Creating Covers and Consensus: Authors, Designers, and Publishers in the Book Design Process

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Creating Covers and Consensus:
Authors, Designers, and Publishers in the Book Design Process

by

Diana Zhang

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The images and typefaces used in my cover designs are royalty free or were purchased with the license to use them for non-commercial purposes. Special thanks to the artists and designers who created them. A more detailed list of credits can be found in Appendix E (see pg. 56).

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ABSTRACT

The cover of a book is one of its defining aspects. Its conception is a collaborative process, involving an author, a publisher, and a designer. However, the amount of input each party is allowed to have is not always balanced. This can be detrimental to the cover’s design, and consequently its reception among the book’s audience. Why does this happen and what are some ways it can be remedied during the design process? What can a book cover mean outside of a marketing context? My project aims to answer these questions. I begin with the research stage, where I summarize the history book cover design in the United States and personally interview five representatives from publishing companies for their opinions on the cover design process. I also interview employees at two independent bookstores located in Iowa, to find out if there is any correlation between book covers and book sales. I then collaborate with three author colleagues to design three batches of covers for their stories. Each batch is differentiated by the amount of input from the involved parties during the process: all designer, all author, and a mixture of the two. Finally, I reveal my colleagues’ evaluations of their covers, emphasizing the potential for book covers to speak to different types of artists.
INTRODUCTION

Although we are commonly advised to “never judge a book by its cover,” the cover is usually the first thing a person notices about a book while browsing a store or library. Therefore, one could say that “a book’s first communication to the reader” (Drew and Sternberger 8) is its cover. But whose vision is truly being communicated through the cover’s design? The cover of a book is the product of collaboration. It visualizes the book written by the author, is commissioned by the publisher, and brought into existence by the designer. However, the amount of input each party is actually allowed to have during the design process is generally unbalanced.

This existing imbalance, and potential for cover design to bring together different types of artists, forms the basis of my creative component project. Allowing the input of one party to eclipse that of the others can detract from the cover’s final design and dissatisfy the intended audience of the book. The purpose of my project is to develop a solution that book designers can use to create more balance between author, designer, and publisher input during the cover creation process. The following questions have informed my research:

1. How much control do publishing houses usually allow authors to have over the way their book covers are designed, and why is this so?
2. What can the cover of a book mean to its target audience beyond packaging and sales?
3. How can book designers use what they know about the interpretative and artistic potential of book covers to help authors and publishers reach more of a consensus on cover design?
RESEARCH

The first stage of my project was comprised of researching book cover design through various means. To familiarize myself with its theoretical and historical underpinnings, I needed to read through existing articles and books on the subject. But I also wanted to hear what people directly involved in the publishing and selling of books had to say about the cover design process, and how it might affect the way readers interact with books. I planned to interview at least six representatives from publishing companies across the United States and two representatives from independent bookstores in Iowa. The publisher interviews would have to be conducted through email, while the bookstore interviews could be done in person.

Literature

It is important to remember that while “the author may be the brand behind their novel […] they may not necessarily choose the book cover that represents them” (Thomsen). When the publisher is involved in the cover design process, marketing often becomes a priority. A company’s goal is to make money, after all. But if the publisher has sway at the expense of the author, it can result in a situation such as the cover reveal in 2014 for Anne Rice’s *Prince Lestat*. The audience her publisher was hoping to attract instead took to social media to loudly express their disapproval of the cover, claiming it looked “tacky” and failed to “represent the story” (Thomsen). This situation is a clear example of why covers created out of marketing concerns are not always successful. But what purpose can a book’s cover serve, besides packaging that helps sell a product?

Before attempting to answer that question, we need to trace the history of book cover design in the United States back to the advent of book jackets in the 1820s (Drew and
The earliest book jackets were “used as protective packaging and tended to be nonpictorial” (20). But from the 1890s to “the first decade of the twentieth century, the book jacket began to take root as a promotional tool, and its design received more attention” (20). The influence of European modernism helped transform the jacket, and its cover, “into a sophisticated integration of type and image” (20) as the twentieth century headed towards its midpoint. This time period also “coincided with the definition of the field of graphic design as a profession” (20).

As graphic designers began to carve out careers, they realized that their work “required reconciliation of the individuality of the designer with the needs of the client” (20). And book cover design was no exception. Any designer who “was presented with the task of creating a cover […] was asked not only to speak for the publisher but for the author as well” (20). The question of whether or not a book’s cover should remain a “commercial device” (20) is decades old in this country. Even back then, there were designers who rejected the notion that covers only existed for marketing. Their attempted solution “was to consider the cover as a part of the larger project of designing an entire book” (24).

This sentiment is echoed by contemporary cover designers. Although Chipp Kidd has become renowned for his cover designs, he feels that ultimately “the book is the greater act of creation” (qtd. in Summers). If the book’s text “is the star,” then the cover is its “visual personality” or “face” (qtd. in Summers). Charlotte Strick, another prominent designer, strives to capture “the essence of each book” (qtd. in Petit) she designs for as well. If we consider the fallout from the 2014 cover reveal for Prince Lestat, then it can be argued that both designers and audiences place a great deal of value on how much a book’s cover “represents” the text within. This is in line with Ellen Lupton’s “call for the consideration of work, not as an isolated
creative act, but as an activity of integrating object, means of reproduction, and audience” (qtd. in Drew and Sternberger 171).

**Publishing Company Interviews**

When deciding who to interview from publishing houses, I tried to focus on designers and creative directors. Initially, I planned to obtain answers from three “small press” or “indie” publishers and three “big name” or “trade” publishers. According to Kate Sullivan from TCK Publishing, the “standard industry definition for a small press in the US is any publisher with annual sales below $50 million, or those that publish on average 10 or fewer titles per year.” In contrast, five companies in the United States are known as the “Big Five” of the publishing industry: Hachette, HarperCollins, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Macmillan (Almossawi). I found potential interviewees from each of those “Big Five” publishers, along with Scholastic and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. For small presses, I had representatives from 11 companies listed as potential interviewees. It should be noted, however, that many of the designers on my list have worked for multiple companies throughout their careers. I ended up emailing over 18 individuals, with each email containing a cover letter and the following questions:

1. In one or two sentences, please describe the cover design process at your publishing house/firm.

2. Are authors allowed input on the cover designs for their books? If not, why not?

3. If authors are allowed input on the design of the covers for their books, how do you think that affects the process, if at all?

4. Briefly describe the contact between authors, designers, and your staff during the cover design process.
5. What is your opinion on this process? Are you satisfied with it? If not, why?

While I was able to receive responses from small press representatives, the only person who works at larger company and had the time to answer my questions was the representative from Hachette Books. The four small press representatives were from Ursus Americanus Press, Dzanc Books, Birds LLC, and Orange Hat Publishing.

For the Hachette Books interviewee, the exact “cover design process varies from book to book” but always starts with a “concepting meeting,” where she meets with the book’s editor to “discuss what the book is about and what we want from the cover.” After this initial meeting, she creates several potential covers and presents them to the publishing team (which includes the editor, marketing director, and so on). She might ask the author for feedback afterwards, but generally ends up consulting the sales department somewhere down the line. With regards to author input, she believes that they should always be included in some way during the design process, and never be left “unhappy with their cover.” But because “authors are closer to their own work than anyone else,” their input can be overbearing when it comes to marketing considerations. She also notes that “the editor will play the go-between between the author and the design team.” Overall, her opinion on the cover design process varies, depending on who is involved. Not everyone has experience but the important thing to keep in mind is “respecting each other and everyone's ideas/work.”

The second interviewee works at Ursus Americanus Press. The cover process at his company starts with “ask[ing] the author if they have an artist or piece of visual art in mind” and then creating a draft. This draft is then shown to the author, again, and the visual artist for approval. Even if the author has no initial inspiration in mind, they are always consulted during the process. The Ursus Americanus interviewee finds author input to be extremely helpful, stating it
makes the process feel “much more holistic and collaborative.” And since his company is independent, there are less people involved, so it feels more personal as well.

The third interviewee works at Dzanc Books. Her company starts off the cover design process by “com[ing] up with some initial aesthetics and pass[ing] these, along with the manuscript, to the designer.” The designer is responsible for creating multiple design concepts, though the author and sales team are also brought in for feedback. The goal of their process is to narrow down various design concepts into a single idea. Author input is “welcome” during the process because “authors have a strong sense of the field in which their book is competing.” However, the company “ultimately needs to defer to the sales team and the designer's aesthetic, as authors sometimes have pet ideas that aren't necessarily appropriate for marketing their book.” Still, the Dzanc interviewee says that while “it's easy to look at a cover as a purely promotional image, but it's important that it reflect the book's soul, too.” Author input helps the others involved in the process realize that. Meanwhile, editors are there to act as mediators between the authors and designers. The Dzanc interviewee feels that her company’s design process allows them “to get covers that speak to the right audience, accurately represent the book, and are also striking and unique.”

The fourth interviewee works for Birds LLC and After Hours LTD. He describes his process as “a free-style recipe” that involves “reading the manuscript, finding a meaningful image or color in the work, taking a thoughtful shower, having a drink, then creating three or four drafts.” He also “like[s] to ask the authors if there are covers they've admired, or if a certain image was in mind when envisioning their book.” Throughout his career, he has noticed that “authors either don't know what they want, or they know exactly what they want.” He adds, “As a designer, I feel if a publisher or author is reaching out to you, they must trust your taste and the ability to
come up with a cover that is both parts your creation while incorporating an element that the
author felt was necessary.” In the end, the book’s cover is “your art and work also being
represented” with the author’s writing and publisher’s product.

The fifth and final interviewee works at Orange Hat Publishing. The cover design process at
her company is described as a collaboration between author and designer, where they “take the
author's vision of the cover and recreat[e] that vision in a way that attracts potential readers to
buy the book.” After the designer comes up some ideas, it is the author who is asked to choose
from them. The company’s owner is also asked for feedback and approval, “but only after
getting approval from the author.” Overall, the Orange Hat interviewee greatly stresses the
amount of input both author and designer have throughout the process.

Bookseller Interviews

Although I was unable to meet my intended quota of publishing company interviews, I
did manage to interview two representatives from independent bookstores as originally planned.
Because I wanted to meet with these people in person, I limited my search to bookstores located
in Iowa. As with the previous interviews, I first sent out emails to potential interviewees, asking
if they were available to meet. This time, however, I only contacted four representatives: one
from Prairie Lights (located in Iowa City), one from Beaverdale Books (located in Des Moines),
one from Plot Twist Bookstore (located in Ankeny), one from the Book Shoppe (located in
Boone). The Prairie Lights, Beaverdale Books, and Book Shoppe representatives all responded.
However, I was unable to travel to Iowa City for an interview at Prairie Lights. In addition, the
Beaverdale Books representative was not available to meet at the scheduled time herself, so I interviewed another employee instead. For these interviews, I asked the following questions:

1. What are your favorite book cover designs among the books your store sells? Can you tell me two or three favorite titles of those books?
2. Do you think the books with your favorite cover designs sell better than others? Why or why not?
3. Have you noticed any popular book cover designs among the customers at your store?
4. Do you think there’s any correlation between book cover designs and book sales?

I first interviewed an employee at Beaverdale Books in Des Moines. When asked about his favorite cover designs, Tara Westover’s *Educated* and *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean were among the books he mentioned. He has a personal preference for clear jackets and embossed covers, though the lack of a dust jacket for *The Library Book* interests him. In his opinion, *Educated* has a cover that “does a good job of describing the story and its setting.” *Educated* is also the only book he knows that cover helps it sell better. He also knows that some cover designs are more popular than others among customers but could not give me any specific titles. Overall, he finds it hard to tell if there’s any real correlation between cover designs and sales. He does point out that publishers will sometimes “change covers for paperbacks and anniversary editions,” though.

Next, I visited the Book Shoppe in Boone. The interviewee showed me two books with covers she liked: *A Home in the Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown and Jerry Pinkney, and *Moletown* by Torben Kuhlmann. According to her, the former depicts “believable animals” while the latter “asks the imagination to go wild.” She believes that covers can help sell books, in that they encourage people to actually pick up the book and look it — especially if they are
unfamiliar with the author. Covers that are relevant to the book’s genre and have some sort of “eye-catching” design element tend to be more popular with customers. One example she gave me was “cozy mystery novels” with cats on their covers. She also noted that romance novels “draw a lot of complaints if the characters don’t match the descriptions in the books” and that self-published books “draw less attention overall.” But if people like a particular author, then the publisher and by extension, the cover will not matter as much to them. Therefore, she thinks that a cover is more likely to help its book sell if the author is relatively unknown to customers.

CREATIVE COMPONENT

After receiving responses from five professional designers and directly interviewing the owners of two independent bookstores, I was ready to move on to the creative component. I wanted to experience the cover design process with different levels of collaboration with authors and see how that would affect the final products. I would be working with three writer colleagues to design three sets, or batches, of hypothetical covers for three stories they had written. The three batches of covers would be distinguished by the amount of input from myself and my colleagues during the design process: no author input, no designer input, and mixed author/designer input. Because of the limited time I would have to design each cover, I planned on downloading royalty free or licensed assets instead of drawing images or type by hand. And because this stage of project was intended to be entirely digital, I used social media to inform my colleagues about it.

Fortunately, I was able to find three colleagues who were interested in collaborating with me: Tatra Luke, Leslie Mei, and Alexandra (Alex) Seaborn. We would continue to contact each
other through Twitter and Google Drive for the remainder of the semester. I told each colleague to choose one story she had written and upload the file in a shared folder in Google Drive. The story could be a novel, a short story, or even a work of poetry. I was also lenient with the story’s status of completion. Tatra did not have a completed story but had made a significant amount of progress in her novel, titled *A Mask of Sea and Bone*. Alex sent a completed short story titled, *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*. And finally, Leslie chose a completed work of poetry titled *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography*. I spent the next several days reading their stories and sketching ideas for the first batch of covers.

**Cover Batch #1**

The first batch of covers (see fig. 1) I created were based entirely on my impression of the stories, without any input from the authors. As such, I did not show these covers to my colleagues until I had finished them.
Figure 1. Brainstorming sketches for all three covers in the first batch

*A Mask of Sea and Bone* (see fig. 2), by Tatra Luke, is a fantasy novel set in a world inspired by Renaissance Italy and the works of Howard Phillips (H.P.) Lovecraft. H.P. Lovecraft was an early 20th century author of horror fiction who is well-known for creating the character known as “Cthulhu.” This character has a monstrous, octopus-like appearance that *A Mask of Sea and Bone* pays homage to in scenes where tentacle imagery signifies a sinister brand of magic. As the title might suggest, skulls also feature as motifs throughout the story and the ocean plays a major role in the setting. There are prominent religious motifs as well, from schisms to saints to shadowy deities. I tried incorporating all of these motifs into my sketches, but mostly felt drawn to the tentacles, skulls, and shadows. I was particularly fond of the way shadow tendrils could
mirror the shape of tentacles and flames — the latter tying into themes of religious conflict. Since one of the key items shared between the protagonists is a ring that resembles a skull with tentacles curling around it, I wanted to the tentacles on the cover to be holding a skull.

![Cover Design Sketches](image)

**Figure 2.** Concept sketches for the first cover of *A Mask of Sea and Bone*

When I started creating the cover in Photoshop (see fig. 3), however, I realized that the composition would have to deviate from my initial sketches. I filled the top half with public domain illustrations of an octopus’ tentacles and a human’s skull from the [Old Design Shop](https://olddesignshop.com) website. I then decided to duplicate the octopus illustration and flip it vertically so that there were also tentacles reaching upward, instead of covering the bottom half with a vague shadow image. This is partially because I was already using a couple of “Black & White Ombre” textures.
from Catherine Wheel for the background, and partially because I simply thought having tentacles frame both ends of the cover would look better. It should be noted that the chapters in this book alternate between the perspectives of two main characters, so the pair of tentacles reaching into the skull can represent the two characters meeting and their storylines converging into one overarching narrative. The cover’s background also contains a barely-visible stock photograph of Venice by Anastasiya Lobanovskaya. This is a reference to the book’s historical influences, while the ombre textures hint at the conflict that is about to “consume” the city in the book’s narrative. Despite all of the changes from the initial sketch, this composition was still able to capture the primary motifs of the storyline while hinting at the skull-and-tentacles ring, an object representing its protagonists.

The background was touched up with two adjustment layer effects: Curves and Hue/Saturation. Two additional layers, a blue-green paper texture from Zeppelin Graphics and a “Vintage Gold Marble” texture from TheHungryJPEG, were placed over the skull and tentacles at lowered opacity levels. The textures were meant to give the cover an “aged but artistic” look, like the surface of an old book or the canvas of a Renaissance-era painting. Aside from religion, art and opulence characterize the city-state that acts as the story’s setting. I then used Curves, Photo Filter (Sepia), and Levels adjustment layers to increase contrast between the foreground and background, and create a dark, sickly green color scheme. Overall, I wanted the colors and composition to tell the audience that this is an “oceanic horror fantasy” novel. I kept this in mind for the typography as well. I used a blackletter font designed by Rui Abreu called “Orbe” for the title and author’s name. Not only was the font appropriate for a “Renaissance fantasy” setting, but the curved lines inside its Os reminded me of octopus eyes. Since there was barely any room to put the text across on lines, I opted to place words underneath and around the curves of the
tentacles, while still remaining legible. To go back to the book’s title, the edges of some letters appear to be “masked” by the tentacles. Finally, I set the color of the author name text to the same green as the tentacles, and the color of the title text to a bone white (also as a reference to the book’s title).

Figure 3. The final version of the first cover for *A Mask of Sea and Bone*

*Bildungsroman: An Autobiography* (see fig. 4), by Leslie Mei, is a 17-page poem split into four sections. Each section is narrated by a different character, and each character appears to be a heroine from a Victorian novel — hence the title, which refers to a coming-of-age narrative. I recognized two of these characters as the titular *Jane Eyre* and Estella from *Great Expectations*. While sketching out my ideas, I knew the cover’s design had to reflect elements from the stories
of four different women. Pamela’s story mentions castles and coins, Jane’s story features a book, Catherine’s story makes note of a clock, and Estella’s story describes a crumbling house. The overall design would be unified through the use of silhouettes, as a nod to both Victorian cameos and the poem’s abstract nature. I also planned on using Victorian-inspired frames to make the time period even clearer to the viewer.

**Figure 4.** Concept sketches for the first cover of *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography*

Once again, the final composition of the cover (see fig. 5) would end up straying from my sketched ideas. I immediately wanted to use the frame I found on Old Design Shop to display the title and author’s name. “Bildungsroman” was placed above the banner, “An Autobiography” was placed on top of the banner, while “Leslie Mei” was placed underneath the banner and
between the two vine curves. “Bildungsroman” and “Leslie Mei” were set in a handwritten font designed by James Grieshaber of the P22 Type Foundry, called “P22 Cezanne”. The font used for “An Autobiography” is called “Trattatello” and was also designed by James Grieshaber. I chose P22 Cezanne because its cursive letterforms give the text a more personal feel, like that of a handwritten letter. Trattatello, also known as “P22 Operina Romano,” shows calligraphic origins with its ball terminals and rough edges. The frame itself also functioned as a visual reference to the poem’s literary theme. It was touched up by replacing its bottom line with the silhouette of a pen (also from Old Design Shop). As a result, the curved lines appear more like ink strokes flowing out of the pen. The lines also resemble plants with heart-shaped leaves, alluding to the romance featured in the poem.

It was then time to figure out what would go above the frame and title text. It turned out the Old Design Shop would continue to supply clipart for this cover. Using Illustrator, I created a silhouette vector out of an illustration of a Victorian woman. The silhouette of a house’s roof was created in Photoshop using the Color Overlay effect. I also thought this roof could be interpreted as the castle from Pamela’s story. In addition, the woman’s head neck somewhat resembles a tree that is mentioned in Jane’s story. Instead of keeping these elements disparate like I had originally planned, I combined them into a single object. This was my way of showing that the women’s stories are also parts of a larger body of work. A clock, representing Catherine’s story, was also added to the layer, though some parts of it were erased to avoid visual clutter. To finish of this silhouette object, I painted over the bottom edge with a brush by Kyle T. Webster called “Foliage Mix”. The brush had the dual purpose of cleaning up rough edges and furthering the tree imagery. Finally, I added a white paper texture from Zeppelin Graphics to the composition’s background, lowering the opacity to 50% so it would not distract
from the other elements. This paper texture also served as another reminder of the poem’s connection to books and writing. I kept the cover in black and white, feeling that the imagery and text were enough to convey the “Victorian literature” theme.

Figure 5. The final version of the first cover for Bildungsroman: An Autobiography

Gretel Shed Bitter Tears (see fig. 6), by Alexandra Seaborn, is a short story about twins with a special connection between each other. This is why I decided to use DNA imagery. I was also drawn to a line from the story describing eyes, hands, and a blue glow. I noticed that shape of an eye could fit within the curve of a DNA strand and played with the idea of “tears” from the title. The image of a tear-like eye that falls towards the palm of a hand was born. While I did not make note of it in my sketchbook page, I wanted blue to be the representative color for this story.
Aside from being the only notable color mentioned in the text, blue is a cool color commonly associated with water and sadness, making it easy to link to the “Tears” in the title.

Figure 6. Concept sketches for the first cover of *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*

In contrast to the other two covers in this batch, the design for Alex’s cover (see fig. 7) did not change too much from initial sketch to Photoshop file. This story also felt more “casual” and less “mature” to me than the other two, so I decided not to use stock images and draw the elements myself. I felt that premade stock images would be too “polished” for the look I had in mind, which would be rougher and more “handcrafted.” I drew the hand and the DNA strand containing an eye on a single sheet of paper with an ink pen. I used a photograph of my own hand as a reference for the illustrated hand. I then scanned the illustrated image into Illustrator.
Using Illustrator’s Image Trace tool, I converted the scanned objects into vectors that could easily be resized and recolored.

From there, I arranged the vector objects in Photoshop. I made the “eye-drop” by cutting out a copy of the DNA strand’s eye and tweaking the edges with the eraser tool. While experimenting with layer effects, I found that I liked the result of duplicating the hand and eye-drop and placing the duplicates under their respective original layers in white. It was a fairly subtle way of reminding the viewer that story’s main characters are twins. I greatly decreased the opacity of the DNA strand so that it could be a background for the text. Otherwise, it would distract from the hand and eye-drop. The title and author’s name were rotated in the same direction as the DNA strand. I used the typeface, “FFAD Metro” by SuperBruut for the title, and the sans serif version of a typeface from Dirtyline Studio called “Shockwave” for the author’s name. The letters in both typefaces feature coarse, brush-like strokes that complement the hand-drawn nature of the images. Finally, I made the text white to match the duplicated eye and hand layers.
Figure 7. The final version of the first cover for *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*

**Cover Batch #2**

The second batch of covers was based entirely from input from the authors. I created a Google® document for each author and instructed her to come up with their own cover design ideas. Then, I made drafts of their ideas in Photoshop, pasted screenshots of the drafts into their documents, and revised the drafts based on their feedback.

For *A Mask of Sea and Bone* (see fig. 8), Tatra wanted to see a dark red and gold color scheme, a script or serif font for the title (embossed or foiled), a leather or paper texture, and an overall “Gothic but minimalist” look. She also wanted to bring back the tentacle-and-bone
imagery from the first cover, but with the added suggestion of a Venetian mask. The book’s setting is inspired by the Italian Renaissance, after all. Tatra also compared the visual effect created by combining the various textures to the surface of a “spellbook.” Since this is a story in the fantasy genre, magic plays a major role. In my initial sketch, a mask-covered skull sits in the center of the composition, framed by tentacles coming from both upper end corners.

**Figure 8.** Concept sketches for the second cover of *A Mask of Sea and Bone*

While browsing Adobe Stock for images, I discovered an illustration by user “jenesesimre” of a Venetian mask that would become the focal image of the cover. In Photoshop, I joined the mask with an illustration of octopus tentacles by Adobe Stock user “Sergj.” These objects meshed so well that I decided to forgo the “tentacles holding a mask” image from my
sketch. I used a layer effect to change the color of the hybrid object from black to golden yellow. It was set against a background that was dark red, adhering to the color scheme requested by Tatra. She did not explain why she wanted those colors, but I tried to keep them on the darker end of the spectrum to match the horror-influenced tone of the story. However, I do get the impression of blood from the dark red, which is fitting for a story that deals with themes such as death and religious violence.

The background was made by combining a degenerated paper texture from Old Design Shop with a red paper texture from Zeppelin Graphics. Still unsure of what typeface to use, I added “placeholder” text around the centered mask-tentacle object. At this point, however, I wanted to experiment more with compositions. So I made two additional drafts, one with the text larger than the object and the other with the object repeated to create a frame around the text. I tried to keep these compositions fairly simple, as Tatra wanted a “minimalist” design. I then showed her the three drafts (see fig. 9) and asked her to choose the one she liked the most.
Tatra chose Composition C, where the duplicated objects form a frame around the text. While I personally would have chosen A, the repeated tentacle-mask in C does reflect how the story is told through two characters’ viewpoints.

It was then time to focus on the type. It took me awhile to find typefaces that would not clash with the illustrated lines in the object nor contradict Tatra’s request for a “script […] or serif font.” I eventually found a typeface called P22 Aragon, designed by P22 Type Foundry’s Ted Staunton. The strokes of the characters in this typeface remind me of bones, so this was a way for me to allude to the “Bone” in the book’s title. I set the title in P22 Aragon and the author’s name in a serif typeface, Priori Acute by Jonathan Barnbrook and Marcus Leis Allion. This particular serif typeface has lines drawn inside its letterforms that, with the help of the textures, make the author’s name look “embedded” in the cover of an antique book. Finally, I put
gold foil textures from vito12 and Bevel & Emboss effects over the objects and text, as requested. I also duplicated the degenerated paper texture and added a Curves adjustment layer to further along the “leather spellbook” impression. Tatra was satisfied with this revised draft (see fig. 10).

Figure 10. The final version of the second cover for A Mask of Sea and Bone

For Gretel Shed Bitter Tears (see fig. 11), Alex wanted to see more shades of blue, silhouettes of a boy and a girl in profile, the title as the main focus down the middle (or on top of the silhouettes), and white text in a heavy weight script font (rather than a calligraphic font). The boy and girl silhouettes were presumably requested because in addition to being twins, the story’s protagonists are brother and sister. I sketched out a version of the cover where the two
silhouettes are facing towards each other and the title is in space between. In the other version, the silhouettes are joined but facing away from each other, and the title is placed on top.

**Figure 11.** Concept sketches for the second cover of *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*

Between the two sketches, the first composition ended up winning (See fig. 12). I downloaded a pair of silhouettes by PiXXart Photography from Adobe Stock and found that joining them like in the second sketch would not work out. After adjusting the size of, and spacing between, the silhouettes, I added the text. I put the title and author’s name in the middle, as Alex had requested. The typeface used for the title is “Reckless” and comes from Nadi Spasibenko, with the author’s name set in “Catch Feels” by Paperly Studio. Both typefaces have an uneven weight to their letterforms that makes them appear hand-drawn, but not too light.
They also lack the serifs and cursive flourishes of calligraphic fonts, which Alex wanted me to avoid. Alex did not specify what kind of blues she wanted, so I took a screenshot of one of Illustrator’s built-in palettes and applied the eyedropper tool in Photoshop to transfer those colors to the cover design. Since the previous cover had dark objects against a light background, I made the objects in this cover light against a dark background.

Diana

![Image of Gretel Shed Bitter Tears cover](image)

How does this look? (Fonts are placeholders and border is actually Photoshop background)

**Figure 12.** Draft for the second cover of *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*

Alex’s main suggestions for revision were to make the text smaller and align it so that “Shed” was in line with the noses. She wanted the text to be smaller because abandonment is a
major theme in the story and having more empty space could reflect that. I made the changes and sent the revised draft (see fig. 13) to her way. She was satisfied and did not request any further revisions.

![Figure 13. The final version of the second cover for *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*](image)

For *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography* (see fig. 14), Leslie wanted a surreal cover in the vein of Rene Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images*. Her aim with this cover was to “[make] the reader think of the book as an object, or a realm within itself” because “this was one of the central aims of [her] project.” There would be the “physical” book, a photograph of a 19th century book on the cover, and an illustration of a book on the cover of the photograph. The “layers” of the cover were supposed to look increasingly abstract, as there is a progression of
abstractness in the sections of the poem. In addition, there would be the silhouette of a Victorian woman’s bust on each layer, creating a sort of “infinite mirror” effect. The overall design would be a “blurring of reality and depiction of reality.” Admittedly, I had some trouble sketching this one, so I requested a sketch from Leslie (see fig. 14) and this was helpful.

![Concept sketches for the second cover of Bildungsroman: An Autobiography (left: mine, right: Leslie’s)](image)

**Figure 14.** Concept sketches for the second cover of *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography* (left: mine, right: Leslie’s)

With the help of my dad, I took a photograph of an old book I had purchased at an antique sale and used it as the “photorealistic” layer. I initially wanted to find a stock photo but decided to take the opportunity to use an object I already owned instead. For the “illustrated” layer, I downloaded a [“vintage” frame by Nongnuch Leelaphasuk from Adobe Stock](https://www.adobe.stock). This frame has both a non-photographic appearance and curves that parallel the design on the photographed
book’s cover. Although this layer was supposed to be more abstract, I did not want the contrast between it and the photograph to be too distracting. I combined these two images in a separate Photoshop file, editing the colors and lighting until I got a light sepia tone. After pasting the combined image into the cover, I added the silhouette of a woman’s head from Adobe Stock user “olga_lebedeva”. I duplicated the silhouette, adjusted the opacity and sizes, and placed them behind one another as shown in Leslie’s sketch. In the draft (see fig. 15), I tried to reduce negative space on the illustrated layer’s cover by rotating the title and author’s name. As with the draft for Tatra’s second cover, the typeface was subject to change.
Figure 15. Draft for the second cover of *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography*

I showed the draft to Leslie, who especially liked that I included an illustration of flowers, as they are mentioned in the poem. However, she suggested I set the text in a horizontal line. Straightening the text, as well as changing the typeface to Wood Craft Revival’s “WTR Roycroft”, turned out to be the only revision I needed to make (see fig. 16). WTR Roycroft seems to be inspired by Art Nouveau typefaces, which are characterized by “embellished stroke endings, very high and low ‘waistlines,’ diagonal and triangular character shapes, top- or bottom-weighted stresses, angled crossbars, and in some cases, filigreed initials” (Strizver). This is a nod to the type on the photographed book’s cover, which is in the Art Nouveau style. It should also be noted that the Art Nouveau movement emerged towards the end of the Victorian era.
Figure 16. The final version of the second cover for Bildungsroman: An Autobiography

Cover Batch #3

The third, and final batch of covers was based on input from myself and the authors. Once again, I created Google® documents to communicate with my colleagues. I told them to type up comments in the new documents, but since I would be giving input of my own, their comments could be less detailed. I was also open to combining or reinterpreting design elements from previous covers.

The first two covers for A Mask of Sea and Bone (see fig. 17) left me with a lot of unused stock images, so I showed them to Tatra in our document for potential inspiration. After taking a
look at the extra stock images, she suggested that I combine elements from the previous covers. This time, she wanted me to go back to dark greens or blues for the color scheme and tentacles reaching in from the edges for the imagery. She mentioned placing the text over a faded image of a skull or mask. I sketched out four options to hear which one she preferred. In the meantime, I found a set of blue-and-green marbled textures on the ProjectPixels Etsy store. I was interested in using these for the background but wanted to know Tatra’s thoughts first.

![Cover Design Sketches](image)

**Figure 17.** Concept sketches for the third cover of *A Mask of Sea and Bone*

Tatra said she liked the top left and bottom right sketches the most. Overall, she preferred having the text toward the bottom. She also liked the marbled textures, so I purchased those on Etsy.
After that, I started making the cover in Photoshop. First, I used the Paint Bucket tool to create a solid dark grey layer. I then placed a texture from the recently purchased set on top of it with the Overlay effect. This gave the background a dark blue appearance that, while different from what I initially envisioned, could still be described as “oceanic.” I found a set of sea monster illustrations by Adobe Stock user “iadaart” and spent some time arranging the tentacles. I made sure they were mostly facing downwards. When I had an arrangement I was satisfied with, I began to place the title in the space toward the bottom. I still had some space for the author’s name at the top and was willing to diverge from the sketches.

Thematically, this cover turned out to be far more similar to the first cover than the second one. As with the first cover, I wanted it to look like the tentacles were “masking” edges of the text. The typeface, ROODY LAST by Attype Studio, was also chosen as a sort of callback to the first cover. Although ROODY LAST is a brush font that is much more modern-looking than Orbe, it is suitable for a horror-influenced story, and its Os resemble octopus eyes as well. It is important to remember that the magic in this book’s story pays homage to Cthulhu, the tentacled monster created by H.P. Lovecraft. While I was setting the author’s name, I realized that there was room for another object at the top left corner — a skull from ClipArt ETC that could allude to the title, the theme of death, and the ring shared between the two protagonists. Once again, I placed the skull so that it looked like it was being wrapped by tentacles. Finally, I changed the colors of the skull and tentacles with the Gradient Map effect, put a teal paper texture from Zeppelin Graphics over everything at 50% opacity, and added a Photo Filter (Cooling) layer to create the dark blue and green color scheme suggested by Tatra. When I showed the cover (see fig. 18) to Tatra, I told her about the changes I made. She approved the changes and the overall design.
Figure 18. The final version of the third cover for *A Mask of Sea and Bone*

As with Tatra, I had plenty of extra stock images from creating the first two covers for *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography* (see fig. 19) and showed them to Leslie in Google® Docs. There were woodcut illustrations of a mansion (from Old Design Shop) and a woman looking down that Leslie particularly liked. She wanted to revisit “abstractness” and Magritte, citing his paintings where objects are placed over a person’s face. Her take on this was to put a book over the illustration of the woman. My own impression of the illustrations was that I could cut out the woman, paste her over the house, and experiment with the colors to create collage-like appearance. This method of remixing images would offer a parallel to poem reusing characters.
from works of Victorian literature to create an entirely new body of work. Leslie gave her approval, and then I created a draft in Photoshop (see fig. 20).

Figure 19. Concept sketches for the third cover of Bildungsroman: An Autobiography

I continued to the woodcut mansion from Old Design Shop for the background, as a reference to the castle and house motifs in Pamela’s and Estella’s stories. However, I switched out the woodcut woman with a painting of another woman. This particular illustration came from The Graphics Fairy and was easier to distinguish from the background than the image I originally planned to use. Another image I added from the Graphic Fairy was a frame. Along with the painted woman, this ended up being a reference to the fact that Leslie’s original “frame” of reference for the design was a Magritte painting. The other Graphics Fairy images were a
blank book, a white flower, and a pink flower with a banner. The book was, of course, suggested by Leslie. But the flowers and banner were callbacks to imagery featured on the second and first covers, respectively.

I put the frame on top of the house and woman, a book on top of the woman’s face, the white flower on top of the frame and woman but under the book, and the pink flower on top of everything but the book. However, I erased the top right corner of the book to make it seem like it wrapped under a leaf. In a way, I was able to refer back to the layers of the second cover’s design. The banner was used to display the “Bildungsroman” part of the title, while “An Autobiography” and the author’s name were placed on the book. I decided to bring back the “handwriting” motif of the first cover and use script typefaces with cursive letters. The title and author’s name were set in “Jelytta”, by Creatype Studio. The subtitle was set in Saffatin Co’s “Cochocib Script”, and duplicated to increase visibility. In contrast to the previous covers, which were fairly monochromatic, I wanted this cover to be colorful — in a surreal way. So, I put Gradient Maps over the woman, frame, and house. I left the colors of the flowers and book as they were. Finally, I applied a texture by layering an image of the back of a calling card from Old Design Shop over everything at 50% opacity, with the Color Burn effect.
Figure 20. Drafts for the third cover of *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography*

I showed the draft (see fig. 20) to Leslie, who simply suggested that I tweak the background color to match the flowers more. I decided to do this by adding a Vibrance adjustment layer, which actually toned down the saturation. I also added more contrast with a Curves adjustment layer. I asked for Leslie’s feedback, and she said she was satisfied with this version of the cover (see fig. 21).
Figure 21. The final version of the third cover for *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography*

In contrast to Leslie and Tatra, I had no stock images left over from the first two covers of *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears* (see fig. 22), so I waited for Alex to send me her ideas first. Like Tatra, however, Alex wanted to see me return to the imagery I used for her first cover. This meant eyes and hands instead of heads. She also suggested that I add some kind of border and keep the title unrotated, as in the second cover. These two ideas seemed to have more to do with her design preferences than themes from the story. Compared to my sketches for Alex’s previous covers, the sketches for this cover ended up being quite different from the final product.
I knew I wanted this cover’s imagery to be somewhere between the first and second ones, so I opted for vector eyes and silhouetted hands. I also considered bringing the DNA strand motif back for the border. I drew an eye in Illustrator and downloaded a pair of vector hands created by “santima.studio” from Adobe Stock. In my sketches, the hands were either part of the border or in the center. In the Photoshop draft, I moved them to the bottom. Instead of making a border, I decided to draw two curved lines connecting the eyes to the hands, making sure these lines looked like they were about to form a strand of DNA. I tried to further that impression by adding a few bars to the bottom space. The curved lines also reminded me of tears streaming out of the
eyes and into the hands — an appropriate reference to both the title of the story and the “hand and eye-drop” imagery of the first cover.

I placed the author’s name underneath the bars, and the story’s title in the larger space above. The typeface I used is “Anthology,” designed by Monocotype. This is a sans serif typeface that has a similar weight to the lines in the design. Upon closer look, the letters also have irregular edges. These edges give off the impression of waves and water, of the tears and trembling that come with weeping. Unsure of the color scheme to use at this point, I sent a black-and-white design (see fig. 23) to Alex.

![Figure 23. Draft for the third cover of Gretel Shed Bitter Tears](image)
Alex was not sure about what colors to use either, but also said she did not mind if I went back to blue. I then visited a website called Color Picker to find a blue color scheme I had not used previously. I applied one of their palettes to my cover, sent the colored draft to Alex, who approved my design (see fig. 24).

![Gretel Shed Bitter Tears Cover](image)

**Figure 24.** The final version of the third cover for *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears*

**Evaluation**

After finishing the covers from the third batch, I made one last trio of Google® documents for the authors to write up their evaluations. I asked them each to write at least a paragraph stating which cover they preferred the most, and why.
According to Tatra, the third cover for *A Mask of Sea and Bone* (see fig. 18) is the best from the perspective of both author and customer. As an author, she feels that “it captures the eeriness and aesthetic of the work without making it look dated or boring.” The imagery, color scheme, and typography make this cover the most “striking” of the three. And as a customer, this would be the cover that compels her to pick up the book.

Leslie, on the other hand, preferred the first cover for *Bildungsroman: An Autobiography* (see fig. 5). While she thinks the “eye-catching” colors and composition of the third cover (see fig. 21) make it the most appealing from a marketing standpoint, she personally feels more drawn to the deceptive simplicity of the first cover. This is because her “intention when writing the story was to create some confusion initially, and draw the reader in so that by the end they are left admiring the sheer miracle of the book as an object.” Therefore, the first cover, with all its little details that may be missed at first glance, represents her story the best.

Alex wrote that the second cover for *Gretel Shed Bitter Tears* (see fig. 13) is the most effective from a marketing perspective, based on her “observations and experiences” with current cover design trends in Middle Grade fiction. She notes that however much the cover represents the story is not the priority when it comes to marketing. However, the cover that she personally likes the most is the third one (see fig. 24). In a somewhat similar vein to Leslie’s evaluation, she explains that “it seems a very simple design, but also contains so many different little details that are drawn not just from the story, but also from the metaphorical title that isn’t referenced in the story at all.”
CONCLUSION

It interests me that my design process for the third batch of covers (see fig. 25) ended up resembling the process described by the Orange Hat Publishing interviewee, in which the author and the designer both play a significant role. The third batch also seemed to be the most popular with my colleagues, with the exception of Leslie’s preference for her first cover (see fig. 27).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 25.** All covers from the third batch
However, all three colleagues judged their covers based on how well each design “represented” their stories. Anne Rice’s readers, if you recall, cited this criterion the most when explaining why they were displeased with the *Prince Lestat* cover. Additionally, one of the most common points
brought up by the designers I interviewed and read about was how a book’s cover design should be informed by the text inside.

Overall, I believe that acknowledging the creation of a book cover as a collaborative process helps improve the design while allowing the work to hold meaning for different types of creators. As stated before, there are three parties with three different skills involved: the author who writes the text, the company that publishes the book, and the designer who visualizes the cover. I will not deny that striking a balance between the three can be challenging. Marketing has been the primary concern for the publisher since the inception of book jackets over a century ago. For decades, graphic designers have struggled against the notion their work simply exists to advertise commodities. Authors are also artists, though the not the same kind as a graphic designer. But in the words of the Hachette Books interviewee, “respecting each other and everyone’s ideas/works” goes a long way in the process. Of course, this is easier to accomplish at a smaller company such as Ursus Americanus Press or Dzanc Books. The representatives I interviewed from those publishers had very positive opinions on the cover design processes at their workplaces.

Although I was able to see how varying levels of collaboration with authors affected my cover designs, my process had a degree of freedom that might not have been afforded to me in a professional setting. Therefore, I am interested in seeing how my results would change if I had the opportunity to work with a publisher. This type of experience is especially important given that I plan on having a career in the publishing industry someday. With that goal in mind, I need consider how I can solidify and expand upon the design process established in this project. As implied before, this process will largely be based on the process for this project’s third batch of covers (see fig. 25). For future authors, I want to create two to three drafts for their covers —
though I will try to make the drafts much more distinct from each other than ones in this project. I am also interested in discussing the text more with future authors to make sure we are on the same page with the themes and such. However, I do not intend to slip into the process for the second batch of covers (see fig. 26) by allowing author input to overtake my own. I will try to be more assertive about disagreeing with the author’s ideas as well. The key is trusting both the author’s judgment of their text and my own design skills. In the end, I believe that the cover is as integral to the book as the text. But covers have can value outside of the context of consumer culture and be more than just “packaging.” Their designs bring together the insights of visual artists, writers, and readers into a conversation they would not be able to have otherwise.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Dear [Name],

I am Diana Zhang and a graduate student studying graphic design at Iowa State University.

I am currently working on the creative component for my M.A. degree, focusing on the design processes for book covers. I am interested in learning more about the relationship between authors, publishers, and book cover designers. I hope my research will be beneficial for both publishers and designers.

I am wondering if you could help me out by answering a few questions? (See below). Your answers should not take much of your time. Feel free to type your answers within the body of this email. I would appreciate your response by February 28.

In case you were wondering, my thesis advisors are Professors Paula Curran and Paul Bruski.

All responses will be kept anonymous and no identifying information will be revealed. If you have received this email in error, could you please forward it to the person better able to answer these questions?

If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me at 515-509-4457.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Diana Zhang
APPENDIX B — PUBLISHER INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Hachette Books Interviewee

“1. In one or two sentences, please describe the cover design process at your publishing house.

The cover design process varies from book to book but they all begin in the same way. I will hold a "concepting meeting" where the editor will bring a cover memo, imagery inspiration, any author feedback, ideas, etc. We will discuss what the book is about and what we want from the cover. I'll then take all that information and work to present an array of covers for review by the publishing team (publisher, associate publisher, marketing director, editor). From there, the process always differs -- we may decide to show the author one of those covers from the first round or I'll make tweaks based on feedback. Eventually we ask our Sales department for feedback, as well.

2. Are authors allowed input on the cover designs for their books? If not, why not?

Yes, always. They usually don't have cover approval written into their contract but we always include them. You would never want an author to be unhappy with their cover.

3. If authors are allowed input on the design of the covers for their books, how do you think that affects the process, if at all?

The process will always be affected when more and more people are involved. However, the authors are closer to their own work than anyone else. Sometimes that means they're very helpful and sometimes it means they're too close and need to be able to step back and consider how a cover will help or not help to market, publicize and sell their book. The cover, after all, is a marketing piece.
4. Briefly describe the contact between authors, designers, and your staff during the cover design process.

Again, this contact is always different but, for the majority of the time, the editor will play the go-between between the author and the design team.

5. What is your opinion on this process? Are you satisfied with it? If not, why?

I think the process will always depend on the players involved -- sometimes it can be painless and other times, you'll do round after round of a cover without much hope in sight. More experienced editors will understand how to present covers to their authors in a way that will relate the feelings of the publishing team well. Less experienced authors sometimes think that the process can be a never-ending thing but everyone has to remember that there are important due dates along the way, such as sell-in to accounts. Respecting each other and everyone's ideas/work will always be the biggest factor in the process.”

**Ursus Americanus Press Interviewee**

“1. Our process is the ask the author if they have an artist or piece of visual art in mind for the cover and then to mock up a draft in house with text before seeking approval from the author and visual artist before print. If the author has no preference, I […] design a draft from scratch and then get approval from author before print.

2. Yep!
3. I think it has a positive effect on the process on the whole because it guides the way we (and eventually the reader) conceptualize the work. It feels much more holistic and collaborative when the author has input, and that gives us energy and vision when working on the project.

4. Expanding on my answer from Question 1, it is very open and communicative. I always send digital drafts/proofs to the author (and visual artist when relevant) before getting a physical proof. When I have physical proof in hand, I send that to the author for review and approval. We are open to suggestions and input from authors and, thus far, have always had a satisfying experience all around.

5. We dig the process. It works. We are completely independent and it’s just the two of us on “staff” so the relationship with the author and artists are very personal and important to us. We are satisfied because we have input in every facet of the process and have always been shown the respect we give by other stakeholders in the process.”

Dzanc Books Interviewee

“1. In one or two sentences, please describe the cover design process at your publishing house.

For each cover we design, we come up with some initial aesthetics and pass these, along with the manuscript, to the designer. The designer then generates a few different design concepts, and, with input from the author and our sales team, we focus on a single concept and refine it until we have something that's original and vibrant.

2. Are authors allowed input on the cover designs for their books? If not, why not?

We welcome author input - authors have a strong sense of the field in which their book is
competing, so their input is very welcome. We do ultimately need to defer to the sales team and the designer's aesthetic, as authors sometimes have pet ideas that aren't necessarily appropriate for marketing their book: a family photo, for example, or a painting they'd like to use that doesn't really lend itself to the design.

3. If authors are allowed input on the design of the covers for their books, how do you think that affects the process, if at all?

Authors have a very strong sense of when their cover design isn't speaking to the work, but instead is speaking too much to the market. It's easy to look at a cover as a purely promotional image, but it's important that it reflect the book's soul, too. Authors help pull us back if we're taking a concept in the wrong direction.

4. Briefly describe the contact between authors, designers, and your staff during the cover design process.

We keep editors at the center - the lead editor on any given book will speak to the designer and the author and pass designs back and forth, where appropriate. This allows the company to filter ideas from either side - author ideas that are too out there or designer concepts that don't suit what the author is looking for or won't work from a sales perspective - without getting sidetracked by unworkable ideas.

5. What is your opinion on this process? Are you satisfied with it? If not, why?

I think it works very well for us. We're very proud of our cover art, and we work hard to get
covers that speak to the right audience, accurately represent the book, and are also striking and unique. It's a fun part of the production process.”

**Birds LLC & After Hours LTD Interviewee**

“1. In one or two sentences, please describe the cover design process at your publishing house.

The process is a free-style recipe. One of reading the manuscript, finding a meaningful image or color in the work, taking a thoughtful shower, having a drink, then creating three or four drafts.

2. Are authors allowed input on the cover designs for their books? If not, why not?

This is an important question and I've seen advantages to both sides of the policy. I'll explain further, but for our designs in particular, I like to ask the authors if there are covers they've admired, or if a certain image was in mind when envisioning their book. This helps with finding a jumping off point, at least as a one draft option.

3. If authors are allowed input on the design of the covers for their books, how do you think that affects the process, if at all?

In my experience - authors either don't know what they want, or they know exactly what they want. And this can certainly affect the process.

As a designer, I feel if a publisher or author is reaching out to you, they must trust your taste and the ability to come up with a cover that is both parts your creation while incorporating an element that the author felt was necessary.

If the design is for another publisher - I ask that any comments or concerns from the author be
4. Briefly describe the contact between authors, designers, and your staff during the cover design process.

When I'm designing the covers for my press, After Hours editions, I am in direct contact with the author. Though I should mention that when I'm working with an author to publish their work it's understood the design will be kept in the style of a series in progress.

Since we're all in this for the love of books and the small press community, we all wear many hats at a given point.

5. What is your opinion on this process? Are you satisfied with it? If not, why?

If I can call 'this process' the general relationship between designer, publisher and author, I can only speak for myself. Each project is a learning experience.

I need to be a bit more firm on the amount of emails exchanged (they are usually upwards to the high 70s) and be confident in turning down a project.

This is your art and work also being represented - allowing for some compromise, you should be wary of being taken advantage of, unintentionally.”
**Orange Hat Publishing Interviewee**

“1) The process of cover design at Orange Hat Publishing consists of the author and designer collaborating to take the author's vision of the cover and recreating that vision in a way that attracts potential readers to buy the book. Shannon, the owner of Orange Hat will also make suggestions for the cover and will give final approval, but only after getting approval from the author.

2) Yes they are!

3) I think it's very helpful that authors have a say in the design process. This is their book after all, and they should be happy with the final product. A lot of the time, the author has a general idea of what they'd like the cover to look like, but then our designer comes in and really brings the author's vision to life and makes it a quality design that will help sell the book.

4) Most of the contact during the process is between the author and the designer. We will connect the two of them over email, and then the author can communicate directly with the designer to tell them what their vision is and what they're looking for with their cover. The designer will typically create a few different options for the cover and will send them to the author to choose what they like or note what they don't like. Shannon will also typically see the cover options and give her input as to which she thinks would be best.

5) I love it! Everyone gets to voice their opinions as to what they think looks the best for the cover.”
Dear [Name],

My name is Diana Zhang and I am a graduate student studying graphic design at Iowa State University.

I am currently working on the creative component for my M.A. degree, focusing on the design processes for book covers. As part of my research, I am interested in learning more about the relationship between book cover design and book sales.

So, I was wondering if you had time this weekend, or next week, to meet with me at your store for a short interview?

In case you were wondering, my thesis advisors are Professors Paula Curran and Paul Bruski.

All responses will be kept anonymous and no identifying information will be revealed. If you have received this email in error, could you please forward it to the person better able to answer these questions?

If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me at 515-509-4457.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Diana Zhang
APPENDIX D — BOOKSTORE INTERVIEW NOTES

QUESTIONS FOR BOOKSTORES

1. What are your favorite book cover designs among the books your store sells? Can you tell me two or three favorite titles of those books?

   * Educated by Tara Westover
   * The Library Book by Susan Orlean
   * Come West and See by Maxim Loskutoff
   * My Absolute Darling by Gabriel Tallent
   * So Much Blue by Percival Everett
   * Clear jackets, embossed covers

2. Do you think the books with your favorite cover designs sell better than others? Why or why not?

   Educated does, but it's not clear for others. The cover of Educated does a good job of describing the story and its setting.

3. Have you noticed any popular book cover designs among the customers at your store?

   "I know that it happens but I can't think of a particular title."

4. Do you think there's any correlation between book cover designs and book sales?

   Sometimes publishers will change covers for paperbacks and anniversary editions to try to spur sales. But it doesn't always succeed. It's hard, overall, to tell how it affects sales.
QUESTIONS FOR BOOKSTORES

1. What are your favorite book cover designs among the books your store sells? Can you tell me two or three favorite titles of those books?
   * "A Home in the Barn" (Jerry Pinkney) - Believable animals
   * "Moletown" (Torben Kuhlmann) - "Asks imagination to go wild"

2. Do you think the books with your favorite cover designs sell better than others? Why or why not?
   Yes, covers that appeal to people do help sell books. People will pick up the book and look at it because of the cover, especially if they don't know the author.

3. Have you noticed any popular book cover designs among the customers at your store?
   Cozy mystery novels with cats (and other animals) on the cover, apocalyptic fantasy novels (men), generally covers that have to do with the genre and are eye-catching.

4. Do you think there's any correlation between book cover designs and book sales?
   Yes, with unknown authors to customers. Displays will have as many books with covers out front. If people like the author, publisher doesn't matter.

Other notes:
* Romance covers draw a lot of complaints if characters don't match descriptions in book.
* Self-published books draw less attention overall.
APPENDIX E — COVER DESIGN RESOURCE CREDITS

A Mask of Sea and Bone by Tatra Luke

Cover #1 (see fig. 3)

Octopus illustration — The Old Design Shop

Venice photograph — Anastasiya Lobanovskaya
www.pexels.com/photo/venice-italy-804954/

“Black & White Ombre” textures — Catherine Wheel
www.creativemarket.com/CatherineWheel/2375107-Black-Gray-Ombre-Texture-SALE/

Paper texture — Zeppelin Graphics

“Vintage Gold Marble” texture — TheHungryJPEG
www.thehungryjpeg.com/freebie/84189-free-vintage-gold-marble/

“Orbe” typeface — Rui Abreu
www.fonts.adobe.com/fonts/orbe/

Cover #2 (see fig. 10)

Venetian mask illustration — jenesesimre
Octopus tentacles illustration – Sergi


Paper texture — Zeppelin Graphics


Degenerated paper texture — The Old Design Shop

www.olddesignshop.com/2015/01/shabby-aged-stained-endpapers-free-graphics/

Gold textures — vito12

www.thehungryjpeg.com/product/12167-gold-texture-elements/

“P22 Aragon” typeface — Ted Staunton (P22 Type Foundry)

www.fonts.adobe.com/fonts/p22-aragon/

“Priori Acute” typeface — Jonathan Barnbrook and Marcus Leis Allion

www.fonts.adobe.com/fonts/priori-acute/

Cover #3 (see fig. 18)

Skull illustration — ClipArt ETC

www.etc.usf.edu/clipart/28800/28892/skull2_28892.htm/

Sea monster illustrations — iadaart

“Abstract Ocean” textures — ProjectPixels

www.etsy.com/listing/639904014/abstract-ocean-blue-green-marble-digital/

Paper texture — Zeppelin Graphics


“ROODY LAST” typeface — Attype Studio

www.thehungryjpeg.com/product/3502350-roody-last/


_Bildungsroman: An Autobiography_ by Leslie Mei

Cover #1 (see fig. 5)

Frame, woman, pen, house illustrations — The Old Design Shop


Clock illustration — ClipArt ETC

www etc.usf.edu/clipart/3800/3868/clock_1.htm/

Paper texture — Zeppelin Graphics


“Foliage Mix” brush — Kyle T. Webster

www.kylebrush.com/assets/cheatsheets/Kyle_Concept_CheetSheets.pdf/
“P22 Cezanne” and “Trattatello” typefaces — James Grieshaber (P22 Type Foundry)

www.fonts.adobe.com/fonts/p22-cezanne/

Cover #2 (see fig. 16)

Book photograph — Qijing Zhang

Woman’s head silhouette — olga_lebedeva


Frame illustration — Nongnuch Leelaphasuk


“WTR Roycroft” typeface — Wood Craft Revival

www.fonts.adobe.com/fonts/wtr-roycroft/

Cover #3 (see fig. 21)

Frame, book, flower banner, white flower, woman illustrations — The Graphics Fairy

www.thegraphicsfairy.com/
www.thegraphicsfairy.com/royalty-free-images-books-unusual/
www.thegraphicsfairy.com/gorgeous-pink-flower-label-image/
www.thegraphicsfairy.com/vintage-white-flower-graphic/

House illustration — The Old Design Shop

“Jelytta” typeface — Creatype Studio

www.creativemarket.com/creatype/2309399-Jelytta-Handwritten-4-Elegant-Font/

“Cochocib Script” typeface — Saffatin Co

www.creativemarket.com/Saffatin.co/2942534-Cochocib-Script/

Gretel Shed Bitter Tears by Alexandra Seaborn

Cover #1 (see fig. 7)

“FFAD Metro” typeface — SuperBruut

www.designbeep.com/2014/07/09/free-font-of-the-day-ffad-matro/

“Shockwave” typeface — Dirtyline Studio

www.creativemarket.com/h_m/2775440-Shockwave-SVG-Collection/

Cover #2 (see fig. 13)

Man and woman silhouettes — PiXXart Photography


“Reckless” typeface — Nadi Spasibenko

www.behance.net/gallery/33130017/Reckless-FREE-FONT/

“Catch Feels” typeface — Paperly Studio

www.creativemarket.com/paperlystudio/2623450-Catch-Feels-Lovely-and-Quirky-font/
Cover #3 (see fig. 24)

Palette — Color Picker

www.colorsupplyyy.com/app/

Hands vector illustration — santima_studio


“Anthology” typeface — Monocotype

www.creativemarket.com/monocotype/3369302-Anthology-Bonus/
APPENDIX F — COVER DESIGN EVALUATIONS

Tatra Luke
“For me, I definitely think the third, collaborative cover is the best. It captures the eeriness and aesthetic of the work without making it look dated or boring. From the artwork, the color scheme, to even the font choice, it all comes together to make something unique and striking. As a consumer, I would definitely be picking it up just to see what it was about. And as the writer behind the work, I think it’s a perfect representation of my book. Diana’s thoughtfulness and understanding of my work and what I wanted shines through but with an execution far better than I could’ve ever dreamed.”

Leslie Mei
“In terms of which cover I like the most, I think the first one is my favorite. It’s very simple and cohesive, and I like the delicate font / border around my name. I especially like the banner for the subtitle ‘an autobiography.’ The black and white are stark and represent the story well. Additionally, the subtle blend of shapes - woman’s profile, house, and clock - look balanced and draw the interest of the viewer without too much fanfare.

I would guess that the third one would be most successful on the market, simply because it is brightly colored and eye-catching. I’ve noticed quite a few books these days have a similar floral pattern juxtaposed with a bright background, so I think for that reason alone people would be more likely to take a second glance. The first one looks very unassuming in comparison. For me, though, that’s a plus. My intention when writing the story was to create some confusion initially, and draw the reader in so that by the end they are left admiring the sheer miracle of the book as
an object. The first cover is just like this; it seems straightforward until you look closer. The disintegrating centerpiece looks similar to the leaves at the bottom! What appears to be a line beneath my name is actually a nibbed pen! These are things I didn’t notice immediately, and they make me like the cover all the more.”

Alexandra Seaborne

“I feel that in regards to publishing, cover #2 would work best, based on my own (admittedly limited) observations and experiences with current covers in the same market as my story (that market being Middle Grade fiction). It’s not the cover most relevant to the story, but what it does contain is still representative of at least part of the story, and what I think is an important part.

As for which cover I personally like best, and think best represents the story, that would be cover #3. I was blown away the first time I saw it—I love how it seems a very simple design, but also contains so many different little details that are drawn not just from the story, but also from the metaphorical title that isn’t referenced in the story at all. I can’t express how much I love this cover, except for perhaps with the fact that seeing how perfectly the cover matched my story made me want to rework my story so that it was more deserving of such an amazing cover.”