James Sutton & Alan Bartram

Typefaces for Books

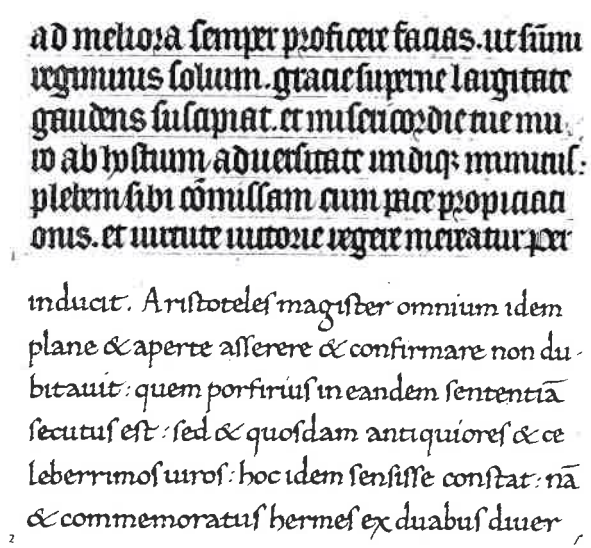
The British Library . London 1990

2 The Historical Background

1440, Mainz. The invention of printing

The series of technical inventions and developments traditionally accredited to Gutenberg at Mainz around 1440 were of colossal importance in shaping the modern world. Prints had been taken from woodblocks many years earlier, but printing by movable, interchangeable, re-usable type was the foundation of the modern printing industry, and Gutenberg's methods were only superseded in the early nineteenth century. By training possibly a goldsmith, his work was of the highest technical standard and his ingenuity made his printed books the equal of the manuscripts they rivalled.

His type forms scarcely reflect the importance of his innovative techniques, for they differed little from those used in the manuscripts his inventions were eventually almost entirely to supersede. The script he took as his model for the 42-line Bible of 1455 was Textura, the most sombre and majestic script then current in northern Europe (fig. 1). It gives the page a noble authority, but its close-packed, heavy, vertical strokes and easily confused letterforms make words static and rigid and therefore hard to read. Five years later, for the Catholicon, he used a far less impressive type with weak characterless letterforms, but it was small like a modern book and the shapes of the letters were round, open and legible.



1. **Textura.** From a French manuscript of 1365
2. **Renaissance script.** From a Florentine manuscript of 1455

Textura was one of the last monuments of the Middle Ages. In Italy the Renaissance awakened a new demand for the writings of classical authors. Before the invention of printing these had been transcribed from manuscripts of the twelfth century and earlier, written in late Carolingian minuscule. The fifteenth-century scribes mistook this for the bookhand of Rome and enthusiastically modelled their own script upon Carolingian. In their writing we at once recognize the model on which the first roman types were based. The letters are round, open, clear, sane and secular, and are known as Humanistic Book Script (fig. 2). In contrast to the awesome blackness of Textura, with its close-packed vertical strokes of similar shape, the Italian manuscript books are light and graceful, with plenty of white space between the words and lines. Even more important, the letters themselves are perfectly distinct shapes, well formed and regular, with the minuscule serifs carefully shaped to correspond with those of the capital letters. These serifs are not easily made by the pen, and owe their shape to the imitation of serifs on carved roman capitals.

1460, Subiaco and Rome

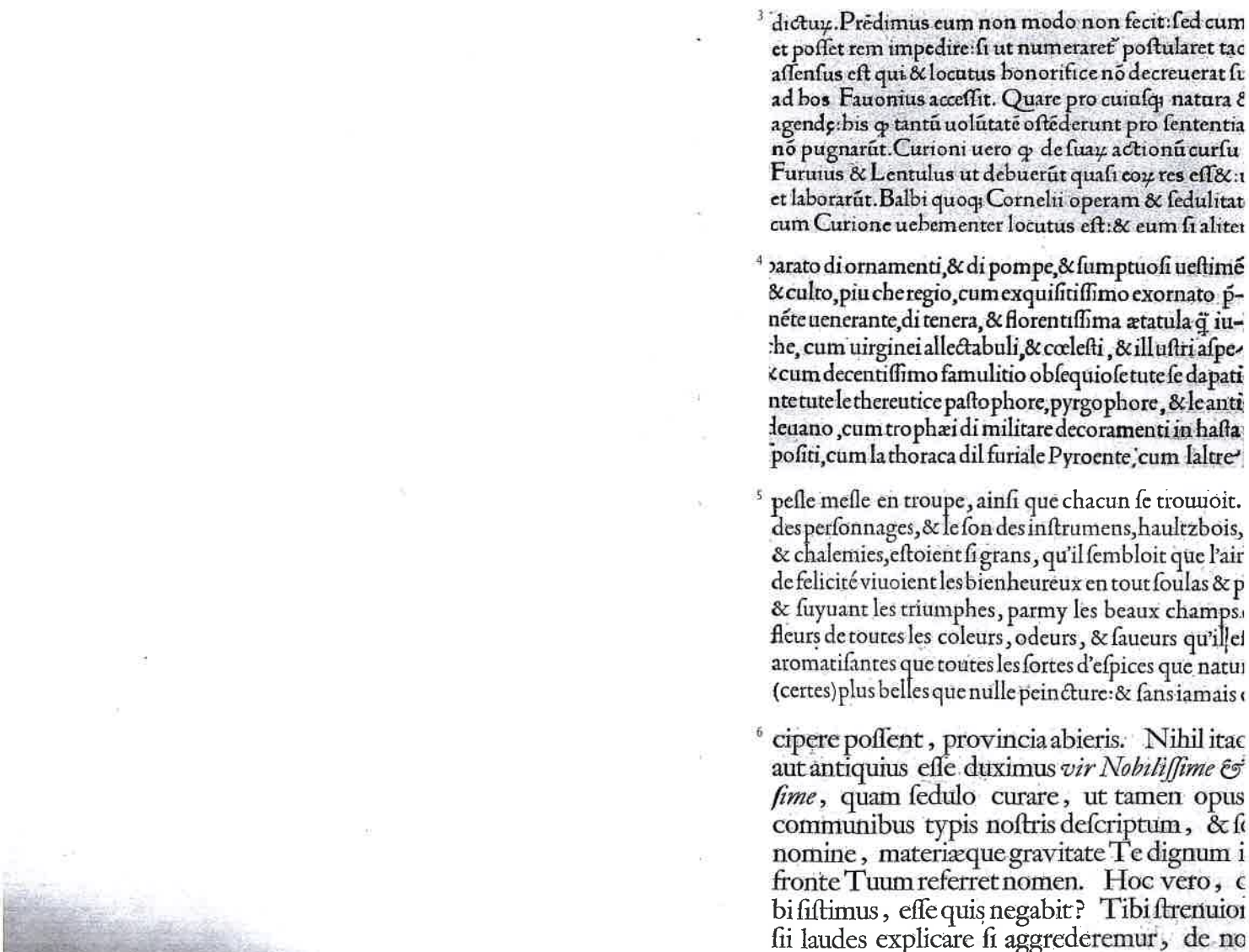
Printing was brought to Italy, the artistic and commercial centre of the Renaissance, by Germans, and Gutenberg's typography is reflected in the early Roman types of the 1460s. By 1465, Sweynheym and Pannartz at Subiaco were using Roman shapes expressed in gothic terms, with pen-made forms dominating strokes and serifs of capitals and lower case. The letters are rather condensed in shape and set close, giving the page a dark appearance.

On moving to Rome in 1467 the German printers cut a new type which had no gothic characteristics. It became known soon afterwards simply as roman type and was thus differentiated from gothic. It was imitated elsewhere in Italy and abroad. Though imperfect in design and roughly made it was recognized as a type of the new age.

1470, Venice and Nicholas Jenson (fig. 3)

Among the Venetian printers, however, the great merits of the new letter were not at once victorious: although roman was thought appropriate for classical texts, gothic was used for liturgical, legal and vernacular works. The finest early Venetian version of the roman letter was cut by the Frenchman Nicholas Jenson. Even Jenson returned to gothic typography, though the two styles seem to us totally different in appearance and association: one, the dark, constricted, highly formalized expression of the Middle Ages: the other, an open, freely-drawn product of the Renaissance.

3. **Venetian.** Cicero *Epistolae*. da Spira, Venice 1469
4. **Italian Old Face.** Francesco Colonna *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Aldus Manutius, Venice 1499
5. **French Old Face.** Francesco Colonna *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Jacques Kerver, Paris 1546
6. **Dutch Old Face.** Salmasius *Pliny*. Utrecht 1689



1495, Venice. The classic typeface takes shape (fig. 4)
Fourteen years after Jenson's death a new roman appeared, also in Venice, which attracted little notice after the sixteenth century until quite recently, in the 1920s, when Stanley Morison supervised the revival and recutting of historic types at the Monotype Corporation. In 1495 the great Renaissance publisher Aldus Manutius brought out a book with a new design of capitals. Though roughly cut, they blended a good deal better with the lower case than the obtrusive capitals of Jenson's roman. Later the same year Aldus published Bembo's *De Aetna*, using the same capitals but with a new lower case cut by his great punch-cutter Francesco Griffo of Bologna.

The Aldine roman is the archetype of the forms which during the sixteenth century established their ascendancy over gothic throughout Europe. The quality of Alding roman was due to the imagination and judgement of Francesco Griffo; and Aldus as an accurate scholar and highly successful publisher became valued and imitated internationally. It was this success which made his stylistic innovations so influential.

N ulla mora, ad nutus diuæ tremefactus Apollo
Conſtitit, atque oculis late agmina circunſpexit,
Et ſubito inſidias ſenſit, peditemque retraxit,
Quem contra impulerat dextra impiger. atque periclo
Reginam eripuit. tum Maia Atlantide cretus
Littoreum caueæ conſeſſum uocibus implet,
Reginam captam ingeminans. fremit undique turba

7. **Italic.** Vida *de Arte Poetica*. Arrighi, Rome 1527

A further achievement of Aldus was the invention of italic, derived from the cursive script developed during the fifteenth century in Florence and in the Papal Chancery at Rome. Pocket classics with their whole text printed in compressed, sloping lower case and upright capitals appeared soon after 1500. They were an immediate success, chiefly because of their scholarly accuracy, and their low cost; the latter was partly due to economies in paper which the new type form made possible. But the Aldine italic (several versions of which were cut by Francesco Griffo) for all its technical mastery has not been followed by later designers. It is rather cramped, and a whole book in it must have been almost painful to read. Few books were printed with italic texts after 1550.



1916, England. 1927, Germany. A return to fundamentals

In their quest for the rainbow gold of ultimate perfection, twentieth century designers tried new approaches to serif-less letters. One, characteristically German, relied on geometry. Another, characterisitically English, relied on tradition. In both cases, letterforms were pared down to their basic skeleton: a 'return to fundamentals' characteristic of the period.

These new versions were designed to avoid the exuberance of nineteenth-century forms, but none made very satisfactory text types. Of the German geometric school, Paul Renner's Futura of 1927 was one of the first, and the best. Its strict geometry and intellectual basis, while avoiding Victorian waywardness, was subtly modified by sensitivity and feeling.

Of the English humanistic sans, Johnston's Railway Type of 1916, designed for London Underground, was the first. Important but somewhat clumsy, it was never intended for text setting. Its originality lies in its proportions, which were based on classical letterforms, not Victorian grotesques. Gill's sans-serif of 1928 was a far subtler and more refined development. Both designs were basically seriffed letters, stripped of their serifs, and made more or less monoline.

Both Futura and Gill Sans were very successful, eventually fathering enormous families of weights and variations. Futura (but not Gill Sans) was widely travestied by inferior and insensitive adaptations.

1890 onwards. England and the private presses

The deterioration of bookwork in the nineteenth century provoked William Morris to found the Kelmscott Press in 1891. Dedicated to reviving the highest standards of printing, it led Morris to experiment with paper, ink and binding as well as commissioning illustrations from Burne-Jones and engraving rich borders. Morris also drew two original typefaces: Golden, inspired by Jenson's roman, and Chaucer (also named Troy in a larger size), based on fourteenth-century German manuscript forms. Neither type nor typography bears much relationship to modern practice, but Morris's achievements earned him devoted disciples whose own private press work at length forced the printing trade to improve standards.

These private presses also commissioned new type designs. Some of the best were later acquired by Monotype or Linotype, and developed for machine setting. The quality of these text types influenced entirely new designs commissioned by the two firms themselves, introduced in parallel with the re-worked classic faces produced by Monotype under Stanley Morison. Unlike those revivals, the new designs show no direct influence of any particular historical example. This less 'revivalist' approach has been even more prevalent since the advent of filmsetting. However, national characteristics – for instance, the living calligraphic tradition in Germany – are sometimes evident in the designs.

Linotype **Kennerley**

roman (05408), **italic** (13408)
bold (07408)
Stempel 1982, based on types by Frederic W Goudy of 1911-24
Copyfitting code 123/119/135

Range also includes bold italic

Goudy's design was possibly based upon Jenson's *Eusebius* type of 1470

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 1234567890
fifl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 1234567890
fifl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 1234567890
fifl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

24 on 27pt

These examples show *normal* letterspacing and the effect of *reduced* letterspacing on roman setting *as well as on words in italic*: they also show the appearance of figures, for example 28 May 1964, within text. These & the ampersand are not included in the setting opposite.

Normal letterspacing

These examples show *normal* letterspacing and the effect of *reduced* letterspacing on roman setting *as well as on words in italic*: they also show the appearance of figures, for example 28 May 1964, within text. These & the ampersand are not included in the setting opposite.

Minus one unit spacing

These examples show *normal* letterspacing and the effect of *reduced* letterspacing on roman setting *as well as on words in italic*: they also show the appearance of figures, for example 28 May 1964, within text. These & the ampersand are not included in the setting opposite.

Minus two units spacing

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED

Capitals: normal letterspacing/plus 4 units/plus 9 units

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE

Small caps: normal letterspacing/plus 3 units/plus 6 units

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN WERE

True small caps/reduced capitals

WALKING ALONG THE MALL *we wondered who all those men*
WALKING ALONG THE MALL we wondered who all those men

True italic/sloped roman

Walking along the Mall we wondered who all those men were – tall hawk-featured men perched on balconies and high places, scanning the city with heavy binoculars. What were they seeking so earnestly? Who were they – so composed and steely-eyed? Timidly we stopped a policeman to ask him. 'They are publishers' he said mildly. Publishers! Our hearts stopped beating. 'They are on the look out for new talent.' Great God! It was for us they were waiting and watching! Then the kindly policeman lowered his voice confidentially and said in hollow and reverent tones: *'They are waiting for the new Trollope to be born!'* Do you remember, at these words, how heavy our suitcases suddenly felt? How our blood slowed, our footsteps lagged? Brother Ass, we had been bashfully thinking of a kind of illumination such as Rimbaud dreamed of – a nagging poem which was not

8 on 9pt

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN WERE – TALL HAWK-featured men perched on balconies and high places, scanning the city with heavy binoculars. What were they seeking so earnestly? Who were they – so composed and steely-eyed? Timidly we stopped a policeman to ask him. 'They are publishers' he said mildly. Publishers! Our hearts stopped beating. 'They are on the look out for new talent.' Great God! It was for us they were waiting and watching! Then the kindly policeman lowered his voice confidentially and said in hollow and reverent tones: *'They are waiting for the new Trollope to be born!'* Do you remember, at these words, how heavy our suitcases suddenly felt? How our blood slowed, our footsteps lagged? Brother Ass,

8 on 10.5pt

Monotype **Italian Old Style**

108 roman and italic
149 bold
Monotype 1911
Copyfitting factor 41.5/37.9/45.4

Range also includes bold italic

The design reflects types of Nicholas Jenson and his Venetian contemporaries of the 1470s

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
ffiflffiffl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
ffiflffiffl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ abcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
ffiflffiffl ()[]&£$.,;:-!?"

24 on 27pt

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Normal letterspacing

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Minus one unit spacing

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Minus two units spacing

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED

Capitals: normal letterspacing/plus 9 units/plus 18 units

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN WERE
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE

Small caps: normal letterspacing/plus 6 units/plus 12 units

WALKING ALONG THE MALL we wondered who all those men were
WALKING ALONG THE MALL we wondered who all those men

True italic/sloped roman

WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN WERE
WALKING ALONG THE MALL WE WONDERED WHO ALL THOSE MEN WERE

True small caps/reduced capitals

Walking along the Mall we wondered who all those men were – tall hawk-featured men perched on balconies and high places, scanning the city with heavy binoculars. What were they seeking so earnestly? Who were they – so composed and steely-eyed? Timidly we stopped a policeman to ask him. 'They are publishers' he said mildly. Publishers! Our hearts stopped beating. 'They are on the look out for new talent.' Great God! It was for *us* they were waiting and watching! Then the kindly policeman lowered his voice confidentially and said in hollow and reverent tones: *'They are waiting for the new Trollope to be born!'* Do you remember, at these words, how heavy our suitcases suddenly felt? How our blood slowed, our footsteps lagged? Brother Ass, we had been bashfully thinking of a kind of illumination such as Rimbaud dreamed of – a nagging poem

8 on 9pt

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