

KLEMÉNTINA MOŽINA

PRINTING TYPES
THEIR HISTORY, FORMS, AND USE

A STUDY IN SURVIVALS

BY

DANIEL BERKELEY UPDIKE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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

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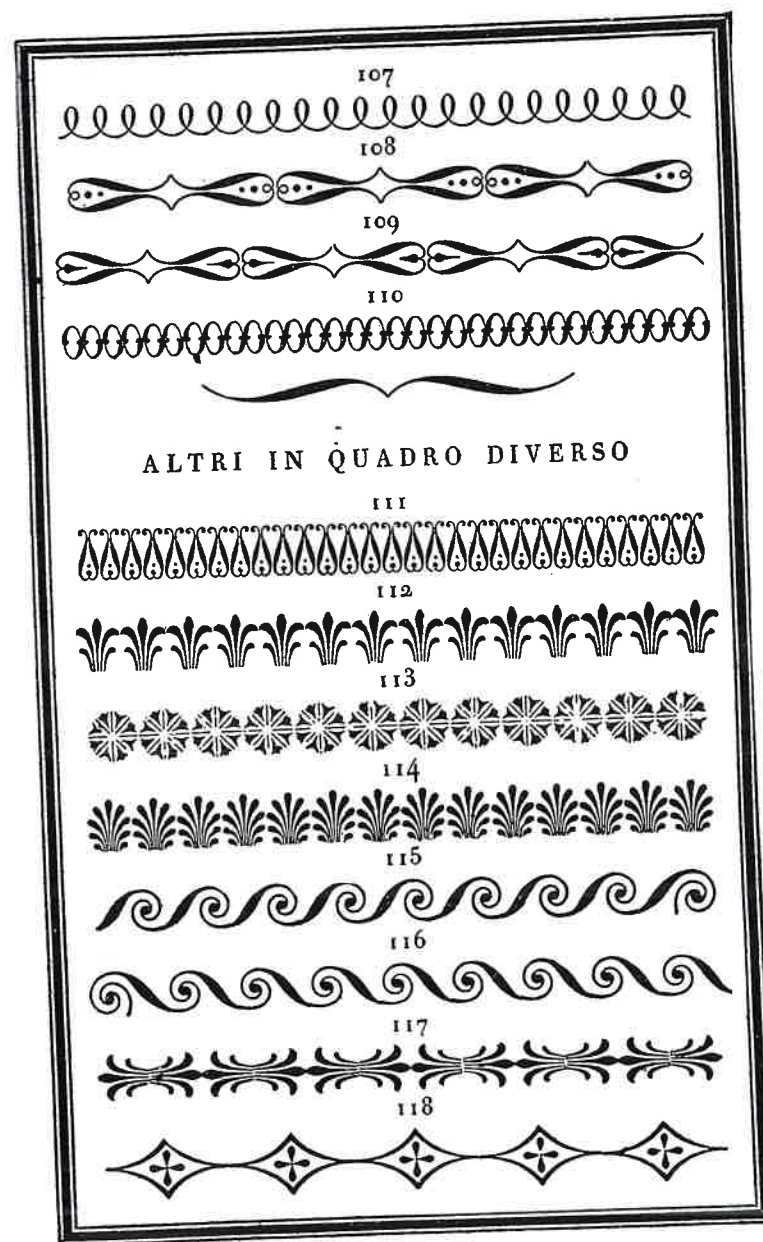
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of Amoretti's fonts is shown in the folio *Poesie di Catullo*, in Italian and Latin, issued at Pisa in 1815. This book recalls Bodoni's manner, but just misses its excellence; somehow the types seem commonplace, and their arrangement lacks Bodoni's clever touch. Amoretti's types are also used in Tasso's *Aminta*, printed in Pisa in 1804 at the same press; but here the types are too much spaced and look weak, not only on that account, but because they are so.

III

SOME account of the manifold activities of the Didot family is given in a previous chapter, but we must now consider their important part in the development of nineteenth century type-forms. Their eighteenth century influence in the movement toward lighter types is shown by François Ambroise Didot's fonts cut by Wafard about 1775,¹ in that interesting book already spoken of, *Épître sur les Progrès de l'Imprimerie*, written and put forth by Didot l'aîné in 1784, and in the delightful *Essai de Fables Nouvelles*, in which the *Épître* was reprinted in 1786. It is but fair to say that mid-eighteenth century French specimens were full of very light fonts, in what was then called the *goût nouveau*, and it was these that the Didots somewhat refined upon. On the other hand, some of the graceful and spirited but attenuated old style types used by the Didots about 1780 were very beautiful, and have not been sufficiently noticed — types just on the turn of the tide — foreshadowing the coming change in style, but by no means

¹ I have not been able to examine any volumes showing large sizes of the Wafard types, which were quickly superseded by Vibert's fonts, for which Pierre Didot was responsible. Alphabets of Wafard's characters are shown in Thibaudeau's *La Lettre d'Imprimerie*, Vol. I, pls. 15 and 16. The date of their appearance there given (1757) would appear to be open to question.



317. Ornaments: Amoretti's *Saggio de' Caratteri*
Parma, 1811

AVIS.

J'ai dû suivre et adopter l'ordre numérique pour la dénomination de mes caractères, au lieu des noms insignifiants et souvent bizarres conservés encore aujourd'hui dans presque toutes les imprimeries, tels que *Perle*, *Parisienne*, *Nompareille*, *Mignonne*, *Petit texte*, *Gaillarde*, *Petit romain*, *Philosophie*, *Cicéro*, *Saint Augustin*, etc., lesquels n'offrent aucune idée de leurs proportions particulières ni de leur corrélation, qui en effet existe rarement entre eux d'une manière exacte.

Cet ordre numérique, le seul vraiment convenable, a été ainsi établi par mon père; et le nom de chacun de ses caractères particuliers en présentait à-la-fois le signalement. Il a donc donné à celui qu'il a voulu prendre pour point de départ, et qui répond à peu près au petit caractère connu dans les imprimeries sous la dénomination de *Nompareille*, une proportion fixe et invariable, la ligne de pied-de-roi. Il l'a nommé le six, parceque le corps de ce caractère contient six points, ou six sixièmes de ligne. Le sixième de ligne, ou le point, est la plus petite partie qu'il soit possible de fonder, soit comme espace entre les mots, soit comme interligne. Ainsi donc le six comprend dans son corps, c'est-à-dire avec les lettres longues d'en haut et d'en bas, telles que b, p, etc. (ou simplement la lettre j, dont le point et la queue complètent la dimension totale); le corps six, dis-je, comprend une ligne juste de pied-de-roi: le sept comprend une ligne, plus un sixième de ligne, ou sept points, etc.

A ces dimensions établies j'ai ajouté des corps intermédiaires, ou demi-points, afin d'obtenir et de présenter plus de richesse et de variété dans les proportions des différents corps, et par là, du six au douze, j'ai augmenté de six le nombre de mes caractères. Leur progression graduelle est ainsi d'un demi-point seulement, ou d'un

110. Suite de P. Didot l'auteur du Nouveau Caractères, Paris, 1819

disfigured by it. None of these characters (save possibly Wafflard's) prepare us for the fonts cut by Firmin Didot about 1800 for the *Racine* and also used in the composition of the *Constitution de la République*.

The famous *édition du Louvre* of *Racine* (1801-5) was printed by Pierre Didot in three folio volumes, and considered his *chef d'œuvre*. "The splendid execution of this book," says Bouchot, "was a true typographical revolution. Never in any country had scrupulous perfection of detail been joined to so masterly a knowledge of arrangement and form of characters. The great artists of the Davidian school were anxious of the honour of seeing their drawings reproduced as illustrations, and . . . designed the fifty-seven plates with which the edition was adorned." Two hundred and fifty copies were printed, one hundred of which had proofs of the plates before letters. It was published by subscription at 1200 francs for the ordinary edition, and with proofs at 1800 francs.

The series of typical "Didot" characters used in it is distinguished by the violent contrast of their thick and thin lines. The heavy strokes of the letters are very strong, the thin lines and the serifs are exaggerated and lightened to a mere hair-line. The italic is almost as if engraved. The effect as a whole is perfect, but dazzling; it sticks into, rather than strikes, the eye. All the agreeable, mellow feeling of the letter of Jenson and Garamond is gone. "Didot uncontestedly realized," says Thibaudeau, "a pompous roman alphabet instinct with majestic grandeur, but of extreme dryness and absolutely glacial rigidity of line." He adds that a whole school of typography sprang up around this Didot "formula-type." There existed, however, a minority who did not accept Didot's fonts without criticism and protest.

We can understand the enthusiasm excited by such books as Didot's Horace and Racine only when we realize that the men chosen to illustrate them were part and parcel of the movement in Art that I have already outlined, and that printing was itself but a tiny current in the far-reaching sweep of this tide. Lifeless and pretentious as such work seems to us now, to the public of that day it appeared the quintessence of the antique spirit. For it must be observed—and this observation has a moral for the printer—that what the contemporaries of Didot saw and admired in his printing is not what we see and admire now. Men of that day saw, or thought they saw, in Didot's great folios, antiquity; to us the only interesting thing about them is that they exhibit Didot's idea of it. And since the Didot idea was not particularly interesting, or his manner charming, neither his types nor the books he printed with them much interest us. The only "period" a printer can work in so as to give pleasure at subsequent periods appears to be his own.

The development of this Didot letter is shown in the *Spécimen des Nouveaux Caractères . . . de P. Didot l'aîné* of 1819 (*fig. 318*). Here we see a new style of French type in full swing. Pierre Didot says these fonts were engraved under his personal supervision by the type-cutter Vibert, whom he assisted (and probably inordinately tormented) for three hours a day for ten years to get things to his mind. François Ambroise Didot, it should be remembered, had reformulated a system of type-measurement—one reason why his style of type became so popular with printers. His son applied this mathematical sense to type-design, with a resultant rigidity which is a mark of early nineteenth century "classic" French fonts. Almost every trace of pen-quality vanishes in these types. It is an alphabet "regularized" to a painful degree; though very perfect and very

brilliant. There are marked and disagreeable peculiarities in some letters (*fig. 319*), and its disabled g and wounded y warn us of the danger of too much fussing over details.

Some very horrid characters engraved for the *Imprimerie* in 1818 by Jacquemin were a reflection of those heavier types introduced by Thorne in England; for after the downfall of Napoleon, English fashions were popular. They had a counterpart in those of Henri Didot's nephew, Marcel-Lin Legrand, whose fonts of 1825—a sort of mechanical version of Didot's 1819 fonts—were followed by the same engraver's unpleasantly condensed types of 1847.

The effect of types of the Didot school may be seen in books published in France by different members of the Didot family, by Renouard, and other progressive publishers, between 1800 and 1850. The following volumes, selected at random, show a certain progression in style of type as the century advanced.

In the *Bucoliques* of Virgil and the *Idylles* of Theocritus, translated and printed by Firmin Didot, his *caractères d'écriture* were first used in 1806. In 1811, Renouard published, in two volumes 12mo, an illustrated edition of the *Fables* of La Fontaine, which was an important book in its time and a characteristic piece of early nineteenth century typography. The fonts used in the 1817 edition of Molière's works—in octavo, printed by Pierre Didot *l'aîné*—show further progression toward modern face types, as we now understand the term. Baour-Lormian's translation of Tasso's *Jérusalem Délivrée*, published by Delaunay and printed by Didot *le jeune* in 1819, though virile compared with later type effects, is a very frigid and tiresome performance.

Poésies et Traductions en Vers de Firmin Didot. Paris, de la Typographie de l'Auteur, 1822, shows Didot's own views

as to what a book should look like; and *Napoléon et ses Contemporains*, a series of engravings with text by A. P. de Chambure (1824), published by Bossange and printed by Lachevardière fils, is a good example of fashionable typography of a little later time. *Lettres de Napoléon à Joséphine*, etc. (1796–1814), published and printed by Firmin Didot Frères in 1833, in two volumes octavo, is also an example of what the Didot house at that period thought fit to present to the public. Paulin's edition of Lesage's *Gil Blas* (1835), with its hundreds of vignettes by Gigoux, and Curmer's edition of St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1838) were considered delightful novelties in book-making. In the latter, besides many full-page wood-engravings by Tony Johannot, the text was smothered with innumerable woodcuts designed and executed by the best hands—French and English—in the “romantic” manner of the day. These two books interest us: first, as endeavours to make what were then considered (and, in a sense, still are) remarkable editions; second, because in them all unity of illustration and typography was thrown overboard. This style in the making of gift-books persisted in all countries for many years.

Finally, Horace's *Opera*, printed by Firmin Didot in 1855 from very tiny types, is worth examination. Ambroise Firmin Didot's address *Au Lecteur* gives some typographical details about the edition. The smallest type in the book (cast by Laurent & De Berny) is used in the notes to Didot's address—not so small, however, as Henri Didot's microscopic types used in 1827 in a minute edition of La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*.

Except for the reconstitution of books of that period, types of the Didot school have little practical value to us now.

LE TREIZE.

Conjurant la mélancolie,
La défiance et ses détours,
La froideur, et la jalousie,
En ont confié l'heureux cours
A l'Hymen sensible, aux Amours,
A la raison, à la folie:
Heureux qui sait régler toujours
Leur accord, leur douce harmonie!

Là, des dieux respirant la vie,
L'Hymen, par sa fécondité,
L'Hymen, que mon cœur déifie,
Entretient, augmente, et varie
L'amour, l'espoir, et la gaieté;
La douce paix, la liberté,
Y président de compagnie,
Versant, offrant de tout côté
Et le nectar et l'ambrosie.

Comme, après un beau jour d'été,
La nuit, plus calme et non moins belle,