

UNION ARTISTS

PRINTING TYPES  
THEIR HISTORY, FORMS, AND USE  
*A STUDY IN SURVIVALS*

BY  
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

*"Nunca han tenido, ni tienen las artes otros  
enemigos que los ignorantes"*

VOLUME I

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decorations, needlessly introduced, are overwhelmed by the magnificent engraved decorations, unsurpassed of their kind. The *Voyage* has a further interest because it helped on the vogue for classical *motifs* in decoration, through its agreeably rendered plates of classical furniture and utensils. The designs from Greek vases in two colours are admirable pieces of copper-plate printing, and a word should be said about the sumptuous engraved Dedication to Marie Antoinette, in Volume I. Saint-Non, the most distinguished amateur of the second half of the century, was himself a passable engraver as well as an archaeologist and antiquary. A convinced idealist, he dedicated his life to producing this wonderful work, which, begun in 1778, was finished in 1786. It was printed by Clousier and — incidentally — ruined Saint-Non.

A book in small *format* that shows Didot *l'aîné* at his best as a printer, is the Abbé de Lille's *Géorgiques de Virgile, en vers François*. Delightful old style types are used in this pretty little 32mo edition, which was printed for the Paris publisher, Bleuët, in 1782 (*fig.* 160). This should be compared with a volume already alluded to (in a way a "specimen-book") that shows some new Didot characters — the octavo *Épître sur les Progrès de l'Imprimerie* (1784), written by Pierre, eldest son of François Ambroise Didot, and printed in italic types designed by Firmin Didot, his second son. It employs for the poem a very light, monotonous italic (*fig.* 161). The notes are set in a smaller size of it, mingled with a roman letter which is somewhat colourless in effect. The general conception of its type is still old style, but pared down to the last degree. This italic was not an invention "from a clear sky," but merely "developed" the type *au goût nouveau*, of which we have seen examples in mid-eighteenth century French specimen-books. Firmin

## ARGUMENT.

*LE Soleil & la chaleur font éclore une multitude d'êtres nouveaux qui animent les élémens. Caractère de grandeur & d'opulence que l'Été donne à la nature. Elle est moins variée qu'au Printems ; elle ne doit être vue qu'en grand. Riche & vaste paysage fait pour être vu pendant l'Été ; ses effets sur l'ame. Éloge de l'Agriculture. Combien il est facile de rendre heureux les Laboureurs ; leurs mœurs. L'Été dans sa force. Puissance & majesté de la Nature sous la Zône Torride ; la chute du Nil ; une forêt. Paysages tels qu'on les désire pendant la chaleur , & leurs effets sur les sens & sur l'ame. Tondaison. Fenaison & gaité des travaux champêtres. Un Gentilhomme que la guerre avoit ruiné prend une ferme. Maturité des bleds. Corvée &*

Enfin, malgré cette gêne, l'observation des règles de notre poésie produit de moins grandes beautés que l'observation des règles de la poésie latine. Dans celle-ci, le mélange marqué des syllabes breves & longues amène nécessairement le rythme : dans la nôtre, les règles ne prescrivent rien sur la durée des syllabes, mais seulement sur leur nombre arithmétique ; de sorte que des vers françois peuvent être réguliers sans être nombreux, & satisfaire aux loix de la versification sans satisfaire à celles de l'harmonie.

Je n'ai parlé jusqu'à présent que de cette harmonie générale qui, par l'heureux choix, l'enchaînement mélodieux des mots, flatte agréablement l'oreille. Il est une autre espèce d'harmonie nommée imitative, harmonie bien supérieure à l'autre, s'il est vrai que l'objet de la poésie soit de peindre. Pope en donne l'exemple & le précepte à la fois dans des vers imités admirablement par l'abbé Duretnel, & que j'ai essayé de traduire.

## PRÉLIMINAIRE. 47

Peins-moi légèrement l'amant léger de Flore.  
Qu'un doux ruisseau murmure en vers plus doux.  
Entend-on de la mer les ondes bouillonnantes ?  
Le vers, comme un torrent, en roulant doit courir.  
Qu'Ajex souleve un roc & le lance avec peine.  
Chaque syllabe est lourde & chaque mot se balance.  
Mais vois d'un pied léger Camille effleurer l'onde.  
Le vers vole, & la suit aussi prompt que l'oïseau.

Mais, il faut en convenir, c'est peut-être à cet égard que la langue latine l'emporte le plus sur la nôtre. La quantité des syllabes, dont la brièveté ou la longueur précipite ou ralentit le vers, étoit déterminée chez les Latins : nous avons aussi des breves & des longues, mais beaucoup moins marquées ; notre prosodie n'est point décidée comme celle des anciens, & cette décision laisse tout le jugement & tout le travail de l'harmonie à l'oreille & au goût du poète.

D'ailleurs, comme je l'ai déjà dit, nous avons dans notre langue trop peu de sons pleins, trop d'z muets, trop de syllabes

Didot's italic types superseded those of Fournier *le jeune*, which until then had been popular, and allusion to this is made in the *Épître*. The *Épître* was reprinted in an exquisite little volume in 18mo—Pierre Didot's *Essai de Fables nouvelles dédiées au Roi ; suivies de Poésies diverses et d'une Épître sur les progrès de l'Imprimerie*. . . . À Paris, imprimé par Franç. Andr. Didot l'aîné avec les caractères de Firmin son 2<sup>a</sup> fils, 1786. The same series of types is used in both books, but not in the same sizes. In this small format the delicacy of type is warranted—and the composition is very tastefully managed.<sup>1</sup>

Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* was printed at Paris by François Ambroise Didot l'aîné, in 1784-88, "by order of Monsieur,"—the Comte de Provence (afterwards Louis XVIII),—who chose the subjects for Cochin's illustrations. It is a beautiful example of Didot's printing. The type is a delicate old style, though a little too much influenced by Bodoni in the contrasting weight of line, an effect increased by the vellum-like paper employed. The Didots no doubt believed that the *papier-vélin* improved their books, by enabling them to attenuate the thin strokes of the type—replacements which these highly finished papers were able to "take" only too successfully.

In 1782, the Paris publishers Molini and Lamy issued a prospectus of an edition of a work first brought out in 1757 by the Comte de Caylus and J. B. Mariette—the *Peintures Antiques de Bartoli*, which reproduced frescoes discovered at Herculaneum. This new edition of one hundred copies was to be all that was most distinguished, and for it some

<sup>1</sup>For title-pages of books in small format, printed in light Didot types much spaced, consult the facsimiles, in *Le Petit's Éditions Originales*, of *Paul et Virginie* of 1789 and *La Chaumière Indienne* of 1791, both by Bernardin de St. Pierre.

new types of Didot *l'ainé* were to be used. The portion of the prospectus which is reproduced (*fig. 162*) shows this beautiful transitional font, which retains the charm of old style letter, but has a touch of grace and delicacy which makes it very much of its period. It is one of a series of steps by which the Didots learnedly but foolishly descended to the types they used about 1800.

In François Ambroise Didot's edition of the *Œuvres de Fénelon* in nine quarto volumes, begun in 1787 and completed by his son, Pierre Didot, in 1792, the shape of letter used is still old style, but it is so thin and fragile that it is scarcely recognizable as old style at all. This results in faded-looking pages that are perfectly legible, but give an insecure feeling to the eye (*fig. 163*). This edition should be compared with Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque*, also printed in quarto in 1787 by Pierre François Didot, brother to François Ambroise. The preface states that it is set in "*les nouveaux Caractères de sa Fonderie*," and that the subscribers, allowed to choose between a *caractère gras* and a *caractère maigre* for this edition, had given six hundred votes for the former against two for the latter. The choice seems justified, for the *gras* employed in *Télémaque* (*fig. 164*) is *maigre* enough, in all conscience! However, it is a type with some colour left in it, and it is beautifully imposed and printed on a rich *papier d'Annonay*, made for the book.

The Kehl editions of Voltaire (with the imprint *Société Littéraire Typographique*) were printed from Baskerville's type, purchased by Beaumarchais for the purpose. Three editions were proposed; but the octavo and 12mo seem to have been the only ones completed. The octavo is the better of the two, and its pages have distinction and charm. Their marked lightness of effect is gained by very open leading and by titles set in spaced capital letters, much

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# É P Î T R E

## S U R L E S P R O G R È S

### D E L ' I M P R I M E R I E .

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A M O N P E R E .

*CET art qui tous les jours multiplie avec grace  
Et les vers de Virgile et les leçons d'Horace ;  
Qui, plus sublime encor, plus noble en son emploi,  
Donne un texte épuré des livres de la Loi,  
Et, parmi nous de Dieu conservant les oracles,  
Pour la religion fit ses premiers miracles ;  
Des grands événements cet art conservateur,  
Trop ingrat seulement envers son inventeur,  
N'a pas su nous transmettre avec pleine assurance  
Le génie étonnant qui lui donna naissance.  
Toi qui sus concevoir tant de plans à la fois,  
A l'immortalité pourquoi perdre tes droits ?*

161. Page employing Firmin Didot's *Italic*, printed by F. A. Didot  
Paris, 1784

## L I V R E   X V I I I .

d'un beau prétexte pour contenter leur ambition, et pour se jouer des hommes crédules : ces hommes, qui avoient abusé de la vertu même, quoiqu'elle soit le plus grand don des dieux, étoient punis comme les plus scélérats de tous les hommes. Les enfans qui avoient égorgé leurs pères et leurs mères, les épouses qui avoient trempé leurs mains dans le sang de leurs époux, les traîtres qui avoient livré leur patrie après avoir violé tous les sermens, souffroient des peines moins cruelles que ces hypocrites. Les trois juges des enfers l'avoient ainsi voulu ; et voici leur raison : c'est que les hypocrites ne se contentent pas d'être méchans comme le reste des impies ; ils veulent

164. *Caractère Gras* used by Pierre François Didot, Paris, 1787

helped by the small sizes of the types employed, which lend themselves readily to this kind of treatment. Some of the tables of contents are particularly interesting in composition. The 12mo edition, planned on the same lines as the octavo, scarcely "arrives," as its type seems rather a misfit for such a small *format*. This work—*de longue haleine*—was printed in seventy volumes octavo, and in ninety-two volumes 12mo, being begun in 1784 and finished in 1789. Artistically a success, it was financially a complete failure. And it is one of the sarcasms of destiny that the Revolution which Voltaire helped bring about, wrecked the "definitive edition" of his works! Pages of *La Pucelle* of 1789 are reproduced (*fig.* 165).

As an indication of changing typography the student should look at Dorat's *Lettres en Vers, et Œuvres Mêlées*, published by Delalain in 1792. It is much the same kind of a book as the *Fables*; but by 1792 types had wholly changed, becoming feeble in colour and modern in shape. Ephemeral volumes like Dorat's are often more "rewarding" typographically than better books, because they depended on luxurious presentation to get themselves read. They are the equivalent of a nineteenth century "gift book." To see the best printing of a century, one must know what books were in fashion—for many volumes, forgotten now, were the ones on which the printer spent most labour.

C. M. Saugrain's octavo edition of the New Testament in Latin and French (translated by De Sacy) was begun by Didot *jeune* in 1793. In plan a handsome work, it is wrecked by its chilly "modern" types, excessive leading, and a paper too rough for the fonts employed. It is illustrated by Moreau *le jeune*, who seems very ill at ease in designing Biblical subjects. The edition is inscribed to the *Assemblée Nationale*, which, though pledged to receive no

dedications of books, made an exception in its favour, to show—in 1791—"its attachment and respect for the Christian Religion."

A six-volume edition of *Œuvres de Molière* was printed in 1791–94 at Paris by P. Didot *l'aîné*, in an edition limited to two hundred and fifty copies, set from some new types cut by Firmin Didot. It was part of Pierre Didot's quarto series of *Auteurs Classiques François et Latine*. To understand it typographically, compare it with the six-volume quarto edition of Molière, of 1734, which was intended to be "printed with magnificence" by Pierre Prault, with illustrations and decorations by Boucher, Oppenort, and others. Prault's edition is from old style types, full of warmth and colour, while in the Didot *Molière*, though the types are not absolutely modern face, they have lost their suave quality—they are too regular and lack picturesqueness, and produce very arid pages.

A folio Latin edition of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, published and edited by Antoine Auguste Renouard and printed from the types of Didot *fils aîné* in 1795, is an example of the use of over-modelled late Didot types, and a very hideous piece of work it is! Each letter of these fonts, perfect enough in itself, has too much light and shade, and in mass lacks solidity of effect. The type jumps at you! The arrangement, too, is without much sense of style. It fails just where Bodoni and even the Foulis brothers succeeded; though none the less it is typographically a very instructive volume for the student.

In France the typographic event of the close of the century was the appearance of Pierre Didot's *éditions du Louvre* of Horace and Virgil. The *Opera* of Virgil, in folio, was a limited edition of two hundred and fifty copies, printed in 1798 from types designed and cast by Firmin Didot.

## AVERTISSEMENT

### DES ÉDITEURS.

1784.

Ce poème est un des ouvrages de M. de Voltaire qui ont excité en même tems et le plus d'enthousiasme et les déclamations les plus violentes. Le jour où M. de Voltaire fut couronné au théâtre, les spectateurs, qui l'accompagnèrent en foule jusqu'à sa maison, criaient également autour de lui : *Vive la Pucelle*, *vive Mahomet*, *vive la Pucelle*. Nous croyons donc qu'il ne fera pas inutile d'entrer dans quelques détails historiques sur ce poème.

Il fut commencé vers l'an 1730 : et jusqu'à l'époque où M. de Voltaire vint s'établir aux environs de Genève, il ne fut connu que des amis de l'auteur qui avaient des copies de quelques chants, et des sociétés où Thiriot en récitait des morceaux détachés.

A 3

## LA PUCELLE

### D'ORLÉANS.

### CHANT PREMIER.

*Amours honnêtes de Charles VII et d'Agnès Sorel.  
Siège d'Orléans par les Anglais. Apparition de  
saint Denis, &c.*

Je ne suis né pour célébrer les saints : (a)  
Ma voix est faible, et même un peu profane.  
Il faut pourtant vous chanter cette Jeanne  
Qui fit, dit-on, des prodiges divins.  
Elle afermit, de ses pucelles mains,  
Des fleurs de lis la tige gallicane,  
Sauva son roi de la rage anglicane,  
Et le fit oindre au maître-autel de Reims.  
Jeanne montra sous féminin visage,  
Sous le corset et sous le cotillon,  
D'un vrai Roland le vigoureux courage.  
J'aimerais mieux, le soir, pour mon usage  
Une beauté douce comme un mouton ;  
Mais Jeanne d'Arc eut un cœur de lion :  
Vous le verrez, si lisez cet ouvrage.

C 2

# ODE I.

AD VENEREM.

INTERMISSA, Venus, diu

Rursus bella moves. Parce, precor, precor!

Non sum qualis eram bonæ

Sub regno Cinaræ. Desine, dulcium

Mater sæva Cupidinum,

Circa lustra decem flectere mollibus

Iam durum imperiis. Abi

166. *Types of folio Horace: Pierre Didot, Paris, 1799*

It was decorated with twenty-three engraved plates after designs by Gérard and Girodet, and was intended to surpass Bodoni's folio Virgil of 1793. This was followed in 1799 by Pierre Didot's folio Latin Horace with decorations by Percier—a companion limited edition. I have some of the "trial" pages of the Horace which belonged to Renouard and were probably given him by Didot. The type is clear to read, but quite without charm. Variations of light and shade are extreme, and the serifs of capital letters such as M and N are literally hair-lines at right angles to the upright strokes (*fig. 166*). The pages as a whole are imposing but lifeless. The décoration to the first ode, designed by Percier and engraved by Girodet, is splendid enough of its kind, but is as hard in feeling and execution as the typography beneath it (*fig. 167*).

From this survey of French books, we see that in the sixteenth century black-letter was at first used, but was slowly driven out by the fashions introduced by Tory and the Italian influence in French art; that during that century, especially in the first half—the great period of French printing—French types were a slightly more delicate form of the best Italian letters of the preceding century. In the seventeenth century, letter-design became less classical and monumental in feeling and inclined more toward what we now know as heavy "old style" types, and of these (as we shall see later) some of the finest were cut only through royal subvention. In the eighteenth century, types, though still rather heavy in the earlier years, became lighter in form and method of composition as time went on, until the type-forms developed into "modern face"—the rigid uniformity of which was then mistaken for classic severity.