
ANATOMY
OF A
TYPEFACE

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DAVID R. GODINE, PUBLISHER
BOSTON

BODONI

The numerous types that today bear the name of Giambattista Bodoni are a tribute as much to his reputation as a printer as to his ability as an engraver of punches. Most of them, in fact, tend to be more in the style of Bodoni than exact copies of his letter forms. Nevertheless, the faces that Bodoni cut represent the ultimate development of the Roman letter form as expressed in printing types. Working in the late eighteenth century, Bodoni carried forward the interpretations first rendered by the Venetian punchcutters about 1470 and continued through three hundred years of type design.

During this long period, the stamp of national characteristics had gradually modified the original humanist style of Italy. Garamond in France in the sixteenth century, the Dutch typefounders in the seventeenth, and William Caslon and John Baskerville in England in the eighteenth century all contributed to the ideal of perfection that Giambattista Bodoni held before him in his work. It was Baskerville, in fact, who made the immediate impact on Bodoni, causing the Italian to develop into the most widely admired printer of his time, and to be considered as among the finest in the history of the craft.

Giambattista Bodoni was born in Saluzzo, Italy, in 1740. As a boy, he learned his art from his printer father, in addition to developing skill in the cutting of woodblocks. At the age of eighteen he became a compositor in the Vatican printing office, which possessed a notable collection of types representing most of the world's languages (assembled for the purpose of bringing the Word of God to the lands then being colonized by the Europeans).

Bodoni studied the Oriental languages and was assigned the task of cataloguing the exotics that had originally been cut two centuries earlier by such noted French punchcutters as Granjon, Garamond, and Le Bé, and which by the eighteenth century were in a sad state of pi. It was this assignment that excited Bodoni's interest in the cutting of

A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

O P Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k

l m n o p q r s t u

v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

MANUALE
TIPOGRAFICO
DEL CAVALIERE
GIAMBATTISTA BODONI

VOLUME PRIMO.

P A R M A
PRESSO LA VEDOVA
MDCCCLVIII

punches, resulting in his designing several ornaments which received favorable comments from his fellow Vatican compositors.

After serving in Rome for ten years, Bodoni decided to travel to England in the hope of visiting John Baskerville, whose types and books, despite the skepticism of his compatriots, were at the time receiving the hearty approval of European printers and bibliophiles.

But on the very first leg of this journey, at home in Saluzzo, Bodoni became ill. The trip was thus canceled. During his recovery he was sought out by the duke of Parma, who – having founded a library and an academy of art – wanted in addition to establish a fine printing office in the manner of other royal houses in Europe. Bodoni accepted the duke's offer to become its director, and in February 1768 he arrived in Parma to begin the accumulation of materials necessary for establishing a press devoted to fine printing.

The typographical aspects of fine book printing had been in decline during the earlier years of the eighteenth century. Bibliophiles then were more enthusiastic about a book's engraved illustrations and ornaments than the design of its text – the success of a book was judged only by its decoration. With book buyers' attention thus focused, printers had become lax about the selection of type and the quality of presswork. Bodoni was to change this approach radically.

For his first types he copied those cast by Pierre Simon Fournier, the Parisian typefounder whose designs owe their inspiration to the Romain du Roi ordered by Louis XIV for the Imprimerie Royale in 1692. With these types Bodoni produced his first half-dozen books. His admiration for the Frenchman is well illustrated in the first specimen book he printed, in 1771, where he closely imitated the ornamental title pages of Fournier's *Manuel Typographique* of 1764–66.

But the Italian printer soon broke away from his dependence on Fournier. It is probable that he had also become aware of the books then being printed in France by the Didots, whose designs competed with Fournier's. In any case, Bodoni established his own foundry and began to cut punches for types that represented a considerable departure from the ones he had been using.

Bodoni's ideas as a printer and punchcutter are best expressed in his own words. In the preface to *Manuale Tipografico* – his magnificent specimen book, published posthumously by his widow – Bodoni writes: 'It is proper here to offer the four different heads under which it seems to me are derived the beauties of type, and the first of these is regularity – conformity without ambiguity, variety without disso-

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

Bokstäverna får sitt sanna behag inte när de skrivs i brådska
och med olust, inte heller när de kommer till blott genom flit och möda,
utan först då de skapas i kärlek och glädje. Giambattista Bodoni

Bodoni (Bauer)

nance, and equality and symmetry without confusion. A second and not minor value is to be gained from sharpness and definition, neatness and finish. From the perfection of the punches in the beginning comes the polish of the well-cast letter which should shine like a mirror on its face.'

D. B. Updike speaks of Bodoni as having two periods. In the first Bodoni printed with old-style or transitional types, with the addition of numerous ornaments; in the second he 'depended on his own type designs and unadorned typography for his effects.' This latter, really a nineteenth-century style, Updike deplored, calling it 'as official as a coronation and as cold as the neighboring Alps!' He was not alone in his criticism. William Morris believed Bodoni's types to be 'shatteringly hideous.' It is nonetheless the later period of the printer of Parma that represents his great contribution to typography, for it represented a radical departure from earlier traditions.

Further treating his concept of design, Bodoni wrote of 'the beautiful contrast as between light and shade which comes naturally from any writing done with a well-cut pen held properly in the hand.' The pen referred to is no doubt the chisel-pointed instrument of his period, rather than the broad pen that had influenced the old-style

ROMAN STUDIO
DAILY WORKER

GUTENBERG
CALIFORNIA

PLEASURE

FRIENDS

Bodoni Title (Bauer)

types. Bodoni thus created in his letters the crisp contrasts of the engraving burin, reflecting a style that was artistically prevalent.

The forty-five years that Giambattista Bodoni spent as director of the Duke of Parma's Stamperia Reale established him as one of the great printers of all time. For Bodoni indeed lived up to his statement 'Beauty is founded on harmony, subordinate to the critique of reason.'

Bodoni's patron certainly had reason to congratulate himself on the founding of a royal press and the selection of its director, who brought worldwide fame to Parma. In response to demand, after 1790 the Duke allowed Bodoni to accept commissions from outside Italy, affording the printer the opportunity to express himself in the typography of other languages, such as German, English, French, and Russian.

The measure of Bodoni's independence, as the duke's printer, from the usual economic strictures of the printing business may be observed from the anecdote told of the French writer Stendhal, who visited Parma and was enchanted with Bodoni's printing. Upon being asked by the printer which of several French Bodoni books he preferred, Stendhal responded that they seemed equally beautiful. 'Ah, Monsieur,' said Bodoni, 'you don't see the title of the Boileau?' The writer confessed that he could see nothing finer in that particular title than the others, at which the printer cried out, 'Ah, Monsieur! Boileau-Despréaux in one single line of capitals! I spent six months before I could decide upon exactly that type.'

Indeed Bodoni did go to great lengths with his typography, sometimes cutting several variations of one size just to fit the copy of a particular title page. An inventory of this output, made in 1840, showed 25,735 punches and 50,994 matrices, an incredible total for one printer when it took upward of four hours to engrave a steel punch. Unquestionably, Bodoni received some assistance in this monumental undertaking, but he was frequently angered when this extraordinary capacity for industry was questioned.

It may be noted that although Bodoni's reputation as a printer and type designer is secure, his standing as a scholarly printer has long been in doubt. This is primarily owing to careless proofreading, and during his lifetime he was criticized, quite logically, on this point.

The Bodoni types were widely copied during the early years of the nineteenth century while the printer was still alive, but most of the imitations were less inspired and more mechanically rigid than the originals. For example, whereas the Bodoni serif in the capitals was of the same weight as the thin stroke but joined with a very slight fillet (bracket) and the lowercase serifs were slightly concave, copies cut by his French rivals, the Didots, featured straight-edged serifs that were unbracketed.

One of the earliest types of the period to imitate the Bodoni letter was cut about 1800 by Justus Erich Walbaum in Germany; a recent writer has called Walbaum's roman 'one of the most important vehicles

ARIEL

What would my potent master? here I am.

PROSPERO

Thou and thy meaner fellows your last service
Did worthily perform: and I must use you
In such another trick: go, bring the rabble,
(O'er whom I give thee power) here, to this place:
Incite them to quick motion, for I must
Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple
Some vanity of mine art: it is my promise,
And they expect it from me.

ARIEL

Presently?

PROSPERO

Ay: with a twink.

ARIEL

Before you can say "come" and "go,"
And breathe twice; and cry "so, so"...
Each one, tripping on his toe,
Will be here with mop and mow....
Do you love me, master? no?

PROSPERO

Dearly, my delicate Ariel... Do not approach,
Till thou dost hear me call.

The mighty * *Orellana*. Scarce the Muse
 Dares stretch her wing o'er this enormous mass
 Of rushing water; scarce she dares attempt
 The sea-like *Plata*; to whose dread expanse,
 Continuous depth and wond'rous length of course,
 Our floods are rills. With unabated force,
 In silent dignity they sweep along,
 And traverse realms unknown, and blooming wilds,
 And fruitful deserts, worlds of solitude,
 Where the sun smiles, and seasons teem in vain,
 Unseen, and unenjoy'd. Forsaking these,
 O'er peopled plains they far-diffusive flow,
 And many a nation feed, and circle safe
 In their soft bosom, many a happy isle;
 The seat of blameless *Pan*, yet undisturb'd
 By christian crimes and *Europe's* cruel sons.
 Thus pouring on they proudly seek the deep,
 Whose vanquish'd tide recoiling from the shock,
 Yields to this liquid weight of half the globe;
 And Ocean trembles for his green domain.
 BUT what avails this wond'rous waste of wealth?
 This gay profusion of luxurious bliss?

* *The river of the Amazons.*

of typographic expression in the German language during the 19th century.' In addition, the English type designed in 1791 by William Martin for the Shakspeare Press of William Bulmer has definite Bodoni characteristics, although still maintaining some of the warmth of the transitional style.

Following Bodoni's death in 1813, his widow continued the printing office, producing the great two-volume *Manuale Tipografico* in 1818. This work is rightly considered among the finest specimen books ever produced. In 1842 the Bodoni punches and matrices were sold and placed in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma; though the library was bombed in 1944, the punches and matrices had fortunately already been moved to a monastery south of the city.

In the twentieth century, interest in the Bodoni types was renewed with a cutting issued by the Italian foundry Nebiolo in 1901. But probably the most important revival of the style was that of Morris Benton for the American Type Founders in 1911. Henry L. Bullen, the printing historian who was ATF's librarian, wrote that Benton had received guidance from Italian sources in his recutting. It is obvious, however, that Benton did not attempt an exact copy of the original Bodoni type, as his version is closer in spirit to the Didot letters; this is particularly noticeable in the unbracketed serifs.

Undoubtedly, the ATF Bodoni influenced subsequent copies produced by the composing-machine manufacturers. The European foundries also produced copies, but they too were inclined to freely adapt the Bodoni idea of high contrast without following through on his details of serif structure.

In 1923, when Giovanni Mardersteig established the Officina Bodoni in Switzerland, he received permission from the Italian authorities to recast some of the original Bodoni matrices. When he moved his private press to Verona in 1927, Mardersteig turned out printing in the spirit of Bodoni's. Later, however, Dr. Mardersteig broke away from his dependence on Bodoni types, designing faces in the fifteenth-century tradition of Italian letter forms, an era to which he was more sympathetic.

Despite his later printing, Mardersteig's original use of Bodoni was instrumental in awakening further interest in the Parma master printer, which resulted in several new cuttings of Bodoni type. Of these the version made available by the Bauer Type Foundry of Frankfurt seems to come closest to the feeling of the original and has thus long been admired.

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQR
STUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyz
.,-,:;"'!?\$&
1234567890**

Ultra Bodoni (Monotype)

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQR
STUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyz
.,-,:;"'!?\$&ffffffl()
1234567890**

Torino (Nebiolo foundry, c. 1908), a condensed variation on the Bodoni model

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OP
QRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuv
wxyz : .,-,:;"'!?\$&
1234567890**

Bodini Bold (Ludlow), the standard for newspaper headings prior to the introduction of phototypesetting

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
O
PQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyz
1234567890**

Die Buchdruckerei ist eine so edle und nützliche Kunst, daß man bei denen,
welche sie ausüben, einen gewissen Grad von Kultur voraussetzen sollte.

JOHANN FRIEDRICH UNGER

Didot (Ludwig & Mayer)

The standard series of weights in Bodoni includes the variants book, regular, and bold. Only one supplier (Bauer) has ventured into an extra-bold version, which is surprising, since the type lends itself better than most romans to changes in weight without loss of character. There are, in addition, a number of other types that trade on the Bodoni name, including Ultra Bodoni and Poster Bodoni, but these are revivals of nineteenth-century modifications and bear no relation to the prototype.

It is difficult to imagine how advertisers and commercial printers could get along today without Bodoni. It has been used for more display typography than any design other than sans serif. It is also beloved by newspapers: in most American two-paper cities, one will feature Bodoni heads and the other sans serifs. As a book type it continues to fare quite well, particularly in the weight called Bodoni Book.

Although Giambattista Bodoni would probably not willingly claim fatherhood to most of the types currently bearing his name, he would certainly find no fault in still being a household word in the printer's craft two centuries after he began his venture in Parma.