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& Robert Bringhurst

A SHORT
HISTORY
OF THE
PRINTED
WORD

Second Edition, Revised and Updated

Hartley & Marks
PUBLISHERS

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striking names, dates and decorations into lockplates. It is possible that this unconventional background gave Caslon a rather old-fashioned attitude toward typographic punchcutting: one more closely related, in fact, to the practice of earlier centuries than to the commonplace aesthetic of his own time.

Caslon's first type was an Arabic font commissioned for missionary use by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. This he completed in 1724. He cut his first roman and italic in 1725. By 1734, when he issued his second specimen, he had cut his first Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Saxon and Greek types, as well as several sizes of roman, italic and textura. All these types are heavily indebted to historical examples, but Caslon's conservative tastes and antiquarian commissions led him into the future as well as the past. About 1745, for an Oxford palaeographer, he cut an unserified Itruscan font. It was based on forms 2,000 years old, but it was probably the first sanserif type ever made.

Caslon's types show their maker's close attention to a range of typographic, scriptorial and inscriptional traditions, but where roman and italic are concerned, he is an artist with one style. Like his eminent contemporary J. S. Bach, Caslon breathed new life into the spirit of the Baroque, while others wished to bury it and reconceive the world in terms of the latest fashion – a fashion which in retrospect we know as Neoclassicism. Caslon was also, like Bach, the founder of a dynasty. When he died in 1766, his son, William Caslon II, continued cutting type, and the foundry remained in the hands of his descendants until 1874.

John Baskerville

John Baskerville was eight years younger than William Caslon and came from the same region in central England. His training, however, was wholly different. He was a Birmingham writing master and designer of decorative headstones, trained to think in ink

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P.

T A N D E M aliquando, Quirites! L. Catilinam furentem audacia, scelus anhelantem, pestem patriæ nefarie molientem, vobis atque huic urbi ferrum flammæque militum
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R.

7.5 Baskerville's *Great Primer roman*. 1762.

in two dimensions, not in three-dimensional steel. He had, like Caslon, a decent head for business and amassed a modest fortune through the manufacture of lacquerware. He was forty-four years old when he decided to devote himself to printing and typography. At his home in Birmingham, he established a foundry and printshop – but Baskerville never cut a punch. He employed a craftsman named John Handy to cut the type that he designed.

Where Caslon's letters are thoroughly Baroque, Baskerville's are thoroughly Neoclassical, and all of his experiments in printing and in page design were aimed at bringing out the spirit of eighteenth-century rationalism inherent in his letters. To this end, he developed hot-pressed papers. He used a dampened *wove sheet* – made on a woven screen rather than a mold whose chain lines and laid lines give the fibers an inherent sense of direction – and subjected it to pressure between hot copper plates after its impression. The silky finish of the Baskerville pages, the brilliance of the specially formulated ink, and the severe, undecorated typography won

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PUBLI VIRGILII
 MARONIS
 BUCCOLICA,
 GEORGICA,
 ET
 AENEIS.

BIRMINGHAMIAE:
 typis JOHANNIS BASKERVILLE.
 MDCCCLVII.

7.6 Title page of Baskerville's quarto *Virgil*. Birmingham, 1757.

high praise in Europe. In time, the effect that Baskerville achieved with his plates was built into papers by *calendering*, or pressing between rollers before printing.

Three characteristics that might be expected in a writing-master-turned-tray-and-snuffbox-painter are neatness, an interest in letters and their general arrangement, and a strong dedication to finish. All these are indeed present in John Baskerville's type and in his printing. His presswork is especially notable and represents perhaps his greatest contribution. In the early 1760s he issued a specimen sheet from which the examples in figure 7.5 are taken.