

tone for quality paperback publishing from its inception in 1935.

Baines offers five chapters long on illustrations and short on text. The weltering array of covers reproduced in each offers a brief panorama of the hundreds of Penguin (and Puffin, Pelican, Kestrel, Ptarmigan, Peregrine and Peacock) titles released by the press that have become part of popular consciousness.

Those of us seduced by the order Jan Tschichold and his successor Hans Schmoller brought to the design of Penguin titles following the Second World War, an order latent in the earliest Penguin titles, have a feast for our eyes in the illustrations. Though Baines' text is wonderfully illuminative, packed with information regarding the circumstances of the covers' production, it's as hard to draw one's eyes from the illustrations as it is not to admire a run of Penguins on one's bookshelf. The difference being that *Penguin by Design* offers a greater run than any one bookshelf can hold. This works to provide a fluid visual narrative of the development of the covers' design.

Yet the illustrations don't stand alone. They reflect Baines' commentary and achieve the effect of which Penguin designer Germano Facetti believed them capable when he joined the press in the early 1960s. Describing the potential of well-designed covers, Facetti said they should resonate with a readership increasingly attuned to cinematic images, be "easily memorized, and...have—when books are displayed in large numbers—a cumulative effect."

The design of *Penguin by Design* tips the proverbial hat to that achievement, the front cover employing the tripartite grid and quartic from the original Penguins. The spines of dozens of Penguins make up each coloured band, illustrating the cumulative effect Facetti desired.

Baines' commentary is occasionally too straightforward, understandable given the depth of detail he presents in such a limited space. Indeed, his narrative does well to weave together enough salient details to make this as much of a tribute to seventy years of Penguin as an instructive encapsulation of what made its designs tick.

The least favourable aspect of the book is the use of light-orange type for the notes placed in the margins of the chapters. A clever device, the light colour could make the reference numbers, if not the text of the notes itself, difficult to read for those with weak eyes.

With the heart of the book being its illustrations, however, there is much else to draw the eyes, and the commentary that accompanies each page of

illustrations will ensure that this book is more than a nostalgic glance back at Penguin's history.

Peter Mitham is a journalist and the author of Robert W. Service: A Bibliography.

REVIEW

Library of Novelty

By Chris Ware (Pantheon, 2005, \$40).

Reviewed by Rollin Milroy

Despite the fact that none of his stories have been made into movies (and probably never will be), Chris Ware has become one of the most influential English-language comics artists in the last decade. Outside comicdom he probably is best known for the existential *Jimmy Corrigan* graphic novel (released by Pantheon in 2000 and into its sixth printing at last count) and as guest editor of *McSweeney's* comics issue, in 2004.

To get a sense of Ware's appeal as one of the few artists to reach readers beyond the comics ghetto, look at how his publisher indulged him on pages 4 and 5 of this new collection: a celestial chart which, reading late one night in a dimly lit library, I discovered is overprinted in

luminescent ink, creating a beautiful glow rising up from the pages. This exemplifies the success of *Library of Novelty*, which is one of craftsmanship and production. It is a beautiful book. Ware's drafting is meticulous, his pages dense with detail and rich colour. He does not



strive for an aesthetic outside comic conventions, but he has established a unique style within those conventions. Unlike the majority of people working in the field, Ware's visual storytelling is strong enough to tell engaging, extended stories without any words at all. And he has a sense of history for the graphic arts: one of the lesser strips in the collection, "The Letterer," culminates with the aging craftsman discovering on a bag of chips his handwork usurped by "insolent little computer hobbyists who don't know a gad-damned thing about ascenders and descenders!"

Reading the stories in this latest collection, however, it is quickly apparent that Ware's influence has been predominantly graphic (and rightly so); the stories he tells don't stray from the themes

of anguish and mean-spiritedness that form the basis of so many “independent” comics artists’ work. This is a shame, because Ware is clearly not lacking in humour and innocent mischievousness. Look at the slim printed paper “wrap” around this folio-sized book: Ware rarely skips an opportunity to torment and mock the fetishists who have come to symbolize comics readers, fixating on condition over content. The band promises to not age well; it is glued to the inside covers, so you cannot even store it safely off-site. But it also encapsulates all that Ware is good at and known for: his abhorrence of any space left unfilled by images or type (note the “world’s smallest comic strip” printed on the fore edge of the volume’s boards); his sense of satire and folly; and the range of his targets. It even serves as a colophon, each copy individually (machine) numbered from an edition of just 875,000 copies! And then there’s the price:



\$29.95 in the United States of America
Hawaii, Alaska, Afghanistan, Iraq
\$39.95 in the Canadian Wilderness
until we invade them, too.

The collection was culled from issues of *Library of Novelty*, an oversized comic published irregularly by Fantagraphics through the 1990s. The stories/strips are short and episodic, not necessarily intended to form a connected longer narrative; this is not, strictly speaking, a graphic novel, but instead a collection of strips. There’s “Rusty Brown,” about an aging and increasingly crapulent collector of toys, comics and other artifacts from childhood; “Stories of Tomorrow,” which seems to never stray from a lonely, depressive shut-in; “Tex Avery,” a simple bumpkin abused and abandoned by the world; and, running through all these pages, a long, wordless and untitled narrative about a being (God?) who comes to earth and lives here with complete indifference to his surroundings or the effects of his actions on others. And what does he learn after his million-years-spanning adventure? That he misses the girl he’d so casually abandoned.

Reading this collection in a single sitting leaves one feeling beaten down. Ware’s stories are confined to themes of greed, selfishness, alienation, futility—all things expected from a teen locked in his (or, increasingly but still less common, her) bedroom, drawing comics, but not a man almost

40 years old. (This is a charge levelled against the other American comics saviour from the ’90s, Daniel Clowes.) The odd story that gave way to the humour evident in the many bogus advertisements or the extended corporate history of the Acme Novelty Co. would have a tremendous leavening effect.

Library of Novelty is a good introduction to Ware’s work. It is beautifully produced and an excellent example of what comics can be, but it will not convert anyone skeptical of comics’ validity as a storytelling medium. To do that, Ware must act his age and recognize that sometimes, good comes with the bad.

Rollin Milroy is the editor of Amphora.

WORLD’S GREATEST COLLECTOR



WIMBLEDON GREEN

Wimbledon Green:

The Greatest Comic Collector in the World

By Seth (Drawn & Quarterly, 2005, \$25)

An episodic collection of stories about exactly what the title promises. Readers of *The New Yorker* will have seen the story “Jonah,” about an infamous thieving collector, last summer. Collectors of anything will enjoy—and recognize—the constellation of quirks and obsessions that Seth amusingly chronicles in small, dense panels printed in tritones. Another excellent title from a small Canadian publisher that has established an international reputation for the calibre of its artists and the quality of its books.