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The concept of the Baroque Roman type face is something which is remote from us. Ungrateful theorists gave Baroque type faces the ill-sounding attribute “Transitional”, as if the Baroque Roman type face willfully diverted from the tradition and at the same time did not manage to mature. This “transition” was originally meant as an intermediate stage between the Aldine/Garamond Roman face of the Renaissance, and its modern counterpart, as represented by Bodoni or Didot. Otherwise there was also a “transition” from a slanted axis of the shadow to a perpendicular one. What a petty detail led to the pejorative designation of Baroque type faces! If a bookseller were to tell his customers that they are about to choose a book which is set in some sort of transitional type face, he would probably go bust. After all, a reader, for his money, would not put up with some typographical experimentation. He wants to read a book without losing his eyesight while doing so.

*Nevertheless, it was Baroque typography which gave the world the most legible type faces. In those days the craft of punch-cutting was gradually separating itself from that of book-printing, but also from publishing and bookselling. Previously all these activities could be performed by a single person. The punch-cutter, who at that time was already fully occupied with the production of letters, achieved better results than he would have achieved if his creative talents were to be diffused in a printing office or a bookseller's shop. Thus it was possible that for example the printer John Baskerville did not cut a single letter in his entire lifetime, for he used the services of the accomplished punch-cutter John Handy. It became the custom that one type founder supplied type to multiple printing offices, so that the same type faces appeared in various parts of the world. The type face was losing its national character. In the Renaissance period it is still quite easy to distinguish for example a French Roman type face from a Venetian one; in the Baroque period this could be achieved only with great difficulties.*

Imagination and variety of shapes, which so far have been reserved only to the fine arts, now come into play. Thanks to technological progress, book printers are now able to reproduce hairstrokes and imitate calligraphic type faces. Scripts and elaborate ornaments are no longer the privilege of copper-engravers. Also the appearance of the basic, body design is slowly undergoing a change. The Renaissance canonical stiffness is now replaced with colour and contrast. The page of the book is suddenly darker, its lay-out more varied and its lines more compact. For Baroque type designers made a simple, yet ingenious discovery – they enlarged the x-height and reduced the ascenders to the cap-height. The type face thus became seemingly larger, and hence more legible, but at the same time more economical in composition; the type area was increasing to the detriment of the margins. Paper was expensive, and the aim of all the publishers was, therefore, to sell as many ideas in as small a book block as possible.

*A narrowed, bold majuscule, designed for use on the title page, appeared for the first time in the Late Baroque period. Also the title page was laid out with the highest possible economy. It comprised as a rule the brief contents of the book and the address of the bookseller, i.e. roughly that which is now placed on the flaps and in the imprint lines. Bold upper-case letters in the first line dramatically give way to the more subtle italics, the third line is highlighted with vermilion; a few words set in lower-case letters are scattered in-between, and then vermilion appears again. Somewhere in the middle there is an ornament, a monogram or an engraving as a kind of climax of the drama, while at the foot of the title-page all this din is quietened by a line with the name of the printer and the year expressed in Roman numerals, set in 8-point body size. Every Baroque title-page could well pass muster as a striking poster.*

The pride of every book printer was the publication of a type specimen book – a typographical manual. Among these manuals the one published by Fournier stands out – also as regards the selection of the texts for the specimen type matter. It reveals the scope of knowledge and education of the master typographers of that period. The same Fournier established a system of typographical measurement which, revised by Didot, is still used today. Baskerville introduced the smoothing of paper by a hot steel roller, in order that he could print astonishingly sharp letters, etc...

In other words – Baroque typography deserves anything else but the attribute “transitional”.

In the first half of the 18th century, besides persons whose names are prominent and well-known up to the present, as was Baskerville or Caslon, there were many type founders who did not manage to publish their manuals or forgot to become famous in some other way. They often imitated the type faces of their more experienced contemporaries, but many of them arrived at a quite strange, even weird originality, which ran completely outside the mainstream of typographical art. The prints from which we have drawn inspiration for these six digital designs come from Paris, Vienna and Prague, from the period around 1750.

*The transcription of letters in their intact form is our firm principle. Does it mean, therefore, that the task of the digital restorer is to copy meticulously the outline of the letter with all inadequacies of the particular imprint? No. The type face should not to evoke the rustic atmosphere of letterpress after printing, but to analyze the appearance of the punches before they are imprinted. It is also necessary to take account of the size of the type face and to avoid excessive enlargement or reduction. Let us keep in mind that every size requires its own design. The longer we work on the computer where a change in size is child's play, the more we are convinced that the appearance of a letter is tied to its proportions, and therefore, to a fixed size. We are also aware of the*

Nymphs blitz quick vex dwarf jog. Falsches Üben von Xylophonmusik quält jeden größeren Zwerg. Egy hűtlen vejét fűlöncsípő, dűhös mexikói úr Wesselényiné! mázol Quitóban. Gojazni đaćić s biciklom drži hmelj i finu vatu u džepu nošnje. Kæmi ný öxi hér, ykist þjófum nú bæði víl og ádrepa. Pójdź w loch zbić małżeńską gęs futryn! Ergonom filcen ma šůvix ukájí pahýl zubu swaté Quildy. Høj bly gom vandt fræk sexquiz på wc. Bâchez la queue du wagon-taxi avec les pyjamas du fakir. Eble ĉiu kvazaŭ-deca fuŝhoraĵo ĝojigos homtipon. Põdur Zagrebi tšellomängija-fõljetonist Ciqo küľmetas kehvas garaažis.

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