

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 8 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 2

Today, we will analyze book covers of Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 ¾*. Before that, let's read and discuss the following article from theatlantic.com.

Has Kindle Killed the Book Cover?

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/04/has-kindle-killed-the-book-cover/255935/>

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How designers are responding to e-readers



AP Images

Daylight Saving came out in the U.K. in February, and in the months leading up to its release, the publisher used a novel strategy to generate interest in the teen novel: It placed a ticker at the bottom of the digital cover, counting down to the launch date. (It's still counting, now into a negative number.) In addition to the digital jacket's embedded clock, an underwater design ripples with the drag of a cursor, as if your finger could make waves through the screen. The interactive blue splashes (gimmicky, maybe) are nonetheless entrancing for the few minutes spent toying with the cover. And with that, the book has caught the eye of a potential buyer. Once purchased, of course, the water transforms into a static image, its graceful motion unsupported by the media formats in which it is ultimately consumed (print or the standard digital forms). The cover is seductive, but its spell is broken. Which brings to mind the tagline of *Daylight Saving*: "Can you save someone from something that's already happened?"

That question comes to bear on the book publishing industry. Digital reading is already happening, but electronic books have only barely begun to adapt to current habits and devices—not to mention forge new standards for either. The various constraints—technological, financial, and cultural—allow hardly any clarity in seeing what books will be, or how they will be. Especially if we are to judge them by their covers.

In November, at the Build 2011 conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, a publisher-designer named Craig Mod told the crowd, "We're trying to bring order and form and boundaries to what is otherwise a boundless space" and went on to describe the "generalized marginalization of the cover that's happening in digital books."

A digital book has no cover. There's no paper to be bound up with a spine and protected inside a sturdy jacket. Browsers no longer roam around Borders scanning the shelves for the right title to pluck. Increasingly, instead, they scroll through Amazon's postage stamp-sized pictures, which don't actually cover anything, and instead operate as visual portals into an entire webpage of data (publication date, reader reviews, price) some of which can also be found on a physical cover and some of which cannot.

The abstract idea of the cover remains, though, as it does for album covers. Book designer Carin Goldberg remembers when she would sit in her room as a teenage girl listening to Joni Mitchell, holding the record in her arms. Since then she has designed hundreds of covers—among them are the 1986 edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, books by Kurt Vonnegut, and Madonna's first record. The cover "functions as an emotional visual touchstone," Goldberg says. "It's still something that we will always visualize in our heads as what that book looked like. It definitely becomes part of the experience."

For three decades, Goldberg has also been teaching design. This year, for the first time, she is offering a digital editorial design class using the iPad. To explain the technology side of things, she teamed up with two pros from Conde Nast. Goldberg launched her career without a computer, and hasn't designed any covers for ebooks herself. These days, she says, "I'm more sort of, I guess, the guru."

Or, as she added later, "I'm just somebody who gives a shit but I don't really know how to do it." In late January, Goldberg tried her hand by presenting at an event on the future of design in digital book publishing, sponsored by AIGA, the professional association for design. She showed off her students' work with animated book covers, and declared that the Kindle experience is like "reading through a tub full of dirty dishwater." Eric Himmel, the editor in chief of Abrams publishing, took notice. After the talk, he called her up and said, "I'm not waiting for the world to shift."

Himmel has been in publishing for 30 years, and at the art-focused ABRAMS, it is his job to care about design. "Book covers have been in crisis for some time now," he told me. Pressure comes from the shrunk images on Amazon, a need for covers to be

more multifunctional, and, on the other hand, a renewed desire to reclaim the tactile qualities of textured, gorgeous print. The idea of a book cover as a singular form has vanished some time ago, and he says, "I don't have a clear view of the future."

Then he saw how Goldberg's students incorporated the vocabulary of bookmaking into multimedia cover layouts. Rather than borrow techniques from documentary film, they used typography in more sophisticated ways that seemed to be digitally-native expressions of book design. Her students also used moving images, video, and audio.

The digital book can be a complete piece of art, Goldberg explained, though "we're doing it by the seat of our pants. There is no technology that is uniform yet." And publishers haven't embraced it, she says, because "they don't have resources."

"I don't think anybody's figured out how to create a whole creative environment that's able to fit well into every publishing house right now," Goldberg told me, adding, "I'm sure there are companies that are talking about it all the time. But I haven't seen anybody go about it."

Himmel's call after her talk came as a sign of hope. He asked Goldberg for her students' phone numbers. He isn't quite sure how he wants to put them to work, but he described "a kind of laboratory" to develop some prototypes using the most accessible software. There's the ubiquitous program, Adobe—which Goldberg and others say can be hard to use for digital book design—and Himmel pointed to Apple's iBook platform as an alternative option. Still, Himmel says, this is all very new.

And costly. Paul Buckley, Vice President, Executive Creative Director at Penguin—who oversees the development of 800 book covers each year—noted the expense of adding digital features: "Benefits have not yet caught up to the costs of this extra content. Because the viewer's not going to pay for it." Publishers' art departments haven't traditionally come equipped with highly tech-savvy illustrators and typographers. And even as more digitally-capable designers arrive, so too will their demand for new tools to support their talents.

With or without digital frills, the cover sensibility is fetching simplicity. A winning formula tends to involve bold text and pared down illustrations. Says Buckley, "We need to broadcast ourselves clearly."

Legible means, literally, capable of being read. For Buckley and other like-minded designers, there is elegance in legibility: The cover can be deciphered by the human eye, from a distance or on a small screen. But it's not only our eyes that must do the reading. So too, computers read our books, with varying degrees of success. So says Holladay Penick—Creative Director at OnixSuite, and formerly of the Institute for the Future of the Book—in noting that "legibility is a big concern."

When Buckley's team at Penguin designs a book cover, they turn it into a PDF (or sometimes a JPG) and load it onto their server for someone else to send out into the

marketplace. But major retailers, like Apple's iBook store, won't sell ebooks as PDFs, mainly because these files can't adapt to different screen sizes. Instead, publishers must offer up their books in a format called EPUB, sometimes by working backwards and converting from the PDF. The EPUB file can then be changed again, as is the case for Amazon's Kindle. In other words, digital reading doesn't only have one kind of digital expression, and this poses obvious complications for how books may be aesthetically packaged.

The early ebooks tossed readers right into the text, without ceremony. This is still true in many cases. On a standard Kindle, for example, you can buy a book and pop right over to the first page of the introduction. There is no procession through the cover, title page, and so on. To see the cover at all, you have to manually click backwards, perhaps more than two dozen times.

"I'm not sure they should be called 'covers,'" says Bill McCoy, the director of International Digital Publishing Forum, which oversees the EPUB system. Rather, "It's really more an introduction to the experience you're going to have in consuming this content." For McCoy, this is comparable to an entrée into a video game or DVD main menu page. If a movie were to just start playing, the viewer's impulse would be, "What's wrong, what's going on here?" he explains, "You expect to get some choices and a menu of options." Whereas the movie business has been sorting this out for the past 15 years, "We're just in year one of that for digital books."

For some, those introductions are simply an annoyance to be tolerated until they can get to the good stuff. When McCoy's 9 year-old son plays video games, he skips past preliminary screens to jump right into play. For their part, readers with print copies rarely stare admiringly at a cover for 20 seconds before diving into the text. "People will come to see what works and what's annoying," he says.

Earlier this year, Nielsen released a white paper on the relationship between metadata and book sales. Metadata was defined on different levels—basic and enhanced—so that the former included familiar elements such as title, publication date, and cover image; the latter included author biography, plot descriptions, and table of contents. "As the book industry takes its next step into the digital age, metadata will not only remain an essential part of the industry, but become increasingly important," the report concluded. Also of note: by including a cover image, sales go up 268 percent.

At his Build conference presentation, Craig Mod said "The cover is being encroached upon by social actions," adding that "the cover is no longer this thing that sits on its own, but it's competing with other metadata."

In digital space, the areas where books are read and discussed need not be set apart. The metadata in the Nielsen paper—recognizable from every Amazon book page—is only one part of the equation.

"What's in books is data. And that data is going to be increasingly subject to business," says McCoy. Cover testing—commonly used for magazines—could just as easily be applied to books, and "data analytics-driven optimization is going to have to be something designers are going to have to deal with." Create 20 covers and watch which one sells the best. Or create a monitored ad campaign to determine which branding strategy works for a given title.

"Books ought to have multiple covers and multiple flaps," says Seth Godin, a marketing expert and founder of the direct publishing website, The Domino Project. Readers should be able to set preferences on their ebooks to show different covers depending on what they're looking for, he explained. This might include, among other things, how many people tweet about the book.

That morning, as Godin spoke about book covers within the context of the publishing industry at large—"the next two years are going to be really bloody. A huge, huge amount of income is going to disappear, and the amount of competition is going to increase"—Godin had just published a book of his own. He made it available for free in PDF and EPUB formats, as well as html and a Kindle version. The "cover," visible here as the first page of the PDF, is simple text. The title is set in white inside a black rectangle. Yet most of the Domino Project books have no words, just pictures, because Godin says, "We felt like words are redundant. And we wanted to use every square inch to send a message." The message of his book on that particular morning was spelled out clearly: *Stop Stealing Dreams*.

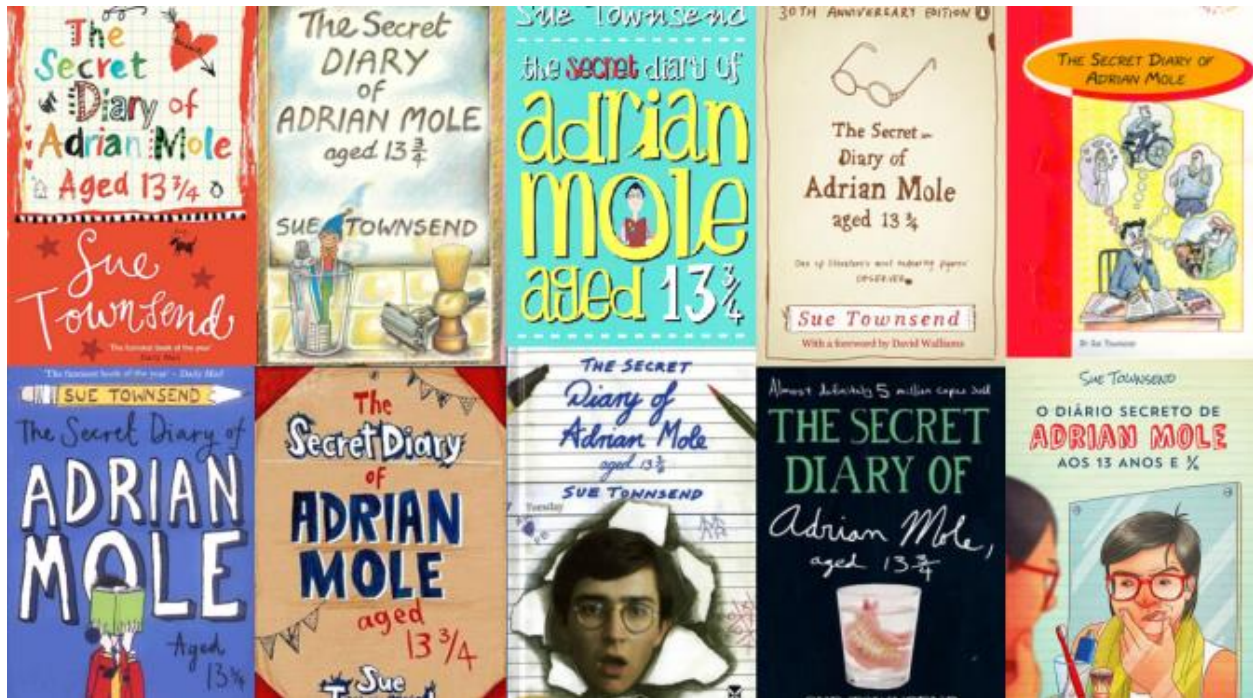
Ultimately, though, he says "I don't think book covers are going to save the day."

Meanwhile, at Penguin, Paul Buckley is not extremely worried. "Whether it's a hard copy or a digital copy, it's still going to have a cover. I think they might change to a certain degree, but everything evolves," he says. And although he faltered when explaining how covers are tailored for ebooks—"It's sort of amazing how behind I am. It's kind of scary"—he also expressed his willingness to make a few adjustments. "I don't get bogged down in visual integrity. If somebody wants the cover to move a little bit, I won't lose sleep over it."

Discussion

What do you think? Have book covers lost their relevance?

Analyze the book covers of Townsend's novel. Your instructor will project them on the screen.



Discussion

Which one is your favourite cover?

If you have already read the novel, which one do you think is the best? (SPOILER ALERT!!!)

What predictions can you make about major and minor characters, the events, the plot, the setting, the conflicts, and the themes?

Read the first few January entries from Adrian Mole's diary.

Winter

THURSDAY JANUARY 1ST

Bank Holiday in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales

These are my New Year's resolutions:

1. I will help the blind across the road.
2. I will hang my trousers up.
3. I will put the sleeves back on my records.
4. I will not start smoking.
5. I will stop squeezing my spots.
6. I will be kind to the dog.
7. I will help the poor and ignorant.
8. After hearing the disgusting noises from downstairs last night, I have also vowed never to drink alcohol.

My father got the dog drunk on cherry brandy at the party last night. If the RSPCA hear about it he could get done. Eight days have gone by since Christmas Day but my mother still hasn't worn the green lurex apron I bought her for Christmas! She will get bathcubes next year.

Just my luck, I've got a spot on my chin for the first day of the New Year!

FRIDAY JANUARY 2ND

Bank Holiday in Scotland. Full Moon

I felt rotten today. It's my mother's fault for singing 'My Way' at two o'clock in the morning at the top of the stairs. Just my luck to have a mother like her. There is a chance my parents could be alcoholics. Next year I could be in a children's home.

The dog got its own back on my father. It jumped up and knocked down his model ship, then ran into the garden with the rigging tangled in its feet. My father kept saying, 'Three months' work down the drain,' over and over again.

The spot on my chin is getting bigger. It's my mother's fault for not knowing about vitamins.

SATURDAY JANUARY 3RD

I shall go mad through lack of sleep! My father has banned the dog from the house so it barked outside my window all night. Just my luck! My father shouted a swear-word at it. If he's not careful he will get done by the police for obscene language.

I think the spot is a boil. Just my luck to have it where everybody can see it. I pointed out to my mother that I hadn't had any vitamin C today. She said, 'Go and buy an orange, then.' This is typical.

She still hasn't worn the lurex apron.

I will be glad to get back to school.

SUNDAY JANUARY 4TH

Second after Christmas

My father has got the flu. I'm not surprised with the diet we get. My mother went out in the rain to get him a vitamin C drink, but as I told her, 'It's too late now.' It's a miracle we don't get scurvy. My mother says she can't see anything on my chin, but this is guilt because of the diet.

The dog has run off because my mother didn't close the gate. I have broken the arm on the stereo. Nobody knows yet, and with a bit of luck my father will be ill for a long time. He is the only one who uses it apart from me. No sign of the apron.

MONDAY JANUARY 5TH

The dog hasn't come back yet. It is peaceful without it. My mother rang the police and gave a description of the dog. She made it sound worse than it actually is: straggly hair over its eyes and all that. I really think the police have got better things to do than look for dogs, such as catching murderers. I told my mother this but she still rang them. Serve her right if she was murdered because of the dog.

My father is still lazing about in bed. He is supposed to be ill, but I noticed he is still smoking!

Nigel came round today. He has got a tan from his Christmas holiday. I think Nigel will be ill soon from the shock of the cold in England. I think Nigel's parents were wrong to take him abroad.

He hasn't got a single spot yet.

TUESDAY JANUARY 6TH

Epiphany. New Moon

The dog is in trouble!

It knocked a meter-reader off his bike and messed all the cards up. So now we will all end up in court I expect. A policeman said we must keep the dog under control and asked how long it had been lame. My mother said it wasn't lame, and examined it. There was a tiny model pirate trapped in its left front paw.

The dog was pleased when my mother took the pirate out and it jumped up the policeman's tunic with its muddy paws. My mother fetched a cloth from the kitchen but it had strawberry jam on it where I had wiped the knife, so the tunic was worse than ever. The policeman went then. I'm sure he swore. I could report him for that.

I will look up 'Epiphany' in my new dictionary.

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 7TH

Nigel came round on his new bike this morning. It has got a water bottle, a milometer, a speedometer, a yellow saddle and very thin racing wheels. It's wasted on Nigel. He only goes to the shops and back on it. If I had it, I would go all over the country and have an experience.

My spot or boil has reached its peak. Surely it can't get any bigger!

I found a word in my dictionary that describes my father. It is *malingerer*. He is still in bed guzzling vitamin C.

The dog is locked in the coal shed.

Epiphany is something to do with the three wise men. Big deal!

THURSDAY JANUARY 8TH

Now my mother has got the flu. This means that I have to look after them both. Just my luck!

I have been up and down the stairs all day. I cooked a big dinner for them tonight: two poached eggs with beans, and tinned semolina pudding. (It's a good job I wore the green lurex apron because the poached eggs escaped out of the pan and got all over me.) I nearly said something when I saw they hadn't eaten *any* of it. They can't be that ill. I gave it to the dog in the coal shed. My grandmother is coming tomorrow morning, so I had to clean the burnt saucepans, then take the dog for a walk. It was half-past eleven before I got to bed. No wonder I am short for my age.

I have decided against medicine for a career.

FRIDAY JANUARY 9TH

It was cough, cough, cough last night. If it wasn't one it was the other. You'd think they'd show some consideration after the hard day I'd had.

My grandma came and was disgusted with the state of the house. I showed her my room which is always neat and tidy and she gave me fifty pence. I showed her all the empty drink bottles in the dustbin and she was disgusted.

My grandma let the dog out of the coal shed. She said my mother was cruel to lock it up. The dog was sick on the kitchen floor. My grandma locked it up again.

She squeezed the spot on my chin. It has made it worse. I told Grandma about the green apron and Grandma said that she bought my mother a one hundred per cent acrylic cardigan every Christmas and my mother had *never ever* worn one of them!

SATURDAY JANUARY 10TH

a.m. Now the dog is ill! It keeps being sick so the vet has got to come. My father told me not to tell the vet that the dog had been locked in the coal shed for two days.

I have put a plaster over the spot to stop germs getting in it from the dog.

The vet has taken the dog away. He says he thinks it has got an obstruction and will need an emergency operation.

My grandma has had a row with my mother and gone home. My grandma found the Christmas cardigans all cut up in the duster bag. It is disgusting when people are starving.

Mr Lucas from next door has been in to see my mother and father who are still in bed. He brought a 'get well' card and some flowers for my mother. My mother sat up in bed in a nightie that showed a lot of her chest. She talked to Mr Lucas in a yukky voice. My father pretended to be asleep.

Nigel brought his records round. He is into punk, but I don't see the point if you can't hear the words. Anyway I think I'm turning into an intellectual. It must be all the worry.

p.m. I went to see how the dog is. It has had its operation. The vet showed me a plastic bag with lots of yukky things in it. There was a lump of coal, the fir tree from the Christmas cake and the model pirates from my father's ship. One of the pirates was waving a cutlass which must have been very painful for the dog. The dog looks a lot better. It can come home in two days, worse luck.