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Penguins on the Mind: behind-the-scenes of Penguin paperbacks.

You may feel nostalgic for the decades before the internet – a time when editorial gatekeepers stood between authors and audiences, weeding out misinformation, half-truths, and falsehoods about psychology. Penguin Books was such a gatekeeper for the post-war British reading public. Its non-fiction imprint Pelican, intended as a ‘definitive library of modern knowledge’ (Joicey, 1993, p. 54), was home to many titles on psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy. Thanks to the Penguin Archive held at Bristol University, we can go behind closed doors to learn about the commissioning, writing, and selling of these books. We may have a nostalgic image of the disinterested psychological expert earnestly distilling their discipline for public’s edification; but examining even just a few titles shows a more complex, ambivalent picture.

Penguin Books was central to the ‘paperback revolution’ in Britain (McCleery, 2002). Instead of selling short hardback runs through traditional booksellers, Penguin specialised in long runs of paperback editions that could be sold through non-traditional retailers. A customer could buy a modestly priced Penguin paperback from a railway newsagent or Woolworths with confidence in the quality of the book, which had often been taken over from a hardback edition with another publisher. (As well as such ‘takeovers’, Penguin and Pelican also commissioned specially written ‘Originals’ where they saw potential demand.)

One of the earliest psychological Pelicans is a takeover, *The ABC of Psychology* (1944), by C.K. Ogden (1889–1957), who was in many ways an enthusiastic amateur. Ogden was educated formally only as a Classics scholar; he was self-educated in philosophy, psychology and linguistics, and a prolific author, editor, and promoter of psychological knowledge. This eclectic book shows how Ogden offered psychology as the scientific answer to profound questions that might earlier have been the province of theology, philosophy, or literature. He offers ‘four and a half good reasons for studying Psychology seriously’: it is a foundation for other disciplines; it tells us who we are, where we go wrong, and how we might be improved; finally (just half a reason), we are made happier simply by learning about it.

Academic psychologists soon spotted the potential of the Pelican market. Hans Eysenck (1916–1997) was widely read through polemical Pelican Originals such as *Uses and Abuses of Psychology* (1953) and *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (1957). Unlike the eclectic amateur Ogden, Eysenck had an axe to grind. Through Penguin, he could speak over the heads of psychological peers to announce a supposed paradigm for a truly scientific psychology. Not only were Eysenck’s declarations contentious at the time, his patrolling of disciplinary boundaries and methodologies must strike us as ironic given what we now know about apparent failures in his research integrity (e.g. Marks, 2019; Pelosi, 2019). Nor was Eysenck’s publishing career with Penguin blemish-free. Editorial files for *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* show publishers Faber and Faber writing to Penguin to accuse Eysenck of ‘copying passages with minor changes or sometimes with no change at

all' from S.G. Soal's *Modern Experiments in Telepathy* (1954). The matter was eventually settled out of court, with Faber and Faber's legal costs deducted from Eysenck's royalties, along with a commitment to revise any later editions to ensure Soal was credited.

That Penguin indulged Eysenck's liberal approach to copyrighted material might be explained by the enormous commercial success of his *Know Your Own I.Q.* (1962) and *Check Your Own I.Q.* (1966). Eysenck's books of tests made psychometry into a game to be played for fun. *Know Your Own I.Q.* was inspired by the success of the Associated Television gameshow *Pencil and Paper* (1960-62) which set questions in the style of an IQ test. Eysenck's book was also a great success, selling 200,000 copies in its first year of publication. (Indeed, his commissioning editor remarked in 1984 that Eysenck's IQ books 'far outrun the sales of all his other books', and he hoped the author would produce one aimed at children – or their worried parents). Eysenck's IQ books helped to make psychometric testing popular, accessible, and enjoyable as a competitive game that could be played against friends and family, and even against the test's creators – Penguin archival correspondence shows readers writing in to record both errors and possible alternative answers.

Eysenck's commercial success was though an outlier. The average Pelican had to sell at least a few thousand copies every year to remain in print. Despite sales figures that might seem enviable, Pelicans were not obviously lucrative for authors, who were often much better paid by their professional activities (Miller, 2015, p. 79). The low cover price (a few shillings) meant that a royalty of 7.5% didn't amount to much over the life of a book. How then were harried professionals motivated to cultivate and exercise the skill of professional authorship? Sometimes they weren't. John Bowlby's Pelican *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) is a case in point. Bowlby (1907–1990) had been sufficiently tempted by the popular market to contract a book on *Difficult Children* with Penguin in 1940 – which he didn't deliver. The manuscript of the Pelican edition of *Child Care* was written not by Bowlby, but by the penal reformer Margery Fry (1874–1958), who saw the potential in rewriting Bowlby's 1951 report to the World Health Organisation. During the commissioning process, which Fry initiates, the book is explicitly framed as a collaboration or 'joint effort' by Bowlby and Fry, since the latter would shorten and rewrite the original text. (Fry also took care of tedious work such as the many copyright permissions requests.) Yet the eventual contract is made solely with Bowlby. Fry's material reward is 68 copies of the final paperback – totalling around £5 in value – which Penguin send her in thanks for her work. Not that Fry even expected so much; she had sent Penguin £5 in order to buy as many books as possible for her own distribution.

*The Psychology of Propaganda* (1963), an Original by the medically trained J.A.C. Brown (1911–1964), shows how ungrateful authors could be for such (often female) collaboration, no matter how much they needed it. Brown's book was intended to rival and rebut bestsellers such as the US journalist Vance Packard's 1957 *The Hidden Persuaders* (on advertising) and the British psychiatrist William Sargant's 1957 *Battle for the Mind* (on brainwashing). Whatever the merits of Brown's psychology, the topic's historical and cultural dimensions took him into a painful editorial process of

correction and revision guided by a copyeditor referred to in correspondence as ‘Miss X’. In lengthy harangues to his commissioning editor, Brown denounces this (presumably female) helper as, variously: ‘arrogant, ignorant about matters upon which she assumes knowledge, and impertinent’; ‘an underling who is too clever by half’; ‘incompetent’; and no better than ‘a garage mechanic’. The great man was not to be told. This may explain why the *New Statesman*’s review of the final product noted tactfully that Brown’s ‘touch as a historian may seem a trifle uneven’.

These books are just a few selected from the Penguins on the Mind exhibition (details below). Back in the heyday of the Pelican imprint, editorial gatekeepers ensured that writing on psychology in the mass media was left largely to recognized experts. Yet for all that, the Pelican list belies any easy nostalgia for a pre-internet public psychology. Experts could use the public stage to declare themselves victor over rival psychologies and psychologists, regardless of professional consensus or dissensus. Some may even have been perpetrators of fraud and plagiarism. Experts were often rescued from unintelligibility or error by a scattered army of poorly rewarded collaborators and editors (many of them female); and some authors lacked the good sense to recognize the value of this assistance. Moreover, as much as authors popularised psychology, they also marketed their discipline to the public with various enticing claims: psychology can make us virtuous, happier people; it can show how intelligent we are, regardless of our status in life; it can protect our children’s mental health; it can ease worries about threats to our freedom. Penguin authors didn’t just write accessible introductions; they created demand for psychological knowledge and expertise itself.

To find out more about the behind-the-scenes stories of Penguin’s psychological list, visit the online Penguins on the Mind exhibition, where you can also find out about events and activities associated with it:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/mhrc/penguins/onlineexhibition/>

or via a tiny url:

<https://t.co/XxZ61cA0FW>

**Please complete the very brief post-exhibition survey:** to be supported to do more of this work, the organisers need to know what you thought of the exhibition, good or bad. You’re very welcome to contact the author directly at [gavin.miller@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:gavin.miller@glasgow.ac.uk), particularly if you’d like to take part in our online stakeholders’ event themed on ‘Psy disciplines in the mass media’.

You can also follow the author via Twitter [@drgavinmiller](https://twitter.com/drgavinmiller)

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