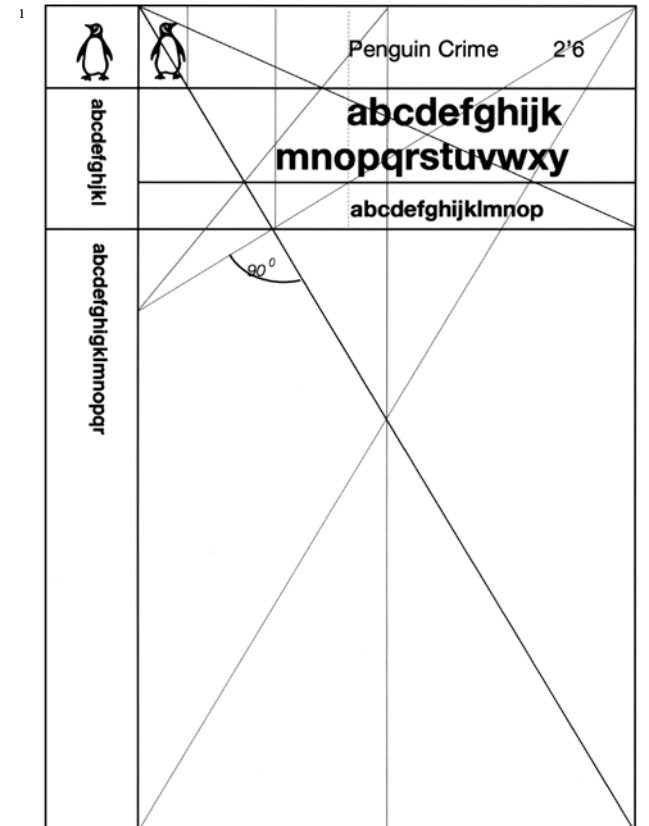


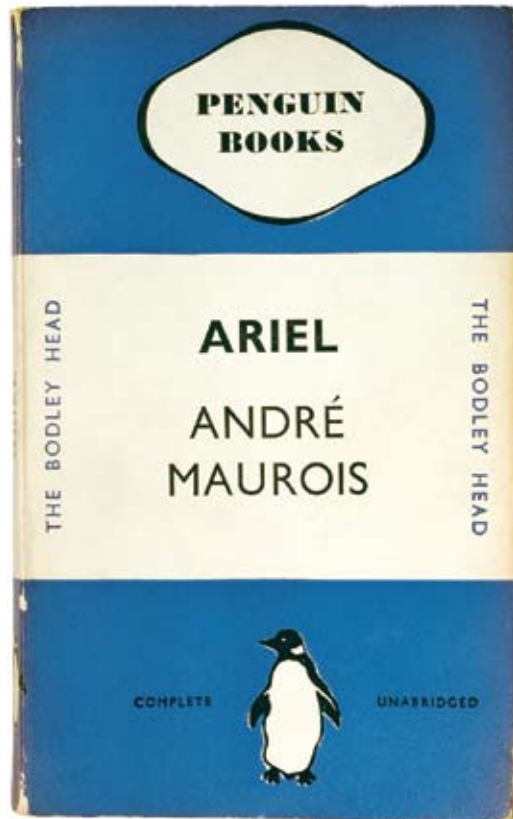
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DAVID PEARSON

Penguin Books—Great Ideas

1 The Marber grid, 1961.
Romek was a freelance cover designer for Penguin from 1961 to 1969.





2 Penguin no 1:
André Maurois, *Ariel*, 1935.
Cover design by Edward Young

3 An early proposal for
The Social Contract cover.

4 Jean-Paul Sartre *Words*, 1983.
Cover design by Derek Birdsall.

In Britain today, books fight fiercely for shelf space. Full-bleed pictures and huge type are very much the norm, and the idea that a quietly suggestive cover could be heard through the noise seems to be increasingly overlooked. There is a common notion within publishing that academics will buy a book regardless of its cover whereas your average consumer has to be manipulated all the way to the check-out. This is a belief not found commonly in other European countries, where books are consistently packaged with dignity and a respect for the buying public. Austere-looking covers sit happily next to packets of sweets in Italian railway kiosks, whilst the most commercial French novels need carry no more information than a tiny title and author name on a plain white background.

In Britain, this rather utilitarian approach has never been more neatly executed than by Penguin Books in its early years. The founding of the company in 1935 heralded a new, egalitarian era of publishing. For the first time, the ordinary man or woman in the street was able to buy a pocket-sized paperback for the price of a packet of cigarettes. Book buying was no longer the preserve of the privileged classes, and books could now sell in huge quantities. Significantly, Penguin achieved this early success without the aid of pictures, shiny foil or marketing slogans, just simple, approachable design.

Over the years, the clarity of Penguin's purpose had become somewhat compromised by shifting



production costs and an increasingly competitive marketplace. And in the field of 'classic' literature, in order to maintain their leading position—and to justify their cover price—many of the books had developed into unwieldy tomes loaded with annotation and critical essays which had the effect of narrowing their appeal, resulting in a more academic readership.

In 2004, Simon Winder (a commissioning editor for Penguin Press) began to develop an idea for a mini-series—modest in both pagination and price—that might go some way towards shaking off the stigma that had attached itself to the buying of classic literature. These new books would revert to Penguin's original 'A' format, which would give them back an easy, pamphletty feel and enable a significant price reduction.¹

The conceit for Great Ideas is to take existing Penguin books and chip pieces off. This is partly to try to encourage buyers to go from the chip back to the classic it came from and partly to remain true to the vision of Allen Lane (the founder of Penguin Books), that the publisher existed to educate and to popularise.

While spanning over 2,000 years of philosophy, the first 20 book selection addresses many very contemporary issues, such as globalisation, the environment, religious intolerance, and so on.

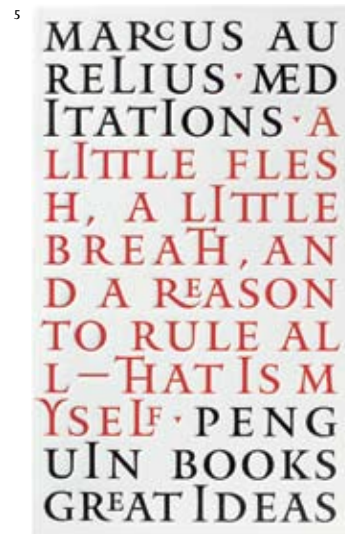
So what is the most appropriate aesthetic for philosophy? How do you sum up a text that tells us everything and, yet nothing at all? Perhaps abstract shapes, patterns or evocative landscapes? At once these solutions feel too contrived, too knowing.

As a junior designer at Penguin, I was given the task of designing the covers. With no existing model to influence proceedings and, therefore no specific sales expectations, my Art Director (Jim Stoddart) deemed it an ideal project for me to cut my teeth on.

Early in the process, illustration was suggested to me as a possible solution, but owing to the subjective nature of the writing it felt like a mistake to dress the covers in imagery that might simply mislead. I imagined that a less literal treatment might better serve the subjects and challenge the reader to project their own meaning onto the covers. If you can activate a reader's interpretive participation you stand a much better chance of making their experience a meaningful one.

On reading the texts, it became apparent that later writers often revered or reviled earlier writers in interesting ways, so there seemed a good reason to make clear visual connections across the series.

I worked up some rough covers to present internally, and although they sported gross historical inaccuracies (blackletter used for Mary Wollstonecraft's passionate



declaration of female independence, for example) the selection was clear enough in its intention: situating the writing in its historical and geographical place through typography.

Type-only covers had become increasingly rare in publishing, but I remember feeling confident that my solution was 'on brand', as Penguin have a rich history of distinctive, type-driven jackets. Also, my feeling was that the cumulative effect of the covers would give them sufficient presence when displayed.

An initial concern was sparked by the lack of a publisher's logo on the covers. To emphasise the period-specific styling I had decided to represent the company and series names with words only, arguing that this treatment—when applied consistently across 20 titles—would then create its own brand identity.

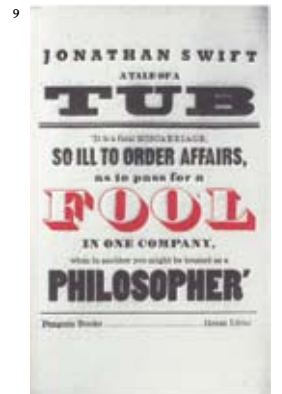
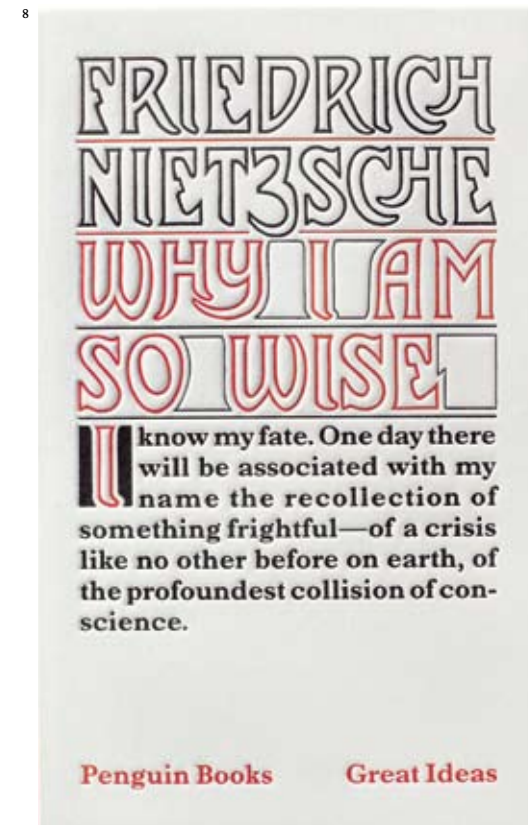
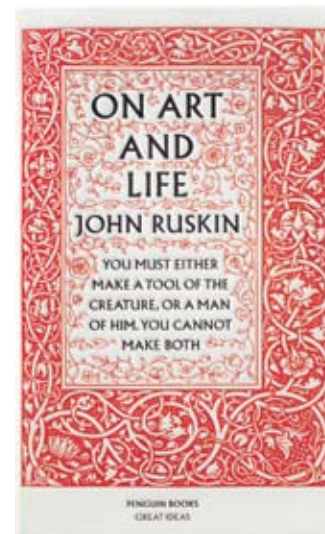
The roughs seemed to have an immediate impact, and this bought me time to go away and research the project in full, with the expectation that I would return with a more complete solution.

During this period I was able to sound out other designers—namely Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon (my college tutors), and one of my old classmates, Alistair Hall. This would ensure two things: that the project would have an in-built level of quality control (typophiles can be very unforgiving if you get it wrong) and that collectively the

covers would appear varied and interesting. For example, when Phil got involved I was struck by how confidently he used the cover area, and it is this fluctuation in scale that helped provide pace to the series. Phil's approach opened my eyes and made me realise that I too could push the idea further than I had originally imagined. The series could have quite easily turned into a straight-laced, visual history of lettering, but we were now finding more and more abstract ways to represent the subject matter. This gave the project personality and even a little humour.

Finally, after eight weeks of intense activity, came the unveiling. I guess I'd begun to feel rather protective of the work since it was the first project I'd been allowed to manage, so I wanted to give it the strongest chance of success. To do this, I held back until I was ready to show all 20 covers at the same time, thus making the strongest possible statement.

The temptation of all clients is to make small changes—partly to acquire some ownership of the idea themselves and partly out of well intentioned attempts to second-guess the market. Happily, in this instance, the Penguin press managing director—Stefan McGrath—stuck his neck out and insisted that every cover be preserved in an unadulterated state. This was a very bold decision, and I noticed more than a few worried looks, but he simply felt that the process of making changes—once begun—would never end and that the integrity of the project would be compromised.²



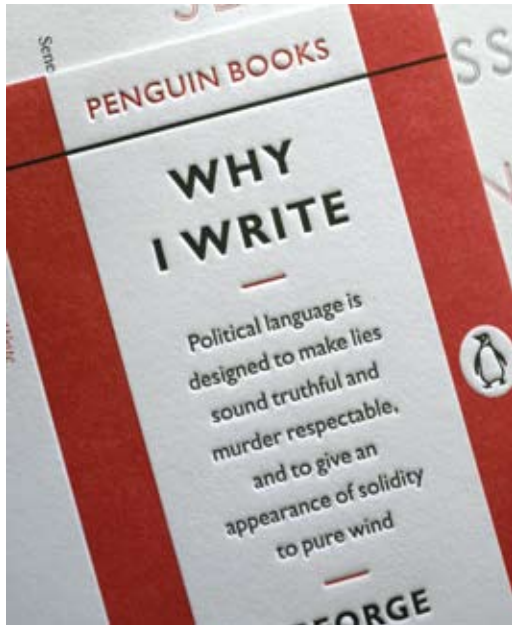
5 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2004. Cover design by Phil Baines.

6 John Ruskin, *On Art and Life*, 2004. Cover design by David Pearson.

7 Thomas Kempis, *The Inner Life*, 2004. Cover design by David Pearson.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Why I am So Wise*, 2004. Cover design by Phil Baines.

9 Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 2004. Cover design by David Pearson.



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With approval won, the next step was to proof the covers.³ Of course, we did not have an unlimited budget, and we had to monitor quite closely what was spent. Once the economical decision was made to use only two colours (black and red, which is the traditional second printing colour), it meant that more elaborate finishes could be afforded. The debossing of type tips a nod to letterpress printing (albeit in a rather amplified way) while the choice of an uncoated, off-white stock reinforces the link with traditional printing.⁴

In book publishing, it can be a contentious decision to leave a cover uncoated, as it tends to get rather dirty, but I never saw this as a problem since the books would only acquire a stronger sense of erudition the more beaten up they became.

These days, the sales team normally show what is new at Penguin on their laptops. The trouble is, in PowerPoint you gain no sense of a cover's tactile qualities.

In one instance, a Penguin salesman (Andy Taylor) pretended that his computer was broken in order to get the proofs into the hands of his customers, and he insists that this made all the difference.

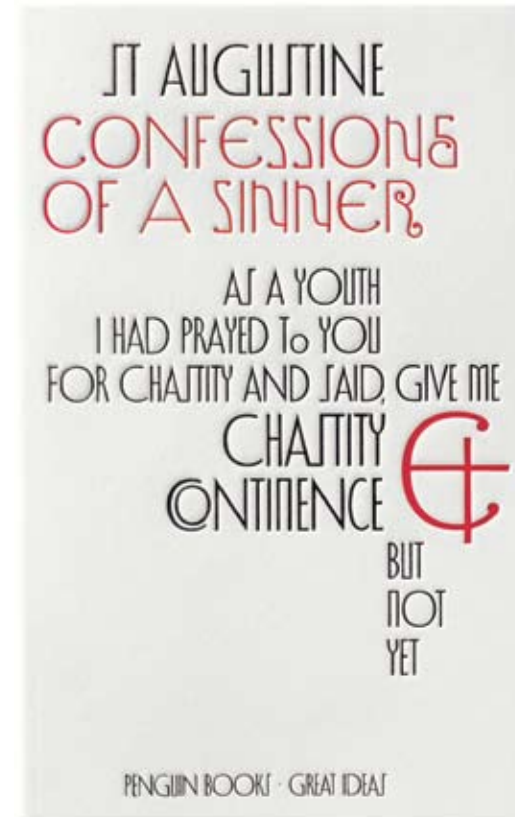
Great Ideas was launched on 2 September 2004, and sales currently stand at three million copies worldwide. Second and third series have since been commissioned—in blue and green respectively—and things may not end there.

10 George Orwell,
Why I Write (detail), 2004.
Cover design by Alistair Hall.

11 St Augustine
Confessions of a Sinner, 2004.
Cover design by Catherine Dixon.

12 Linotype Vere Dignum:
Regular (top) and Decorative.
Designed by Phil Baines.

OHAMBURGEFONSTIV¹²
OHAMBURGEFONS



11

The series' success should be attributed to many different factors: Simon's original idea was a great one, implying that world-changing thought and writing equates to Penguin, while the finished books reflected Allen Lane's philosophy that good design should cost no more than bad; but above all the publisher displayed an unflinching level of confidence in the project, ensuring that its message remained clear and its purpose true.

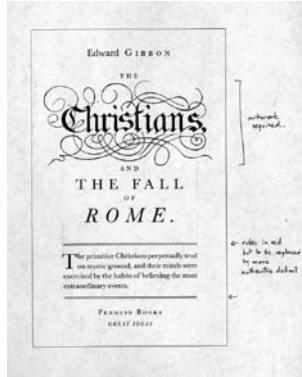
The Covers: *Confessions of a Sinner* (series I)

There is no early Christian font revival contemporary with St Augustine, so designer Catherine Dixon decided on a more lateral approach for *Confessions of a Sinner* (Great Idea no 3):

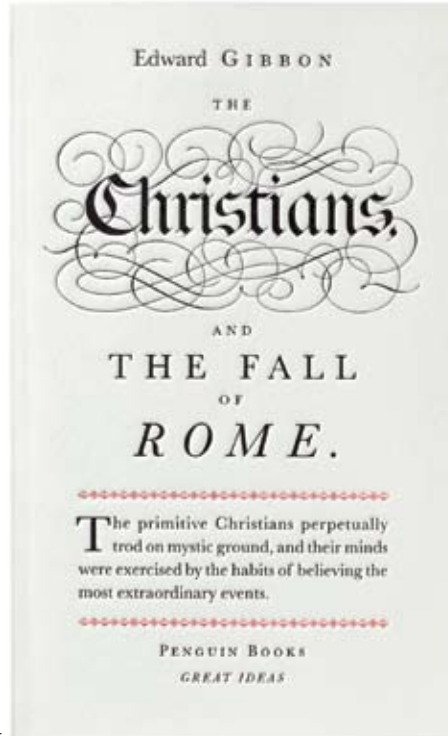
...My work focused instead on ideas about how lettering could be used in a certain celebratory and decorative sense. I also wanted to retain a crudeness in the letterforms used. The Vere Dignum font offered both these things. It also reflected ideas about visual excess and restraint as it has an over indulgent, curly variant of the plain base font. I have to say, though, that it bothered me quite a lot at first that the letterforms were not historically legitimate. But that is to miss the point of the series idea, I think. That has far more to do with a way of looking at aspects of past practice and extracting the ideas informing that practice, as much as it is about copying the visual manifestations of different styles.



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The Covers: Christians and the Fall of Rome (series I)

The Christians and the Fall of Rome (Great Idea no 9) mirrors the title page design of Baskerville's Bible for Cambridge University Press, 1776.

As he developed the cover, Phil decided that his favourite band—The Fall—should be entitled to a special mention.

The Covers: Books v Cigarettes (series III)

Far be it from me to imply that laziness has ever gripped a Penguin design department, but even the briefest look through the company's archive presents a very clear pattern: Penguin have often turned to the humble circle in order to solve a design brief. So obvious is this trend (there are literally hundreds of examples) that when it came to designing George Orwell's *Books v Cigarettes* (Great Idea no 57), the revival of the big circle felt like a fitting tribute to this quintessentially Penguin author.

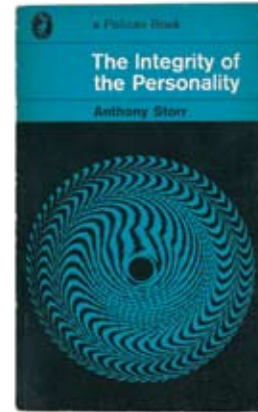
Adopting Romek Marber's Penguin crime grid, the cover suggests that a cigarette stub (or is that a bullet hole?) has actually punctured the book's cover, fatally wounding it.

With Penguin's 'crime green' already in place as our series colour, all that remained was to persuade Penguin that an extra colour was required.⁵ Red had made fleeting appearances in Romek's own crime covers

—usually to denote blood—and such sparing use of embellishment was symptomatic of Penguin's early rigour. Although it didn't make me very popular with the other designers, its addition to our palette felt like a fitting indulgence for one of the list's biggest-selling authors.

The typeface used is Intertype Standard (a version of Berthold's Akzidenz Grotesk) and this was directly lifted from a selection of previous Penguin covers

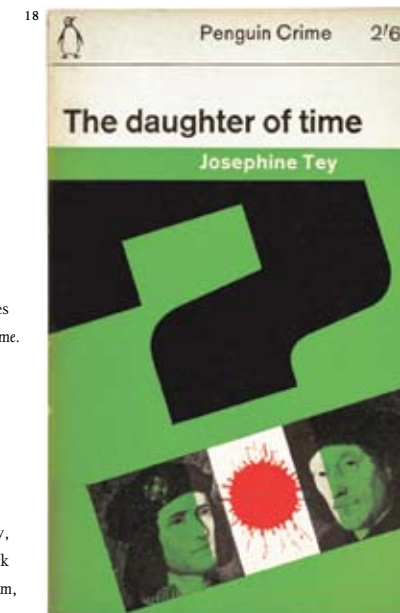
Early titles in Romek's crime series featured minimal use of capitalisation, so this model was retained for our own version, for example using 'cigarettes' instead of 'Cigarettes'. Overprinting also makes an appearance here, in what is one of our looser interpretations of a typographic cover.⁶



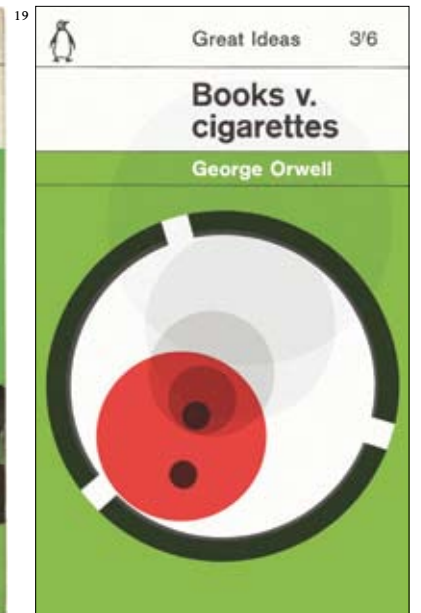
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13 John Baskerville's title page, for his 1776 Bible.

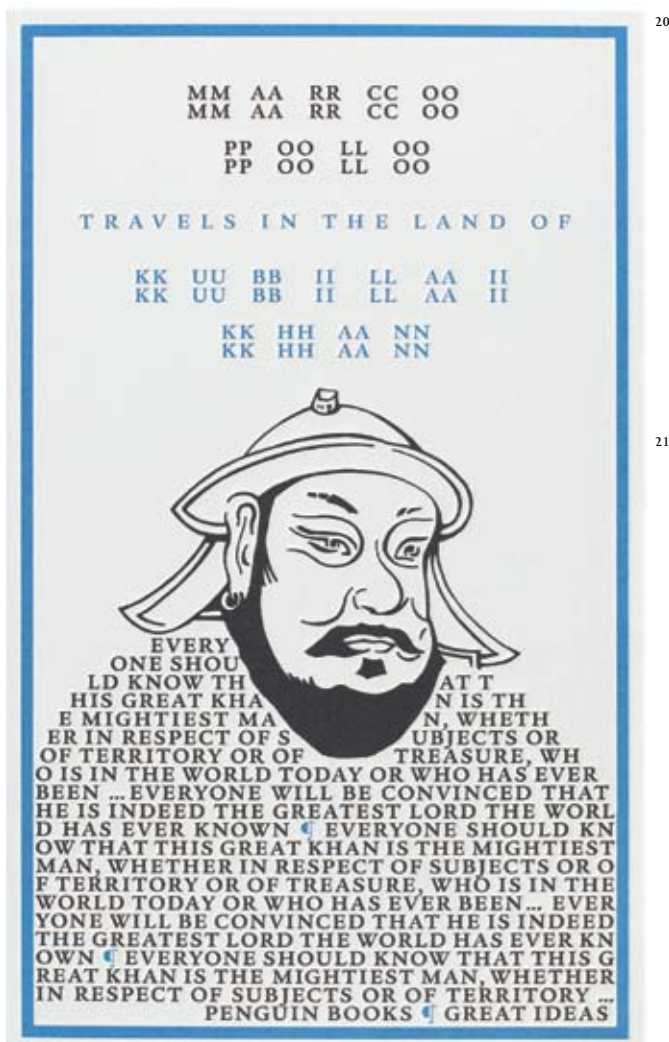
14 Rough layout by Phil Baines for *The Christians and the Fall of Rome*.

15 Edward Gibbon, *The Christians and the Fall of Rome*, 2004. Cover design by Phil Baines.

16, 17 'Big circles': Anthony Storr, *The Integrity of the Personality*, 1970. Cover photograph: Snark International; *Radical School Reform*, 1972 (uncredited).

18 Josephine Tey, *The Daughter of Time*, 1961. Cover design by Romek Marber.

19 George Orwell, *Books v Cigarettes*, 2008. Cover design by David Pearson.



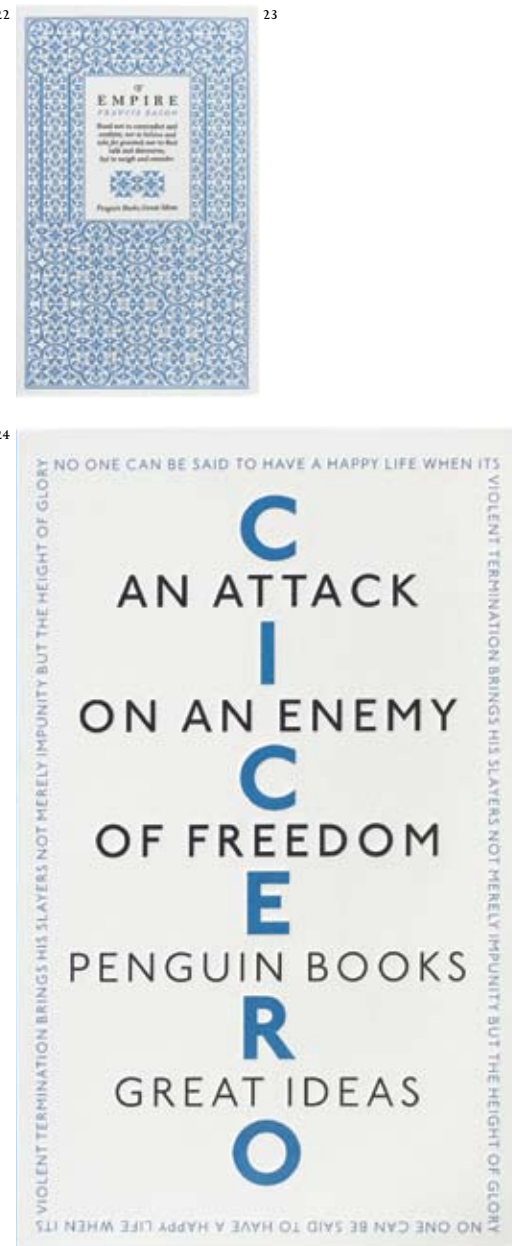
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20 Marco Polo, *Travels in the Land of Kubilai Khan*, 2005.

Cover design by Phil Baines.

21 Baldesar Castiglione, *How to Achieve True Greatness*, 2005.

Cover design by Phil Baines.

22 Albert Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 2005.

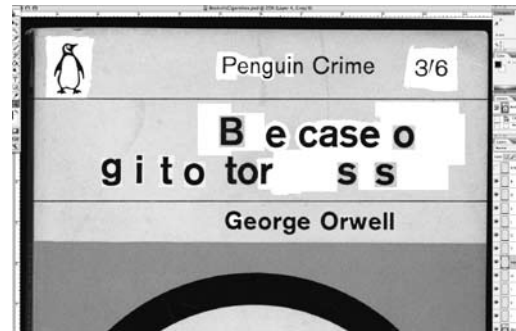
Cover design by David Pearson.

23 Francis Bacon, *Of Empire*, 2005.

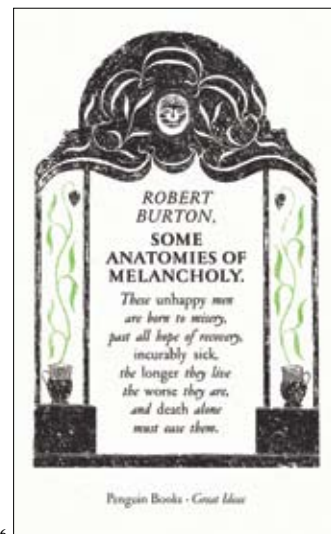
Cover design by David Pearson.

24 Cicero, *An Attack on an Enemy of Freedom*, 2005.

Cover design by Phil Baines.



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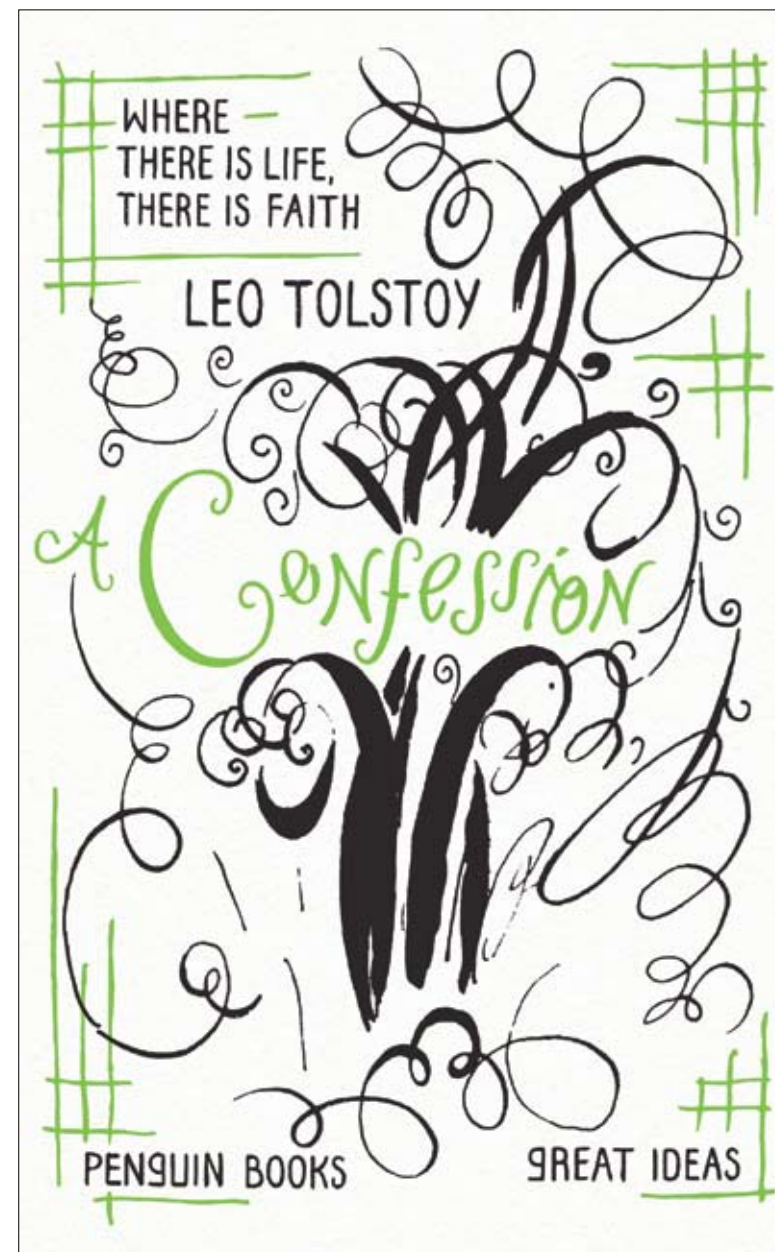
25 Letter sampling using Adobe Photoshop.

26 Robert Burton, *Some Anatomies of Melancholy*, 2008. Cover design by Catherine Dixon.

27 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 2008. Cover design by David Pearson.

28 Leo Tolstoy, *Confession*, 2008. Cover design by David Pearson.

29 Frantz Fanon, *Concerning Violence*, 2008. Cover design by Phil Baines.



28



29

FRIEDRICH
NIETZSCHE
MAN ALONE
WITH HIMSELF

Every superior human being will instinctively aspire after a secret citadel where he is set free from the crowd, the many, the majority.

Penguin Books Great Ideas

30

PLUTARCH
IN CONSOLATION
TO HIS WIFE
WE MUST NOT
SLUMP IN
DEJECTION
OR SHUT
OURSELVES
AWAY
PENGUIN BOOKS
GREAT IDEAS

31

AN APPEAL TO THE
TOILING, OPPRESSED
AND EXHAUSTED
PEOPLES OF
EUROPE
THEY TURN THEIR PEOPLE'S BLOOD INTO THEIR MASTERS' GOLD
LEON TROTSKY
PENGUIN BOOKS GREAT IDEAS

32

30 Friedrich Nietzsche,
Man Alone with Himself, 2008.
Cover design by Phil Baines.

31 Plutarch,
In Consolation to his Wife, 2008.
Cover design by Catherine Dixon
and David Pearson.

32 Leon Trotsky, *An Appeal to the
Toiling Oppressed and Exhausted Peoples
of Europe*, 2008.
Cover design by David Pearson.

33 Albert Camus, *Fastidious
Assassins*, 2008.
Cover design by David Pearson.

34 Ralph Waldo Emerson,
Nature, 2008.
Cover design by David Pearson.

33

Albert Camus

THE
FASTIDIOUS
ASSASSINS

*I rebel
therefore we exist*

34

IN THE WOODS IS PERFECTIONAL YOUTH IN THE WOODS IS
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