "advice about these covers" ("The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 154), which marked the beginning of an almost lifelong collaboration between the sisters as professional

[43] Scholar Diana Gillespie coins this term in reference to the close collaboration between Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. As she notes, here Gillespie intentionally modifies the classical association between the visual and verbal arts as "sister" practices, however, this is not the only motivation behind the term. The adaption of the "sister arts" / "sisters' arts" to the works of Woolf and Bell signifies the importance Gillespie assigns to individual artistic practices (the literary and visual arts, respectively) each sister engaged in, as well as the shared and "common" nature of their artistic inspiration which Woolf herself identified as "a set of experiences, related values, and a desire to embody their perceptions in appropriate artistic forms" (*The Sisters' Art*, 4). In other words, "sister's art" as a concept aims to show how integrally related the works of Woolf and Bell are both in conception and impact.

artists, during which Bell produced cover designs for almost the entirety of Virginia Woolf's oeuvre with the Hogarth Press, even posthumously[44] (Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 116).

Bell's artistic style is often described in terms of its intensity of line and colour. Gillespie also observes a clear inclination for still-life arrangements in Bell's canvas work (*The Sisters' Arts*, 252). In contrast, Bell's designs for book covers are less defined in terms of their stylistic modes. The relative simplicity of the designs has been discussed in different ways, but mostly to highlight the lack of care or interest from Bell in this field. Gillespie challenges this idea by referencing the sketches that survived as the evidence of the intensive drafting Bell had done for each design before deciding on the final cover (*The Sisters' Arts*, 253). It should also be noted that the design process for the Hogarth books was highly collaborative. Among the recorded correspondence between Bell and both Virginia and Leonard Woolf, there are many instances when the Woolfs drew Bell's attention to certain covers or provided brief feedback about the completed design. Leonard Woolf's initial commentary on Bell's cover for *Jacob's Room* is one of these instances:

> The lettering on the Jacob's Room jacket isn't plain enough and the effect is rather too dazzling. Could you make the "r" of room into a Capital?
>
> Could the lettering be picked out in some colour which would make it bolder? (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II:1912-1922*, 543).

While Leonard Woolf's notes are understandable in the context of the publishing house, Gillespie observes an interesting contrast in Virginia Woolf's attitude towards the covers. On the one hand, she was clearly attentive to the impression of the book cover and its role in the "overall impact of the book" (*The Sisters' Arts*, 253). Her notes to Bell, in which

[44] Gillespie notes that the only example of a Woolf novels featuring a cover not designed by Bell is *Orlando* (1928).

she comments on both the "loveliness" and "practicality" of Bell's designs, show that she was alert to both the aesthetic and functional aspects of the book cover (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. IV:1929-1931*, 251). On the other hand, Gillespie notes Woolf's hesitance to pass all comments along to her sister for fear that these notes might "spoil the design" (*The Sisters' Arts*, 254). Despite these concerns, it seems that Bell was already developing an integral visual style for the Hogarth Press books. Common in her still-life work as well, the floral compositions play a significant role in combining the works of the two sisters. In many ways, Bell's design formula for book covers was relatively simple. Almost all of Bell's covers for Virginia Woolf were created with the help of a limited, two-tone colour palette (Hermione Lee; qtd. in Southworth, "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts," 154), bold lettering, and abstract object-imagery (Beechey, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 16-17). A motif that stands out is the domestic, feminine but most importantly, modern nature of the objects such as flowers, curtains, circles, and abstract shapes that Bell chose to represent the books she was working on (ibid.).

It is both important and interesting to see how the floral symbolism is integral to both Virginia Woolf's and Vanessa Bell's art. Indeed, the use of flowers in Woolf's work is widely documented. Particularly, Elisa Kay Sparks' 2011 study meticulously catalogues every flower reference in Woolf's novels, references that occur in a variety of contexts with symbolic weight, such as such as red roses for romance, asphodels to connote death, and lilies to symbolize innocence ("Everything Tended to Set Itself in a Garden," 45). Most importantly, Woolf's use of flowers allows her female characters to remember and reminisce (by sensory engagement with flowers and recalling of memory), perform their female identity (by accepting flowers from their suitors) and affirm their class belonging (by showing interest in certain kinds of flowers only) (Ziegler; qtd. in Sparks, "Everything Tended to Set Itself in a Garden," 43). Furthermore, Woolf also employs flowers as a means to recontextualize

masculinity. Sparks argues that the reference to Barnard's vision of Percival "covered over with lilies" (265) in *The Waves* does not simply telegraph Percival's impending death at a young age, but also Barnard's homoerotic affection for him ("Everything Tended to Set Itself in a Garden," 44). While not as complex as Woolf's iconic language, for Bell, flowers were one of the main visual symbols she used to explore the world of solid objects through form and line (Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 228). Interestingly, Bell's use of flowers in graphic design is more critically analyzed than her still-life portraits. Indeed, one of the early uses of Bell's flower motifs, which appeared for the first of Woolf's books published through the Hogarth Press in 1922: *Jacob's Room* (Figure 12).

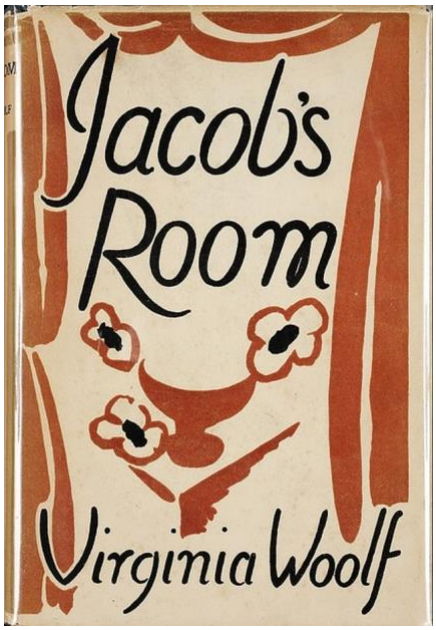

Figure 12: "Jacob's Room" by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press). Cover art by Vanessa Bell. 1922.

Gillespie identifies the particular flower on the cover of "Jacob's Room" as Iceland poppies, which itself is referential of Bell's painting of by the same name, albeit in singular ("Iceland Poppy") (255). The recurrence of the same floral motif and stylistic connection between both paintings and graphic designs by Bell emphasizes the shared aesthetic language that both Woolf and Bell shared. In the case of *Jacob's Room*, it can be argued that the visual composition of the cover is directly referential of Woolf's writing. The frame of the cover design is created by the abstract formulation of curtains that imply the existence of a hidden window[45] behind, as well as the central flower detail which is directly taken from the text of the book as well, albeit with slight modifications. Overall, Gillespie summarizes Bell's adjustments of the textual formulation like this: "Although the table in Jacob's room is round

[45] There are in total 93 references to windows, and specifically to characters standing by the windows in *Jacob's Room.*

and the flowers are in a jar, the cover design still suggests Woolf's description" (*The Sisters' Arts,* 255). A striking element of this design is its stripped-down colour palette dominated with black type against a white and crimson background illustration. Gillespie observes that Bell relied on her primary colour palette not only for cover designs she produced, but also for her paintings (ibid.). In this sense, Bell's use of the colour black in particular becomes a versatile connecting motif as the flat contours of her brushwork create a vivid Impressionist composition reminiscent of Japanese graphic art (*The Sisters 'Arts,* 257). Black also symbolized both Woolf's and Bell's fascination with death (ibid.), which when juxtaposed with brighter colours makes an impactful impression on the viewer. Most importantly, Gillespie also argues that Bell's evocative use of colours and flowers defines her impersonal style of depicting abstract ideas such as permanence and femininity (*The Sister' Arts*, 11). Bell's 1908 painting "Iceland Poppies" powerfully embodies this effect. The flow of soft colours, here, is interrupted by the bright red and white flowers that look to be on the verge of withering (Figure 13). The boldness of the red here is as strong as the impact of the daring black in the cover design discussed above. Furthermore, the fragility of the flowers is also in contrast with the solidity of the urn and cup, which themselves clash in terms of the solid, square stand of the urn and the perfect roundness of the glass.

Figure 13: "Iceland Poppies" by Vanessa Bell (1908-9). Vanessa Bell Estate and Henriette Garnett.

We can see that, in transitioning into cover design, Bell employed flat colours and round shapes to create a vibrant effect to show the folds of the curtain, which emphasizes the container of the flowers in the foreground. The continuity here is also interrupted by the

round stand of the jar, contrasted with the sharp, angular edge of the table, creating a wide "V" shape, possibly in reference to Virginia Woolf, that recurs on other covers designed by Bell. The cover also features the amended, capitalized title in Bell's hand lettering, which is curiously off-centre. The effect here is not one that breaks the compositions, but instead, it gives the flat, static, abstract composition a sense of movement and flow. The fragile stems of the flowers Bell painted on canvas in 1908 completely disappears on the cover of "Jacob's Room" in 1922, where the flattened flowers are suspended in air rather than sitting in the vase. When we consider closely, it can be seen that more than being stylistically unique, it is Bell's peculiar use of the repeated flower motif across different media gives her works a notable depth and referentiality beyond the single composition. Maybe it can even be suggested that one of the reasons why Virginia Woolf showed a great resistance to altering Bell's covers was exactly this close intertextuality and aesthetic references between the latter's paintings, which Woolf admired greatly, and the covers Bell designed for the sister's books.

Bradshaw notes that the production of the cover for *Jacob's Room* was a highly collaborative project, with Bell producing the sketch and Virginia Woolf finishing it with terra-cotta, earthy colouring (*The Bloomsbury Artists,* 16). It is interesting to note that, despite his only feedback being about the typography, Leonard Woolf had subtle reservations about the cover potentially misrepresenting the Hogarth Press as an unprofessional venture (Morley, "The Sisterly Collusions," 2022). The emphasis on the corporate dimension of the cover is important and as the records how, unfortunately, Leonard Woolf's fears were not completely unfounded. The reaction to the book, and its cover, was a big disappointment for the Hogarth Press. Leonard Woolf both reacted to and explained this in his autobiography:

> The reception of *Jacob's Room* was characteristic. It was the first book for which we had a jacket designed by Vanessa. It is, I think, a

> very good jacket and today no bookseller would feel his hackles, or his temperature rise at sight of it. But it did not represent a desirable female or even Jacob or his room, and it was what in 1923 many people would have called reproachfully post-Impressionist. It was almost universally condemned by the booksellers, and several of the buyers laughed at it. (*Downhill All the Way*, 76)

It is notable that, here the reason for the lukewarm reception of the cover is assigned to its artistic style rather than to its misrepresentation of the book. It is clear that both Leonard and Virginia Woolf agreed on the artistic merit of the cover. Particularly, in the midst of all the negative comments, Virginia Woolf was the main supporter of her sister's cover art, and her personal letters and accounts show sincere admiration of and support for Bell's work, which she insistently calls "exquisite" and "lovely" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II:1912-1922*, 543).

A similar pattern of negative reception followed with the release of *The Common Reader* (1925) (Figure 14). In this instance, however, the reviews made no qualms about their intention and identified the book cover as the main shortcoming of the book. For instance, one of the *Common Reader* reviewers in *The Star* aimed the following criticism at Bell's cover:

> What means this flaunting of crude art, this almost reverent attempt to copy the early paintbrush effects of a child? I think it is a curiously accurate reflection on the misguided effort of the author in her criticism of contemporary writers to vindicate crude literary art against the cultivated and polished literary art. (Majumdar & McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, 17)

Overall, despite the disparagement, Gillespie notes that the reviewer's comment shows them establishing a clear link between the book and the cover, albeit one defined here as "misguided and crude" (254). Woolf, too, observed this point in a letter to Bell, where she jokingly suggests that "I try to live up to them by being as revolutionary and nonsensical" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III:1923-1928*, 182). This cover, similar to that for *Jacob's Room*, was created with a simple, two-colour abstract drawing of a green flower vase with two flowers and an uncapitalized title. From the descriptions above, it is clear that many critics found this particular cover more "decorative" than symbolic. While it did not explore any visual references from the essays featured in this collection, Gillespie notes that it was nevertheless a "strikingly appropriate variation" of the Woolf covers (*The Sisters' Arts*, 254).

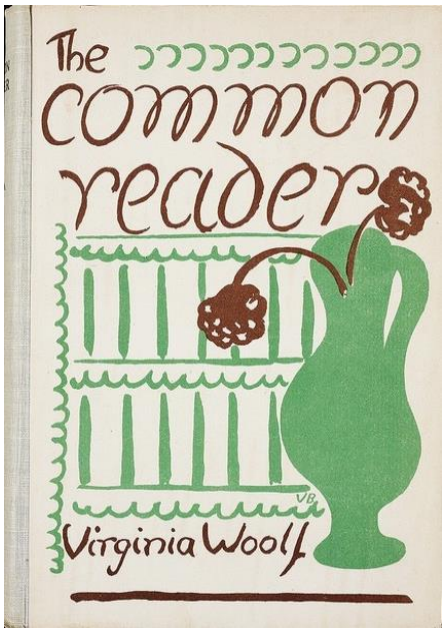

Figure 14: "The Common Reader" by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press). Cover art by Vanessa Bell. 1925.

To further pursue this theme of variation, we can also review the cover for Woolf's pivotal essay *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, which presents a semiotically dense composition (Figure 15). Another one of Bell's two-colour compositions, it features a square clock set on a two-tier stand. This cover also appears to be more elaborately decorated (sewn pearl lining following the arch), which Morley explains as a reference to the theme of feminine freedom addressed in the book ("The Sisterly Collusion," 2022). Interestingly, the simple square clock which is the centrepiece of the composition is not mentioned in the book (ibid.). More broadly, it is suggested that Bell's use of a clock here alludes to Woolf's famous statement that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (*A Room of One's Own*, 4). In other words, the cover enables the coming together of time and

space which transforms this hypothetical space into a real place. Furthermore, the image of the clock carries a symbolical significance as well. As Råback suggests, the creation of "V" between its arms pointing at "2" and "10" creates a triple signature, referring to both Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, as well as to Woolf's love affair with Vita Sackville-West ("Covering for Her Sister," 8). Several historians note that Woolf expressed a great delight in her feedback about the cover (Råback, "Covering for Her Sister," 9). However, her direct comment on the uses and implications of the clock is just as remarkable: "What a stir you'll cause by the hands of the clock at that precise hour! People will say—but there's no room'" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. IV:1929-1931*, 81).

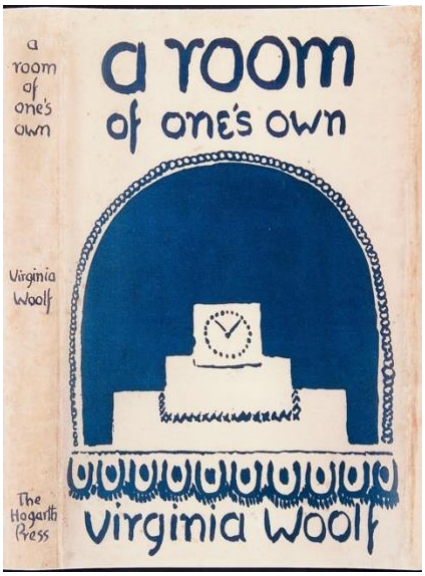

Figure 15: "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press). Cover art by Vanessa Bell. 1929.

From all three examples discussed above, it can be surmised that what excited and pleased Virginia Woolf the most about her sister's covers were personal allusions she could deduce. Instead, a close study of these elements perhaps reveals a social basis for the negative reception. For instance, according to Southworth, criticism aimed at Bell accusing her of "idiosyncrasy, parochialism and commercial unviability" echoed the public perception regarding the Bloomsbury Group in general (156). One the one hand, these concerns were related directly to the Modern art conventions practiced in Bloomsbury art at this period. Accordingly, the lack of human figures on the cover of the *Jacob's Room* led to quite a few accusations of the cover being "reproachfully post-impressionist" (Beechey, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 16). On the other hand, the rejection of Bell's covers by the booksellers who stood in arbitration of the public taste show that the discomfort about the Bloomsbury art was also because of mixing of high art techniques with commercial art forms like graphic design. In

other words, the elitist nature of Modern cultural thinking required that mass and avant-garde forms would remain socially separate and visually distinct. However, the Bell-Woolf collaboration, the exchange between two forms was more a personal preference than a cultural undercurrent. Indeed, the use of private codes and symbols, as well as shared artistic references from Woolf's and Bell's past make it quite difficult at times to decode Bell's works without proper biographical knowledge. For example, Bradshaw notes Woolf's excitement in seeing Bell's cover for *To the Lighthouse* for the first time, complimenting her sister for "her truthful and unique style" (*The Bloomsbury Artists*, 17). Indeed, Morley notes that the symbol of the lighthouse was a common motif between both sisters who associated their mother with the strength and grandness of the monument:

> For the sisters, a book cover wasn't a marketing tool: it was a celebration of joint memories, an acknowledgement of their shared artistic origins, and an embrace of familial collaboration. ("The Sisterly Collusion," 2022)

The emphasis on personal nature of art and reading is a part of Roger Fry's theory of design (*Vision and Design*, 49). Accordingly, he divides the human sight into two main categories: the first of which is practical vision that compels the viewer to seek the "aboutness" of the art and distill its meaning. Fry notes that this is a temporary state of visibility as the moment the meaning is discerned, the object of art goes back to obscurity. The second form is identified as "creative or artistic vision" (51). Because creative vision dwells in the realm of imagination and abstraction, the artist who possesses it does not seek aesthetic value, which is socially negotiated, but seeks instead to go beyond and attain an aesthetic vision:

> In his continual and restless preoccupation with appearance he is capable of looking at objects from which both aesthetic and even curious vision

> may turn instinctively, or which they may never notice, so little prospect of satisfaction do they hold out. But the artist may always find his satisfaction, the material for his picture, in the most unexpected quarters. (*Vision and Design*, 53)

When viewed with Woolf's creative vision, the cover becomes biographical in allowing her experience and memories with Bell to be shared through these compositions. In other words, these covers confirm the Bloomsbury ideal by marking books as uniquely belonging to their creators and the world of art, rather than to a public curious to enter their closed circle. So, while we have the evidence to think that it was originally not intended for this purpose, the *sisters' art* elevated the cover into the realm of avant-garde tradition.

We can see the avant-gardist legacy of Bell's covers when we review them int the context of Modern design as well. In this sense, the coexistence of both mass and exclusive dimensions of Bell's designs needs to be noted. Paul Rand, for example, argues that design is not inherently business-oriented but rather, it represents the "creative impulse of an individual" (*Design, Form and Chaos*, 19). In other words, design is a method which requires a personal, deep and deliberate engagement with form and content from the designer who seeks to achieve a clear communication. Claire Badaracco expands on this idea by locating the book cover between the forces of production and consumption, "belonging at once to the interpretative level of the book and the market forces that led to the production of its meaning as an objective text" ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 40). This widens the functions of the book cover beyond its protective and aesthetic ones but adds a new function of "interpretation" to the mix. In this new paradigm, the designer, who is perceived as the authority over the reading by "visualizing the book's interior", is the chosen middle point between the author and the reader (ibid.). In this case, defined as a representative reading of the "book's interior", the cover is effectively defined as the outside of the book.

It can be argued that the use of "dust jackets" in the context of the Hogarth Press carries a specific connotation which serves as a precursor to the Modern discourse that seeks to establish a hierarchy between the content and form. Indeed, tracking the uses of the terms like "cover" and "dust jacket" by the Woolfs can be very informing. Bradshaw notes that book jackets or dust jackets were not a common tradition in the 1920s, and particularly that the Bell-designed covers were directly worked on the cloth binding rather than on separate paper coverlets (*The Bloomsbury Artists*, 16). Indeed, Morley observes Woolf's first interaction with Bell's cover in 1917, in which the term used by Virginia Woolf is "cover" and not "jacket": "I want your advice about covers" ("The Sisterly Collusion," 2022). On the other hand, in his autobiography, Leonard Woolf in his defence of their cover design repeatedly makes references to the "paper jacket":

> Looking at them today any bookseller would admit that they are extremely well-produced books and that their jackets are admirable. Within ten or twelve years the binding of books in gay, pretty, or beautiful papers over boards was widely adopted for all kinds of books, particularly poetry. (*Downhill All the Way*, 76)

The transition from "covers" to "dust jackets" also marks the separation of Virginia Woolf, as a binder and author, from the design of cover which was mastered by Bell. From the business point of view, the emergence of the Hogarth dust jackets in the 1930s signals a shift in the operation of the Hogarth Press. For instance, John Lehmann, who was the managing director of the Hogarth Press, in a personal letter to Virginia Woolf was suggesting that "the dust jacket should not be considered an integral part of the book" (qtd by Råback, "Covering for Her Sister," 5). This suggests that the externality of the jacket-cover, which was a new development embraced by the Hogarth Press. It can be suggested that the shift in technical terminology here embodies how the functionality of the book cover evolved within

the Hogarth Press form a directly associated composition to an attachment responsible for mediation. This, in turn, signals the growing role of the designer that came to overshadow the role of the binder, and the critical change in the production of the book cover that began to transition from a work of craft into an artistic medium.

It can be argued that one of the main outcomes of this was the design specialization that the dust jacket underwent in order to become a medium of visual reading. Modernist design, with its emphasis on both form and content, should be our primary source to understand this process. First, according to Paul Rand, the aesthetic judgement of design is first and foremost intuitive (*Design, Form and Chaos*, 4). In other words, when presented to the viewer, the form of the design always supersedes its content. Reading, in turn, emerges as the result of the meaningful interaction between form and content. Rand notes that the response to visual design is either associative (subjective) or formal (objective) (*Design, Form and Chaos*, 6). In the case of the former, the viewer brings their personal experiences to *read* the message by creating an association between a symbol and social or cultural meaning. Formal or aesthetic judgement, on the other hand, is largely dependent on ideological concepts such as beauty, talent, taste, etc. (ibid.). One main example of this is the early twentieth-century Modern poster design that brought together recognizable content with avant-garde forms. Particularly, the posters by Edward McKnight Kauffer commissioned by the London Underground in 1906 emphasized the "benefits and joys of travel" (*A History of Graphic Design*, 236) (Figure 16). The *reading* here is framed not through scenes of travel and commuting, but rather through the pleasures and entertainment resulting from taking such journeys by using

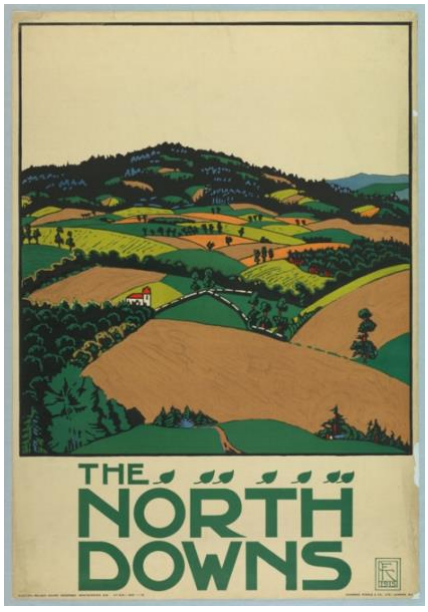

Figure 16: "The North Downs", London Underground" by Edward McKnight Kauffer (1915). Smithonian Design Museum.

new techniques of colour printing and Modern art. The text accompanying the illustration is colourful, large and readable, which helps to establish the idea of a beautiful destination that can be accessed by public transport. According to Meggs, Kauffer's graphic style was famously inspired by the Cubist and Art Deco movements (*A History of Graphic Design*, 263), showing a strong emphasis on the geometric and dynamic shapes that impress a sense of movement on the viewer in the play of light and shadow achieved through the flat colours. Salisbury also describes Kauffer's works as the perfect blend of contrasting colour, shade and shapes that create a simple look "by making invisibility visible" (*A History of Graphic Design*, 119). The central figure in this design is an invisible subject who attains a presence by decoding or *reading* the deeper narrative both textually and visually. Similar to this, a group of the Bloomsbury artists also tried their hand in popular graphic design. Another Bloomsbury member, Duncan Grant, produced promotional posters for the Shell Oil Company in 1934, focusing on the celebration of the rustic beauty of the English countryside (Figure 17). The main message of the commissions was to frame travelling as an educational activity whereby the citizens could experience both the untouched beauty and the distant parts of the country (Beechey, *The Bloomsbury Artists*, 20). The framing of the graphic water landscape with a clear, white caption, once again, emphasizes the importance of reading in order to understand and benefit from this design.

Figure 17: "St Iven, Huntingdon" by Duncan Grant (1932). The National Motor Museum Trust.

Unlike the poster designers, Bell did not seem to have the same investment in guiding the reader's eye into a narrative. What is notable here is not the potential for misreading of form or content, but rather Bell's rejection to allowing *reading* to commence with her covers.

In other words, while poster design, in a no less artistically accomplished way, prioritizes reading by offering a visual intrigue and keeping the eye wandering on the surface, Bell's method of design was meant to interrupt and guide the viewer to the depth of the book. The use of the terminology of "depth" and "surface" may cause concerns about the *shallowness* of the book cover, however, it should be noted that the divide suggested here between surface and depth of the book is more discursive than practical. What this means is that the surface and depth of the Modern book are intrinsically connected, and the reception the latter have to be negotiated with the former. As Shusterman posits, the understanding of depth inevitably begins and ends with the surface (*Surface and Depth*, 3). Ultimately, it can be argued that Bell's method of cover design is indicative of the Modernist artists who sought to separate their art from the social and historical context, thus making the reading indirect and discontinuous. This approach, Shusterman explains, was an intentional move by to distil art from life (*Surface and Depth*, 10). In this sense, by emphasising the division between the surface and depth, the Modern artist attempted to secure a certain distance between the art object and society.

The relationship between a designer and the object, however, is more complicated. While the interpretation of art can be left open-ended, the readability of the design does not have the same liberty. Indeed, the transformation of the textual reading into the visual medium is not a straightforward process. For instance, according to George Salter, who was one of the most renowned designers of the Modern cover in the first half of the century, "The good book jacket is the product of an editorial mind, [which is] able to extract the essence of the whole contents of the book and project it on the cover in a visual manner" (qtd. in Badaracco, "George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 45). The practice, however, reveals otherwise. Specifically, for Salter, reading was not always a primary element in his design practice. As a political émigré from interwar Germany living in the United States,

Salter could not proficiently use English at the time of his arrival in the New World. Badaracco notes that Salter's jacket designs show the economy of detail which he could obtain only with the help of his younger brother, who read the manuscript aloud to him ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs," 44). The vicariousness of the reading here is notable. A similar case can be observed with the Hogarth Press. Bradshaw argues that Bell's covers were often created without her reading the book, based either on the title or a short summary given by Woolf (*The Bloomsbury Artists*, 17). In other words, what is captured by Bell in the covers are more cumulative and collaborative rather than based on a definitive textual source.

The divide between the surface and depth of the Woolf books became more pronounced with her later designs when, according to Bradshaw, the cover became outright "misleading":

> The heavy dark rose lying over the interlocking circles on the cover of *The Years*, the pretty swagged floral curtain design for *Between the Acts*, make these novels look less powerful and angry than they are. (*The Bloomsbury Artists*, 17) (Figure 18)

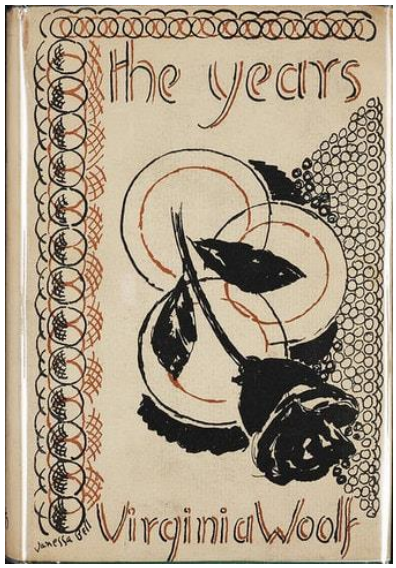

Figure 18: "The Years" by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press). Cover art by Vanessa Bell. 1937

The suggested disparity between Bell's "decorative" visual compositions and Woolf's exploration of darker themes did not seem to hamper the latter's enjoyment ("Do you think we have the same pair of eyes, only different spectacles?") (qtd. in Bradshaw, ibid.). Conversely, the continued references in reviews to the covers lacking "aboutness"[46] imply

[46] "What are Mrs Woolf and Mrs Bell going to find in *Kew Gardens* worth writing about? And engraving on wood and binding in a cover that suggests the tulips in a famous Dutch-English catalogue – 'blotched, spotted, streaked, speckled, and flushed'?" (Unsigned review for *Times Literary Supplement*, 1919; Majmudar & McLaurin, 66).

that, for readers, the aesthetic divide between the surface and depth of the book were neither arbitrary nor absolute.

Furthermore, the reason behind some of the negative feedback also could have been caused by the thematic independence of Bell's avant-garde compositions that disoriented these readers. This idea is at the core of Theo van Doesburg proclamation, "The book is no image" ("The Book and Its Design," 82). As one of the most vocal critics of book covers, Theo van Doesburg introduced to the book cover discourse of the twentieth century a perspective focusing on restraint and functionality. In this sense, his repeated allusions to a book as "a house" ("The Book and Its Design," 80) and "architecture" (82) is an echo of Ruskin and Morris' conceptions of the harmony of the materially and aesthetically defined ideal book. Similar to the British Arts and Crafts thinkers, Van Doesburg's addressee is the artist, or in this case, book designer, whom he accused of creating presumptuous designs that treat the reader as "at least half-blind and sleepy on top of that" (ibid.). It is clear that Van Doesburg here is alluding to the covers designed solely with an intention to pull the eye of the reader by all means possible.

Van Doesburg's dislike of what he calls "dynamic" covers embodies the visceral discomfort the visually defined book can instil in the reader: "The book falls like a bomb on your table, and its colours, covers, punctuation and aggressive lines give the impression that the author is holding a gun to your head" ("The Book and Its Design," 80). The victim in this scenario is clearly the reader whose sensory capacity has been assaulted by the book. However, it is important to note that, unlike that of his nineteenth-century avant-gardist predecessor, the pushback from Van Doesburg was not aimed at the decorative elements of the cover, but rather at the lack of understanding of the role of the cover. Instead, Van Doesburg argues, "A poor book will not become better if it has slashes, stripes, bars, and dots. It remains a poor book" ("The book and Its Design," 82). What is clear from this

statement is that, according to Van Doesburg, a book is a composite object of its surface cover and textual depth. The value and meaning, in this model, is retained in the text, while the cover remains a passive transmitter. It is interesting to note that he uses the term "intensity" to talk about distracting covers, which he sees as detrimental to the "duration" that the text requires (ibid.). This signals that Van Doesburg considers the book as a controlled container where the "intensity" of the cover should remain invisible to aid the visible "duration" of the interaction with the text. While this model seemingly helps to explain the strong response to intrusive, or "intense" covers made by Vanessa Bell, it ultimately fails to account for the later success of these covers not only for Woolf's books but also for establishing a visual brand for the Hogarth Press. Nor does it explain the positive shift with regard to Bell's covers in the latter years of the 1930s, when the covers became not only a source of inspiration for Woolf's own increasingly abstract prose but also a positive influence on the reception of her books (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists,* 18). In other words, while he offers an effective model to review the Modern covers, the lack of nuance in Van Doesburg's model needs to be overcome. This is mainly because Van Doesburg considers visibility as a linear movement of the eye ("To be sure, the book will be read from left to right and from top to bottom, one line after the other", "The Book and Its Design," 82). Shusterman, in turn, argues against this view and suggests that visibility is an act of recognition of "patterns and conventions", and thus a highly contextual process (*Surface and Depth*, 169). In this case, while the early renditions of the covers did not appeal to a wide audience, Bell's method of visual representation eventually came to be adopted as an artistic convention, replete with flowers, colours and forms, which becomes recognizable, thus "visible" to a larger audience as a cultural icon.

On the other hand, the transition to "book jacket" instead of "book cover" by the members of the Hogarth Press also supports this theory. Whereas utility is imposed as the

main function of the cover, the "book jacket" changes this role by becoming a metaphoric garment for the book. This allows the cover to be reviewed not only for its functionality but also for its adherence to the fashion system that is a socially signified field[47]. This does not seem to be a well-explored to full capacity in the case of the Hogarth Press covers, mainly because Hogarth is indeed a unique instance where the publisher, who also was the author, worked in close collaboration with the designer. In the big picture of Modern publishing, this case is not a very common model. Particularly towards the middle of the twentieth century, the development of visibility through conventions and a common visual lexicon gained a new importance as new middle agents such as editors, art directions, booksellers and independent book critics enter the scene. In this new world of publishing, the reception of the cover became a ceaseless process of negotiation for how each book was seen, read and canonized. Thus, the development of the book cover through the cultural and artistic history of the mid-twentieth century will be the focus of the following chapter.

[47] The connection between the class and the history of fashion is explored at a great length by Georg Simmel in his 1904 essay titled "Fashion" where he notes not only the hierarchical nature of the fashion trends but also the social nature of the transmission of these trends where the bourgeois class is keenly taking on the trends set by the aristocracy while the latter is constantly in process of exploring new trends and symbols to enforce their status as the patrons of taste and culture.

Chapter 2: The Book Cover and Publishers: A Comparative Study

This chapter chronicles the emergence of the new book form – the paperback, that transformed book culture in the second half of the twentieth century. The paperback revolution was a socially and culturally significant development that made the book a truly *everyday object.* While existing side by side with hardbacks, the paperback book offered a new experience of reading and book collecting that impacted the way book covers were conceived, designed, published, critiqued, and received. While reviewing two quintessential book forms, hardbacks and paperbacks, this chapter will discuss the impact of the modern book cover on reading. This period is often marked with many clashes, irregularities, and contradictions as they are recorded in history and theory. However, I argue that these undercurrents should not be perceived as the impossibility of conceptualizing the book cover as a cohesive form, but rather the variety and pace of these developments need to be seen as an integral part of the culturally reflexive nature of the book cover. To achieve this, I will adopt Campbell's formula of "Modern Hedonism" to explore the cultural impetus for the divergences and convergences in cover signposts. At the heart of Campbell's argument is the conception of a Modern consumer who seeks new pleasures with repeated experiences. In this sense, I will offer a look at how the cover balances the dynamics between the new and traditional, elite and mass, unknown and familiar. Because the paperback book is considered as a mass medium of production and consumption when it comes to books, assessing the aesthetic impact of the paperback cover inevitably necessitates a close reading of the publishing industry and emerging reader communities. In this sense, the analysis here will complicate the easy division between paperbacks and hardbacks and offer a comparative reading of design acumen of the Modern cover in the age of mass publishing.

This account opens with a consideration of the book cover in the interwar period for a very important reason. Stephen Greengard argues that the golden age of book jackets took

place between the 1920s and 1930s when the artistic heights of the graphic design that was directly inspired by the Jazz Age came to an end during the Great Depression ("Cover Story," 101). While Greengard's approach to the modern book cover offers an insightful look at American book cover history, the exact timelines for a long-passed golden age vary from history to history. For example, Drew & Sternberger highlight the 1930s and 1940s as a particularly significant period which is remembered as the period when the main hubs of graphic design in Europe were closed either because of censorship or war, relocated either to America or Britain (*By Its Cover*, 22). Due to the political changes, the influence of artists such as George Salter in America, and Jan Tschichold in Britain played a significant role in bringing the new Modernist inspiration to the book cover in the English-speaking world (ibid.). The founding of Penguin Books in 1935 as the first British paperback publisher is an important turning point. Due to the impact of growing nationalism during the interwar period and the social and cultural shifts of the post-war period, these books became a staple of reading culture in the English-speaking world in general, and particularly in Britain.

Throughout the years, many similar taxonomies have been developed about the book cover in the twentieth century. The emergence of new forms of covers such as more specialised dust jackets and permanent paperback covers, as well as the constant repackaging of backlist books in subsequent editions all make it necessary to accept the contextual nature of book covers and their effectiveness, which, at times, must be considered from an interdisciplinary perspective. For instance, Matthews & Moody's 2007 study of book covers combines cultural studies and media studies approaches to analyze book covers, which they define as "material objects with a visual dimension" (*Judging the Book by Its Cover*, xvi). This shows that, the duality of the cover's sensory capacity was still important as the book form was undergoing radical shifts. Secondly, the sheer number of design monographs produced by cover designers, the many specialised manuals, publishing anthologies, and even

book cover exhibitions suggest that not only readers, but designers, collectors, and critics alike had become more aware of the cultural impact and artistic legacy of book covers in this period. Finally, and most importantly, the changes that took place in publishing and book distribution in the twentieth century make it more important to reflect on the functions of the book cover in the context of the complex sociocultural relationship among publishers, booksellers, and readers. These changes include the emergence of specialised agents such as editors, art directors, and permanent design departments, as well as independent and corporate booksellers. The widening of the book world in this way naturally caused a divergence in the uses and purposes each independent agent assigned to the book cover, either as a marketing tool, a branding opportunity, a work of art indicative of literary brilliance, a visual representation of the text, a historical document of visual culture, an aesthetic object worthy of collecting, etc. Some of these categories may overlap for different parties such as publishers and designers (marketing tool); however, this does not rule out the possibility for multiple motivations for each group, as well as an undeniable potential for divergences within groups.

It is often argued that the main purpose of all participants of the book sphere is to deliver books to "interested" readers. Book covers are important to this process. As Matthews asserts, "book jackets are a key conduit through which negotiations take place between authors, book trade and readers" (*Judging the Book by Its Cover*, xi). However, it is also very common to come across discussions of book covers that talk about the "lure", "seduction", or "attraction" of book covers. The use of terms such as these often depicts readers as a gullible and impressionable group helpless against the cover that works relentlessly on the onlookers until the book is purchased. While this idea may be helpful to provide extra context about the impact of the covers, as Campbell notes, currently it is impossible to assess the affability of the readers due to the lack of valid sources documenting the consumer behaviour of the early

modern period (*The Romantic Ethic*, 77). In general, the idea that covers have a significant influence as a "selling device" (Alan Powers, *Front Cover*, 6) is a particularly common misconception in the book trade, mainly because of the fact that, other than in a few isolated cases, there is no substantial and pervasive evidence to fully prove or disprove this claim. Furthermore, Matthews challenges this idea by suggesting that the book cover is not employed simply to lure readers through nefarious means, but also provide a physical location for the book in the bookstore ("And Another Thing ... Dust Jackets and the Art of Memory Dust Jackets and the Art of Memory," 157). Here, the emphasis on materiality is an important concept suggesting that the conditions of book storage and display are integral elements to consider when talking about the cover's impact on the visibility of the book.

The expansion of the book sphere in the twentieth century began to put pressure on the limited bourgeois conception of the book as an object of use (educational function) and luxury (display function). The creation of a public library system that specialised in distributing books, in turn, allowed new forms of reading and buying to emerge. Book reading as the main pastime activity among the commuting working classes who spent at least an hour of their day in train compartments with "enforced leisure" was one of these developments (Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 89). In order to meet the growing demand from commuters for books, publishers began to offer books directly from bookstalls set up at railway stations (Matthews & Moody, *Judging the Book by Its Cover*, xiv). The book began to adapt to this new reality both in terms of its content and form. Altick notes the emergence of what is now known as "railway literature" (*The English Common Reader*, 89). This particular trend in publishing has been discussed in two ways. On the one hand, book historians see paperbacks as a result of a natural evolution representing the transformation of the book into a reader's object in the true sense of the word (McCleery, "The Paperback Evolution," 4). Combining in itself lightweight design utility with affordable, low pricing,

the paperback book embodies the everyday nature of the book through its portability. However, when viewing from this angle, cheaply made paperback covers of the early twentieth century also emphasize their ephemeral form that compelled readers to think about them "as relatively disposable upon reading" (ibid.). In other words, both its form and content initially positioned the paperback as an object with temporary functionality that would expire when the reader would either finish the story or the journey when it was being read would come to an end. At this point, the paperback book would be deemed a disposable object.

On the other hand, according to cover historians, the paperback is not an evolution, but rather a *revolution* of the Modern book. This approach is often historically based and sees the paperback as a recurring format throughout history that only succeeded to its full capacity in the twentieth century. For instance, Piet Schreuders argues that:

> Tauchnitz and Albatross were not only important publishers in their own right. In addition, they served as forerunners for what later became known as the "paperback revolution", the worldwide production and distribution of inexpensive mass-marketed books, universally and widely available at prices most people could afford. (*The Book of Paperbacks*, 12)

Schreuders explains the simple, colour-coded, mostly typographic paperback covers by suggesting that the main point of the paperback format was their "cheapest possible production" (*The Book of Paperbacks*, 5). This suggests that paperback covers were primarily the outcome of the economic model favoured by the publishers who aimed to keep their books in a very low-price range (ibid.). In other words, the material production of the paperback cover prioritizes affordability rather than aesthetic definition. Interestingly, McCleery expands on this idea by arguing that the design priority of the paperback cover was aimed at allowing the reader to identify the book as

a part of a specific publisher's catalogue ("The Paperback Evolution," 4). This can be seen in the use of certain patterned papers which become associated with individual publishers and brands (5). The emerging definition of the paperback cover then signifies an object that is both affordable and mass in its design appeal. Thus, it is not surprising that the paperback is the main medium in which the formula cover was first introduced. While it is easy to imagine that the sole function of the formula covers would be to inform the reader with direct textual communication, its original form, the formula cover was not purely typographical. The occasional use of small, illustrated details also contributed to establishing the aesthetic repertoire of the paper covers. This suggests that, even with new functionality of positioning the book in the market full of reading matter, the cover's visual medium was preserved and active.

When we talk about the material definition of the paperback covers, it should be noted that the use of paper coverlets originated with the hardback books at the turn of the twentieth century, long before the paperback revolution. Due to the need to protect books from the grime and pollution at the railway stations, cloth-bound books began to be wrapped in standard paper coverlets that were fashioned and designed as dust jackets (Matthews & Moody, *Judging the Book by Its Cover,* xii). The unique element of the dust jackets, however, was the separation of the printed book from its environment; the paper covers surrounding the book acted as a solid boundary between the two. This creates an interesting dynamic in the ways that covers began to identify and represent the book. In this regard, the legacy of the Modernist designers is undeniable. Indeed, one of the main benefits of the removable dust jacket and fast-moving production was the endless experimentation with the formula covers. It is interesting to note that, form the design standpoint, the visual uniformity was already being seen as Achilles' heel for the paper covers. Therefore, the designers attempted to

develop dust jackets by concentrating on the cover's capacity for innovation and creativity by pushing back against specialised design formulas.

Among the most notable pioneers of the cover design in the US was George Salter, who left Germany for the United States on the eve of the Nazi takeover. Badaracco notes that Salter was surprised at how differently the American publishing houses functioned compared to his experiences in Germany ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 41). The difference was mainly in ways that the design work was executed. Badaracco mentions that the Weimer period was notorious in Germany for using book jackets for their "propaganda value" by exploiting their mass communication capacity. The focus for German covers was to "influence the reader's mind" rather than realising the artistic potential of the medium (ibid.). In the United States, Salter carried on with his preferred style of design that combined traditional illustration with his "modern twists" (Drew & Sternberger, *By Its Cover*, 28). One big innovation Salter employed on his American covers was his exploration of the representational capacity of the cover. This is what makes his style strikingly original. For example, among the covers that he created in 1947, one can see Salter's unique approach to cover design. The cover for Robert Bloch's *The Scarf* combined Salter's surrealist inspiration with dreamlike colour swirls around the single eyeball, a design that gives the cover a fresh, intriguing look (Figure 19).

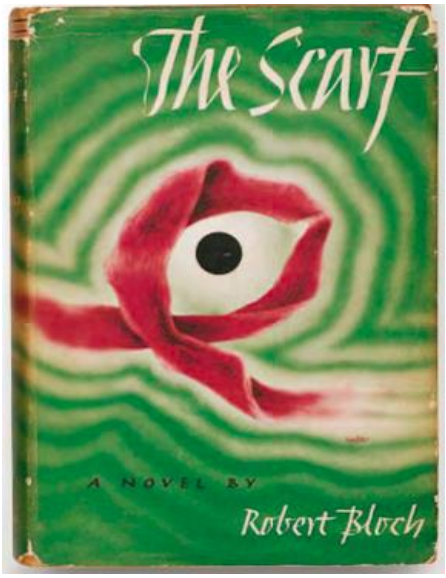

Figure 19: "The Scarf" by Robert Bloch (Diall Press). Cover art by George Salter. 1947.

On the other hand, his cover design for Elias Canetti's *The Tower of Babel* shows off his artistic dexterity in a compelling composition he created using Modernist techniques such as "collage, geometric abstraction and figural drawing" (Drew & Sternberger, *By Its Cover*, 28). Heller & Vienne suggest that Salter's use of paper cut collages achieves a youthful,

timeless look that embodies Modernist anxieties about materialism and industrial uniformity (*100 Ideas that Changed Graphic Design*, 54; 90). Salter's economic use of the cover space should be noted too. His "editorial" approach is clearly evident in his selective use of represented content on his covers (Badaracco, "George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 47).

What is noteworthy here is that, despite a clear Modernist resonance between these two samples, these books were published by two different presses. Bloch's *The Scarf*, categorized under the mystery genre, was released by the Dial Press, which specialised in publishing select works of fiction but mostly narrative non-fiction and memoirs. *The Tower of Babel*, on the other hand, was published by Alfred A. Knopf, which was an established hardback publisher in the United States (Figure 20). Beyond the obvious stylistic connection between the two covers that resulted from both of them belonging to the same designer, this also suggests that for the hardback publishers, the individual scope of the design was still more significant than achieving a public brand. However, when we look at this from the publishers' point of view, we can see that the opposite was suggested, at least in theory. For example, Salter notes that, at Knopf, the "personal taste" of the publisher did not matter as much as having a visual cohesion in their catalogue. Badaracco expands this by adding that "The Borzoi style [of Alfred A. Knopf] was the instrument upon which the composition is played, not the composition itself" ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 46). In this sense, the designer was allowed to independently "interpret the text as a reader" (47), which suggested that the cover was ultimately for the benefit of the reader. This meant that each

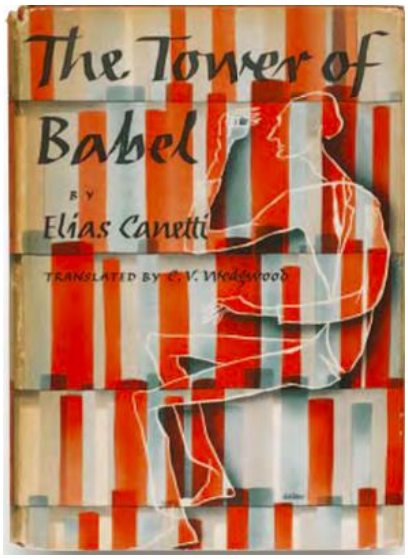

Figure 20: "The Tower of Babel" by Elias Canetti (Alfred A. Knopf). Cover art by George Salter. 1947.

cover had to be formulated individually with the final book in mind. What this suggests that, while it had not fully come to fruition yet, the push towards visual branding of the books in accordance with their producers was an idea that publishers were greatly interested in.

Furthermore, as can be seen from Salter's covers, with the impact of the Modernist movement, the principle of cover illustration had also undergone a shift. One of the more prevalent explanations offered for this trend of non-Realistic, nonrepresentational covers that metaphorically connected with the book by aesthetic means such as mood and style was that their intriguing design "caught the eye of the reader." This was a viewpoint mostly shared by publishers who wanted to explore the commercial capacity of the cover. Indeed, despite being adamantly against the commercialization of the book through erotic motifs and *cinematic* clichés, Salter himself was a big proponent of the idea of developing the "promotional" capacity of the cover ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 47). Knopf was not as convinced of the idea that covers aided sales, but Badaracco suggests that every publisher that collaborated with Salter reported a big uptick in the sales of their books[48]. Whether the cover leads to the purchase of the book or not, what is certain is that Salter's designs were memorable enough for both readers and publishers to speculate about their *hidden* commercial value. I would argue that the key to understanding the appeal of Salter's and other designs lies in the ways that Modernist art was adapted for the purposes of graphic design. The use of asymmetrical and visually complex, as well as stripped down, compositions did not always lend itself to the creation of the most "legible" covers, but these covers were able to engage the observer by replicating the aesthetic chaos of life during the Modern period. It can be suggested that it was the variations of the Modern theme that created an appeal for the readers to pursue not only the sensory but also the deductive nature

[48] Badaracco notes that Salter's popularity was evident in his designs causing the books to be "sold more than 20,000 copies" ("George Salter's Book Jacket Designs, 1925–1940," 47).

of the composition. This was particularly important in establishing visual signs that would distinguish one object from another in a saturated marketplace. The specialization of the book cover for this purpose is understandable when one considers that the cover was what readers and booksellers first saw and reacted to when encountering a book on the shelf.

As Campbell explains, of all sensory experiences, the sense of sight offers the greatest potential for long-lasting aesthetic pleasure (*The Romantic Ethic*, 114). In this regard, the idea of *Modern Hedonism* is directly connected to visual signs allowing the individual to explore the pleasure of the book for themselves. However, unlike pain, which according to Campbell is a concentrated sensation, the pleasure sought by the Modern Hedonist is more scattered and complex. This means that pleasure is not always connected to passivity and enjoyment. The individual's capacity for pleasure is also directly tied to the "negative emotions" evoked by the constant state of overstimulation and distraction. This allows the subject to exercise a degree of dominance and authority over the experience: "Before any emotion can possibly be 'enjoyed', therefore, it must become subject to willed control, adjustable in its intensity, and separated from its association with involuntary overt behaviour." (*The Romantic Ethic*, 120). When applied to the book sphere, this statement can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the "chatter and noise" of these new settings in which books were sold and read resulted in a different type of experience in comparison to the silence and aesthetic cohesion of private libraries (Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 91). Thus, sensory pressure made it necessary for the individual to make private commitments disconnected from the outside world. Then, the extent to which the reader could exert their mental control over their surroundings would determine the intensity of pleasure they would drive from reading (ibid.). And because Campbell posits the "past experiences" alongside with sensory stimulation as one of the preconditions of pleasure (*The Romantic Ethic,* 112), we can see an interesting dynamic

emerging between the push for novelty and the grounding of familiarity. This allows us to deduce that the aesthetic and commercial conditions of the book sphere were being shaped under a new reading culture where the *new but familiar* experiences would be sought as the locus of the heightened pleasure. On the other hand, the dynamic between "new but familiar" made Modern art with its "inward turn" and rejection of Realism an ideal medium through which the individual could realise the pursuit of pleasure. It should be noted that the unique nature of this experience is its centralization on the subject rather than the object. Accordingly, the Modern Hedonist, in an attempt to disengage from the outside world, turns to their own subjectivity into a source of meaning and reflection (*The Romantic Ethic*, 123). This means a clear rejection of all aesthetic associations with real life in favour of the individual's desire to control their interactions with the "objective world" (124). The subject, then, performing the role of meaning-maker, is allowed to choose experiences it deems *pleasurable* from those that does not excite an aesthetic exhilaration. Furthermore, Campbell also associates this shift towards Modern Hedonism with the growing self-consciousness of twentieth century readers. As both the content and form of the book began to adapt to this new paradigm, the cover design began to feature more abstract, non-Realistic design patterns that did not contain a clear narrative (Heller & Pomeroy, *Designing with Illustration*, 12). In other words, the pleasure of the modern cover now effectively resided in the reader's capacity to reflection on and decoding of its meaning. The longer the cover held the eye and attention, the better its standing appeared to be in relation to the other books it was surrounded by. Indeed, I argue that the artistic excellence and lasting legacy of the twentieth-century book covers, which have often been explained with their radical experimentation with "commercial design", are the results of the *Hedonistic* nature of their conception and the fundamental role played by the book cover in the creation of the *Modern* book culture.

If we look at the contemporary reader as the descendant of the *Modern* reader, then we can understand why the subjective nature of its communication carries a tendency to be interpreted in terms of the commercial motivation as these two aspects are essentially intertwined in the ideal of *Modern Hedonist.* In this sense, another important innovation of cover design of the twentieth century took place in relation to illustration that became a fundamental part of the visual branding of the book covers. Heller & Pomeroy note that illustrative design was particularly important for the Modernist designers not only because it was a versatile medium with a vast capacity for artistic experimentation, but also because of its mythical connotations of "heroic" representation that allowed the designers to juxtapose traditional compositions with Modern alterations (*Designing with Illustration,* 10). These experimentations were soon stabilized in a new design style ushered in by artists such as Paul Rand, who masterfully brought together Modernist art and commercial design. The result of this combination of traditional and historical methods with the *subjective* twist was the style known as *Moderne* (12).

In terms of design approach, *Moderne* combined the artistic and ornamental forms of illustrative design with "austere functionality" of Modernist art. The mixing of these two styles created very interesting examples of covers that relied on both photography and illustration (*Designing with Illustration*, 13). Heller & Pomeroy note that the *Moderne* began to appear on book covers during the 1930s, and most of its practitioners were European Modernists who were working in the US, where commercial design was heavily based on the illustration format. To overcome the disparity between two traditions, as Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer suggested, *Moderne* constantly underwent changes to adapt "European objectivity to American narrative sensibility" (qtd. in Heller & Pomeroy, *Designing with Illustration*, 13). This was intentional as the Modernist interest in commercial art was directly focused on eliminating the realist illustration that signified the mass status of the graphic

design. The direction chosen was a complex style called “object poster” that centred on graphic composition with minimal textual captioning. The creation of what Heller & Pomeroy call “visual signposts” was the impetus for the new cover style based on the publisher’s brand. The prevalence of this trend can be observed both in paperback and hardback publishing. Indeed, one of the most popular examples of this was the collaboration between designer Alvin Lustig and James Laughlin, who was the head of the New Directions publishing house (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Book Cover designed by Alvin Lustig for the New Directions between 1945 and 1950. Courtesy of the publisher.

Lustig’s most prolific period at New Directions took place between the 1940s and the 1950s. Simple but evocative typography, and muted but symbolic imagery in a two-tone colour palette is the signature style most commonly associated with the cultural legacy of New Directions (Heller & Fink, *Covers & and Jackets!,* 17). Drew & Sternberger argue that Lustig’s abstract and symbolic designs were indicative of the New Directions catalogue that specialised in avant-garde literary projects in which the “spirit of the book cannot be expressed by naturalistic representation of episodes or by any preconceived formal approach” (*By Its Cover*, 48). This, not only marks a significant point in the adaption of *Moderne*

tradition into the cover art but, as we'll see in the following paragraphs, through this transition we also see the rise of the publisher brands.

Despite their outlandish look, Lustig's covers, overall, garnered very positive responses from readers and critics. James Laughlin noted with great joy the commercial success of Lustig-designed covers that resulted in sales being tripled compared to previous editions of the books, noting that the critical acclaim of Lustig's works "symbolized in physical terms the desired isolation of [New Direction's] editorial program from that of the great commercial houses" (*By Its Cover*, 49). By itself, this statement implies the complete acceptance of the commercial merit of the book cover, however in a bigger context, we can a different image emerging. Specifically, when viewed together with Laughlin's comments about his discomfort about the mass appeal of the covers and "cover buys", the previous commentary may seem contradictory. However, when we analyze these two statements side by side, we can see not a separation but rather an attempt at reconciliation of two dimensions of the book cover, namely their capacity to visually individuate and commercially appraise the book. The choice between either one of these functions seem difficult for the publishers. From the institutional perspective, publishers were particularly hesitant to limit the scope of their role to commercial activity. Instead, they also saw themselves as patrons of book arts. As the former statement shows, the degree of integration between cover design and the cultural authority claimed by the publishing house was an important detail for the publishers. Laughlin's follow-up statements make it clear that the only to validate the market success of the book cover should always be through the cultural importance of the text:

> It is perhaps not a very good thing that people should buy books by eye. In fact, it's a very bad thing. People should buy books for their literary merit. But since I have never published a book which I didn't consider a serious literary work and never intend to, I have no bad

> conscience about using Lustig to increase sales. His beautiful designs are helping to make a mass audience aware of high-quality reading.
>
> (qtd. in Drew & Sternberger, *By Its Cover*, 49)

While it may sound like further disparagement of the book cover by Laughlin, I would argue that his words are aligned with the cultural ideal of *the complete book* that exceled at aesthetically distinction, commercially success and literary value. This belief was shared by many major publishers who were specialised in hardcover production.

On the other hand, paperback publishers attempted a similar strategy to associate their branded cover design with the literary merit of the books they published, this approach took a different shape in practice. Schreuders meticulously documents the personal history behind the invention of publisher logos (often inspired by animal motifs[49]) and formula covers which showed the complex and layered, but also extremely colourful history of the paperbacks. The main element of the paperback "signposts" was that the publishers of these books were not as interested in the sort of *subtle branding* methods employed by the hardback publishers. Indeed, paperback form was often defined by their overt, formula covers.

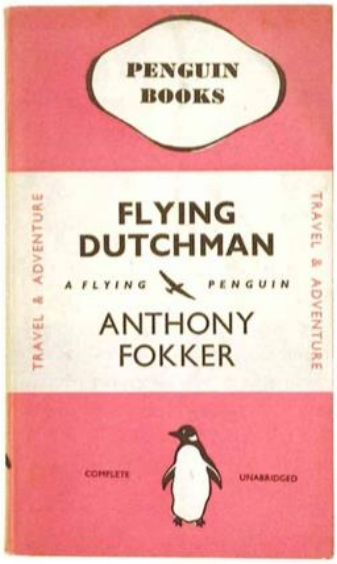

Figure 22: The Original Penguin cover grid, designed by Edward Young, 1935. Courtesy of Penguin Books.

It is impossible not to mention Penguin Books when talking about formulaic cover design in the mid-century. As the title of Phil Baines' seminal history of the Penguin Books - *Penguin by Design* suggests, Penguin books were considered

[49] In *The Book of Paperbacks*, Schreuders approaches each paperback imprint separately, by offering many anecdotal but detailed stories behind the publisher's invented colophons and the creative ways in which they were updated regularly. This takes up a big section of the book between pages 56 and 104.

to be *Penguins* because of their recognizable design, more than for their individual success. The Penguin cover grid was invented by Edward Young in 1935 and remained almost unchanged until the end of the 1940s. Divided into three horizontal bars with clear visual branding of the logo, the Penguin grid was both colour-coded and typographical in its use of separate fonts for the Penguin logo, and the title and author name (*Penguin by Design*, 19) (Figure 22).

It can be argued that such a simple design was indicative of the treatment of paperback books as a secondary medium. As Warpole notes, the first editions of literary fiction works were always published in hardback form "destined for a serious readership", and only after a period would they be released in cheap paperbacks for mass consumption (*Reading by Numbers*, 7). However, it is important to note that, unlike the American paperbacks which were commonly associated with sensational fiction, Penguin books in the UK did not have similar negative associations with "cheapness" of make. This can be explained by the main audience of Penguin readers, who were not just public commuters but also students and academics who preferred paperbacks both for their affordability and portability (Ketron & Naletelich, "How E-Readers Have Changed Personal Connections with Books," 440). This is often credited to Penguin founder Allen Lane's intentional diversification of the Penguin backlist that included both classics, genre fiction and scholarly materials (McCleery, "The Paperback Evolution," 11).

Bonn notes that, soon after its adoption, paperbacks had become a constant companion for readers in places ranging from the comfort of their homes and bedrooms to airplanes, buses, and cars (*Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks*, 10). Reading, however, was not limited to the urban lifestyle. As Baines notes, the coincidence of the Penguin book size being complementary with the size of battledress pockets soon made it possible for paperbacks to reach the far trenches of the war (*Penguin by*

Design, 15). The years of war were so important in establishing reading as part of everyday life that, after the war, economic challenges that plagued everyday life included the concerns about the cost of books as well. Particularly in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the war, paperbacks were the main form that the poverty-stricken masses could rely on for reading. With its wide public appeal, McCleery argues that the easily recognizable typographic covers of Penguin books were conceived as a means for the company to remove the "cheap" stigma from their books by showing "discipline, good manners and economic realism" ("The Paperback Evolution," 14). Here, we see yet another parallel between the hardback and paperback publishers where the commercial success was not the sole motivation, but rather one of the criteria that determined the visibility of the book cover.

However, as Allen Lane's control over Penguin Books began to loosen due to the corporate changes that took place in the 1940s and 1950s, the Penguin grid become a topic of heated discussion (Baines, *Penguin by Design*, 16). The appearance of visually distinct American paperbacks in the British marketplace put the well-established typographic brand image of Penguin at risk of being outcompeted. Tschichold's reworking of the cover grid eventually led the way for more radical changes. The vertical grid, which was introduced in the 1950s, put more emphasis on the authorship of the book (Baines, 80). However, the main visual shift in the Penguin brand occurred under the leadership of Hans Schmoller, who commissioned Germano Facetti to redesign the covers to allow illustrations and imagery without the covers losing their essential Penguin characteristic (McCleery, "The Paperback Evolution," 17). While the redesigned covers were still based on the Penguin cover grid, it was clear that the direction towards which the new covers were evolving did not align with the limited scope of the grid formula. The appearance of full-size surrealist paintings commissioned specifically for Penguin books towards the end of the 1960s effectively broke the dominance of the cover grid over the visual aesthetics of the Penguin books. In the new

reality, as the textual content changed in response to cultural dynamics, the covers began to reflect this shift as well.

The most notable aspect of the new grid was its flexibility. Unlike rigid guidelines about the font and stylization initiated by Tschichold in the late 1940s, the new cover grid designed by Romek Marber "featured a more relaxed use of capitalization in [genre] titles" which allowed greater freedom to cover designers to experiment with the medium (*Penguin by Design*, 103) (Figure 23). Baines also notes that after adaption of the Marber grid to Pelican titles, the Art Director of Penguin books at the time - Germano Facetti began to switch the commission policy for artworks, preferring to work with covers designers rather than independent illustrators (ibid.) As a result, new covers exhibited broader integration between all design elements, such as typography, illustrations, and photography. Aesthetically, the Marbek grid was also effective for "suggestive, rather than literal" covers, which emphasized the role of the reader in every aspect of the paperback book. Even as grid covers began to go out of practice towards the end of the decade, genre traditions they initiated remained strong. Baines argues that the distinct visual cohesion of the Penguin catalogue speaks directly to the genius of the Art Directors like Facetti, who managed to strike an effective balance between formulaic and artistic design: "Later in the 1960s strict observance of the grid was no longer thought necessary, but because covers were commissioned with care and were of a high standard with a consistent typographic feel, the series look was maintained." (*Penguin by Design*, 103). This shows that the paper covers, similar to high-end

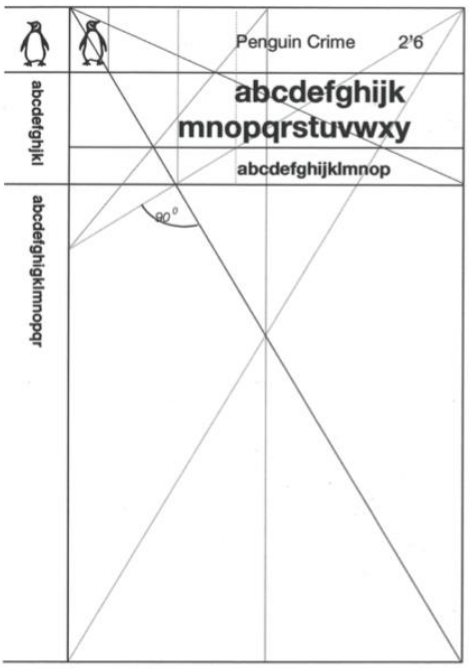

Figure 23: "The Marber Grid", designed by Romek Marber, 1962. Courtesy of Penguin Books.

dust jackets were essentially *Modern* in their balancing of mass with exclusive, commercial with innovative and avant-garde and ultimately, reading with collecting and owning.

Overall, the second half of the twentieth century was a time of big changes in publishing and distribution, the main change being the takeover of smaller imprints by corporate publishers and the expansion of the book market beyond bookstores into malls and bookstore chains. Miller notes that, unlike the independent bookstores which emphasized the importance of public relations, drugstores and bookchains offered a non-intimidating alternative for book buying (*Reluctant Capitalists*, 34). These were commercial spaces open and welcoming to everyone, regardless of their cultural or social capital, which was not the case in renowned independent stores with their crowded, dusty book piles, and the lonesome and elitist image of independent booksellers who delivered judgement upon the reader rather than recommendation. The focus in these new spaces was on self-service and minimal intrusion on the browsing readers (*Reluctant Capitalists*, 43). This meant that the cover had an opportunity for direct interaction with the reader who would be browsing books and the magazine section of department stores with a passing gaze. Unlike in previous decades when the purpose of the cover was to stand out by disrupting the observer's attention, with the impact of the paperback generation, covers now showed a clear yearning to relate their *signposts* to the canons of visual culture that included television and cinema, as well as magazine covers.

In this regard, the exuberant Surrealist inspiration for paperback covers during the 1960s and the 1970s can be explained by the communal shelving of books with many science-fiction magazines, where the tradition of using Surrealists artworks in the cover originated (Warpole, *Reading by Numbers*, 7). This trend can be seen as the continuation of the *Moderne* sensibilities, albeit as a retrospective take on the original. According to Barnard, the emergence of the Bauhaus movement, which successfully combined traditional German

aesthetics with the new, technologically advanced utopian simplicity (*Graphic Design as Communication*, 124), was the final development of the integrated design principles that drew inspiration from both the graphic arts and industrial culture. The dynamic shaping the typographic dimensions of book cover design was intensely contested. On the one hand, the design discipline demanded high readability for the typefaces, while, on the other hand, the Modernist influence made typography a site of contention with the notable resistance of the design styles to be easily read (Figure 24). The blurry, distorted fonts, as well as the psychedelic colours used on these covers show that, while appealing to contemporary taste, the Modernism in cover design had not yet come to an end.

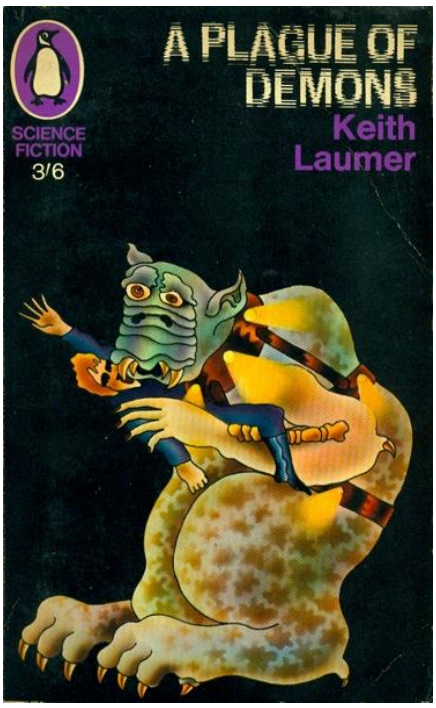

Figure 24: "A Plague of Demons" by Keith Laumer (Penguin Books). Cover art by Alan Aldridge. 1965.

The transience of the bond between the cover design and the paperback book has always been a pervasive part of the discourse on the twentieth century book covers. Indeed, the cultural responsiveness of the book cover had become particularly pronounced in the rapid world of paperback publishing. The "responsiveness" in this case, was not always in relation to the book's inner structure defined by its producers, but also the cultural position in the book sphere where the external agents like readers, booksellers and critics operated. This means that the response to an individual cover was now more directly contingent on the angle of the analysis and the parties involved in the discourse. For instance, when talking about the history of the surrealist Penguin covers, design manuals often highlight Alan Aldridge's works (specifically "A Plague of Demons" as discussed above) for their iconic simplicity and artistic excellence. However, we see look up the same title in the online image search

engines, the said design appears at the bottom of the list which is formulated based on the popularity of each design (Figure 25).

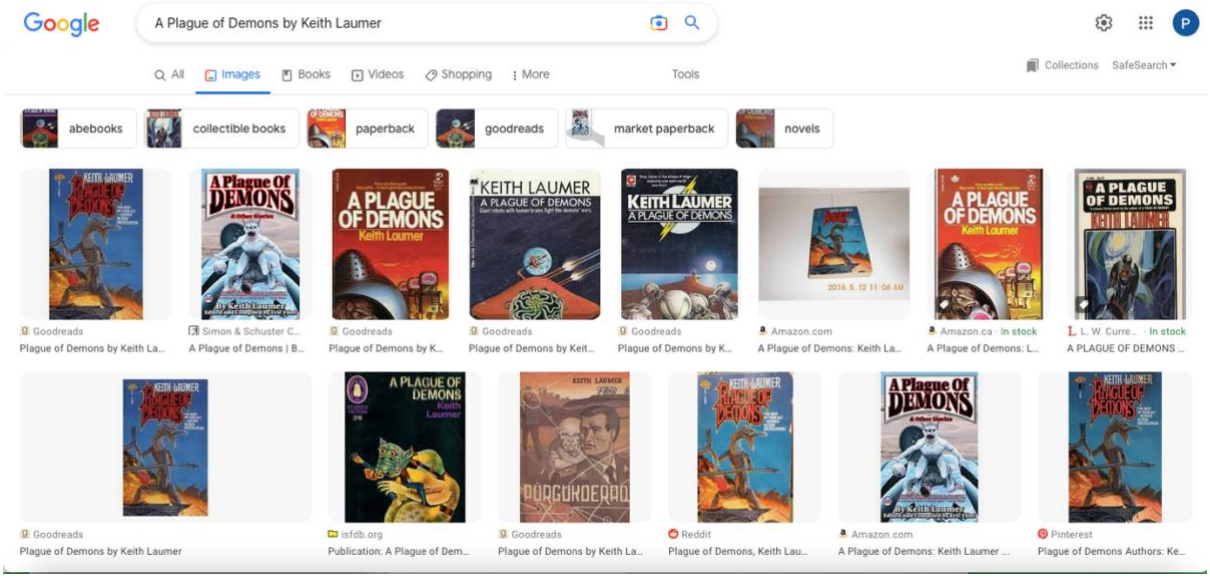

Figure 25: The Screenshot from Google Image Search Result for "A Plague of Demons by Keith Laumer", 2022.

This experiment reveals an interesting dynamic about paperback covers: the relevance of the design often seems to reside outside of the book rather than being connected to the book's inner form or textual content. Furthermore, the "externality" of the cover seems even more pronounced for the books belonging to defined genre categories. The next chapter will consider the subject of the genre covers that resulted from the expansion of the paperback market and offer a review of how the book cover is perceived and discussed by readers and critics in the contemporary culture.

Chapter 3: Challenges in the Contemporary Period: The Book Cover and Genre

Despite the falling numbers of readership today[50], the impact of the paperback book can still be felt in its lasting legacy of avid and extensive reading practices. In terms of the book cover, the stability and predictability of paperback reading was solidified by the emergence of the design depository for book covers reliant on somewhat overused cultural references. This shift inspired an interesting discourse about the aesthetic and cultural functionality of the book cover, a discourse that dominated the last decades of the twentieth century, lasting well into the contemporary period. When the book cover is imagined as the *face* of the book, certainly the standardization of cover aesthetics can be explained by the formalization of the textual genres on which the paperback publishing grew very dependent. In this light, to understand the conventions of cover design, one must address the role and importance of genre categories not only in the aesthetic concerns of the book but also in contemporary reading practices. This final chapter will attempt to explore the relationship between narrative genres and the cover while addressing some of the contemporary worries about the impending end of the book and its cover. I will use Dick Hebdige's concept of "Style as Homology" to further contextualize how recycled signs have come to inform the book cover not only in its recent manifestation but also in its future prospects.

To explore the uses of visual tropes on the covers, we need to establish a working definition of genre. John Frow argues that, rather than being an integral feature of the text, genre is a category "to which a text belongs" (*Genre,* 101). Indeed, Frow's theory of genre suggests that reading is always contextualized by the "layers of background knowledge

[50] Zandt & Richter report that the average number of books read in the United States has fallen from 15.6 (2016) to 12.6 (2021), which means that average American is reading only one book per month. It is important to note that the report explains this statistic by noting that the size of the book is a factor; the time spent on a single book with a longer page count can skew the median downward. The truth of this point is evident when readership rates are contrasted with other social activities. Reading for both academic and leisurely purposes still remains the "favourite pastime" for Americans. Overall, those who identify as readers consume more books than what the statistic average suggests.

which texts evoke" that is based on the reader's previous experience with reading and books (ibid.). In other words, the comprehension, enjoyment, and classification of the text are predicated on the experience of the reader with similar texts in the past. Furthermore, this definition also reorients the concept of genre away from the text by suggesting that, as a category, genre "is a function of reading" (102). Catherine Sheldrick Ross corroborates this point in her 2001 study about the habits of readers by expanding "background knowledge" from an individual's personal experience to greater aggregates that the reading communities rely on in deciding on their next read:

> The systems they [readers] described for choosing books usually depended on considerable previous experience and knowledge of authors, publishers, cover art and conventions for promoting books, and sometimes depended on a social network of family or friends who recommended and lent books. We can consider this to be "behind the eyes" knowledge that the reader can draw upon when considering for selection or rejection any particular book that comes to hand. Past experiences with books and remembered information from reviews or from word of mouth are carried in the reader's head and available to be called upon when the reader is browsing in a bookstore or library. ("Making Choices: What Readers Say About Choosing Books to Read for Pleasure,"11)

Ross 'mention of the paratextual matter of the book is very important, as it allows us to explore the way through which the genre establishes the communication between the book and readers. Firstly, the effectiveness of the cover as a category of taste is ensured by the variety of ways in which it can be manifested. What this suggests is that the topical and symbolic elements of genre conventions lend themselves to be easily adopted by the textual

and paratextual forms with the aim of ultimately contextualizing the text within the cultural discourse. This means that, thanks to "externalized" genre clues, the reader is allowed to harmonize their personal experience with the knowledge of other readers to increase the potential for pleasure reading. In this sense, genre, similar to Genette's conception of paratext, not only marks the text as belonging to a literary community, but also conditions the reading through a series of "semiotic prompts" (*Paratexts,* 105;109).

For example, as one of the most popular genre categories with a notoriously dedicated and loyal readership, Romance books adopted an easily recognizable cover convention referring to the erotic nature of the genre. The trend of "guys who have lost their shirts" was satirized not only by the librarians who curated targeted shelves just for these covers, but also by readers who have created recommendation lists of the same name on popular book review and recommendation platforms such as Goodreads. It is apt to note that, despite their humorous nature, these bookshelves both in their physical and online form reveal a very important fact about the way books are introduced to their potential readers. The synecdochic nature of these "shirtless" covers bestows the genre books with a significant advantage by making them easily perceivable, allowing them to reach the intended reading community (Figure 26). In this sense, the addressee of the cover is not just the reader, but also the cultural institutions that facilitate the distribution of the book. This is for a very simple reason: before the book reaches its reader, it first has to pass through the inspection of the booksellers or librarians who ultimately make

Figure 26: A Library Shelf titled "Guys who have lost their shirts", (R/Funny), 2008.

the decision about its placement. Rinzler identifies the danger of being "shelved away" from their genre category for genre books as "the kiss of death":

> Sales will suffer, on the other hand, if – horrors – a book is shelved away in Sociology – a catch-all section for ambiguous titles, and the kiss of death for book sales. Even worse and most frustrating of all, is if a store clerk mis-shelves the book to begin with. Then the book is doomed. It's impossible to locate, even if a customer requests the book and the store shows it's in inventory. ("Shelf Wars," 2010)

This truth of this statement is supported by one of the most recent studies of the book market. Portland State University's *Immersive Media and Books 2020 Report*, conducted by Noorda & Inman Berens, assesses the effectiveness of each book's paratextual details in convincing the readers to purchase a certain title (Figure 27). The results help put into perspective that, alongside reviews and author name, the genre category of the book plays the most significant role in inspiring the purchase decision in the buyer ("Immersive Media and Books 2020," 11). It is also interesting to note that, alongside the genre, the role of pricing (9.2%) and book cover (collectively 6.6%) score a higher attraction point for readers than the identity of the publisher (3.8%) per se.

However, while this report is helpful in providing some idea about the general trends during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also has several shortcomings. For instance, the researchers note that, despite their study being category-reliant, responders were generally unaware of the "industry specific terms-of-art" ("Immersive Media and Books 2020," 7). Because of this, the genre category here largely reflects either the publisher's or the bookseller's catalogues, such as Amazon Kindle (56), rather than readers' own groupings. The lack of consensus among the readers on genre categories or ambiguity about what is considered an indicator of genre leads one to question the conflations between categories.

Furthermore, the focus on the impetus behind "recent purchases" by readers makes the data less focused on the book and more on the general buying habits of readers. Because of this, the "genre" category here leaves out the capacity of the cover to provide supporting information to readers in guiding their purchase, as was evident with the "shirtless" covers.

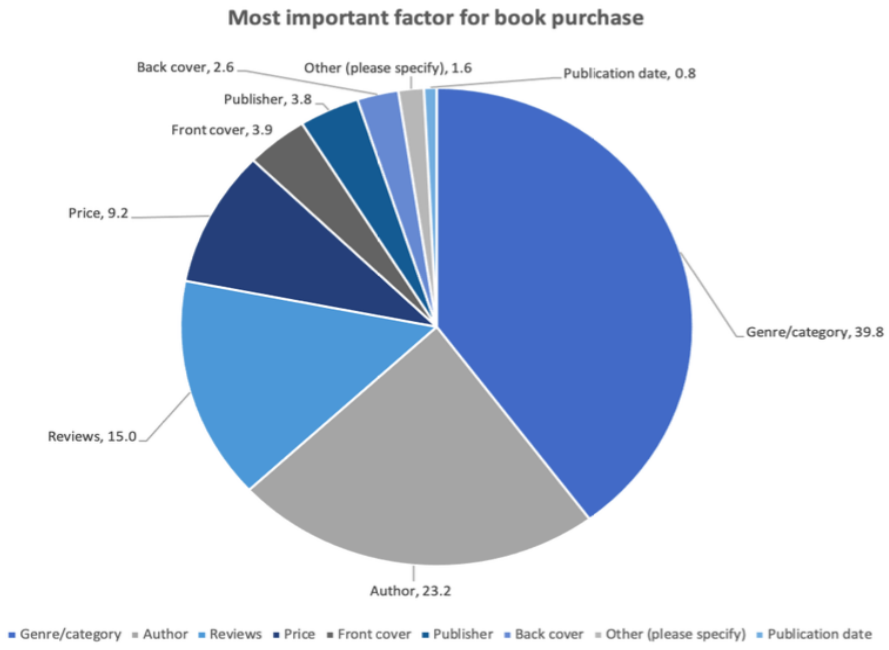

Figure 27: "Most Important Factor for Book Purchases from September to November 2020" (Rachel Noorda & Kathi Inman Berens / Portland State University, 2021).

Ultimately, when speaking about the design of the book cover, we must note that the designers are better informed by the genre categories existing in the book market than they were in earlier periods. For example, Sonzogni suggests that the genre-belonging of the book is a more significant factor in defining the book cover, scoring more highly than both the "content" and "setting" of the book – two subcategories which already hold a relatively higher importance than other indicators such as who published the book (*Re-Covered Rose*, 22). We can see a stronger resonance of this idea in the paperback medium. Schreuders notes a number of genre-related visual signposts that exist for popular fiction, such as "peepholes, Gothic, skulls and skeletons, large hands, disembodied eyes, bare legs, naked and partially

naked women, swamp girls, dead women lying on the ground, women on beds with men standing next to them, women in red dresses, women being carried by men, bound women, women being slapped in the face, and on a lighter note, an extremely popular motif – embraces and kisses" (*The Book of Paperbacks*, 116). On the one hand, the "trope"-based covers of the genre books can be viewed as a part of the corporate culture of many paperback publishing houses. Bonn, on the other hand, notes the specialization of paperback publishers on certain subsets of the literary field as the basis for the "gimmicky" covers (*Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks*, 115). It is particularly interesting to note the importance of these conventions for the Romance category and Romance publishers. While mystery and thriller genres were quick to move away from the clichéd illustrated covers, Gothic romances, in particular, remained heavily reliant on two archetypal covers. One had a dark, romantic tone and featured "long-haired young women, tortured landscapes and eerie castles" (Bonn, 108). The other was simply an illustrated image of "the hand that lit the mysterious lamp" (ibid.). As Schreuders confirms, many publishers believed that this motif alone would improve the sales rates of a book by 5% (*The Book of Paperbacks*, 114). Indeed, the almost-superstitious dedication to the formula covers of the Romance genre by both publishers and readers is one of the important elements that set it apart from other genre categories.

It is important to note that, in light of these developments in genre-based cover conventions, the previously important elements of the cover such as its regional variations lost its importance in determining the cover trends. This is true both for the approach taken by publishers and designers, and for reader response to the covers. Some of this is certainly driven by the rise of the global publisher conglomerates that now service many cross-audiences. For instance, in an interview with the book blog *The Casual Optimist,* the creative executive director and cover designer for Penguin US, Paul Buckley, stated that currently

there is no noticeable stylistic difference between the book covers created exclusively for British and American audiences ("Q&A with Paul Buckley," 2016).

It also makes one wonder if this statement is driven more by the general lack of interest in researching broader cover categories when the success of the targeted covers, due to their recognizability and define readership, are being perceived as a self-fulfilling prophecy by the industry insiders. In this regard, Angus Phillips 'seminal study of the re-covering process for several Agatha Christie books deserves a special mention. While Phillips' argument appears more author-centric than genre-centric, his methodology focuses on the importance of modernized genre convention from the commercial perspective. Looking at the updated covers for Harper & Collins' Agatha Christie catalogue, Phillips concludes that the cover design can improve the book's standing with "casual browsers" in the bookstore by striking the right balance between the contents of the book and the ideas popular in book cover design ("How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 24). Here, of course, the focus is on the clarity of genre indicators such as the background colour and illustration. Particularly for the debut titles, the greater resonance with the genre conventions is of paramount importance to ensure the success of the book (Kean; qtd. in Phillips, "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 21). However, it is important to note that Agatha Christie is already an established name not only among readers of mystery and detective fiction, but also among the book community at large. Therefore, the broader applicability of this method is, at best, uncertain.

It is interesting to note that, despite the success of her books, Christie often had an uneasy relationship with the covers of her books. Indeed, she notes several anecdotes in her writings about disagreements about the cover choices with her first publisher, Bodley Head. As one of her more detailed accounts, Christie relates the following episode dating to 1923 about the covers for her third published title:

> The Bodley Head were pleased with *Murder on the Links*, but I had a slight row with them over the jacket they had designed for it. Apart from being in ugly colours, it was badly drawn, and represented, as far as I could make out, a man in pyjamas on a golf-links, dying of an epileptic fit. Since the man who had been murdered had been fully dressed and stabbed with a dagger, I objected. A book jacket may have nothing to do with the plot, but if it does it must at least not represent a false plot. There was a good deal of bad feeling over this, but I was really furious, and it was agreed that in future I should see the jacket first and approve of it. (*An Autobiography*, 282-3).

While Christie's personal dislike of the artwork and her disparagement of the covers depicting "a false plot" are notable, the description of the cover itself seem to be in perfect alignment with the genre conventions for murder mystery book covers showing a clear crime scene or the murder weapon (Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 116). In other words, it is the formulaic nature of the Bodley Head cover that Christie is reacting here rather than disliking the stylistic or aesthetic composition of the design.

It is noteworthy that the problem with the Christie covers in the late 1980s was a similar one of similar misrepresentation, but this time of the genre, rather than of details of the mystery. More specifically, it was being argued that "by concentrating on the gory aspects of the crime, the covers were presenting the books more in the horror genre rather than as mysteries: 'horror style covers were repelling her natural market'" (Williams; qtd. in Phillips, "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 27). Surprisingly, despite their commercial success in increasing sales by 40% (23), these new "more upmarket, grown-up" covers do not depart significantly from the previous covers. While the "edgy, slightly sinister" and darker tones of the covers make these covers look different from those

of the previous editions (28), the subject matter seems to have remained the same: many covers feature object-centred photographs with a similar clinical feel about them. For instance, the cover for *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* features a photograph of a series of dental instruments (Figure 28). The background is an eerie green colour that gives the shadow play in the image a creepy effect.

Figure 28: "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe" by Agatha Christie (Harper Collins). 2002.

As the new covers built the sense of dread in a less overt way, it can be argued that the positive reception of the new covers was not because of the lack of gore on the covers, as mystery readers would be familiar with the fact that the genre is centred on murder. Then, the main question here is not about the changes in the genre conventions, but rather in the aesthetic representation of the visual tropes. As Phillips observes in passing, the main selling point of the new covers was "the modern look" created by the typeface and the use of photographs ("How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 28). Indeed, as Powers documents, the transition from illustrated covers to photographic covers in the 1990s was a part of a bigger cultural shift towards technological experimentation in design (*Front*

Cover, 107). Furthermore, the success of the new covers can also be measured by the visual intrigue they create by bringing established genre conventions together with modern design techniques. The success of the book cover is often dependent on its capacity to compress "as many layers of meaning of the text and interpretation options as possible" into its imagery (Armstrong; qtd. in Sonzogni, *Re-Covered Rose*, 28). Because it is reader-oriented, the genre cover embodies the accumulation of the reader's personal and communal experiences with books, allowing the reader to engage simultaneously with a multitude of texts. This, itself, lies at the heart of the genre theory. Overall, the case study of the new Christie covers reveals an important fact about genre covers. Relying on a vast tradition of literary and artistic codes, the aesthetic symbols of the genre cover change and grow according to the complex dynamic between reading communities, and cultural and technological developments. In this sense, the symbol used on the cover is never fully out of commission and returns to colloquial use after a necessary redefinition in form and usage.

This dynamic in genre covers implies the existence of a certain stylistic basis for genre covers that designers and readers use to define reading communities and literary preferences. Catherine Sheldrick Rose notes that a reading community is defined by the constant, layered readings that allow its members to become better at choosing their next book with a higher likelihood of satisfaction ("Making Choices: What Readers Say About Choosing Books to Read for Pleasure," 9). Furthermore, because of their perpetual reading of certain genres and of their ability to recognize corresponding signposts, readers often establish their association with books through intuition rather than deliberate reading (10). In other words, it is the connotative nature of genre covers allows readers to form a complex relationship with the cover design that not only visually indicates the genre belonging of the book for new readers, but also validates the membership of the returning reader as a part of a defined reading community.

This is the core of the argument about the social history of the gothic and romance genres, both of which make prolific use of cover signposts. The historical precedent for this is also noteworthy. Campbell suggests that the excessive reading of gothic romances began among the middle-class women of the eighteenth century (*The Romantic Ethic*, 69). Because of this middle-class origin, the romance genre shows a deep inclination to subscribe to bourgeois moral values that require visible symbols to communicate its cultural legitimacy. However, the history of reading shows that there was a clear social opposition to female readers who read outside the moral code. Hence, the conflict here takes place between a yearning for fashionable symbols such as meek female characters on the cover for the reader to identify with, and the need to disguise the genre of the book being read from other genres. This reflects the underlying and almost unanimous criticism of romance covers for their representation of outdated female archetypes, with no substantial progress to this formula until very recently.

Figure 29: "Illustrated Romance Covers" (The Book Riot, 2019).
Courtesy of the publisher.

The re-emergence of illustrated covers for romance books at the close of the 2010s quickly become a topic of discussion (Figure 29). While the graphic illustration is a new

design phenomenon for the genre romances, the current style is characterized as a radical move away from realistic renderings of characters on the cover. The initial reaction to this trend was surprisingly negative, argued that the "cartoon covers" were "infantilizing and sexist towards romance readers" (Jensen, "As Illustrated Covers Trend in Romance, What is Being Said About Women's Interests?," 2019). This shows that the main line of resistance to new covers suggested that new cover designs *misrepresented* not the book, but the romance reader: "the books contain the tantalizing components of a romance novel but are sheathed in contemporary designs that make for embarrassment – proof and harassment-free public reading experiences." (ibid.)

Despite this, some positive reactions also emerged. Jessica Pryde, for example, noting the social and cultural importance of this new trend, discussed the potential impact of this trend for the future of the romance genre:

> The problem is much bigger and much more insidious than an illustrated book cover. It's the beliefs underpinning the need to turn romance into something other than what it is that trips the industry and holds the genre back from reaching the potential readers who it can truly reach—and truly impact. ("Illustrated Covers Aren't a Conspiracy to Belittle the Readers," 2019)

It is interesting to note that, unlike Jensen who criticized corporate greed eroding genre boundaries, Pryde's support for the new covers is motivated by a potential expansion of the readership. Rather than seeing the genre cover indicative of the collective readership, Pryde's argument attempts to show the pluralism that exists within the community: "This is how we'll have more covers with people of all complexions, and people with disabilities. How we'll have more covers featuring non-white interracial combinations. How we'll have queer

rep and trans rep and nonbinary rep. Because those people read romance and write them, too". (ibid.).

When Jensen and Pryde's comments are contrasted, it becomes apparent that the aesthetic form of the cover is one of the main sources of conflict. In this sense, the minimalist caricature style of the illustrations, combined with the flat colour backgrounds and playful typeface allows a wider flexibility for the representation and identity discourse to be reflected on the cover design. Indeed, Pryde emphasizes this point as a part of her commentary:

> As long as there's a central love story and an HEA [happily Ever After], the foundations of romance will remain the same—and any changes in who is being represented and who picks them up only makes it a greater experience for the whole romance community. ("Illustrated Covers Aren't a Conspiracy to Belittle the Readers," 2019)

While this debate depicts a point of divergence between the readers of romance, the use of shared symbols and references informs a common ground based on aesthetic symbols. In this sense, the romance readers at large are typified as a homological entity with stylistic definition. Dick Hebdige explains the idea of homology of style as a symbolic association between certain groups and cultural objects ("Style as Homology," 46). When applied to book covers, it can be said that the adopting of objects as codes and signs of belonging to a community is an important part of the reading experience. Hebdige also stresses the importance of well-defined subcultures based on shared symbols among the members of the group:

> Despite these individual differences, the members of a subculture must share a common language. And if a style is really to catch on, if it is to become genuinely popular, it must say the right things in the

> right way at the right time. It must anticipate or encapsulate a mood, a moment. It must embody a sensibility. (“Style as Homology,” 51)

Furthermore, the stylistic unity of the romance covers can also be argued through the emphasis put on the material and economic factors by the readers. Hebdige emphasizes the role of consumption in establishing a common aesthetic basis through which the style is being exercised and sustained (“Style as Homology,” 47). Interestingly, both sides of the debate about the new romance covers accuse the other as having the market advantage on their side. For example, Pryde returns to what she disparagingly calls “clench covers” to quickly explain the reason behind these covers being still in use, which she associates with the successful commercial legacy of this style of cover (“Illustrated Covers Aren’t a Conspiracy to Belittle the Readers,” 2019). Jensen, on the other hand, counters this by her observation that the booksellers such as Barnes & Noble often advertise the illustrated covers more prominently because of their YA appeal that easily translates into a cross-genre interest for readers who do not read romance exclusively (“As Illustrated Covers Trend in Romance, What Is Being Said about Women's Interests?,” 2019). The clash between Jensen’s and Pryde’s views, in fact, shows that the romance genre covers operate based on a certain stylistic homology, which is centred on the affirmation of the subjectivity of the reader. Indeed, Jensen’s rejection of the new romance cover is aimed at reclaiming the unique, familiar aesthetic form of the romance genre from the uniformity of globalism. Hebdige, in turn, explains this dynamic as a case of symbolic association between the progressive and conservative ideologies:

> The way in which [an “authentic” working-class backlash to the proletarian posturings of the new wave is] signified, via a magical return to the past, to the narrow confines of the community and the

> parent culture, to the familiar and the legible, was perfectly in tune with its inherent conservatism. ("Style as Homology," 51).

This opposition between the old and the new also defines the way material and ideological realities of subjectivity are negotiated for readers of the romance genre. Ultimately, for Pryde, the graphic style of cover design is more acceptable than racially biased "realistic" covers which fragment the human form into shapes such as *beheaded torsos* for entertainment ("Illustrated Covers Aren't a Conspiracy to Belittle the Readers," 2019). Here, it is important that the agency of the individual subject is assured when the body is allowed a material *wholeness* and cultural representation. Jensen, however, locates the power of the genre in the collectivity of its readers, positing that "Romance is a genre written by women that, while not exclusively, offers a space where women are the heroines, where women are given power and autonomy, and where women find romantic and/or sexual satisfaction. Women have agency in romance" ("As Illustrated Covers Trend In Romance, What Is Being Said About Women's Interests?," 2019). In this sense, traditional romance covers historicize the victory of women over the oppressive cultural institutions that controlled books and reading with a patriarchal dogma.

The push and pull between the contemporary and traditional covers are one way through which the homology of the visual aesthetics of the book and reading is effectively adapted to discuss the points of tension that exist in society. While the ideological discourse here can certainly be extended into gender politics, my interest in this debate lies with the impact of the changing genre conventions on the material form of the book. According to Jensen, the erasure of genre boundaries creates hybrid categories in which the established conventions of narrative styles are prone to radical changes (2019). For instance, the cross-impact of the "Young Adult" genre on romance had already resulted in a new short-form genre with a unique format:

> These romcom romance novels are also seeing their trim sizes change: no longer are they relegated to the traditional mass market paperback size. More and more are published in the trade paperback format, putting them in line with non-genre fiction which sees paperback releases in that size. Trade paperback also comes at a higher price point, which may also explain some of the increase in romance sales. (Jensen, "As Illustrated Covers Trend in Romance, What Is Being Said About Women's Interests?," 2019).

This is an important observation that may help to explain the main reason behind the new illustrated covers. The existence of large romance-reading communities online may be a clue to this process. More specifically, it can be argued that the emergence of the graphic style on the romance covers is an offspring of the "thumbnail cover" ("Does Your Small Book Thumbnail Cover Stand Out?," 2022). Derek Haines argues that the development of these smaller, graphically simpler cover styles occurred after Amazon became a permanent player in the everyday book trade. Consequently, now book covers have to use every inch of the "500 x 333 pixel" vertical rectangle to their best advantage. Furthermore, Haines' article also provides a self-help guide to independent authors on how to adjust the pixels and sizes of their book covers for Amazon and other online retail platforms.

While the density of information presented by Raines about creating an Amazon-friendly cover without cropping the cover is revealing, I consider that the debate centred on "clarity or readability" more pertinent to the discussion of the contemporary cover. Indeed, I would posit that the demand laid the book cover to adhere to the simplified graphics of online platforms is the main challenge that the cover designer face. On the one hand, the simplified, abstract illustrations can be seen as an adaptive reaction to the movement of book distribution, particularly for the romance genre, to online platforms. On the other hand, the

negotiation carried out between the colourful, recognizable and simple graphic styles for the background, and abstract, minimalist illustrations for the foreground causes an observable fracture in the form of the cover. I suggest that the compromise between the professional quality of the design and homogenized formula reduced in resolution and size can be seen as a part of the deeper anxiety felt about the survival of the book form.

It can be said that the contemporary discourse on the illustrated Romance covers and digital cover design in general have resurrected latent fears about the impending *death of the cover*. According to some critics, the disapproval of the new cover trends is native to the way each book form have historically been met public panic and criticism. However, some of the ongoing conversations about the cover also signal a fundamental shift in the function of the cover as an ally of the reader. For instance, Tim Kreider argues that the establishment of homologous symbols favoured by the digital platforms is a sign of degradation and even disappearance of the cover. If one considers the development of the paperback as a formative step in an evolutionary process, Tim Kreider's assessment of the Modern book cover is very striking. Calling contemporary book covers "inbred" with often-repeated "half-faces, napes, piers stretching into the water" ("The Decline and Fall of the Book Cover," 2013), Kreider argues that the main challenge today for book cover design is to stand out among the "disturbingly same" covers that dominate the landscape. Comparing contemporary design to that of the 1970s and 1980s, Kreider argues that the missing element in new cover design is the lack of excitement and intrigue:

> Looking at those old, beloved covers [in reference to the 1970s science-fiction covers] made me wonder: How come books for kids get to look so mysterious and tantalizing and spooky, while books for us grownups have to be so dull? Why don't the covers of mainstream literary books make me feel that same way—almost scared to find out

> what's inside? For some reason children's books, Y.A. literature, and genre fiction still have licence to beguile their readers with gorgeous cover illustrations, but mature readers aren't supposed to require such enticements. For serious literature to pander to us with cosmetic allurements would be somehow tacky, uncool. ("The Decline and Fall of the Book Cover," 2013)

What is suggested here is that covers are made to look noticeably plain, in order to frame certain books as a part of a prominent literary legacy. Interestingly, Kreider extends this critique to the critically acclaimed covers as well, jokingly suggesting that the early typographic covers of James Joyce's *Ulysses* should be seen as the prototype of nondescript covers. This not only suggests a certain degradation of design creativity, but also asserts that the future of the cover is an empty space with no *character*. Ultimately, it can be said that Kreider's account is more alarmist in its intention. However, it is notable to highlight that, the way he frames the argument in historical precedent shows that the *fall from grace* of the simplistic covers does not only concern the contemporary cover but the history of the cover at large.

As a final note, I would argue that the shifts in the cover design are not necessarily signs of the disappearing creativity or functionality of the cover, but rather the results of competition from the growing e-book format. As e-books begin to gain traction in the market, new online bookstores such as Amazon become increasingly successful, they contribute to pushing the book cover towards minimal design for its adaptiveness to the "thumbnail" format. Thus, the future development of the cover needs to be negotiated within the context of the coexistence of the print book with the e-book. This provides the basis for the final entry in this study where we will reflect on this thesis by summarizing the chronological development of the book cover and its changing role in the age of digital visual media.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I looked at the concept of the book cover with the intention to provide a better understanding of how it first emerged and changed in reaction to many cultural and social movements. My method in accomplishing this was to study it from the twelfth century to present day by reviewing different theoretical schools that explored the cultural potential of the book and its cover. It is often true for accounts dealing with the history of objects like books to end on a forlorn note, mourning the long-passed time of status, prestige and authority. While the history of book covers can also claim several highs often discussed as "renaissance", "revival", "golden age", I am not so pessimistic about the future of the book covers. Thus, as this study catches up with the present day in its recounting, it is worth to summarize the conclusions drawn from the historical analysis conducted in this dissertation and use these as a way to discuss future projections for the book cover.

While the reader is often tempted to judge the cover, the main goal of this thesis was to balance this impulse with the notion that the judgement of the book cover is a complex and conflicting process. The introduction to this thesis opened by reviewing some of the ongoing discussions about the present state of the book and book cover. The difficulty in finding a clear answer to questions raised in this section showed that the discussion of book covers and how we judge them are incomplete if not contextualized in their history. Judgement and history are interrelated terms; as every judgement has its history, histories also rely on personal or professional judgement. Thus, the history of the book and book cover, at its core, belongs to every book and book cover that has been subjected to judgement or discussion. Despite the fact that book cover is explored thoroughly in design manuals and critical work done on the paratext, it is clear that the lack of consensus on when it comes to what book cover is and what book cover does lies at the heart of the cover-conflicts discussed in this dissertation. While it is difficult to separate the incident with Barnes & Noble's "Diverse

Editions" with the social discourses regarding race and equity, when we look at the proposed covers, we can understand that the bigger issue here was how one individual cover is *bound* to an individual book. The cover is expected to define the book against a cultural backdrop. While the "Diverse Editions" covers attempted to do this, the proposed compositions worked more towards destabilizing the book than recontextualizing it. As such, the material bond between the book and the cover makes it necessary that the outside and the inside of the book remain connected. Perhaps the mass adoption of the true e-book – a book with only a digital existence and no material form, may bring the relevance of the books to our daily lives into question. If judging material cover is difficult, the capacity of human senses, such as touch and feel, to penetrate the digital cover remains uncertain.

As the opener, the first chapter in this study attempted on contextualizing the cover in theory and in history. The discussion here focuses on the definitions and functions of the book cover in order to understand that how the book cover engages in a cultural dialogue with onlookers and readers. The book cover does not simply hand the book to its reader, but rather *leads* the reader to the book. Books are so intrinsically tied to our lives that, we spend a lifetime learning how to read, collect and assess them. What does not change, however, is the primary function of the book cover. In my opinion, this function is to assist the reader in reading. I envision reading as a public performance, but also as a private adventure. Interestingly, these two concepts coexist together in books, one never denying the possibility for the other. Because of this, the focus of this project was the interiority and exteriority of the book as it impacted and inspired personal and public forms of reading. If one is to suggest that readers learned and grew alongside their books, the cover then is the historical witness to how ideas, thoughts, and concepts were manifested, reimagined, and materialized. The Bible, as was discussed in the following section, is a great example of a book that has taught millions how to see, listen to, read and revere books. The final chapter in this project

attempted to paint a wider picture of the reading and the reader in relation to the cultural, economic and political changes happening in the background of pre-Industrial period. Here, the discussion aimed to locate the book covers in depictions and discussions of the reader and reading, because, alongside their visuality, book covers are an integral part of the reading experience.

The second project, on the other hand, offered a fully focused account and history of the book cover between the late-eighteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While the technological developments in book printing and bookbinding during this period was largely driven by the Industrial Revolution, the book cover was explored at large by social critics who were interested in assessing the impact of the mass production on arts and crafts, as well as on everyday culture. Bought, bound, gifted by thousands of readers, the nineteenth century book embodies the triumph of the aesthetically defined book as a symbol of the taste, beauty, history. The discussion of the British Arts and Crafts movement was also significant for the history of the book cover as it chronicled the first aesthetic revolution of the book cover by bringing together modern technological developments with the historical methods and traditions. As this project discussed at a great length, the beauty of the book cover can also be inattentive to the social implications of indiscriminate reading while filling the reader with an insatiable hunger for books and the madness of reading. Towards the end of the century, Wilde's casting of the beautiful book as a poisonous weapon both crowned the Romantic symbolism of the book and used its moral significance and religious legacy against itself. Reading now was a communal and private activity. Performed in total silence, it was spread by recommendations from one reader to another, driving them both into a shared frenzy of obsession and adoration. *The Picture of Dorian Grey* is essentially a book about a book and reading. It speaks of a moment in the history of the book cover in which the reader, ensnared and empowered by their own possessions, began to read while remaining conscious that the

book in their hands were ready to pounce upon its next victim in a new reader. Dorian's love and hatred for this beautiful, yellow-covered book is not a story emblematic only for the nineteenth century, as Dorian still inspires many readers to this day. The cover or binding is the domain through which the reader claims its ownership to the book and its history.

The final project in this thesis opened by addressing the changes that affected the twentieth century book cover, namely the impact of the Modernist movement in arts and culture. The close study of the Bell covers for Virginia Woolf's books published by the Hogarth Press, owned and operated by the Woolfs, reveals an important turning point in the book cover as it began to fully embody the book rather than the text. The comparison between the reception of Bell's covers then and now proves that the impact and aesthetic reading of the cover is never static and can change after the release of the book. Ultimately, the cover becomes culturally meaningful only after it is allowed to find its reader and reading by interacting with individual and institutional participants in the book world. The publication of Woolf's books spans across two world wars, which also marks the period when the book form began to bifurcate on a mass scale. The cultural explosion that the paperback book caused fundamentally changed the way book covers were conceived and produced. The extensive reading habits and reading communities the paperback fostered made it necessary for the cover to acquire visual cues to assist the book in its journey from the publisher to the reader. Consequently, the book cover as a medium demonstrated aesthetic compatibility with every new background it was exposed to, be it trains, private or public libraries, or the shelves of the corporate booksellers.

Ultimately, the emergence of e-books in the book scene at the beginning of the new century once again caused a shift in ways that the book cover is understood. The digital existence of the cover now impacts how physical covers are being made with the demands and rules of the online retail platforms in mind. Furthermore, the rise of online reading

communities also created new opportunities for authors such as E.L. James, whose *Fifty Shades* series began as online-only fanfiction based on Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga and was subsequently published in physical form with innovative covers that fundamentally impacted romance genre covers, causing a shift from people-oriented covers to upmarket object-oriented covers. This was particularly important for the visibility of the book and reading in public spaces. The readers of genre books have often been left out of the greater book community despite having a significant impact on the aesthetic and cultural norms prevalent in different genre categories.

In the contemporary period, the book cover remains as one of the most divisive manmade objects in terms of its aesthetic form and visibility. Human eyes remain highly sensitive towards a poorly designed cover, as is reflected in current debates about it. While the changes in the book cover have been contingent on the book for now, I would observe that that the cover had always shown a great adaptability, reacting very quickly to the way the book form grew and changed. As I am ending my research on the cusp of the transition between printed and digital book, it is important to emphasize that this process is just beginning to gain enough momentum to cause a cultural and aesthetic stir in the discourse surrounding book covers. In this sense, to attempt to predict the end of the book cover is as naïve as predicting the end of the book. While materially significant, the book cover has a very complex relationship to the book itself and the reader, and I expect it will still put up a valiant fight before it is ready to be pronounced defunct and defeated.

In the following section I would like to expand on this possible doom theories about the cover. Having documented the history of the cover and witnessed many occasions when it survived against all odds, my perspective in this matter is simple: because the cover is still able to elicit reactions, either good or bad, from the readers of both digital and physical books, then the *end* is still premature to theorize. The main reason for this is the fact that the

e-book, as it is often posited by the critics as the main villain that can undo the history of the book, is still mainly a digital replica of the print book. Perhaps this point, more than any argument dealing with technological adaption, explains why the close competition between these two book forms easily lends itself for alarmist projections. In this sense, the cross-pollination between digital and print cover conventions is often interpreted as the erosion of the dominance of the print form as the sole claimant to the cultural authority of the book.

The simmering tension resulting from the side-by-side existence of material and digital version of the same object is not unique to book covers. However, when discussed within the paradigm of *the end of the book,* the trajectory of discussion is often predictable: the book's hopeless race against other forms of media is observed by presenting the expected statistical data about the percentage of youth forgetting about books because of their cell phones and adults obsessed with watching television or playing on their tablets instead of reading print books[51]. Another common feature of these theses is the deterministic manner in which they posit the experience offered by books as stable and unchanging (e.g.: book – reading; book cover – identifying the book), to the point that even the slightest divergence from the convention risks the complete loss of its relevance. This approach is highly ineffective in understanding how objects adapt to the cultural norms, and how their functionality reflects that of their community of users. A compelling analogy to the uneasy dynamic between print books and e-books could be the resurgence of the vinyl form despite the mass digitalisation of music. Once pronounced dead and outdated, vinyl has made a full, comeback against all odds, exact reasons of which remain unclear[52]. Regardless of this, it is

[51] Robert Coover's 1992 article for *The New York Times*" The End of Books" and Ben Ehrenreich's 2011 seminal essay titled "The Death of the Book" are a good example for this trend.

[52] A compelling analogy to the uneasy dynamic between print books and e-books could be the resurgence of the vinyl form despite the mass digitalisation of music. Once pronounced dead and outdated, vinyl has made a full comeback against all odds, exact reasons of which remain unclear. According to some critics, the vinyl form is widely appeal to people of all ages. For example, Olivia Deffes highlights this in an interview with Dana Labat, the owner of Capital City Records in Baton

interesting to note that, while digital music streaming remains the dominant form of consumption, the way the vinyl has been able to reflect contemporary aesthetic tastes became a big contributor to its popularity. For instance, when talking about the attraction of the vinyl form, it is impossible to avoid comments about its "poster-size packaging" (Deffes, 2020), and "vibrant colours" of the record and its cover art, which make for a "deeper listening experience" (Garcia, 2021). What made vinyl relevant once again was not just its capacity to allow private access to recorded music, but rather how it connected with music-lovers in a deeply aesthetic way, offering them, not only a good music-listening experience ("the warm, mellow analogue sound")[53], but also a visual outlet to express their taste in art and culture. In other words, the ease with which the digital platforms have enabled the display capacity of the objects is one of the reasons why vinyl now appeals to a broad range of audiences, possessing both "nostalgic" and "novelty" value at the same time.

What does this tell us about the future of book covers? Certainly, print books, like vinyls are also adapting to the aesthetic norms of their day; but what causes all this fear and anxiety about its disappearance when it is still relevant to our everyday in many ways? What sets books apart from vinyls or other aesthetic objects, is the fact that the changes happening with the books are difficult to discuss without reflecting back to their history. As books become neutralized citizens of the twenty-first century, every change in their form translates into a restlessness about the loss of symbol for wealth, status, learning, faith and knowledge,

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Rouge, Lousiana: "Labat said that there isn't one age group that frequents Capital City Records more than others. "It's ages 11 to 80. I have a lot of teenage and college-aged customers who are into music, so that may be the biggest demographic. [..] "But then there are many who are middle-aged and have been interested in records all their lives. It's really all over the board." ("Repeat Performance: Music Lovers Warming up to Vinyl – Again," 2020). On the other hand, for others the vinyl resurgence owes its success to Gen-Z and young adult audiences. Quoting *Pitchfork* senior writer Mark Hogan who emphasizes the "novelty" factor of the vinyl form for "younger people who don't have any experience at all with physical music consumption", Garcia writes the following: "Even though vinyl was popular in the 80s, its return is not caused by the adults who lived through this era, but rather by the young-adult demographic. Since young people have their music digitally, vinyl has become a novelty." ("How Vinyl Records Have Made a Miraculous Comeback," 2021).

[53] (Deffes, "Repeat Performance: Music Lovers Warming up to Vinyl – Again," 2020).

among other cultural connotations. However, I would argue that the changes in the book design in the current day is no different than how Bibles adapted to the taste of their readers or giftbooks bought and given for their display value. In other words, the gloomy reaction to the cover is not a historical reaction, but rather a social one aiming to control the behaviour associated with the object. For instance, the reaction to growing impact of the algorithm-driven social media platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok[54] on the book cover may not be fully positive but suffice to say this is not the first time the book cover has turned to a simple, iconic look in order to make them easily recognizable to the readers. In fact, there are many clear parallels between the paperback vending machines in early-twentieth century urban centres and the "BookTok" shelves in bookstores dedicated to the books popular on the TikTok platform. The book cover remains attached to its reader whether they are an urban commuter or a social media user. One thing is for certain, the contemporary cover, now more than ever, is bound to its reader who's travelling not only between physical spaces but also cyber spaces.

Perhaps, it is apt to present a few points about where this journey may take the cover in the immediate future. It would be predicable to suggest that the transformation of the book cover will continue full force, under the influence of the new digital technology. However, as the e-book and print book continue to co-exist, I envision that a bigger dialogue between the two formats will ensue, similar to the way paperback and hardback books existed side by side and in dialogue with each other for most of the twentieth century. E-book libraries, unlike physical bookshelves, show the front cover constantly facing the reader. This condition changes once the book is read in a perpetual state of scrolling leaving the cover behind. The

[54] In a recent BBC article, the role of TikTok in driving the sales of, not only the new releases, but also the backlisted books was discussed at a greater length ("TikTok helps UK Book Sales Hit Record Levels, Publishers Says," 2022). With this, it is now becoming very common seeing "BookTok Favourites" shelves dedicated to the list of titles that generate a lot of view-count on the platform.

need for the cover is now to offer an open initiation to the reader, compelling them to deliberately seek and create meaning through scroll-reading.

The futurity of the cover is often discussed in two scenarios: the most extreme of them being the death of the book cover. Some people believe that the e-book as a digital object seems to endanger the existence of the cover which still remains a materially signified object in the world of paperbacks and hardbacks. I believe fearing the demise of the book cover in our digital future is an unjustified fear, for the book, whether in print or as an e-book remains an object with a strong visual signification. We care and continue to care about books because we spend many hours looking at them when we engage in reading. Just like how the e-book did not bring about the death of the book, the digital cover will not make the book cover disappear. But it may make it fade. The impact of the digital age on the cover is felt more strongly by the readers who like to read for the questions as well as the answers. The algorithmic systems used by the internet platforms where the digital book is sold, discussed, and collected already seem to strip the cover from its complexity and puzzle. Simple two-tone designs; white, abstract backgrounds with even simpler illustrations appeal is god-sent for left-leaning minimalistic aesthetic tastes that prevail across the internet sphere. The result of this is the confusion and overuse of the same symbols like flowers, crowns, and snakes for a wide variety of genres and categories. The lack of clarity makes these covers turn into almost a fun accessory, to borrow from Genette, rather than purposeful objects.

As I mentioned in this dissertation several times, books are objects of intention. This applies to book covers as well. While they are technologically impressive, the trend of suggesting hyperrealist paintings created by AI programs as the cover design of the future is not convincing, because it is not the images or symbols that made the cover, but rather the synthesis of the two. The aesthetic future of the book cover is unknown, but I believe that there is a future for the book cover. Even when deprived of its material form, the cover will

always remain a visual and aesthetic object that prods and pricks the readers. The unsettled discourse about what the cover is and how it is supposed to look proves that we have not yet discovered everything there is to know about the book cover. However, one thing is certain: the cover still very much belongs to its reader, maybe more than the rest of the book, because they remind us that our judgment can be correct sometimes.

While this thesis mostly focused on the cultural history of the book cover as an aesthetic object, another history of book cover still waits to be written from the perspective of the author of the book. It is impossible to read accounts about, for instance, Kafka insisting on not having any insect illustrations on the cover of *The Metamorphosis*, or J.D. Salinger's strict rules about having only typographical covers given to his book, or even Penguin Art Director David Pelham's failed experiment in trying to create covers that Graham Greene suggested for his books, without wanting to know more about why the author is often kept away from the cover. Is book designer Peter Mendelsund right when he says that "dead authors get the best book jackets." (Alter, "The Creative Art of Selling a Book by its Cover")? At its core, the difference in vision and expectation between the author and audiences is certainly a topic of immense interest that can shed light into how we can expect the book to change in the future. This research has the potential to finally explain the existence of a gap between the textual and visual and why all attempts to unite them under the rule of one authority figure has, so far, failed. Both the material and digital book cover, first and foremost, engages a visual medium of communication. Therefore, any theory of the book cover, be that from the perspective of the author, publisher or the object, needs to consider the eye of the reader as a part of the future of the cover.

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