

Peter Mayer

Industry figures remember the c.e.o. of Penguin Books from 1978 to 1996, and Overlook founder, and who died in New York last week aged 82

Andrew Franklin

Profile Books m.d.

"Very few people in our world change it, but Peter Mayer transformed publishing, not just in the UK but globally. He revived Penguin, a zombie company when he took it over, and made it the most formidable and admired publisher in the English language. He created vertical publishing in the UK, ending the sale of paperback rights. He was the first person to see the potential for local publishing in India and elsewhere and, in setting up Penguin India, transformed the face of Indian publishing and literature. He globalised Penguin, turning it into an international force and the first of the big global groups.

He taught, inspired, mentored and drove insane generations of people in publishing. And all that with peerless exuberance, energy, a passionate belief in books and literature and, most of all, an indefatigable sense of fun. He was very special indeed."

Tom Weldon

Penguin UK c.e.o.

"One of the few regrets of my career has been not to work directly with Peter Mayer. But I enjoyed the next best thing when I became c.e.o. of Penguin UK in 2011: the two of us would occasionally meet for drinks and Peter gave me a series of masterclasses in publishing and business leadership. He was generous, curious, funny, and brilliant company. Perhaps the most important three things he taught me were: publish the best of every type of book; leadership is about trying to do the right thing and that means sometimes you won't be popular; and never lose your sense



of humour. He was an inspirational, wonderful man."

Clare Alexander

Aitken Alexander m.d.

"Peter was a giant among a great generation. His extraordinary energy and vision, coupled with [editor-in-chief] Peter Carson's erudition and [former sales and marketing director at Penguin] Patrick Wright's business skills, made Penguin in the UK a powerhouse and a thrilling place to work, and all of us who worked there were forged thereafter in a very particular way.

Peter was an American, a fact that initially upset the British establishment when first he came to run Penguin. But he was also the son of German Jews, and both these things were important to him.

He revelled in being let loose into what was then a rather vapid British publishing scene and it has hard to overstate how much he changed everything. Already a star from his transformative days at Avon in the US, he—like Sonny Mehta—had grown up as a paperback publisher. Passionate readers, paperback publishers could not afford to be literary snobs. They liked excellence, but they loved to sell books, and brought marketing skills unimagined before them.

I wish all the young people in publishing now could have a sense of what fun it all was. Those of us who worked with Peter will all have stories to tell. He changed us. He exasperated us. He inspired us."

Tim Binding Novelist

"I worked for Peter both times I was at Penguin and was the luckiest of men to have done so. When he came to Penguin, it was haemorrhaging to death. When he left it, Penguin had not only been restored to its rightful place in British publishing, but had become a global force. Just as important as what he did to Penguin UK (and USA) was what he did for British publishing as a whole, breathing new life by the vision of vertical publishing and the importance of ownership. His first words to me (after "My door is always open") were "Backlists erode". Regarded at the outset by the English publishing establishment as a brash whizz kid, he was one of the best read men I have ever known, and his love of books, and his understanding of the nature of publishing, infected all of us who were fortunate enough to work with, and alongside him. Alongside is a good word too, for his door was always open, and conversation and engagement with the world (plus continuous smoking) were his hallmarks. Funny, impossible, inspiring, inquiring and constantly alert, he was a unique and lovely man."

Tony Lacey

Viking former publishing director

"For about a decade, between his arrival at Penguin and the publication of *Satanic Verses*, he sprinkled stardust on British publishing. It was the aura around him I find hardest to describe to those who didn't experience it. Above all, he made books and publishing seem glamorous, not just to those working in the industry but to millions of readers too."

A full obituary of Peter Mayer will be published shortly.