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John Baskerville, Shaping the Alphabet

by Robin Hull

John Baskerville lived in Birmingham in the middle of the Georgian period. Innovative & naturally enquiring, he prospered as a manufacturer of fashionable japanned goods, built a fine house & used his success to fund a new printing office. From 1757 he began publishing books, fine works of exceptional craftsmanship, inventiveness & an understanding of letterforms that developed out of his early experience as a writing master. He introduced new concepts in typographic style, new italic types based upon the latest models of writing in roundhand, & roman types that broke with the traditional Old Style & shared common ground with late seventeenth century developments in France. Combined with his incomparable skill in the layout of pages, Baskerville published the finest-looking books ever printed in England, especially his quarto classics which clothed works of 'Reputation' in a style worthy of the Georgian era. This volume sets out his work in a wide-ranging collection of photographs and a number of printing types based on the forms of the letters he designed and cast for printing his books.

Dust jacket: front flap.

Robin Hull, born in Cheshire in 1943, studied Fine Art at the University of Reading and the Slade School of Fine Art, London. His interest in type dates from that time, but his fascination with the books of John Baskerville lay dormant until his retirement from lecturing in painting & drawing.

At www.johnbaskerville.co.uk, he offers a number of Baskerville's books in photographic form; they are downloadable for free use in any non-commercial context.

Of this volume, James Mosley has written, "I am most impressed by your book ... I am afraid that my own screen makes online access to your images and your text hard work, but they are both well worth

the effort. Indeed, it seems to me that this is one of the most considerable contributions to Baskerville studies that I have seen in a long time.”

Dust jacket: back flap.

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by Robin Hull

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www.johnbaskerville.co.uk

Text and images

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[Illustration] Frontispiece: A letter from John Baskerville to a printer in Paris, 1773. St. Bride Library. See page 174 for a transcription.

huc vina et unguenta et nimium breves

flores amœnæ ferre jube rosæ,

dum res et ætas et sororum

fila trium patiuntur atra.

Horace, Odes, II, iii.

TO ALL TRANSLATORS.

In the middle of the eighteenth century John Baskerville, a man entering his fifties, became a printer of books. ‘In 1754 Baskerville issued a specimen of his type incorporating a prospectus for his first printed work, a collection of Virgil’s works, with additional specimen settings for the title-page and a page of text. Publication was to be by subscription, with a price of 1 guinea in sheets....“Publii Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica, et Aeneis”, a quarto of nearly 450 pages, is regarded by many critics as the most accomplished of all Baskerville’s printed books. Its startlingly novel and calligraphic type, the density of the ink, the excellence of the presswork, the smoothness and gloss of the paper – all these elements work in harmony in a design that was unusually sober for a relatively expensive book, since there are no copperplates or ornaments of any kind.’

James Mosley, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

[Illustration] Right: “Bound by C. Kalthoeber, London”, the binder’s ticket attached to the copy of Baskerville’s Virgil of 1757 from which the title-page, illustrated opposite, is taken.

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PREFACE.

John Baskerville, though not a household name, was a great printer of books, perhaps England's finest. Few will know his books and fewer will own one of them and it is unlikely that many will have noticed in the books they read that some are printed with contemporary versions of his typeface, known as 'Baskerville', created originally in the 1750s by their namesake and revived and updated for modern printing methods during the twentieth century. It is relatively easy to access books printed by Baskerville and to handle the real thing; there are collections in the Library of Birmingham (Baskerville's home town), in London at the British Library, the National Art Library and the St. Bride Library, and in many university libraries. Examples of his work may be purchased at some expense from those who sell rare books.

I came across Baskerville more or less by chance. I first saw his work as illustrations in *An Atlas of Typeforms* by James Sutton and Alan Bartram. Their book contains many wonderful photographs from early manuscripts to William Morris but my fascination with the volumes they illustrate was

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[Illustration] Right: Double Pica italic 'Qu', Terence, page 2. Opposite: French Cannon roman 'Q', Juvenal, page 187.

[Illustration] Bindings of Baskerville's quarto & duodecimo volumes & the octavo Book of Common Prayer. Maggs Bros.

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interrupted at a turn of the page revealing Book IV of the *Georgics* in Baskerville's Virgil of 1757. Admiration was overtaken by far more meaningful or touching feelings, a long sigh of satisfaction at recognising a spirit that is the perfect book. Nothing before or since has for me the simple directness, easy grace and generosity that was imbued by Baskerville in this astonishing creation. It is as an icon spreading wellbeing before a word is taken into consciousness; the feeling has never left me and never fails to be renewed.

As years went by, I became interested first to understand why I felt so strongly affected when looking at a page of his work and, much later, to resolve my puzzlement as to what precisely the intended shapes of his letters may have been, since twentieth century revivals of his type

all differ from one another and because the hand-inking of metal type in the eighteenth century made for variations in the forms of letters when they were printed.

These questions led to my producing this book. It is primarily a picture book, a collection of images that surveys a substantial part of Baskerville's best work, including his monumental *Holy Bible* and the *Book of Common Prayer* that he printed at Cambridge University.

[Illustration] Right: The heading to Book IV of the Georgics, from the Virgil of 1757.

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I have drawn particular attention to his remarkable series of editions of works by Classical authors in their native Latin: Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Juvenal, Lucretius and others, themselves now almost as obscure as Baskerville following the decline in the learning of Latin. However, it is not language that is the issue, rather the ways in which texts were printed in Baskerville's editions: the shapes of the individual letters of the new typeface he designed; the relationship between the black ink and the white spaces inside and outside the letters; the new approach to typographic layout – for Baskerville's works are monuments of English printing that have been influential throughout the world and as much as ever before are a standard against which new books of any design ambition may be assessed. The photographs, with some contextual and explanatory text, seek to show the qualities John Baskerville brought to the printed book in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. I have also given prominence to his particularly fine italic type in Double Pica size which he used substantially in his quarto volumes of the *Satires of Juvenal and Persius* and the *Comedies of Terence*, early and late

[Illustration] Right: A traditional style of marbling on an endpaper for a copy of Baskerville's folio Holy Bible, 1763. Sotherans.

Opposite: Baskerville's interests extended to making decorative papers, including this unusual form of marbling which he used as an endpaper in a binding of his edition of Milton, 1758. Sotherans.

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publications in his activities as a printer over roughly twenty years from the mid-1750s. There are photographic enlargements of the letterforms printed with his type and of the punches cut for the

casting of the type – from which the fonts for this book were prepared.

No doubt it was the case that Baskerville anticipated how his type designs would be modified by the printing methods of his time but as a result of the range of his innovations his types printed more cleanly and sharply than was customary at the time, as several of the photographs show.

Little of my study would have been possible without the help of library staff and antiquarian booksellers who have been generous with their time in allowing me to make many photographs of their holdings and giving me permission to publish many of the images in this book in my hope of bringing Baskerville's work to a wider public. I am grateful to Nick Smith and the University Library, Cambridge for giving me access to the surviving Baskerville punches presented to the

[Illustration] Right: A great ambition of Baskerville's was to print the Holy Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, a right to publish held by Cambridge University. Baskerville gained permission from the University, set up his press in Cambridge, & produced a handsome Bible and a popular Book of Common Prayer from 1760–63. Maggs Bros.

Opposite: a collage of examples of Baskerville's letter 'a', showing the variations in shape brought about by letterpress printing techniques in the eighteenth century. The roman letter 'a' in this Great Primer size is about 2.5mm high. Printing obscured very tiny errors in punchcutting.

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University Press by Charles Peignot in 1953. My especial thanks also to Bob Richardson at the St. Bride Library who has acquainted me with many of the treasures within these pages. Antiquarian booksellers have been kind enough to collect their Baskervilles for me to photograph: I wish to thank George Bayntun, Blackwells Rare Books, Maggs Bros., Sotherans, and Unsworth's Antiquarian Booksellers. The Guildhall Library, City of London, the Wellcome Library, London, the British Library, the British Museum and The Schøyen Collection have been the source of marvellous examples of work within these pages.

*

On the printing types used in this book. Baskerville's own letterforms were used in making the fonts for the text of this book. From photographs of Baskerville's punches taken at the University Library, Cambridge and photographs of the letterforms printed in

Baskerville's books, I have produced digital types in the font creation software Fontographer, tracing as closely as I could the outlines of each of those letter-sizes most commonly featured for text setting in his quarto

[Illustration] Right: Much enlarged, an italic English size 'Q' traced from the photograph of the 'Q' punch shown underneath. See also page 37. Opposite: The engraving from a drawing by Gravelot that faces the title-page of the *Ars Poetica* in the works of Horace, 1770.

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classics, including the eighteenth century long 's' a characters. These are not thought of as revival fonts but an investigation of what may have been Baskerville's intentions for the shapes of letters in five important text founts:

Double Pica italic, roughly 18-20 points in size.

Great Primer, roman and italic, roughly 16-17 point.

English, roman and italic, roughly 14 point.

Baskerville created fewer types than other type-founders such as Caslon or the exceptional Bodoni who cut 300 or more Latin types: the listing of types in the *Specimen of Baskerville's Types*, dated 1777, shows samples of just fifteen roman and eleven italic sizes. All shown in the *Specimen* are Latin faces; his only non-Latin type was the Greek he created for Oxford University.

For numerals, in common with other printers of the day, Baskerville did not create Arabic figures in italics and it was rare for him even to set Roman numerals in italics; in *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* he set columns of Latin and English text side-by-side using roman numerals in the one, italic in the other (e.g. IV and *IV*, shown on page 118).

*

[Illustration] Right & opposite left: Great Primer roman & italic letters, enlargements from the fonts used in this book.

[Illustration] Opposite right: Example settings of the five digital versions of Baskerville types created for this book.

Double Pica italic.

Used for setting titles of poems and for running headers, for example in the

Virgil, Horace, Catullus, &c.— and for the synopses of Juvenal's satires and Terence's plays; this is a particularly fine italic that works well with the main text face in those books, the Great Primer roman. Most of the text in this book is set in this italic.

Great Primer roman.

This is the size of type used for the text of Baskerville's first book, the works of Virgil, and for most of the subsequent quarto classics, the Book of Common Prayer and the Holy Bible, among others. I have used it here for a number of samples.

Great Primer italic.

This italic was much in use in Baskerville's edition of the works of Addison, 1761. It is used for quotations in the main text of this book and for a number of samples.

English roman.

One size smaller than Great Primer, this type was Baskerville's second most useful for

the larger works, the octavo and quarto editions. Used in much of the Addison, for the quarto Sallust and Florus, 1773, but especially in many of the octavo editions.

English italic.

See also in the Addison, 1761, particularly for the setting of foreign language verse where his founts include accented letters and ligatures for French, German, Italian & Latin. Used here for captions to the illustrations.

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[Illustration] Photographing the Double Pica italic punches at the University Library, Cambridge. With everything else held fixed with Blu-Tack, adequate focus was maintained for each punch by using a small steel transport found on Ebay. Making the tiniest of movements it carried the punch to the fixed focal length of the camera lens. Focus was checked on an iPad via wireless connection to the camera through a CamRanger. This kept the sizes of punches consistent with one another in the photographs for later tracing and creation of font outlines. Lighting was a problem: the torch was the best I could think of at the time.

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On the photography for this book.

Most of the photographs were taken by the author using a digital camera; conditions were very varied for taking photographs, often the camera was hand-held and rarely under controlled lighting or other studio conditions.

Images of individual pages of Baskerville's quarto editions approximate to actual size and page heights have been included in most cases. As the height of this book almost equals Baskerville's trimmed quarto pages, images of deckle-edged pages that are a centimetre larger are slightly reduced; so too are images of whole books above octavo size. Images of the smaller books approximate to actual size in many cases.

Appendix B contains photographs of example punches for five of Baskerville's types in the collection at the University Library, Cambridge.

[Illustration] Right: The face of the punch of Baskerville's Great Primer roman 'A'. University Library, Cambridge.

For the author's photographs, a Canon 60D DSLR was used with Canon's E24–105 mm f4L IS USM lens or a Sigma Macro 50 mm f2.8EX DG lens with Kenco extension tubes for close-ups of individual punches & printed letters. The photographs were processed on an iMac with Adobe Photoshop Lightroom & Adobe Photoshop Elements. Some images were corrected for geometry using DxO's 'Viewpoint' plug-in, especially useful when straightening photos of lines of printed text.

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INTRODUCTION.

In the years 1757–74, John Baskerville published some of the most legible, readable and satisfyingly designed pages in the history of printed books.

Letterpress, the printing technology in use in Baskerville's time, had made manuscript books redundant by the mid-sixteenth century, if not earlier; in our own time, letterpress itself has been displaced and metal type is largely a thing of the past, supplanted in favour of digital imaging carried out on huge, fully mechanised presses.

This progress has taken readers in the West from the experience of manuscripts, where each individual letter was drawn by hand, to the impress of metal type shaped, cast and set by hand and printed on a hand-operated press, thence to the mechanics of the industrial and digital periods where, for the great mass of books, no trace of the human hand remains, not in type, paper or binding, merely a ghost albeit one of un-ghostly precision and sharpness.

From this state of affairs it was just another step to dispense with the physical book altogether; ebooks

[Illustration] Right: Denise felt reading text on a tablet was "like reading a book" – apparently. Advertising the pleasure of paperless reading on the London Underground, November 2013.

Opposite: The face of the 6 mm high Great Primer roman 'Q' punch, reversed, side-lit to highlight its edges. University Library, Cambridge.

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that are backlit on a tablet's screen, have so little sensory quality that a swipe across a piece of glass rolls down the lines of immaterial text that shrinks and expands at the flick of the reader's fingers, only the size of the type changing in this latest, electronic pocket book, never the form and proportions of letters that were so carefully calculated by typefounders everywhere when founts came in a variety of sizes

from the almost unbelievably tiny through many steps to large letters for titles and display. From the beginning of printing the two skills of typefounding and printing were to be found in the printer himself, only later did some printers begin to supply type to others; it was unique in England when William Caslon set up as a typefounder to supply printers with their types. Baskerville, however, took responsibility for all his needs, about which he was most particular, not least in the shapes of his letters.

“When John Baskerville cut his seventeen sizes of type for text, titling and display, he varied the proportions and even the pattern of his letters to an unusual degree from one size to the next.” —Stanley Morison.

[Illustration] Right: Two of Caslon’s types (enlarged): Great Primer italic, which approximates to the size of the Great Primer of Baskerville, & the tiny Pearl italic, a more upright letterform with a considerably larger x-height in proportion to the height of the capital letters. From the Caslon Specimen book, 1796. St. Bride Library.

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THE VIRGIL OF 1757.

In starting out to become a printer, John Baskerville set himself the task of learning to do everything related to the occupation of printer and publisher. He undertook no apprenticeship with other printers but used his natural sense of enquiry and his inventiveness and competence in practical matters that had been proven by his success as a japanner. He clearly believed he should not rely on existing practice and set to work to devise a better printing press, blacker ink, smoother paper and the new printing types he considered necessary to achieve his goal of publishing the finest books in the land. One marvels at his devotion and his self-assurance in taking up such a wide-ranging challenge with no previous experience of printing. His first book was five years or more in preparation; enough correspondence and printed ephemera have survived to show how he approached its design and spread the word to potential purchasers. This is detailed in Philip Gaskell’s indispensable *John Baskerville, A Bibliography*.

[Illustration] Right: A Specimen sheet by John Baskerville, 1757 (reduced). In descending order, Baskerville’s type sizes are, left & right columns, Great Primer, English, Small Pica, Brevier No. 1. The sizes Pica, Long Primer, Bourgeois & Nonpareil had been added to his founts by 1762. Sheet height, 299 mm. St. Bride Library.

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[Illustration] Baskerville introduced himself to his potential public with a Specimen of the Virgil with Proposals, 1754 (reduced). The Virgil was published three years later. St. Bride Library.

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[Illustration] Baskerville seemed to have entered printing as an amateur but the Virgil of 1757 was of exceptional power and confidence by any standards, not just as an initial essay in the printer's art. Left: The sixth book of the Æneid. Page height, 293 mm.

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WRITING AND THE 'MECHANIC ARTS' OF PRINTING.

Over millennia the world has produced an inexhaustibly vast treasure of writing and printing but it seems no museum displays all that history or complexity; scattered elements fall into a range of categories in libraries, museums and art galleries but, surprisingly, communication through the written word is not comprehensively surveyed in a single dedicated institution. This is a great pity because the urge to communicate other than face-to-face and to store communications for reference and later use, has been a primary feature of the rise of civilisations; the creation of marks to convey meaning is universal and shows so many similarities regardless of language that a centre for comparative study would be tremendously exciting.

Writing and printing have undergone revolutions throughout history. Their processes can last thousands of years, as did cuneiform, or hundreds or just decades, only to succumb to a new discovery or invention or change in need.

The history of bookmaking in the West shows it was slow to change its fundamental processes but

[Illustration] Right: Soso or grass script; a detail of a courtier's calligraphy of the Edo period, Japan, on silk, 1662–70. Photo: Courtesy British Museum.

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just as the coming of the alphabet put an end to cuneiform script that had flourished over several millennia, papyrus, parchment and paper took the place of the terracotta tablet as the surface upon which to preserve writing; so too, the manuscript book which contained the learning of the Middle Ages and of classical antiquity began to fall in the late fifteenth century in Europe to the coming of printing with

moveable type. We still live with the basic alphabet of that time but printing methods and styles have been transformed many times. These thoughts have been triggered while I have been looking at how Baskerville generated the particular shapes of his letters, how he made his type and printed it. There are obvious physical and mechanical relationships between forms of manuscript throughout the world and between printing techniques. There is, too, the inescapable fact that peoples regarded writing and printing as a potentially aesthetic and spiritual experience as well as a way of displaying power and of holding power.

In his preface to *Paradise Lost*, Baskerville sets out his goal of achieving “Elegance and Correctness” in his printing: “Having been an early admirer of the beauty of Letters... I formed to myself ideas of greater accuracy than had yet appeared, and have

[Illustration] Right: A detail of a seventeenth century manuscript land deed, on parchment. Suffolk Records Office.

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endeavoured to produce a Sett of Types according to what I conceived to be their true proportion”.

This universal love of endowing truth with visible beauty in manuscript and printed forms has raised scratch and scribble to an art across continents and has seen the pendulum swing time and again between formal and informal, creating opportunities for new styles of writing and printing.

Chalk on a blackboard or stylus on a wax tablet are ephemeral forms of writing contrasting with inscriptions in granite or illuminated manuscripts on parchment. Where longevity is an issue, for legal purposes, display of power, sacred texts or works otherwise held in high esteem, the materials and processes of writing and printing are very much as Baskerville understood the simple principles: all the materials should be of best quality, all processes carried out with the greatest care and skill. The carriers of such texts are precious objects, well deserving of being deemed national treasures.

A stone that crumbles in a testing climate will not serve; paper and parchment, often well-protected because viewed as fragile, when made to a high standard have withstood the challenges of time.

[Illustration] Right: Papyrus inscribed with a line of Virgil's Æneid, repeated perhaps as a writing exercise, 1st century AD. Line 601, Book II, “non tibi Tyndaridis facies invisā Lacænae”, which translates as, “it is not the face, hateful

to you, of the Laconian woman, daughter of Tyndareus” (Spartan Helen). One of the two earliest surviving manuscript fragments of Virgil. British Museum. Above, top: Lettering carved on the London tomb of Gaius Julius Alpinus Classicianus, c.61AD. Compare the wide ‘N’ with those on the papyrus opposite. Bottom: Cruder carving on a 1st–2nd centuryAD altar, Winchester, Hampshire. British Museum.

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The printed book, as it developed in Renaissance Italy, set out to imitate the manuscript books of the time; the typefaces that were created as moveable type imitated the scribes’ writing. The luxurious pocket book of Virgil’s work printed in Italy by Aldus Manutius in 1501, was also illuminated in traditional style; later, illustration came to be by wood block or metal engraving and, depending on purpose, illustration would be dropped altogether.

Aldus’s book was the first to have been produced as a pocket book. To enable text to fit within such a small, narrow format, he adapted a cursive style of writing, producing the first ‘italic’ typeface. There was no need of capital letters in the italic fount; traditional manuscript styles used a strongly differentiated capital letter at the beginning of each line; these were based upon classical Roman inscriptional letterforms. It should not have been a subject for disparagement of Baskerville, when he created his italic, that he had merely copied into type the latest, roundhand writing style; that approach had a solid history and Baskerville rendered his new type with consummate skill and subtlety. By comparison, Aldus’s italic type, cut by Griffo, was soon improved upon by Arrighi.

The most striking feature of the printed book is,

[Illustration] Right: Manuscript books. Top: Catullus, Naples, 3rd quarter of the 15th century, MS Burney 133. Bottom: Horace, N.E. Italy, probably 1470–1480, MS King’s 27. Photos courtesy the British Library.

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however, the limiting of letterforms by their becoming uniformly repetitive, whereas every scribe had his own handwriting style with in-built flexibility and variations. It is interesting in this context that in the 21st century, with the development of readily available font-creation software, every week sees the publication of new fonts, slight variations on a range of models, comparable in a way with the variations that emerged naturally in the scribes’ manuscript books. The illuminated manuscript had a long, successful history and was flourishing in Italy when the presses began to issue printed books

whose type designers, typesetters and page designers naturally incorporated all the features of such long-established models that were well known to publishers; it was not just text but image, too, that was to go into mass – relatively speaking – circulation. To take a few examples: capital letters at the beginning of each line of verse (a custom still followed by Baskerville); large, illustrative initial letters at the beginning of chapters, two to six or more lines deep; the decorative capitalisation of book titles; imposing title-pages, and titles for individual poems set in capitals; and decorative borders around text blocks. Not all manuscript

[Illustration] Right, top: Manuscript Juvenal, Italy, c. 1464, MS King's 29. Bottom: An illuminated letterpress Virgil by Aldus Manutius, 1501. Photos courtesy of the British Library & the John Rylands Library.

Catullus, c. 1450–75, Naples, MS Burney 133. British Library. Catullus, c. 1450–75, Naples, MS Burney 133. British Library.

Gellius, Noctes Gallicæ, c. 1465–70, MS Burney 175. B L. Virgil, Æneis, Rome, 1447, MS Harley 2701. British Library.

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or printed books were equally richly decorated but large numbers followed this pattern.

What we refer to as capital letters were the unambiguous forms that had the power and authority to be used by the state for clarity in its most significant inscriptions, and in books as titles and headings. For all the variety of skill and approach to design within the hand-carved group of capital letters on this page, it is clear that the early Roman inscriptional capital letters, of which those on Trajan's column are in a highly developed form, were accepted across Europe and remained stable.

On the other hand, those letterforms that came to fill the lower case of type, after letterpress printing commenced in Renaissance Italy, had begun to emerge as a clear and consistent set of letters only as a result of Charlemagne's need to govern through a standardised and commonly understood form of writing: the period of the Carolingian minuscule is, therefore, the basis of our small letters today.

[Illustration] Right, from top to bottom (the first five images are of plaster casts of original works, in the cast court of the V&A Museum, London): Monument in bronze of Ernst, Duke of Saxony and Archbishop of Magdeburg, Magdeburg Cathedral, 1497;

Monument to Elizabeth and Hermann VIII of Henneberg, Romhild, near Meiningen, 1520;

Part of the inscription around the column of Donatello's Judith & Holofernes, Florence, 1460;
Inscriptural capitals on Trajan's column, Rome, 113;
Lettering running across the doors of Hildesheim Cathedral, 1015;
Provincial Roman inscriptional lettering on a tombstone from Lincoln, 3rd century AD. British Museum.

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Manuscript letters evolved over time; they were not just personal to individual scribes and, as in the lower image on this page, were more evenly proportioned and spaced than some of the early typefaces. One can see how this kind of calligraphy with generously rounded letterforms relates to Baskerville's roman face – but not to Didot or Bodoni – and how the designation 'transitional', as towards the moderns, is misleading in labelling Baskerville's concept of perfection in letterforms.

*

We may think that books really began with the invention of the printing press but the range of possibilities for type and book design was well-sown ground before volumes were printed on a press. This emphasises the slowness of an evolutionary process that on rare occasions felt the impact of an invention that was fundamental to production but not to the concept of the Western book, whose authors continued to have their works published in similar formats as technologies changed, but with wider circulation. Printers & readers can be averse to sudden change, as Baskerville was to discover.

[Illustration] Right, above and below: Detail of a page of Romanesque book script, Italian, 2nd quarter of the 12th century; and a detail of a page of Humanistic book script, Italian, c. 1470. Note there is no additional space after full stops or other punctuation marks. Photographs courtesy of The Schøyen Collection, MS 2857, & MS 647, www.schoyencollection.com.

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BEFORE AND AFTER BASKERVILLE.

In 1734, when William Caslon produced his first type specimen sheet in London, his foundry embodied the concluding development of European typefaces in the Old Style, a humanist tradition, that began in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

A little earlier than Caslon, in France, a development of a different kind had taken place with the emergence of the *romain du roi* Louis XIII, a proto-modern typeface that was first used in 1702, founding a style that was developed over the next hundred years, most notably

by the Didots in Paris and Bodoni in Parma, and pushed in England by typefounders Robert Thorne and William Martin.

Baskerville appears almost to be dismissed as

[Illustration] Right: A translation of Juvenal printed by William Bulmer in 1802, page height 287 mm.

Quite apart from its lacklustre typographic layout, swimming within margins large and unstructured in design, together with its unpleasant, modern typeface, it follows a tradition from which Baskerville chose to part company. As few as two lines of the Juvenal translation may stand on a page, the remainder of the space given to notes, perhaps carried over through the previous two pages with a second note also carried on from the page before; such books also contain introductions, Lives of Authors, and other essays (amounting to nearly seventy pages in this edition); they are books for academic study – textbooks, really. Baskerville’s approach was to set out the original text for continuous reading, note-free, much as Latin authors might have circulated their poetry to their friends; this marks out Baskerville as a publisher with a vision, just as he was original in his page layout & his new typeface.

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a mere transition between Old Style and modern faces; in practice, it may be truer to say that he stands to one side of these lines of development, perfecting a typeform which, while having elements of both old and later styles, avoided the less readable aspects of both and, notably, maintained a strong contact with the calligraphic foundation of historic types, quite unlike the moderns’ calculated steeliness.

*

As an outsider, Baskerville was not successful in promoting his types for sale, if indeed that was his serious ambition: in Great Britain, Caslon’s many different typefaces had spread to many printing offices before Baskerville cast his types; in continental Europe, Fournier, Didot and Bodoni had powerful enterprises making types of their own and the influence of Baskerville may have been as a stimulus, felt as much for his uncluttered and un-ornamented book design as for the specifics of his typeface. It must have been so in the end, for late Didot and late Bodoni typefaces show little or no connection with Baskerville’s spirit of type design.

[Illustration] Right: Authoritative, playful and inventive, Bodoni’s extreme contrasts of thicks & thins as expressed in his ‘Papal’ italic. A detail from the Serie di majuscole e caratteri cancellereschi specimen book of Bodoni typefaces, 1788. St Bride Library.

NEW FORMS OF WRITING & PRINTING TYPES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

When John Baskerville turned to printing books in the 1750s, it was after significant developments in handwriting had taken place towards the end of the seventeenth century and during the first part of the eighteenth. It was natural, therefore, and to be expected that a man whose instinctive inclination as a boy had been to draw letters and whose early employment had been as a writing master, should use the latest models of the teacher of handwriting as the foundation of his new printing types.

Baskerville's italic typeface was based upon roundhand, the newest script that had been developed in support of burgeoning commercial enterprise. His roman face appears somewhat indebted to the French *romain du roi* of the later seventeenth century and to similar roman letterforms much in evidence in the numerous English manuals of writing produced by his contemporaries. The italic and roman types produced by Baskerville signalled a clear departure in typography from the final flowering of the Old Style tradition under William Caslon.

[Illustration] Right: Bodoni's 'Papale' roman typeface from the Serie di majuscole e caratteri cancellereschi, 1788. Capital letters are about 20mm high. St Bride Library.

Indeed, there comes a very great seizure, typographically, between a book printed in 1700 in the Old Style and one dating from 1800 using the modern types so espoused of Robert Thorne in London, later to swamp the nineteenth century's printed matter.

Regrettably, Baskerville's business did not prosper in Great Britain, though his work was admired on the continent. While his typefaces were later dubbed a 'transition' to the modern, they were indeed manipulated to the advantage of the English modernists; only in the twentieth century was Baskerville effectively recognised as historically important for a unique contribution to type design.

Baskerville worked on the fringes of the printing industry; Caslon, London-based, had cornered the market for type in England thirty years before Baskerville set up his Birmingham printing office, and printers on the continent went their own ways regardless of whether Baskerville's books fitted for a time into their concepts of printing

types whose continuing development had, by 1800, come to their clearest forms in the types of the Didots and Bodoni – a quiet revolution that divorced typeface design from handwriting and in which type became ever

[Illustration] Right: English size, the header in Great Primer. Baskerville's number '1' usually has similar serifs top & bottom, whether Roman or Arabic. In the Sallust & Florus, 1773 (and on the title-page of the The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus), the serif at the top of the Arabic '1' is formed on the left side; also, the usual '3' has changed to a flat top.

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more machined in appearance.

As previously noted, John Baskerville's type flowed from his early experience of enjoying and being good at drawing letters; later from teaching writing, particularly roundhand, a speed-writing style developed to support the fast-growing commerce of a fast-growing nation. Through Baskerville, roundhand in manuscript became roundhand in italic type, an apt sign of changing times in Great Britain during the Georgian period.

Clear-headed, successful businessman that he was, Baskerville also had poetry in his soul that found expression in the aesthetic decisions he took with regard to the shapes of the letters he cast, his choice of books to publish, and the surest of touch when laying out a page. The means were mechanical, the locking up of type in the chase and all the paraphernalia of printing, but the result, if not as fluid as calligraphic expression, is not of thoughts imprisoned but of their lying easily on the page awaiting the reader with respect for his desire to immerse himself in the pleasure of reading and communicating with the spirit of the author – Baskerville in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

[Illustration] Right: A detail of a business letter from Baskerville to a printer in France, 1774. Baskerville's writing matches the model George Bickham showed in The Universal Penman, engraved in 1739, as "a legible and free Running Hand...indispensibly Necessary in all Manner of Business", where rapidity of execution combined with legibility promoted this writing style. St. Bride Library.

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PRINTING PROCESSES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Letterpress is the name given to the foremost method of printing books that lasted, roughly speaking, from the mid-fifteenth to the

mid-twentieth century. As its name implies, it involved pressure, in the form of a printing press, onto letters fashioned in wood or metal type.

Individual letters, or 'sorts', were placed one beside another, held securely together, their surfaces dabbed with ink and then a sheet of paper pressed against them to transfer the image of the type onto and into the fibres of the paper. The sheets were stitched together by the bookbinder and protected by boards of wood, leather or cardboard as preferred. This traditional, artisanal handicraft is now uncommon, confined to special interests and those engaged in printing and bookbinding as art.

Letterpress brought machinery into the production of books; beforehand it was the scribe, many scribes, who drew and painted books that we now term illuminated manuscripts. Such books were expensive and relatively few in number.

There is a fundamental difference between the flexibility and responsiveness of the hand-held pen

[Illustration] Right: Type cast from Baskerville moulds, or matrices, set for printing. St Bride Library.

A Baskerville capital 'Q', English size, cast onto the body to form a 'sort' or piece of type. The character is approx. 5mm high. The printing sequence: engraved steel punch; stamped matrix in softer metal; sort cast in even softer type metal; printed letter.

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or brush drawing liquid colour across a page, and the rigid type being impressed onto paper or, come to that, the rigid stylus being imprinted into soft clay by the Babylonians in producing wedge-shaped, cuneiform writing in terracotta tablet form.

For letterpress, the letters were cast separately in matrices, one-by-one, to produce a sufficient number of each letter of the alphabet, punctuation mark, numeral, &c. to print several pages of a book, covering at least one side of a sheet of paper that would be folded to make a section for stitching.

Matrices were formed by punching short steel rods, the engraved punches, into pieces of softer copper. Each punch had been cut by the punchcutter with the mirror image of the letterform; he was a highly skilled craftsman who would create punches at a rate of maybe one or two per day. This was the technology used by John Baskerville and his punchcutter, John Handy, in the creation of his new typeface in the 1750s in Birmingham.

*

It is in the nature of things that letterpress should be superseded by changes in printing processes, from squeezing the type against paper, sheet-by-sheet, to a

[Illustration] Right: As with paper & type, so with the printing press – long in development, part improvement, part invention. It is refreshing to see printing history written up in a local paper. Courtesy The Milwaukee Journal, from August 20, 1971.

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planar, lithographic process offsetting ink onto the paper; cheap, easy and fast, first using filmsetting and now computer generated imagery, including fonts that can comprise of glyphs of many languages, and gigantic rolls of paper running at high speed through cylinders to transfer image and text as part of a wholly mechanised process. In the digital era, typefaces can be created by anyone with a computer and software appropriate for generating letters and symbols that can be used for publishing books that need never go to a printer to become a physical object, but may be distributed electronically via a website by downloading to a tablet or computer for reading.

*

For Baskerville and all printers of his era, the need for several sizes of type for book printing meant cutting punches for each size and casting complete founts of each size; an advantage was that letter shapes, while conforming to the overall style of the typeface, could be adjusted to suit the size at which the words would be read: large titling letters cut especially for display would differ slightly but significantly in their shapes from the smaller sizes, each of which would have its own variations.

[Illustration] Right: The punch for the Double Pica ‘m’, reversed in this photo; actual size about 3.4 mm high. Cambridge University Library.

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It is relatively rare for digital fonts to be produced in a range of sizes; mostly, one shape fits all. And so it must, I suppose, if the size of the type is to be controlled by the reader using a computer or tablet – but we are not paperless yet, though paper itself has about it little to excite by comparison with the handmade papers of the eighteenth century. This is more than a note of nostalgia; I sometimes find

myself replacing modern reprints of books with secondhand copies of their original letterpress versions of only fifty years before, so different even then is the feel and the visual experience of the letterpress page.

The present study uses Baskerville-size types drawn by tracing photographs of his punches and the letters in his printed books, a project stemming from a curiosity to know what it was that he designed, for even the best of digital revivals of his type that are available depart from the shapes of his letters in one way or another. Not drawn as another revival of Baskerville's types or to substitute for Baskerville's own printing, they are a guide to his thinking taken largely from the first stage of production, an exercise seeking to understand what forms Baskerville was aiming for when his new style of type represented a departure from a

[Illustration] Right: An illustration of a punch (left), & a matrix (right), used in type-founding. From De Vinne, The Practice of Typography: Modern Methods of Book Composition, 1904.

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tradition that had spanned three centuries. Indeed, during the lead-up to publishing his first book in 1757, Baskerville was keen that Caslon should not see his new typeface while he was in the process of developing it over the five years when he was setting up his printing office and exploring how to get the best from press, paper, ink and type.

His intention was to produce the very finest printed books and his *Virgil* still surprises in every aspect of printing; at the time it came as a shock, having both supporters and detractors, the latter mainly from among the printing fraternity. His types were not taken up in his home country but they had some influence in continental Europe, especially with Fournier, the Didots and Bodoni. They took the new elements of his style or, more accurately, the style that had emerged in the *romain du roi*, in an extreme direction, with the result that by the nineteenth century, serifs without brackets, the strongest contrast between thick and thin strokes, and a vertical orientation of this shading were fashionable such that Baskerville's less mechanical and still essentially humanist approach was passed over until its re-discovery and revival at the beginning of the twentieth century. That revival

[Illustration] Right: A cuneiform terracotta tablet, c.2,500 BC. By this stage, the stylus was fully developed & the script fully conveyed the Sumerian language; this tablet accounts for sums of silver. British Museum.

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involved the re-cutting of punches by several type-founders with the inevitable alterations brought about by re-thinking them for the new century.

Baskerville's own punches, meanwhile, had been purchased from his widow by the playwright and publisher Beaumarchais and Baskerville's types were used in France during the revolutionary period.

Baskerville had wished to print some of the works of Voltaire, whom he admired, and it would have pleased him that Beaumarchais achieved that endeavour using Baskerville's own types.

Finally, the punches were given to Cambridge University Press by Charles Peignot in 1953, their story being told by John Dreyfus in *The Survival of Baskerville's Punches*.

[Illustration] Right: Enlargement of the type used by Pierre Didot l'ainé for his edition of Virgil, 1791. St Bride Library.

Opposite: The title-page of Baskerville's 4^o edition of the works of Catullus, Tibullus & Propertius, 1772.

The names of the type sizes, from largest to smallest on the page are: French Cannon

Two-line Great Primer

Double Pica roman

Double Pica italic Great Primer roman English roman.

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BASKERVILLE'S PUNCHES.

The Caslons kept scrupulous records of the punches cut and re-cut for all Caslon types. The typefounding Baskerville engaged in, by contrast, was on a small scale and within one generation – no records of the punches cut. After Baskerville's equipment went to France, a number of punches were repaired or re-cut by Claude Jacob and other punchcutters as they became damaged or lost. John Dreyfus reports that all the punches were taken to Strasbourg where they were held as surety against debt, but on their return to Kehl a year later in 1786, the carriage spilled their boxes into the snow and 347 punches were lost. Entirely new punches were also created for specifically French needs, such as italic numerals and those accented letters that Baskerville had not required. As a consequence, there is a

level of uncertainty as to which of the Baskerville punches now at Cambridge were made for Baskerville himself and used to create the matrices for the type used in his books.

The faces of punches are delicate, albeit of steel. On the following page, even the opposite end of the

[Illustration] Right: Part of an article copied from The Printers' Register, Jan. 6th, 1877, that describes punch-cutting, the creation & use of matrices to cast type & the delicate finishing processes of each sort cast, readying the letters for printing. "The punch-cutter...with patient labour cuts out on softened steel each letter on a separate punch. Many a time does he take a proof of it by smoking it in a candle, and taking an impression of it on paper, and as frequently does he see by the aid of a powerful glass some shade of improvement that may be made, some little corner to be rounded off or some round to be made sharper, until at last it is pronounced correct by his employer, if he be a servant, or passed as the embodiment of his taste, if a principal. That this task is not a light one may be judged from the fact that a single punch is often a fair day's work, while on some punches of ornamental letters many days are expended. There are required for a complete fount of roman and italic no fewer than 360 punches, and when to the cost of cutting them is added that of the succeeding processes, it will be evident that it is not a small matter for a founder to undertake to get up a fount of book letter.

The finished punch is now taken to the hardener, whose duty it is to heat it to the required temperature, and then plunge it into cold water. After this he has to temper it with gentle heat, to keep it from cracking when struck, a fate, however, it does not always escape, for should there be the slightest flaw in the rolling of the steel, its succeeding course of treatment is eminently qualified to develop it. The hardened and tempered punch is now handed to the justifier, who strikes or drives it into a piece of copper of a selected size and thickness, and it is then his task to make this "strike" or "drive" into a finished matrix, and he has to so trim and shape it that when it is put into the mould to be cast from, the types produced from it shall be even in line, in uprightness, in length, and in width to the types cast from all its fellows; that is, that all 360 matrices shall, upon simply being placed in the mould, produce types which shall both look and be regular in every way. As the matrix in its early stage of a drive is merely struck in haphazard, so to say, and as the instruments used to complete it are such as will measure to the 5000th part of an inch, it will be evident that this is no light or unimportant part of the work."

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of the 'O' punch, top right, is shattered, shortening the punch, evidence of the toll taken by striking punches to make matrices for casting type. There are small cracks or chips in each punch used for the printed 'OPERA' on the Catullus title-page.

The finer strokes and extremities of punches were especially easily damaged and their use required great skill. It is likely that some punches needed to be re-cut in Baskerville's lifetime, as a result of damage; certainly Beaumarchais employed a punchcutter, Claude

Jacob, to go to England to study even before Baskerville's equipment embarked for France.

Some replacement punches cannot be identified with certainty from Baskerville originals, creating difficulties in comparing the shapes of surviving punches with the printed letters. John Dreyfus considered just three-quarters of the punches at Cambridge had been Baskerville's own.

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville's French Cannon punches used for the word 'OPERA' on the title-page of the Catullus, 1772, showing early signs of damage, cracks & chips in the metal. Bottom row, the Great Primer capital 'V'. The punch is clearly a narrower, more Didot-like shape seen beside the printed letter taken from the Catullus, 1772, showing how punches cut in France can differ from the missing originals.

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Nonetheless, the punches are invaluable when considering what to make of the differences between the shapes of printed letters that have come about as a result of ink spread, even though, ultimately, the printing in Baskerville's books must be the standard by which we assess and can enjoy his editions.

The capital 'W' shown on the right is a Great Primer size punch in the Baskerville collection but it is rare to find in print this size of roman capital 'W' with centre serifs. Baskerville did create alternative letterforms; the Great Primer roman clearly has had two styles of 'W' in the fount – both are printed on page 42 of John Huckell's *Avon*, 1758 – but the sort without the centre serifs was the one generally used. That style of 'W' is not present in the surviving set of punches.

[Illustration] Right, top: The text includes two differently designed 'W's in Great Primer size type. From the Avon, 1758. Maggs Bros.

Middle: the punch used to create the 'W' with the centre serif (reversed).

University Library, Cambridge.

Bottom: As well as using a different 'i', with a single top serif, two forms of Great Primer '3', round-topped & flat-topped, were used in almost equal amounts in one of his late works, the 4^o Sallust & Florus, 1773, showing Baskerville was still experimenting with letterforms. Opposite: Punches & printed letters from the title-page of Baskerville's 4^o Catullus, 1772, French Cannon size, enlarged. Even at 12mm high, ink spread still makes some difference in the printed letters.

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[Illustration] Left: The page that opens the first chapter of the Philosophie de Newton, volume thirty-one of the octavo edition of the Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire (during his exile in England, Voltaire attended Newton's funeral), published by the Société Littéraire Typographique that had been instituted by

Beaumarchais before his purchase of Baskerville's equipment from his widow, Sarah. From 1784, the *Voltaire* was printed with Baskerville's types at Kehl, just across the border from Strasbourg. The page size of this volume is 200 | 125mm. Some of the type is clearly not Baskerville's: the 'T' of 'Newton' in the title has a straight top bar but its form should be similar to the 'T' in 'Newton' at the beginning of the text; the characters in the title's first line, at 5.85mm high, fall between Two-line English & Double Pica size, not to be found among the samples in the *Specimen of Baskerville's types* dated 1777. Possibly, these types were cut by Claude Jacob who had been sent to England by Beaumarchais to learn the necessary skills before Baskerville's equipment was shipped to France. Soon after returning to France, however, Jacob left Beaumarchais in order to set up his own *Société Typographique* in Strasbourg in 1784, cutting punches similar to Baskerville's; these were purchased in 1795 by F. G. Levrault who presented them as "caractères dans le genre de Baskerville".

This is not to be critical of the *Voltaire* which has a sense of itself & is very comfortable to read, even if not quite as well printed as Baskerville's own editions. It is good to see this type in another context.

Opposite: Robert Thorne, an important letter-founder in London, was born in 1753 as Baskerville began to

set up his printing office in Birmingham. Thorne was the prime letter-founder to espouse the mechanical 'modern' style of type & to be responsible for promoting it in England. His tomb at St. Mary Magdalene, Holloway, shows how letter-cutters in stone, whose practice Baskerville had engaged in early in his life, naturally form bracketed serifs & how Baskerville's own stone-cutting may have given him a strong attachment to this aspect of letterforms. The italic script on this tomb is strongly reminiscent of the roundhand letterforms Baskerville had turned into italic type by 1754.

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[Illustration] Above: Baskerville's English type printed in 1761 (left, Addison), & in 1907 (right, *Le Tércence des Ducs*), the latter from type cast in France using old matrices, including any from 'Baskerville' punches made in France following the purchase of the Baskerville originals by Beaumarchais. Baskerville's Arabic-style numeral '1' always had two top serifs, as in a Roman 'T'; an exception was at the end of his career, in the 4^o *Sallust & Florus*, where its top changed to a single serif on the left side of the main stroke. *Le Tércence* uses this form, but not the flat-topped '3' noted on page 47. Marius Audin & John Dreyfus researched the history of Baskerville's punches: Plon had bought the punches & the matrices in 1842 from the Didot family (Pierre Didot l'aîné had them from Beaumarchais' daughter & passed them to his son Jules in 1822), & sold them as "elzéviris anciens" to A. Bertrand from 1893-95: Bertrand continued to provide type to Plon, whose *Le Tércence des Ducs* was the first book printed with Baskerville's type since it was last used, during much of the revolutionary period (notably for the *Gazette Nationale* ou *Le Moniteur Universel*, Paris's daily newspaper, set with his type from 1st November 1790 to 29th May, 1795).

A Plon prospectus, set in the – as yet unrecognised – Baskerville types, was spotted in Paris by Bruce Rogers, but the type's authenticity was not confirmed before he made a direct comparison with a Baskerville specimen in England in 1917. Returned to America, Rogers obtained a fount of the type in 1920 for

Harvard University Press; the first book to use the type was The Cemetery at Souain, 1921, with occasional un-Baskerville-looking characters.

Opposite: Le T rence des Ducs (height of the text area of the description, 234 mm), a facsimile edition by Henri Martin, published by Plon-Nourrit et Cie, Paris in 1907. The full page height is 363mm. The main text was printed in Baskerville's English roman & italic type handed down from Beaumarchais; the headers & footnotes are set in types different from Baskerville's.

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[Illustration] Above: A two-page spread from a fine copy of Shaftesbury's Characteristicks. Blackwells Rare Books. Opposite: The title-page of Shaftesbury's Characteristicks. Page height, 239mm. Blackwells Rare Books.

BASKERVILLE'S CONTRIBUTION.

In looking at Baskerville's letterforms in punches, type and printed letters and at his approach to designing with type, it is fascinating that the deceptively simple format of his pages and the limited range of types and type sizes Baskerville settled upon in 1757 with his first quarto volume of Virgil's works, was an approach he kept essentially unchanged, though many details were modified over time. Across his twenty years spent printing books, their aesthetic quality has remained unchallenged as a reading experience.

John Baskerville's contribution to typeface design was well-researched and commented upon in the twentieth century. Briefly, what is different about his type is that it is seen as an emergent 'modern' design, modern in the typographic sense as realised by the Didots and Bodoni before the nineteenth century. The characteristics of Baskerville's new typeface include a stronger contrast between thin & thick strokes; a re-orientation of the thin and thick parts of letters such that they appear more upright, as when a broad nib pen is held more vertically; the brackets at the termination of strokes are finer,

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though not so reduced as to be a straight line; generally, the shapes of letters are wider, extending the length of a line of type; both roman and italic faces break significantly with the traditional humanist faces of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, a shift that had begun in the French *romain du roi* and continued in the specimens of English writing masters that Baskerville consulted and collected. In book design and production, Baskerville is credited with an improved, blacker printing ink; the use of the best paper he could obtain which he regularly hot-pressed between heated copper rollers to make the

surface of the page smoother, glossy even; modifications to the printing press that brought about a more even impression of the type on the sheet of paper enabling a lighter, cleaner inking of his type; and page design that used broad margins with well-proportioned blocks of type. The type itself was unusually even and consistent in the way letters sat together, not so surprising perhaps from one familiar with the steely regularity of line- and letter-spacing in the engraved examples of the writing masters.

On reflection, one can say Baskerville's roman type retains much of the humanist approach and his italic retains the idea of being a face constructed

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville's serifs were fine but not reduced, as were Didot's, to a straight line, removing the bracket altogether. This example is from the punch for the Great Primer roman 'h'.

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independently of the roman, not just a version of roman that has been sloped with a sideways push.

What is recognised but not analysed, if analysis were possible, is the sudden aesthetic contribution Baskerville made to the printed book. How did he, especially in his quarto classics, come to make them such visually well-integrated objects? It is not just the type; others who printed with Baskerville's types did not achieve such heights, or even approach them. What was it in Baskerville's formulation of his ideas that kept driving him to make such incomparably fine books? Although Baskerville was obviously in business as a printer, there appears to have been some ambivalence in how he thought of his work. On the one hand, making money was important, to such an extent that he tried at times to sell off his equipment because of lack of take-up of his publications and types, but also because the death of his stepson and intended successor was such a blow; on the other hand, he could not but return to printing as a personal challenge to make the finest of books. His seems to be more in the nature of a private press before that movement's inception under William Morris in the later nineteenth century.

[Illustration] Right: The Rosetta Stone, key to deciphering hieroglyphs. The upper text is Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, the middle portion Demotic script, & the lowest Ancient Greek. Photo: British Museum. Baskerville's one non-Latin type was a Greek fount commissioned by Oxford University.

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[Illustration] Right: *The 8^o Novum Testamentum printed in 1763 at Oxford using Baskerville's newly commissioned Greek types, Great Primer & Two-line Double Pica. Page height 225 mm.*

The Oxford University Press had bought punches, matrices and type from Baskerville in 1761. The Press still has those punches & matrices.

Although the printing is not to a Baskerville layout, its chapter titles have a comparable boldness & Dibdin lists the work, 4^o & 8^o editions, as "Exceedingly beautiful". However, this Greek type was not well received by some. "Execrable", said Edward Rowe Mores – known as "a crusty, crabbed clergyman" – of Baskerville's Greek type &, "his typographical excellence lay more in trim glossy paper to dim the sight". Nichols, a rival printer, endorsed Mores's prejudices.

Josia Benton, a great admirer and collector of his books, took a more responsive line in 1914:

"To the student of to-day Baskerville's Greek type is far easier to read than any of its contemporaries. The letters are far from being execrable, as Mores called them. They are in effect cursive, well formed, and probably modelled, like those invented by Aldus, upon some calligraphy of the day. Baskerville's type held the field and gave us a finer Greek type than we had before."

The Greek type follows the approach Baskerville took in designing his italic types; it sits very well with the English italic as can be seen in the Sallust & Florus, 1773 (photograph, page 148).

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BASKERVILLE'S CRITICS AND HIS SUPPORTERS.

A few oft-repeated adverse comments on Baskerville the person and on his printing types have probably put out of balance the general view in England of his life and work, which recognised his

achievements in his lifetime and around the turn of the century.

Some plaudits were silent – the copying or close following of his type in Fry's Baskerville, similarly by Alexander Wilson, even by William Martin who used Baskerville as a step to new forms – others, by bibliophiles such as Harwood, Dibdin and Kippis, could be brief and to the point.

T.F. Dibdin's appraisal of Baskerville in *An Introduction to the Knowledge of Rare and Valuable Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics*, 1802, offers of the Virgil, 1757:

Exquisitely printed. "The best printed book", says Dr. Harwood, "the typographical art ever produced"....

It is remarkable that this very splendid work was the first production of Baskerville's press: a bold attempt in a foreign language! but he secured his reputation by it.

and of the duodecimo Horace, 1762:

Elegant and correct. "This is a beautiful little book, both

[Illustration] Right: A Greek typeface by Bodoni, in the Theophrastus of 1786. Page height 301 mm. Wellcome Library, London.

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in regard to type and paper. It is also the most correct of all Baskerville's edits. of the Classics; for every sheet was most carefully revised by Mr. Livie, who was an elegant scholar." —Harwood. In *Biographia Britannica*, 1778, Andrew Kippis wrote of Baskerville's works:

"These publications rank the name of Baskerville with those persons who have the most contributed, at least in modern times, to the beauty and improvement of the art of printing. Indeed, it is needless to say to what perfection he has brought this excellent art.

"The paper, the type, and the whole execution of the works performed by him are the best testimonies of their merit."

Other assessments see his roman letterforms as too wide, his italics spidery, titles too widely letter-spaced, running heads too large, that they would be better ranged left, inappropriate punctuation marks in title-pages, that it was a cheap trick to hot press his paper, that heat has damaged its long-term

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville's coach was spectacular, inset with panels of his japanned ware, & was something of an object of fun in Birmingham: "his carriage, each pannel of which was a distinct picture, might be considered the pattern-card of his trade, and was drawn by a beautiful pair of cream-coloured horses." This chariot was one of the wonders of Birmingham, one section richly gilt and painted with little naked cupids and flowers, drawn by two cream-colored horses with net hangings almost to the ground. The panels were said to be each in the nature of a picture, got up Japan-wise.'* — Was Baskerville the developer of advertising in motion on the carriageway? Plus ça change...

* J.H.Benton, John Baskerville, Typefounder and Printer, 1914. Opposite: An enlarged 17-line section of page 446 of the *Novum Testamentum*, actual height approximately 100 mm.

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quality, that the ink was too black such that reading his pages hurt the eyes, that his types were merely copies of what had become fashionable in writing, that the texts of his books are inaccurate, &c. There are hints of jealousy in these criticisms and some judging by the criteria of later times; none gains much traction other than the staining and browning of his paper which is an unfortunate feature of several of his books, some sections being more heavily blemished than others; however, there are books that have been stored in

libraries in conditions that have led to the degradation of the paper, as making comparisons between a range of copies will show.

Admiring Baskerville, Sir Francis Meynell said,

“Look at the title page of his Virgil. It seems no more than a series of lines of capitals centred one over another by a combination of logical arrangement and formula. But this is artifice at its height: the art of concealing the care and the sense of balance which has taken infinite pains to obtain the right interlinear spacing and letter-spacing, the right gradations of size.”

Of his typeface, Sutton and Bartram write, “It is an original design, which echoes the architecture of the Augustan Age in its serenity & masculinity.”

Twentieth century appreciations echo the clear

[Illustration] Right: Punctuation marks on the title-page of Baskerville’s Virgil, 1757. Eighteenth century printers included punctuation in titles & title-pages; that emphasis on the act of reading has been lost in favour of graphic design.

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influence Baskerville had on continental printers of his day; the Virgil had a powerful effect; Bodoni and the Didots were encouraged by Baskerville’s work to develop typefaces and layouts that swept away decoration in favour of refined spacing and scaling of lines of type. But they drove contrasts of thicks and thins in letterforms far beyond Baskerville, producing ever more upright forms and extreme differentiation within the letters, a quite different approach within a philosophy originating in the *romain du roi*, which had indeed influenced Baskerville directly or via the copy books printed for writing masters of his own day.

Carl Purington Rollins comments:

“I would not hold Baskerville responsible for the terrible types of the Didots, or for the ‘faultily faultless, icily regular’ pages of the great Parmesan printer...Firmin [Didot] cast the types used in French books of the nineteenth century, types which ‘to be hated need but to be seen.’...Bodoni...developed a hard and rigid form of letter which may be seen in...a mortuary edition of Horace...he carried the idea of modelled letters far beyond Baskerville, however; almost, I should say, beyond the decencies.”

Baskerville was recognised abroad in an age when publications such as the interdisciplinary review magazine *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten*

[Illustration] Right: Criticism of Baskerville's punctuation in titling may now lapse. Shakira's poster on the London Underground, 2014, would not so touch the observer's feelings without that tiny, pupil-like, humanising point.

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Sachen – founded in 1739 and still in print – covered books published in several European languages, including Baskerville's editions which were advertised in the magazine. There was strong international interest in developments, particularly of a scientific and medical nature. The Enlightenment project was firmly established by the time Baskerville began printing books.

Though illness prevented his journey, Bodoni planned a visit to England, very likely to meet Baskerville, certainly he knew his characters. Bertuch, a German publisher, saw the Virgil awakening Europe to the need for better printing presses and better taste in typography. Benjamin Franklin was a friend and admirer who bought several of his books. Baskerville corresponded with Voltaire & specimens of his printing passed between them, though Baskerville's proposal to print some of Voltaire's writing came to nothing in the end; it was left to Beaumarchais to buy his types after his death and use them for printing Voltaire's oeuvre. Shortly before he died, the Molini brothers in Paris commissioned Baskerville's editions of *Orlando Furioso*, but as early as 1766, Fournier's *Manuel Typographique* had singled out Baskerville for

[Illustration] Right: Combined here for convenience into a single column, the text of Salomon Bauer's contribution on Baskerville to Ersch & Grüber's *Encyclopädie*, 1821.

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praise in its assessment of English printers:

“The last [Baskerville] is more modern [than Caslon]. Mr. Baskerville, a rich individual, has established in Birmingham, his place of residence, renowned for beautiful manufacturing in steel, a paper-mill, a printing-press & a type-foundry; he spared neither pains nor expense to bring them to the highest state of perfection: the characters are engraved with much boldness, the italics are the best there are in all of England's foundries; but the romans are slightly too wide. He has already published several editions made with his new characters, they are real masterpieces of clarity. Some are on smooth paper; though a little tiring on the eye, one cannot deny it is the most beautiful thing one has yet seen in this genre.”

‘*Papier lisse*’ may translate as ‘smooth’ or ‘slick- surfaced’ paper; we are used to smooth paper but in the eighteenth century it was generally very rough by our standards and Baskerville’s polished surface, really quite slick at times, must have come as a genuine shock.

What Baskerville retained, to the lasting glory of his books & upon which the *romain du roi* had turned its back, was the connection with the hand.

Philip Gaskell wrote that Baskerville’s books were “unusually beautiful, expensive and incorrect.” Contrary to their being incorrect, Sally Power’s view in her assessment of *Paradise Lost*, is that he

[Illustration] Right: Fournier, Manuel Typographique, Vol. II. Wellcome Library, London.

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used the best sources and gave such unusually close attention to detail that no assumptions should be made about incorrectness before checking any works coming into question. Of the eleven copies of the Virgil at Yale, A. T. Hazen writes, “Such a long list of cancels in a book that was merely a reprint of a standard text, surely justifies Reed’s charge of nervous fastidiousness.” Baskerville sought the best texts to follow for his publications but that was not easy or, if easy, not a guarantee of reliability as the *Lucretius* shows (Appendix A). Baskerville did not set up an editorial system where scholars worked on Classical texts as at a university, as Aldus and Plantin had done. This had not been his aim, nor had he economic or social connections to achieve it.

Criticisms that Baskerville could have improved his layouts – smaller running headers, ranging them differently, eliminating some punctuation, etc. – are easy to mock-up in computer software to see whether we shall prefer Baskerville’s or his critics’ judgements. For me, the mock-up for a re-designed page on page 67, loses authority, presence, scale, proportion and an important spatial dimension. It has become flat and boring – a weakness exemplified in the running headers in Bulmer’s layouts.

Judicious re-adjustments may work extremely

[Illustration] Right & opposite right: I have taken my comparison no further with the copy I used; claims by the anonymous writer seem to be just a malevolent, personal attack on Baskerville. His was not the only such outburst.

From Chambers’ Biographical Illustrations of Worcestershire, 1820: ‘The following account of Baskerville is copied from the European Magazine of December, 1785:

“I was acquainted with Baskerville, the printer, but cannot wholly agree with the extracts concerning him, from Hutton’s History of Birmingham. It is true he was very ingenious in mechanics, but it is also well known he was extremely illiterate, and his jokes and sarcasms on the Bible, with which his conversation abounded, shewed the most contemptible ignorance of eastern history and manners, and indeed of every thing. His quarto edition of Milton’s Paradise Lost, with all its splendour, is a deep disgrace to the English press. He could not spell himself, and knew not who could. A Warwickshire country schoolmaster, of some parish charity school, we presume, was employed by him to correct this splendid edition, and that dunce has spelt many words in it according to the vulgar Warwickshire pronunciation. For example, many of the western vulgar clap an h to every word beginning with an open vowel, or even the w, as hood for wood, my harm for my arm, heggs for eggs, &c. &c. and again as viciously dropping the h in verbs, as ave for have, as for has, &c. &c. Many instances of this horrid ignorance we find in the ingenious Baskerville’s splendid Milton, where as is often put for the verb has, and has for the conjunction as, with several others of this worse than cockney family. Nor can I by any means agree with Mr. Hutton that “it is to the lasting discredit of the British nation that no purchaser could be found for his types.”—What was the merit of his printing?—His paper was of a finer gloss, and his ink of a brighter black than ordinary; his type was thicker than usual in the third [stet] strokes, and finer in the fine, and was sharpened in the angles in a novel manner; all these combined gave his editions a brilliant rich look, when his pages were turned lightly over; but when you sit down to read them, the eye is almost immediately fatigued with the gloss of the paper and ink, and the sharp angles of the type; and it is universally known that Baskerville’s printing is not read; that the better sort of the London printing is infinitely preferable for USE, and even for real sterling elegance. The Universities and London booksellers therefore are not to be blamed for declining the purchase of Baskerville’s types, which we are told were bought by a Society at Paris, where tawdry silk and tinsel is preferred to the finest English broad cloth, or even Genoa velvet. Mr. Hutton says, “If you ask what fortune Baskerville ought to have been rewarded with? the most which can be comprised in 5 figures. If you further ask, what he possessed? the least, but none of it squeezed from the press.” By this quaint riddle me ree I suppose it is meant that Baskerville’s genius ought to have been rewarded with £99,999. good English money, but that, such was the baseness of the age, he only died worth £11,111.; and that none of this was squeezed from the press is a full proof that there was more glitter than real merit or improvement in the boasted printing of Baskerville. “VIATOR.”*

** In the first three books of the first octavo edition of Paradise Lost, there are no instances of ‘as’ for ‘has’, three out of thirty-nine instances of ‘is’ have had a character removed by hand (Gaskell mentions one of these & a number of other corrected leaves inserted, as was Baskerville’s custom), there is no instance of ‘has’ for ‘as’, & the ninety-two instances of ‘his’ in Book I are correct. Gaskell assumes the 4^o & 8^o editions are similar. I have not had sight of the 4^o edition.*

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well, as in the re-design by Jan Tschichold of the covers of Penguin Books, but it is more likely that works of art such as Baskerville’s editions need every dot and comma left in place to avoid weakening

the effect of a whole that is not just well-calculated but rounded by being a product of an instinct in sympathy with the aesthetic of the time.

An unusual amount of controversy surrounded Baskerville in his lifetime, arising in part from his rejection of religious belief and his scandalous cohabiting with Mrs Eaves, partly from the rivalry of a few printers and publishers. In a period of revolutions, free-thinkers were not popular with church and state in England, France or Germany and Baskerville no more hid his opinions than did Voltaire, whom he admired, or Beaumarchais whose own admiration united them after their deaths in his extravagant project of printing Voltaire's oeuvre with Baskerville's types; the typestyle had come to be viewed symbolically as sympathetic to the French revolution. The punches and matrices that England failed to preserve, survived in great part in France, passing through a succession of company sales in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the punches finally passed to Cambridge, the matrices, if still extant, are probably in Basel, Switzerland.

[Illustration] Overleaf: A spread from the Juvenal; left hand page, Baskerville's setting; right hand page, header altered to smaller type & ranged left.

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[Illustration] What Baskerville stood for.

Baskerville published his 4^o & 8^o volumes of Milton's Paradise Lost & Paradise Regained in 1758. They were very popular, his greatest success. In the first volume he set out his position in the Preface & this is as close as we come to having from him a picture of his purpose as a printer, despite the many letters he wrote in which he recounts his trials & travails & his hopes. St Bride Library.

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[Illustration] Above: If Baskerville produced a typographic rival to his Virgil of 1757, it is the Juvenal of 1761, with its wider line-spacing. The headers are set in Baskerville's Double Pica & the text in his Great Primer.

Opposite: An example of the Double Pica italic (enlarged), from the Terence of 1772.

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BASKERVILLE AND CASLON.

What were the essential differences created by Baskerville from the types in the Old Style being used concurrently with his? The illustration opposite shows, in red, the shape of his Double Pica italic punch 'm' and below it the 'm' of Caslon in a digital version by Adobe,

superimposed upon an engraving of the roundhand writing style of the first half of the eighteenth century.

Beatrice Warde drew attention to the similarities between Baskerville's type and eighteenth century roundhand in her 1927 article in the *Monotype Recorder*. Her argument demonstrates that Baskerville, whose early experience as a writing master taught him contemporary styles of handwriting, was strongly influenced by this in the new design of the letterforms that emerged in his letterpress types (see his handwritten 'p's and the roundhand engraved 'p's, below right).

The main differences between Baskerville's type and Caslon's in this example are that Baskerville's orientation is considerably more upright than Caslon or the engraving, secondly, his transitions from thick to thin in the stroke are more abrupt,

[Illustration] Baskerville's handwritten 'p', 1774, compared with an engraved roundhand 'p' in a copy book from his youth as a writing master.

Top line: Engraving of a roundhand 'm', 1740s.

Middle line: Baskerville Double Pica punch 'm' superimposed on the engraved 'm'.

Bottom line: Caslon italic 'm', by Adobe, superimposed on the engraved 'm'.

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[Illustration] Top line: Baskerville's lowercase 'm' drawn from the punch shown on its right, reversed, & a digital Caslon Old Face 'm' by Adobe. Bottom line: The lowercase 'm' printed in the romain du roi, Baskerville's, & Caslon's Great Primer No. 1. from the Caslon Specimen of Printing Types, 1796, which slopes more than the Adobe version. St. Bride Library.

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finally, the curves are formed in a rounder way than the sharp transitions in Caslon's top and bottom curves.

A glance at the 'm' created by Caslon on the opposite page, is sufficient to demonstrate how different in feeling and tone was his italic of similar size to Baskerville's Double Pica. Another example of Caslon's italic, right, falls on the eye like the teeth of a saw, whereas Baskerville produced a very readable, easy and graceful form. It is just so surprising and unfortunate that he engendered antipathy and controversy in the printing trade when his books were published. "Baskerville's design shows more originality and personality than Caslon's...Baskerville cannot be said to be more picturesque than Caslon, but its proportions are better, the face is clearer and the whole design, roman and italic, more efficient for present-day work." —Stanley Morison.

[Illustration] Right: Caslon Old Face italic, printed as part of a fine, inventive Caslon specimen book in 1924 by George W. Jones at The Sign of the Dolphin, Gough Square, London. Nineteen lines, 145 mm high.

Overleaf: In the same specimen book, a re-setting by George Jones in Caslon type of a page of Baskerville's 4^o Horace, 1770, compared with the original setting. Subtle though the differences in the Horace may seem at first sight, the Caslon setting lacks the finesse of the presumed uneducated Baskerville, whose natural sense of proportion shows up the shortcomings of this Caslon type specimen, good as it is. The page sizes are similar but the sense of scale and space in the original, created with smaller types, better letter-spacing & better line-spacing is profound: the re-working with Caslon's types seems flat, heavy, cramped & too insistent.

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[Illustration] The text blocks of George Jones's transcription into Caslon, left, & Baskerville's original, middle; the two settings overlaid, right; both pages scaled to the same height.

What makes this transcription into Caslon a relatively unsuccessful setting? Baskerville's lines of headings use smaller types relative to the height of the block. This is especially the case in the second line, 'HORATII FLACCI'; the Caslon is particularly cramped in its letter-spacing as a result of being too large a type. In the body text, the larger letters of the Caslon font make for insufficient line-spacing. The result of the changes, subtle and not-so-subtle, makes the Caslon setting slightly uncomfortable because there is ambiguity – verticality competes restlessly with horizontality; there is no doubt in the Baskerville design that the text flows from top to bottom.

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[Illustration] Left: Type Specimen by John Baskerville, c. 1760–62 (reduced). Image courtesy of Providence Public Libraries, the Daniel Berkeley Updike Ephemera Collection.

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BASKERVILLE AND THE FOULISES.

There are strong similarities between the pared-down typographic design of Robert and Andrew Foulis in Glasgow and Baskerville's approach. It seems very probable that Baskerville knew some of the products of the Foulis Press, which had been running for more than ten years when Baskerville turned to printing, and that he was influenced by them or simply confirmed in his own beliefs; it was not the case that he copied the Foulis approach of maximum simplicity but shortness in stylistic and aesthetic impact, however, which renders their work somewhat dull. The Foulises in the form of their punchcutter and typefounder Alexander Wilson, benefitted from the innovative roman types shown in Baskerville's first years. The

improvements Wilson made to his types are clearly the result of his study of Baskerville. These similarities of approach to making typefaces shown by Baskerville and the Foulises were to be broken by William Bulmer and William Martin.

[Illustration] Right top: The printer's details on the title-page of An History of the River Thames, 1794, which shows how far modern types had come before the end of the century. Guildhall Library, City of London. Bottom: A detail from the Virgil printed by Andrew Foulis the younger in 1778, who carried on the approach taken throughout by the Foulises at their Glasgow press. Unsworth's Antiquarian Booksellers.

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[Illustration] Double Pica roman types by Baskerville (top), & Alexander Wilson (below). Although this photograph of the Wilson type is not sharp, it can be seen how much narrower his letterforms are & that the letters fit closer together. The proportions of the Foulises' books were generally relatively narrow by comparison with Baskerville's wide quartos. The two types fit well with their respective books; neither might look so good if printed to the other's format. It does seem, however, that the open spacing of Baskerville's type allows for an easy, unhurried flow in reading along the line, whereas the tighter fit of the letters in Wilson's types used by the Foulises requires a definite shift from word to word. The emerging modern types were to make reading significantly harder.

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[Illustration] Above: A chapter opening in Baskerville's Virgil, 1757. Page height 293 mm. See the following pages for a comparison between Baskerville's typography & that of the Foulis press with which there are some distinct similarities. The two books are scaled to show their respective sizes. The staining across the title on the Foulis page opposite, from the ink on the previous leaf, is similar to that affecting some of Baskerville's books (see page 121ff.).

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[Illustration] Above: The Virgil edition by Andrew Foulis the younger, 1778, in the style of production that the Foulis Press had always followed – a well-judged, restrained typographic layout with no frills. Page height 380mm. Unsworth's Antiquarian Booksellers.

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[Illustration] Title-pages & chapter-headings for editions of Virgil's Bucolica, Georgica et Æneis published by Baskerville in Birmingham, 1757, & Andrew Foulis the younger in Glasgow, 1778. Before Baskerville turned to printing, the Foulis Press was already producing unadorned books that relied on type alone for their effect, much of its production being for the University at Glasgow.

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[Illustration] The Foulises generally employed a narrow format and a speciality was small pocket books. They took correctness of text to the limits of the age whereas Baskerville, rightly or wrongly, was criticised for the incorrectness of his texts – as was Bodoni who suffered scathing criticism from Didot. Commercial rivalry was keen in the eighteenth century.

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[Illustration] Alexander Wilson cut the types used by the Foulis Press in Glasgow, examples from his Specimen sheet of 1783 shown on these pages. His Double Pica & English romans were much admired by Philip Gaskell in A Bibliography of The Foulis Press, in which, while recognising Wilson had benefitted from Baskerville's types, he assessed Wilson's English & Double Pica roman types of 1760 & 1768 respectively, as carrying out Baskerville's ideas 'better even than did Baskerville himself'. As regards italic types, Wilson chose not to go in the direction Baskerville had gone. St Bride Library. Opposite, left-hand column, Wilson's types; right-hand column, Baskerville's.

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BASKERVILLE AND BULMER.

William Bulmer's work as a printer sat firmly in the modern style using types cut and cast by William Martin, whose brother Robert had been Baskerville's foreman for many years. William Martin had spent time with the Birmingham printer's business during Baskerville's latter days, before moving to London in the 1780s. To some extent Martin's types show the Baskerville influence, especially his italics, but the spirit is entirely different. By 1794, when *An History of the River Thames* was published, it would seem Martin had been most strongly influenced by the Didots or Bodoni or both. The book about the Thames is a two-volume publication on a grand scale, clearly intended to be impressive, but it is in a style that is cold and mechanistic, both in type – the roman especially – and its aquatint illustrations.

[Illustration] Right: Details from An History of the River Thames, 1794, printed by William Bulmer with types by William Martin, over which Bulmer had exclusive rights. Guildhall Library, City of London.

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[Illustration] Above-left: The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis, translated by William Gifford, printed by William Bulmer in 1802. In this two-image comparison, the Bulmer inside margin has been increased to take account of the apparent narrowness resulting from the curvature of the paper as it turns into the spine; the Baskerville page from the Catullus, Tibullus & Propertius has been

scaled down to ninety-five percent to match the height of the Bulmer volume.

Neither book was trimmed by the binder.

The two text blocks are remarkably similar in width & almost the same in proportion, the Baskerville just slightly taller. However, while the Baskerville text interacts well with the page, the Bulmer seems printed on a paper size too large for the text block, which looks lost in space. The paper Bulmer used feels uncomfortably like thin felt.

The weak, modern typeface used by Bulmer, weaker running headers, and the ambiguous relationship of verse to footnotes & of text to page all make for an unsatisfactory book design by comparison with Baskerville's quartos.

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BASKERVILLE'S FEELING FOR SPACE.

It has been recognised that Baskerville's type fitted the age in which he lived, echoing "the architecture of the Augustan Age in its serenity and masculinity", as Sutton and Bartram put it. I would enlarge on this, that Baskerville's type and his page layout do more than produce an echo: the spatial confidence of the buildings of the time, the simplicity of their assured scale and proportions, and the two- and three-dimensionality of architectural plans and their fulfilment in buildings are transposed by Baskerville into a parallel typographic concept and realisation: there is something inescapably three-dimensional about Baskerville's combinations of type in his title-pages, & of titles & headings with body text; his selection of type, refined as a classical order of architecture, performs related functions: columns, capitals and supported entablatures and cornices of type. It is these features that separate Baskerville from other printers and is reason enough for his apparent lack of interest in illustrating his editions – and where they are illustrated, they seem poorly served by the engravings: it is an explanation that emerged

[Illustration] Background image: Baskerville's book pages have much the same qualities as the Georgian style of window: simplicity, stability, prestige & authority.

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during this study for why I have been drawn to familiarise myself with Baskerville's printing types and his typography.

Other considerations around spatial representation, the way we may interpret form through spatial cues via the use of line and tone, make a link between drawing and typography in the manuscript and printed book. There is a striking parallel between the title-pages of books such as Baskerville's *Orlando Furioso* and the architecture of

large buildings of his time – the Church of St. Philip on his doorstep being a live example of a collection of forms he would have known intimately. Indeed, we see in prints of his own house the urns set out along the parapet. Baskerville would have sensed space in the techniques of line and tone in prints (Piranesi was a contemporary), an example being that of St. Philip’s by William Westley, where three-dimensional form has been translated into a linear, tonal, two-dimensional image that represents three dimensions intelligibly to us.

All Baskerville’s pages are spatial, in the sense of being suggestive of a third dimension that emerges from the structuring of size and tone in his lines of type, rather than simply creating a graphic, flat rectangle of type surrounded by a frame of margins,

[Illustration] Background: One of many different urns in the gardens at Chiswick House, Lord Burlington’s Palladian villa, 1729; a type of form reminiscent of some of Baskerville’s titling, as described in later pages.

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as many of Bodoni’s pages were, and those of other printers, too.

This interpretation of Baskerville was not the one taken by his critics at the time who had other expectations, not least the assumption that text was functional and, if otherwise, a failure. This kind of criticism continues: Robin Kinross dismisses Baskerville in his *Modern Typography*, assuming,

“that value lies in editorial quality, in the content of text and images, in their accurate transmission, and that notions of ‘beauty’ are best left undiscussed, or, at least, construed in the light of these primary tasks of printing. This may explain...the short shrift given to some of the staple subjects of typographic history – Baskerville, Bodoni, the post-Kelmscott private presses – whose reputation rests on superfluous books of doubtful textual accuracy, meant for viewing rather than for reading, or as investments. The cult of ‘fine printing’, with its fetish of the title-page, has been questioned often enough, and by celebrated typographers (Jan Tschichold, Eric Gill), but it seems to persist. Faced with its complacent monuments, one turns to work that shows some life.”

I cannot grasp what kind of “life” it could be that so dismisses beauty, so diminishes the nature of the book and what it may be or may have been, that so ignores the meaning of art and a form of human endeavour that seeks to go beyond materialism.

[Illustration] Right: A nineteenth century treatise on levelling of lamentable typography, printed fifty years after Bodoni's of 1813, but where, unlike Bodoni's, 'NIVELLEMENT', the subject of the book, is the most prominent word on the page. Image by Google.

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[Illustration] Above: Bodoni's title-page holds tightly to a central spine rather than spreading easily across the page in wide-spaced letters as Baskerville's often do. The quantities of information in title-pages such as this, & those with many more lines, are handled with consummate skill by Bodoni in creating a pattern of lines in which the sizes of type work well with their content, though 'NIVELLEMENT' is small in scale for the subject of the book. He obviously preferred the slender column to an alternative such as the mock-up to its right, which would have made the title wider than the setting of the book's text, & would have introduced ambiguity to the title-page's emphasis on vertical over horizontal; the margins of the original retain a strong framing function.

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Baskerville had a clear sense of beauty and artistic value, as with others of his Age. He built himself a fine house with a large garden, "of which no prince could be ashamed" (Lichtenberg, 1775). His early love of letterforms was shown in that house by his displaying framed examples of writing masters' specimens. His own publications, he hoped, would find favour and he was gratified when they did, having sought to provide books "which the public may be pleased to see in an elegant dress".

Art is for contemplation beyond the acquisition of factual knowledge; early manuscripts were of familiar religious texts, visually significant in their writing and illumination; the texts Baskerville chose were well known, staples of publishing at the time, and his editions were to enjoy and to meditate upon. He treated pages as material with which to paint or sculpt in type. Letters spread over the paper, giving the impression of not being simply confined to a rectangle within a rectangle; the title-page of his Virgil presents type and leaf as one; wide line-spacing and wider than usual letterforms and letter-spacing mean type and paper interact over the whole surface of the page with a lively naturalness.

*

[Illustration] Right: An example of Bodoni's work in the 1780s – a text within a decorative frame. However subtly done, it is a flat imprint hung from its folio cartouche like a tablet hanging against a wall.

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*[Illustration] Above, left to right: A page from the *Traité du Nivellement*, 1813, (Brooks 1133); the opening page of the dedication to the King of Spain, Charles IV, from a text book on geometry, 1803, (Brooks 902); the opening page of Part II on geometry. Wellcome Library, London.*

By comparison with Baskerville's suggestions of structure with three dimensions in mind, these pages by Bodoni are strictly two-dimensional. Even the page in the centre, with its dramatic gap between heading and text seeming to symbolise the social distinction between king & subject, is formed in consciousness of the rectangle of a full text block framed by the wide margins of the page. The chapter heading to its right uses a strong rule to link the lightly-filled open rectangle in the upper section to the darker one below that contains the block of text. Again, the folio cartouche is the pin from which to hang it all – so very calm, minimalist, beautiful & flat. Wellcome Library, London.

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Baskerville's opening page of the first book of Tibullus's *Elegies*, opposite, is a column of verse text surmounted by an urn or capital that has a rounded quality going beyond a two-dimensional shape. The largest type, the 'TIBULLI', is not simply the most important line of the page – the sizes of type in this heading do match the significance of their content – but it feels spatially to be swelling in front of the lines below and above, the line in italics adding a decorative element to the form of this urn or capital. In the relatively restrained title-setting, with three sizes of type over five lines, the colour of the letters gives variation in light and shade, helped by the closer letter-spacing of 'EQUITIS ROMANI'.

Baskerville's contemporary, Piranesi, employed a tonal system in translating his observations into print, using techniques that play with light and shade in rendering form; Baskerville, using type alone, its variations in scale, tonal weight and letter- and line-spacing, here suggests a three-dimensionality, too, as he does very commonly in his other volumes, whether or not he was consciously planning this effect or following a strong intuition.

[Illustration] Right: A detail of a Piranesi etching, the Veduta del Tempio di Giove Tonante, Rome, 1756.

Background image: A Corinthian capital from a column at the front of St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

Opposite: The title-page of the first book of Tibullus, 1772.

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Baskerville's page layout, in its clarity and simplicity of design, has an architectural quality related to the building styles of his time: aspects

of English Baroque and Anglo-Palladianism are reflected in his typography. The headings to the various books within his Virgil, the *Bucolica*, *Georgica* and *Æneis*, have a spatial quality that shows a relationship of body text to title similar to that in buildings such as Henry Flitcroft's St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, where the faces of the tower beneath the clock support a powerful entablature.

This approach was repeated in other publications such as the *Lucretius* where the titling creates an entablature with bands reminiscent of cornice, frieze and architrave, the lively italics of 'RERUM NATURA' adding stylish decoration with the five swash letters.

[Illustration] Background image: A detail of the tower of St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, built between 1731–33 in the Anglo-Palladian style.

Right: One of many title-page layouts created by Christopher Plantin in which type & architecture are associated with one another, 1566. Opposite: The title-page of Book II of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, 1772.

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In one of his very last books, *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto, printed in Italian, Baskerville produced one of his most dramatically spacial title-page designs; 'ORLANDO' and 'ARIOSTO' zoom towards us from the distant 'D I'; fitting, perhaps, that his parish church, St. Philip's, should have been designed under the influence of the Italian Baroque, the sweeping lines in this etching of the entablature beneath the clock having a rhythm and play between two and three dimensions.

Baskerville's five-line title-entablature has a similar spatial energy topping the finer carving of a stacking of rules and lines of publisher's details, the date in Roman numerals so evocative of the fluting of a column. This is more than flat text on flat paper; rather, a key to Baskerville's penchant for wide letter- and line-spacing is his thinking three-dimensionally.

Alan Bartram, in *Five Hundred Years of Book Design*, found these "unnecessary changes of type size ... and its over-generous linear spacing are unsettling ... we have pointless punctuation. The little lost word in the middle helps the sense and is here forgiven. The overall pattern ... is very satisfying". Unsettling but satisfying: an acceptable analysis ! but I would say spirited, not unsettling.

[Illustration] Background image: Detail of the etching by William Westley of the new church of St. Philip, consecrated in 1715.

Unusually, *Orlando Furioso* was printed in both 4^o & 8^o formats using the same typesetting.

The thumbnail image above shows how the text fitted the smaller format. Page height, 242 mm.

Left: The title-page of Volume II of the 4^o *Orlando Furioso*, 1773. Page height, 302 mm. Maggs Bros.

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SOME FURTHER COMPARISONS.

Differences and similarities between Baskerville and other printers of his time – the Foulises, Bulmer, Bodoni and the Didots, the most noteworthy printers in Scotland, England, Italy and France – serve to some extent to show Baskerville's particular qualities and influence. Caslon, out of whose shadow Baskerville stepped, was a type-founder, not a printer.

The large and magnificent edition was a lure to all, but least of all to Baskerville whose Bible is the only large scale example of his work other than *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, 1774, necessitated by its large plates. However, the *Holy Bible*, being destined for the lectern, is of an unexceptional size. Baskerville's desire to print on this scale was a challenge keenly sought, as though to prove himself and hope to make his mark as a printer. It must have given him a lot of confidence, if small reimbursement, to have completed it. It was not magnificence for its own sake, however, as might be thought the case with the huge volumes printed by others, who created or filled a need in the later eighteenth century for the large printed work,

[Illustration] Right: The Foulis Press published large-scale works but also many small & inexpensive pocket-size editions, mainly in narrow format. Page height, 122 mm. Wellcome Library, London.

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statements of power and glory as Louis XIII's *Médailles* of 1702 had been. While not commonplace, publishing events across Europe involving large, impressive editions became fashionable and more frequent. These volumes make claims to fame but are not for the common reader; they were always expensive and exclusive. But Baskerville, the Didots and the Foulises published many other editions, sized to fit the pockets of the growing readership. The skills involved in the larger works scaled down nicely in many particulars, retaining the styles of their individual printers.

The following pages show Baskerville's work set beside that of these other printers of his time or soon afterwards. All but the Foulises used types that went far beyond Baskerville with increasingly modern features, "very striking books, though built on wrong lines", as Alfred Pollard would write in 1912, or the triumph of style over readability. In his late twenties, Bodoni produced his first book following his move to Parma. Baskerville's Virgil of ten years earlier had no influence on this design which resides unnoticeably within the poor standards of typography in Italy at the time.

While shocking, the Virgil was to have a great effect upon European book design, including in

[Illustration] Right: Pierre Didot l'ainé signed & numbered the 100 copies of his luxury edition of Virgil's Bucolica, Georgica et Æneis, published in folio in 1791. St Bride Library.

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England, but it took two decades to make its mark. As the French Revolution approached, Bodoni's title pages became sparser, daring to be as uncompromisingly devoid of decoration as any Baskerville conceived; by 1791 they were more so (the Horace example opposite, Brooks 417, is the first classic work from Bodoni's private press). Extreme contrasts of thick & thin, dark & light, make it difficult to read Bodoni's texts at small sizes, notwithstanding the lessening of contrasts in some of his smallest types; probably, they were challenging to read at any size.

All Bodoni's types are quite awkward to read in continuous text because the 'modern' face was so upright and lacking in a calligraphic flow; the eye is constantly challenged by verticality when its desire is to move along – suited to titling and short texts, but onerous if one wishes to settle into reading a story. Even the short lines of a poem are something of an optical challenge to the reader, however impressive, amazing even, may be the image created by the layout of the page and the brilliance of the type. How many of Bodoni's books were actually read, or were expected to be read?

[Illustration] Right: Almost Bodoni's smallest type, from the Manuale Tipografico, 1818.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Bodoni's first printed book at Parma, 1768; Baskerville's first publication, 1757; Baskerville's late octavo volume, 1773; Bodoni's first privately printed classic, showing his mature style, 1781.

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[Illustration] Baskerville's designs are an active presence, a surface alive and mobile, engaging the whole page like arms wide-spread, the paper interacting with the type, not there just to receive a black stamp. He seems at pains to engage with the reader, where the Italian seeks to maintain his reserve, a regal distance.

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[Illustration] Bodoni's lines of type establish their content in a clear hierarchy of importance through the sizes of the letters in a two-dimensional layout. His is an inherently flat page; he does not play with three-dimensional space & though his type is spaciouly laid out he creates a tightly-knit image; command & control are much in evidence.

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[Illustration] Right: Pierre Didot l'ainé signed & numbered the 100 copies of this edition of Virgil's Bucolica, Georgica et Æneis, published in folio in 1791. St. Bride Library.

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[Illustration] Left: Baskerville's edition of Virgil, 1757, shown roughly to scale with Didot's page opposite. Baskerville's typography seems always to be dynamic & engaging, with a sense of poise. The use of capital letters and the weight and size of the heading in Baskerville's opening pages for the series of books that make up the Bucolica, Georgica & Æneis, creates an architectural power & interest similar to the effect produced by an entablature in the classical buildings of Greece and Rome – & of the Georgian period, too. In this example, the main body of text forms the support for the group of lines making up the titling; it is another instance of Baskerville giving rise to a sense of three-dimensional space offered by the sheet of paper. In a related way, his running headers on each text page have a cornice-like weight & size that gives structure to the page layout – to some critics, intrusive & a fault in his design.

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[Illustration] Left & opposite: The title-page of the Virgil printed at Kehl in 1784, & the beginning of Book II of the Georgics. As well as being used by Beaumarchais for the main project of printing Voltaire's œuvre, he permitted a few other books to be printed with Baskerville types, including this Virgil, so it is possible to make a direct comparison with another printer's work. Apart from the typographic differences, there is a noticeable contrast in papers, the French book being rough-surfaced by comparison with Baskerville's calendered pages. The type is not quite as finely printed as in Baskerville's books but it is a very acceptable setting of the Virgil texts, though the moustache-like rule on the title-page looks out of place. Page height, 212 mm.

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[Illustration] Right: The engraved lettering generally found as part of illustrations to eighteenth century books followed the styles developed by the writing masters. In the Human Gravid Uterus, roundhand was the style of the

times, fitting Baskerville's own views on appropriate letterforms. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Page 113-119

BASKERVILLE'S LARGE-SCALE EDITIONS.

For Baskerville, *The Holy Bible* was a magnum opus and it was well-received though it sold fewer copies than required to cover the great cost of its printing. Another, slightly smaller edition followed in 1769–72. It was published in parts but was not as good typographically.

Baskerville's last work, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, is primarily a collection of medical illustrations, the text printed in Latin and English.

[Illustration] Right: Bodoni's massive two-volume Télémaque, 1812, approaching half a metre in height & weighing 5kg a volume, was printed for the eleven-year-old Achille Napoléon, "fils de Joachim Napoléon, roi des deux Siciles". Joachim-Napoléon Murat had been made King of Naples in 1808 by his brother-in-law, Napoléon Bonaparte; he was executed by his subjects in 1815. Achille was exiled to Vienna. Later, he emigrated to America & following an unsuccessful return to France after the 1830 revolution, he re-crossed the Atlantic & died in the USA in 1847.

Following pages:

The title-page of The Holy Bible, 1763, is the most complex of Baskerville's arrangements of type forms & is a virtuoso performance including 'all the styles' that he had advertised himself as being capable of executing when starting business as a letter-cutter in stone. Sotherans.

The title-page of The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus, 1774, by William Hunter, & a sample of the setting of the text accompanying the plates. This last, in differentiating the columns of English from Latin text, shows a rare use by Baskerville of Roman-style numerals set in italics. Images courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

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[Illustration] Right: Attached to a leaf of the Bible illustrated on the previous pages is a short manuscript biography of John Baskerville. It is an extract from Biographia Britannica, 1778, by Andrew Kippis. Sotherans.

Page 121

BASKERVILLE'S PAPER.

John Baskerville has been credited with being a paper-maker but there is no evidence that he made the paper for the books he printed or that he made wove paper, the smoother 'Velin' paper that he used as part of the Virgil but on few other occasions.

Wove paper took many years to develop into a successful printing paper and although it is likely that Baskerville was involved for some time with Whatman in the development of a wove paper, a usable form of it did not come soon enough in any quantity and for most of his printing Baskerville relied on laid paper which he could smooth and polish between hot copper sheets as it left the press.

Some of his publications indicate sources via their watermarks, though these are few and far between, but it is clear from the variety of his printing papers that he looked to several suppliers. The quarto Terence is an example of watermarked paper, as is the duodecimo Horace to some extent, several papers being used in that volume, but it must be assumed that if Baskerville was looking for the best he had to be satisfied periodically with a quality of printing paper below the finest.

[Illustration] Right: Book paper, like house paint, can be glaringly white. Baskerville was criticised for hurting the eyes of his readers but we now think of his papers' soft cream surfaces as delicately toned & eminently suitable.

Page 122

Many eighteenth century books, including such prestigious works as the *Médailles sur les Principaux Evénements du Règne de Louis le Grand*, suffer from foxing, staining, and numerous discolourations of still uncertain provenance – a wide range of fungi, variations in relative humidity, contaminants at the time of making the paper and subsequently, among other possibilities.

In Baskerville's case, there is reason for thinking heat from calendering his sheets straight from the press served to create browning and maybe to vaporise contaminants out of the ink and into the next sheet stacked above or below, or offset ink from the copper rollers; an example is a quarto Horace at the British Library. Safe to say that at the time of printing all these contaminants were invisible and the printer took the paper and his processes on trust. I presume Bodoni's paper was made in Italy at a later date for Bodoni was only seventeen years old when Baskerville published his Virgil, and I doubt whether Baskerville sourced paper from further away than Holland. The papers don't compare, for Bodini's books rarely have staining damage and his paper has remained exceptionally bright and clean.

[Illustration] Right: Bodoni's papers generally remain bright and free of contamination, as in this volume of *Theophrastus*, 1786. Wellcome Library, London.

Page 123

[Illustration] Some purple staining occurs in several of the pages of many copies of the *Juvenal*, as detailed in Philip Gaskell's *Bibliography*.

Page 124/125

Baskerville's regular small book size, the duodecimo, is here compared with a quarto (the *Horace* of 1762 with the *Catullus* of 1772). Whereas the *Horace* was printed on several different papers that have become dreadfully stained or foxed throughout in some copies, the page illustrated being one of the mere handful relatively un-marked in this copy, time has demonstrated that the *Catullus* quarto appears to have been printed on some of the best paper Baskerville ever used.

The three papers Baskerville used in his small *Horace* volume are described by Philip Gaskell:

- (a) Poor quality, chain 12.5 mm., no watermark, badly foxed.
- (b) Good quality, chain 12.5mm., no watermark, unfoxed except by offset from (a).
- (c) Poor quality, chain 24mm., Post-horn watermark similar to Heawood 2741 (with the mouth of the horn to the right), slightly foxed.

*

[Illustration] Right & opposite: Baskerville's 12^o *Horace*, 1762, and the 4^o *Catullus*, *Tibullus* & *Propertius*, 1772.

Page 126

[Illustration] Baskerville printed his duodecimo edition of *Horace's* works in 1762, Didot his Stereotype edition in 1800, both comparable in their pocket-size formats with the *Everyman's Library* of the early twentieth century or those of Aldus Manutius at the beginning of the sixteenth.

The title-pages of these editions of *Horace* seem to belong to two different eras; in the Baskerville, the now-termed 'transitional' typeface clearly shows how much of an old style humanist still resides in his design; letterforms are very much hand-drawn, while the Didot, only forty years later, is fully a modern face, emulating or foreshadowing the mechanical aspects that came to dominate nineteenth century industrial processes. Generally speaking, Baskerville was not given to the use of engravings – a frontispiece is missing from this copy – Didot was sparing with them, too; his use of engravings in this edition shows a traditional kind of treatment.

Page 127

[Illustration] The Didot work is a very fine typographic design, beautifully printed on good paper with helpful spacing between verses but the body text is in a small size of type that is hard on the reader's eyes despite the clarity of the printing. Didot's type has taken the modern style towards its final form; it is very elegant & maintains a cool sense of distance from the reader.

Page heights: Didot, 162 mm. Baskerville, 158 mm.

Page 128

[Illustration] There is an advantage to Didot's small size of type as the setting of the lines of verse avoids turning words at the ends of long lines. Baskerville's setting of Ode XI, famous for 'carpe diem', is unfortunate; not only is the short verse split in half over two pages but the last two lines of the poem do not fit within the measure. He chose not to go down a size from Bourgeois to Brevier, presumably for the sake of readability. However, such turning over of the line, seen also in the first line of the poem, occurs on few occasions, on just eight of the 116 pages of the Odes.

Page 129

[Illustration] The severe paper damage in Baskerville's 12^o Horace, here contrasted with what has turned out to be the better paper used by Didot.

Page 130/131

[Illustration] Stained paper from imperfections in the paper-making processes & for several other reasons mars many books, even those that were produced regardless of cost, such as the Médailles du Regne de Louis le Grand, printed in 1702. Adjacent pages are often quite free of staining. Page height, 432 mm. Height of text frame, 340 mm. St Bride Library.

Page 132/133

[Illustration] Left & far left: these pages show the two sides of one leaf of the Médailles; the photo of the front is positioned on this page, its reverse on the page opposite.

The verso of page 57 shows, in the ghostly lighter patches, the areas where the paper has been highly compacted by the force of printing the three engravings & the engraved border. These areas are less affected by discolouration that may have come about through the easier interaction of molecules within the relative openness of the fibres of the paper where it remained uncompacted. St Bride Library.

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[Illustration] The Guildhall Library, City of London, holds two copies of An History of the River Thames, printed by William Bulmer in 1794, an edition recognised as one of his finest, & using William Martin's types over which Bulmer held rights to exclusive use at that time. One copy contains a few pages that have become very browned with even heavier staining across large areas (opposite). The pages of the other copy (left), are very clean and bright but, as with most eighteenth century books, some pages are slightly yellowed. Page height, 415 mm.

Page 136

[Illustration] Right: Title-page held against the light, showing the wire marks of the laid paper that Baskerville used for the 4^o Juvenal & Persius of 1761.

Page 137

[Illustration] Left: The same title-page viewed under normal lighting with some staining from the text printed on an unrelated page.

Page height, 286 mm.

Page 138/139

[Illustration] Viewed against the light, the paper reveals the wire structure of the screen and the variations in density of the paper pulp the wires introduced. The Juvenal's half-title &, opposite, a detail of the Catullus title-page.

Page 140/141

[Illustration] Above: A benefit of the ageing of this book is that the positioning of the text block on the sheet is exposed, showing the full width of the inner margins, 44–45 mm. In establishing his proportions, Baskerville was aware that tight bindings of the period, which are common, conceal much of this space. Page size 287 | 228mm. Approximately 12mm was trimmed from each of the other sides by the binder. St Bride Library, formerly Philip Gaskell's copy.

Opposite: The watermark in the paper used for the Terence of 1772. It was positioned in the sheet such that half the watermark sits either side the fold between two pages.

Page 142/143

[Illustration] Above: The paper was dampened at the time of printing to enable it to take up the ink; the stretch marks created by the pressure of the text block remain, as does some of the texture of the laid paper after hot-pressing.

Opposite: The stretching of the paper is clear, as are the impressions left by the lines of wire supporting the mesh when water drained from the pulp in the paper-making process.

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TYPE SHAPES AND SIZES.

Of the Virgil and the *Book of Common Prayer*, Sir Francis Meynell quotes the opinion that the size of text, Great Primer, was “calculated for people who begin to want spectacles but are ashamed to use them at Church”. The Great Primer was used in most of the quarto Latin classics from Virgil to Catullus, in the 1763 *Holy Bible*, the quarto Addison, two editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* and *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus*, among others. The size does make comfortable reading; the finer strokes of the italic make the slightly larger Double Pica italic as easy to read as the Great Primer roman. The layout of the duodecimo editions – *Horace*, Catullus, &c.

– set in Bourgeois roman, five sizes smaller than Great Primer, with slight modifications of shape & setting, make those small volumes, held naturally close to the eyes, quite comfortable to read.

[Illustration] Right: Caslon's types showing English size at the top (Great Primer is one size larger), similar in size to the Baskerville English (used for this caption), down to the tiny Pearl. From the first Caslon Specimen Sheet, 1734, shown in a facsimile printed by George Jones.

Opposite: Baskerville developed his types between Caslon's and the example title-page by Didot, to whom he is unconnected, & vice versa. There is some life in Didot's 'D's & an unexpected stepping-out in the leg of the 'R's, but the contrasts & verticality of his characters & their general severity are way beyond Baskerville's thinking. Only twenty-five years separate Baskerville from each of those type-founders & printers.

Page 146/147

The shapes of the letters, their widths, x-heights and leading, varied by size for the best in legibility and readability, while retaining their essential style. In the italics, there are slight differences in slope, too, between Double Pica, Great Primer and English, seen in my re-drawings:

The shapes of Double Pica size AZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

The shapes of Great Primer size AZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

The shapes of English size AZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

All was done by hand, including the finishing of the cast letters by rubbing smooth the individual sorts, so slight differences in orientation and fit of letters occur, the final outcome depending upon the skill of the printer in compositing and press work; the evidence of the printed page shows that Baskerville himself showed exceptionally close attention to all these processes.

[Illustration] Right: Text set in Great Primer (top), Brevier No. 1 scaled to a similar size (middle), & at its original scale (bottom). There is approximately 10% more space between the lines of the smaller text size. Specimen sheet 1757, St Bride Library.

Baskerville's Double Pica italic caps from the printed Virgil of 1757 (shown in red). He made some adjustments (shown in black), for later publications – these examples taken from the 4^o Catullus of 1772.

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[Illustration] Above: Baskerville's English roman & italic & his Great Primer Greek, cast on the English body, from the Sallust & Florus, 1773. This is a rare page giving a view of Baskerville's Greek in the context of his Latin types. The substantial amount of Greek text demonstrates the great care taken in designing the type to work seamlessly with his italic fount. Text width, 132 mm.

[Illustration] Top two lines: Baskerville's Double Pica italic from the Juvenal, Satire VIII, compared with the digital Double Pica italic. Bottom two lines: Baskerville's Great Primer italic, from the Addison, Vol. I, p. 254, compared with the digital Double Pica italic. Ink spread aside, many characters in the Great Primer italic are wider, weightier & more strongly sloped & the 'j' has a serif. The characters on this page have been scaled roughly to equal height for comparison of their forms. In Baskerville's books, the italic 'w' does not carry the middle loop that occurred in his first specimen of 1764. However, the looped form – 'w' – was taken up by Monotype & some other companies in their cuts of his design but this was avoided in ITC's 'New Baskerville' 'w'.

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[Illustration]

Above: The 'r' traced from the punch.

Right: Impressions of the Double Pica italic lowercase 'r' showing a range of variations in its shape, & the punch from which they derive.

Opposite: Impressions of the Great Primer roman lowercase 'r' showing a range of variations &, bottom right, the 'r' from František Štorm's cut for his Baskerville 120 Pro.

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[Illustration] Above: Examples of lightly-inked Great Primer type scaled up approximately to equal size.

Page 153

[Illustration] Slightly more ink on some letters, the 'c', 'e', & 'r', results in changes in shape that show how skilled the printing process was in the eighteenth century if evenness of weight of type, whether within words or between pages, was to be achieved.

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[Illustration] Baskerville's characteristic open-bowled 'g': the Double Pica italic punch (reversed), & a lightly-inked Great Primer roman 'g'.

Page 155

[Illustration] Left: Photograph of the possibly rusted but certainly unclear Double Pica italic punch 'T' (reversed).

Middle: Photograph of a lightly-inked impression of the Double Pica italic 'T', taken from the Catullus.

Right: A stage in which an outline is being traced in Fontographer to create the digital 'T'.

Unfortunately, there is considerable latitude in forming an outline for a digital font that aims to be true to the Baskerville original.

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[Illustration] Right: Three sizes of type to scale, from top to bottom: English roman & italic; Double Pica italic; & Great Primer italic with some roman.

For actual size, the central image should measure 4 in high.

Page 157-159

[Illustration] Left: In his four-volume Addison, Baskerville used italic for poetry and in part for plain text; Great Primer and English sizes of italics were used. The amount of leading varies.

This page, from Volume I, is set in Great Primer roman & italic. Page height, 278 mm.

Overleaf & following page:

A collage of two passages in Great Primer roman & italic also from the 4^o Addison of 1761. The upper section of the image shows the italic type inserted as emphasis & as a change in language from English to Latin. The italic face sits comfortably, if seeming slightly smaller, & appears quite happy as the occasional word inset within the roman text. The lower section shows an inversion of the roles; the roman face is more emphatic & intrusive where the italic face is the primary font. But would such an opinion have held in the later eighteenth century?

This is followed by an enlargement of a detail of Edward Young's verse in Baskerville's Addison, showing the differences in weight & size of Great Primer italic & roman types. At the time of its publication, critics commented upon the 'spidery' nature of the italic. The two founts match in height but differ in weight & width.

Page 160

[Illustration] The inscription in capital letters that had a strong influence on Renaissance typeforms, Trajan's column, Rome, AD 113. Photograph of a plaster cast of a French copy of the lettering made in metal for Napoleon III, at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. There are some problems with the plaster version not being a truly accurate representation of the letters carved on the column, as detailed by Edward Catich in The Trajan Inscription in Rome.

Page 161-163

[Illustration] Above: Trajan's italic 'G', a digitally sloped roman from the plaster cast of his column, AD 113. It may be compared with the italic 'G' from the roman du roi on pages 188 & 189.

Following pages: Two examples of ink spread where a minimal amount of ink has been used: the dark edges following the inside and outside curves of the 'G' show against the paler grey lines created by the type metal where the pressure of paper against the type's arris has thinned the film of ink.

In reality, these letters are only 6 mm high & look very sharp. A question that arises is the extent to which Baskerville was accommodating his design to the printing technology of his day, which the 'T' on page 155 appears to push to its limits. Were the same types to be printed with modern letterpress methods, using rollers rather than dabbing the ink onto the type, there would be cleaner impressions generally.

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[Illustration] Developing the drawn letter ‘G’ superimposed on Baskerville’s Double Pica punch.

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[Illustration] Capital ‘G’ drawn from the Baskerville Double Pica punch. Capital ‘G’ in ITC New Baskerville.

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[Illustration] Clockwise from top left: Baskerville’s Double Pica punch; Bodoni; Caslon; Didot. The last three in commercial digital fonts. Opposite: The punch for the Double Pica italic capital ‘K’.

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REVIVALS AND ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY.

On the website, ilovetypography.com, William Berkson considers, “the goal of authenticity is misguided. What is most a desirable today is not ‘authentic’ but ‘classic.’ And in order for a classic to look classic today it needs to be changed.”

As with Caslon, the type, Baskerville cannot be a thought of as one font; Baskerville’s variations on his letters across their size range & as printed, mean choices are made when his typeface is re-created, as in any form of translation. The resulting variety of ‘Baskervilles’ is both inevitable and to be welcomed. Clearly, long ‘s’ forms or blobs of ink that had spread from the type on eighteenth century pages should not be transferred to a font revival other than as a novelty. Revivals also mean, in practice, tinkering with shapes, especially those that now do not fit well with online reading or with contemporary ideas of homogeneity and consistency. In an effort to improve upon the original, to make for easy acceptance by the modern designer and modern production processes, there are philosophical, aesthetic

[Illustration] Right, top to bottom: Baskerville’s Double Pica, Great primer & English italic ‘a’ from his punches; Bauer’s Bodoni; Adobe’s Caslon. Opposite, top to bottom: Baskerville’s italic ‘a’ by Adobe, Storm, Berthold, ITC & Monotype. Examples on both pages are set in 150 pt.

Page 171

and practical problems; some are objective, some personal taste and there will always be many views within this range on what is right or wrong.

I do not know what ‘classic’ means. A horrible feeling rises in me of type themed on Baskerville, but compromised in so many ways to fit

our age's ideas that the spirit is lost in anodyne products. I prefer a notion of authenticity, but see it offering a multiplicity of fonts genuinely related to their model.

As Berkson says, Caslon was a reviver, too, & of Baskerville, "suffice to say that he always strove to improve upon existing methods and materials, whether that be in his recipes for new inks, or his finer quality glossy papers", and he quotes Francis Meynell via Simon Loxley's *Type, the Secret History of Letters*, that Baskerville was "not an inventor but a perfecter". This is obscure, for Meynell seems to have several meanings for 'invention' in his book; is there a meaningful divide here? Surely Baskerville was both improver and inventor, for in type design and printing technology the two are so closely linked. Baskerville had the vision, the courage and the ability to take a position on how to make types and books that were 'correct', strikingly fine, up-to-date and very desirable; his was a creative spirit and a challenge to revive.

Page 172

CATULLUS: poems IV and I, set to show italic types.

This boat you see, friends, will tell you
that she was the fastest of craft,
not to be challenged for speed
by any vessel afloat, whether
driven by sail or the labour of oars.

Monotype Baskerville.

The threatening Adriatic coast won't deny it,
nor the isles of the Cyclades,
nor noble Rhodes, nor fearful Bosphorus,
nor the grim bay of the Black Sea
where, before becoming a boat, she was

Storm Baskerville Pro 120.

leafy wood: for on the heights of Cytorus
she often hissed to the whispering leaves.
The boat says these things were well known to you,
and are, Amastris and box-wood clad Cytorus:
she says from the very beginning she stood

ITC New Baskerville.

on your slope, that she dipped her oars
in your water, and carried her owner from there
over so many headstrong breakers,
whether the wind cried from starboard
or larboard, or whether Jupiter struck at the sheets

Berthold Baskerville Book.

[Illustration] Right: František Štorm's alternative lowercase 'w' available in OpenType-aware programmes in stylistic set 001.

Page 173

on one side and the other, together :
and no prayers to the gods of the shore were offered for her,
when she came from a foreign sea
here, as far as this limpid lake.
But that's past: now hidden away here

Bitstream Baskerville No.2.

she ages quietly and offers herself to you,
Castor and his brother, heavenly Twins.

My Baskerville Great Primer.

This poem, translated by A. S. Kline, 2001, is dedicated to Catullus's pinnace.

AD CORNELIUM NEPOTEM
Quoi dono lepidum novum libellum,
Arida modo pumice expolitum?
Corneli, tibi. Namque tu solebas
Meas esse aliquid putare nugas
Jam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum
Omne ævum tribus explicare chartis,
Doctis, Jupiter! et laboriosis.
Quare habe tibi quicquid hoc libelli est
Qualecunque: quod, o patrona Virgo,
Plus uno maneat perenne seculo.

My Baskerville Great Primer.

For this introductory poem in Catullus's Carmina, weight has been added to the font roughly to match the weight of Baskerville's italic letters as printed. Baskerville's spelling & punctuation have been used.

[Illustration] Right: Detail of Baskerville's Great Primer italic from the Addison, Volume I, page 50.

The text of the letter from John Baskerville to the King's Printer, Philip Denys Pierres, in Paris. Transcribed from the frontispiece:

Birmingham 2d Dec.r 1773.

Sir,

Your Favor of 2.d June came duly, which I reply'd in a Week after, but this day I was surpriz'd at its being return'd, charg'd 2/3. & on the back was written, that the Person directed to could not be found in St. James's Street Paris. My Letter was to the following Purport. You are pleas'd to make me a Compliment in supposing I have a superior Knowledge in the Art of Printing, it is indeed a Compliment; for if I have excel'd, it is in the Execution; my Presses &c are exactly on the same Construction of other Peoples, but perhaps more accurate than any ever formed since the Invention of the Art of Printing; to explain myself, I have been able to produce three more perfect Plans than have before appeared in a Letter Press, (to wit) the Stone, the Platten, (mine are all of Brass an Inch thick) the two first may be produced by any Man who has some Ingenuity and much Attention; But for the third, all Printers must depend on the Letter-founder. All my presses were made at Home under my own Inspection; for the truth of the whole Work I refer you to the enclos'd Specimen, produced at one pull of the Bar, the larger Characters fully inked, the smaller not over inked: I use but one double of the finest Flannel, others two or three double of thick Swanskin.

You are pleas'd to ask for a Description, Drawing, &c of my Presses; I have answer'd that above. I referred you, in, my last, to Palmer's History of Printing in 4^o.: but since my writing a much more valuable Book has fallen into my Hands (to wit) The History & Art of Printing in 8vo. by P. Luckombe, printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church Yard, London, in which you have a Print of every Part of the Press.

As to Yr last Request of giving you two Lines of each Size of my Characters to insert in your intended Work, I reply'd that I had but one Objection to it, and that was, that it was not in your power to do them Justice when us'd among

other Types, but lest you should think this too assuming, I enclos'd to you, a Specimen, and have in this sent another. I am, Sir, with due Respect,

Your most obedient Servt. John Baskerville

over

As I am come to a Resolution to sell Types occasionally, if you will give me the Length of your Line, & the Matter you intend setting up, I will send to yr. Order to any Person in London, who will receive and pay for them, the two Lines of each Size in my Specimen, which you desire & a Fount of any Size in my Specimen.

to Mr Pierres an eminent Printer at Paris To the Care of Mr Molini a Printer there

[Illustration] Right & previous page: Four pages, the design rather Frenchified in its decoration, from Luckombe's book mentioned in Baskerville's letter. These extracts show the primacy of Caslon's types in Luckombe's eyes (earlier pages of the book show a full set of Caslon's types), & the practice common among printers regarding the structure of the printing press. Comparing the text of the letter with the book, Baskerville's approach in setting up a press was indeed different. Images: Google Books.

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BASKERVILLE'S ORNAMENTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

Baskerville's ornaments are both restrained and restricted in their use. Some books such as the Virgil of 1757 and the Juvenal of 1762 have no ornaments at all and rely solely on carefully calculated lines of type. Other volumes, the Terence and the Catullus for example, decorate the title-page with a short chain, reminiscent of a sixteenth or seventeenth century necklace, rather than using a simple rule that might be the expected device for separating title and author from the publisher's details. But Baskerville liked trimmings to his clothing and perhaps this preference found expression typographically in the 'lozenge and star' ornament, as Philip Gaskell terms it, the indication of shadow giving form to the oval jewel. Baskerville made fuller use of this chain as a border around each page and as a separator between the text columns in some impressions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1760–62, and he used it very extensively as a separator in the *Addison*. Few of his other ornaments were used; Baskerville had never used many of the ornaments printed in the *Specimen* sheet issued after his death, in 1777.

[Illustration] Right: Detail from Vol. I of the 4^o Addison, 1761.

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[Illustration] Top: Baskerville's most used 'lozenge & star' ornament, similar to some 16th & 17th century styles of necklace. Bottom: The full range of ornaments collaged from the Specimen of 1777.

Overleaf: Title-pages of the Terence, the Addison & the Horace.

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[Illustration] Above: Illustrations form a significant part of Baskerville's edition of Orlando Furioso, occurring at the beginning of each canto. Some have criticised their style as out-of-date when placed in the company of the later eighteenth century's restrained typography, but the Georgian period maintained such a fascinating mixture of rococo & classicising styles that we should be able to view them comfortably in association with one another, given our own turmoil & turnover in design. Page height, 302 mm. Maggs Bros.

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[Illustration] Above, left: The illustration from Robert Dodsley's Select Fables of Esop is one of several delightfully playful rococo designs & not to be expected of the restrained Baskerville – the engravings were commissioned by Dodsley, as was Baskerville.

Right: The title-page of the Esop. Page height, 174mm. Sotherans.

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In many cases there was no choice but to include illustrations because the author or publisher wanted them. In his own editions, Baskerville tended to eschew images but not entirely as his quarto Horace shows, though perhaps even that was a mistake and a distraction given the small merit of most of its images; not all copies had the plates inserted.

For the *Book of Common Prayer*, subscribers had a choice between the decorative 'lozenge and star' ornament framing and separating the columns of text, or no decoration at all.

[Illustration] Above: The Book of Common Prayer in the version with lozenge & star ornament framing & dividing columns of text. Maggs Bros.

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GEORGIAN BRITAIN AND THE FRENCH LEGACY OF LOUIS XIII.

French domination of Europe in the seventeenth century gave way to a period in which Great Britain expanded and prospered through wars, naval power, manufacturing and trade with the rest of the world. The Seven Years' War gave Britain an empire 'on which the sun never sets' and in 1762 Baskerville printed, in English and in French, Richard Gardiner's account of an hostility, the *Expedition to*

the West Indies. Under the four Georges, Great Britain emerged with a new self-awareness and sense of style that engaged the minds of all with the money to promote themselves, while France under Louis XV declined. Public buildings, private houses, gardens, fashions, furniture, books, chess pieces – all kinds of objects came within the orbit of the expanding classes in Britain who would be held men and women of taste.

Louis XIII had been interested to create a royal type for use by the King's printers. The *romain du roi*, created in the last years of the seventeenth century, was in truth a new style of typeface that set a course through the next century and beyond.

[Illustration] Right: Engravings of medals showing Louis XIII at different ages, from the Médailles de Louis le Grand of 1702. St Bride Library.

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Louis Quatorze, le Roi-Soleil, self-aggrandising, absolutist monarch, lived from 1638 to 1715. By the time of his death Baskerville was nine years old and George I had been crowned a constitutional monarch just nine months earlier. Under the Hanoverian monarchs, Great Britain produced many of its highest achievements in its history of design.

The *romain du roi* that graced the successes of Louis XIII in this book of medals, came out of committee decisions deliberating over graph paper designs. It was a coldly constructed, formal design rescued in great part by its discerning punchcutter, Philippe Grandjean. It led directly to the extremes of Bodoni and the Didots and those enchanted at the coming of a machine age and metric mensuration that divested us of the human proportions inbuilt in the duodecimal system, the body-related foundation that echoes throughout the humanist approach that Baskerville followed – howsoever much his modernising was subverted by others. In 1946, it was Tschichold's judgement that, "Bodoni was the forerunner of the New Typography insofar as he undertook to purge roman type of all

[Illustration] Right: The italic 'G' of the romain du roi printed in the Médailles of 1702. The typeface was commissioned by Louis XIII for exclusive use by the Imprimerie Royale. The 'G' as printed shows the benefit Grandjean's punches brought to the shape of the letter from its design stage, shown opposite.

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traces of the original written form and...to reconstruct it from the simplest possible geometrical elements.” Moreover, for some, the *romain du roi* stands as the first ‘digital’ type inasmuch as it uses a grid not far removed from the structure of a digital bitmap for its design.

For his part, Tschichold came to forsake the New Typography and saw Baskerville’s typeface as one of the few classics that could be used with confidence in typography in the late twentieth century. Amid that period of rapid change in the eighteenth century, Baskerville’s independence of mind, subtlety and resolution precisely to achieve his intentions, persist as a source of constant surprise, admiration and encouragement.

[Illustration] Right: The geometry & grid underlying the design of the italic ‘G’ for the romain du roi, a clear demonstration of a non-calligraphic, sloped roman.

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[Illustration] Two typeface-publishing firsts, showing the relative sizes of the two books & the different kinds of authority they signal. The title-page of Baskerville’s Virgil of 1757, the first book to use his new typeface, is designed with a simple, judicious boldness that creates space & a sense of scale. It is contrasted with all the pomp and regal grandeur of the title-page of the Médailles of 1702, opposite, the first book published using the romain du roi created for Louis XIII, Ludovicus Magnus Rex Christianissimus, as the medals illustrated in the book record.

One must assume that Baskerville knew of this ground-breaking French typeface, if not directly, then from engravings published in manuals created by British writing masters early in the eighteenth century.

Page heights: Médailles, 432 mm. St. Bride Library. Virgil, 296 mm.

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BASKERVILLE’S PAGE PROPORTIONS, LAYOUT AND THE MODERN BOOK.

“Harmony between page size and type area is achieved when both have the same proportions”, wrote Jan Tschichold in his 1953 *Consistent Correlation Between Book Page and Type Area*. He set out three distinct elements of a canon: the “clearest, intentional and definite” page proportions that he found in manuscript and early printed books; a simple method for creating the text area in proportion to the page, of whatever size; a way of positioning the text area on the page such that the margins, too, were exactly proportioned. It is an undoubtedly beautiful, time-honoured scheme, a geometry that lasted well into the eighteenth century.

That Baskerville had a rule of thumb understanding of this canon is likely but he rejected it for his quartos, consciously or instinctively, with the result that his work does not look dated; it feels

[Illustration] Right: The diagram originates with Villard de Honnecourt, the thirteenth century architect. It is a simple method of dividing the rectangle into fractions & from those fractions constructing a variety of rectangles in proportion to the full sheet, here 2:3. The top of the smaller red rectangle in this drawing is positioned one sixth of the way down the sheet.

Opposite: The organisation of text through schemes of layout is as old as writing, it would seem. This cuneiform tablet is reminiscent of a twentieth century grid for structuring columns of information – here, synonyms for difficult words. The tablet is from Ashurbanipal's royal library at Nineveh, 7th century BC. British Museum.

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right and it introduces the modern book.

There are, nonetheless, significant elements of Tschichold's canon seemingly built into Baskerville's layouts: a sheet of the Writing Royal paper that Baskerville used, creates a double-page spread where the height and width is in the 2 : 3 proportion, while the dimensions of the text areas in the quarto Catullus, for example, are in 2 : 3 proportion also. Further, the width of the fore-edge margin equals the combined inner margins; the bottom margin is unambiguously at least twice as large as that at the top, often larger. This was Baskerville's solution for an ordered setting of verse in wide, quarto formats; duodecimo formats needed different solutions, shown in later diagrams. The octavo Milton is close to the Golden Section.

In the books Tschichold so admired, he found the canon was followed to within half a millimetre. Baskerville's seems to be a more loosely-followed scheme of proportion but certainty is difficult as his layouts were disrupted by the bookbinders' variable binding styles and trimming of pages.

[Illustration] Right, top: Quarto page in proportion 3:4; the double spread, 2:3; the text areas, in grey, follow Tschichold's canon.

Bottom: Baskerville's 4^o Terence. The binding makes the inner margins appear narrower, the two together similar to the outer margin. While the proportions in the upper example result from a simple geometric plan, the customary tight margins at the centre of the book always seem to withdraw the reading matter too far into the stitching of the book. Baskerville's solutions avoid that discomfort & his taller, narrower text area suits, in particular, the short lines of Latin verse.

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[Illustration] Top: A page in proportion 3:4, common to many manuscripts and incunabula studied by Tschichold, where text area & page area are in the same proportion, text height equals page width & the proportions of margins are 2:3:4:6.

Bottom: After J.A.van de Graaf, a construction with ruler & pen of the canon for sizing & placing text areas on a 4^o page. The grey rectangles are text areas from Baskerville's 4^o Terence: left, text without header & right, text with header.

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[Illustration] The quarto edition of the poetry of Catullus, Tibullus & Propertius of 1772 (this copy bound untrimmed & sewn in a manner that allows the book to open almost flat), was one of Baskerville's final classic texts in 4^o format, produced in the same year as the Lucretius & the Terence, hard on the heels of the Horace of 1770. These volumes, despite the éclat greeting the Virgil of 1757, are also a wonderful typographic legacy; they deserve reading more than an analysis of their design. Nonetheless, their design is what makes them so readable, so comforting, so sure in their values & so respectful of the artistic achievements of their authors; these books, "of Consequence, of intrinsic merit, or established Reputation", the criteria for publishing that Baskerville had set out in his preface to Milton over ten years earlier, show his steadfastness in driving to achieve his goals. Speed reading is not appropriate here: a settled enjoyment of one's reading at leisure seems to be Baskerville's aim and achievement.

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[Illustration] Investigating a consistent correlation between book page and type area, Jan Tschichold discovered a number of successful book proportions, seen above; set alongside – the last three rectangles in the bottom row – are Baskerville's 4^o page, & the text area proportions of his Terence & his Addison. An important aspect of the Tschichold system of proportions is that the text area has the same proportions as the page in the books he identified, a design element upon which Baskerville made variations.

Top row: 1:1.618 (Golden Section), 1:1.414 ($\sqrt{2}$), 1:1.732 ($\sqrt{3}$), 1:1.538 (derived from the pentagon).

Second row: 1:2, 2:3, 5:8, 3:4.

Third row: 3:5, 1:1, 21:34 (Golden Section), 1:2.236 ($\sqrt{5}$).

Bottom row: 5:9, 1:1.22 (untrimmed Baskerville page), 1:1.59 & 1:1.39 (Baskerville text areas, including headers).

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[Illustration] From a basic geometry showing the diagonals of the page and the two-page spread, Tschichold demonstrated three different text areas, each of which maintained the proportions of the page but with different margins.

Above: a medium-sized text area.

Opposite: the smallest text area.

Overleaf: the largest text area to come out of this construction method.

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[Illustration] Baskerville's untrimmed 4^o Catullus, Tibullus & Propertius, 1772, shown opened almost flat, with 27 lines of verse to the page. The red rectangle on the left indicates the text area that Baskerville's typesetting adhered to throughout the book, which is similarly proportioned to others of his quarto classics series printed from 1757–73.

The red rectangle, when rotated and scaled up in the same proportions, fits the height and width of the paper forming the double spread. The black rectangle on the right hand page shows the text area a Tschichold/ van der Graaf construction would have produced. It would not have suited verse set in this size of type on a quarto page.

The proportions of the text area of the Virgil, 1757, are similar to the Catullus, while being larger with 30 lines of verse & the margins correspondingly smaller. The Juvenal has more inter-line spacing between its 22 lines of verse, and is slightly wider in proportion, working well with the extra leading.

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[Illustration] Left: A page from the 12^o Horace, with Tschichold's canon overlaid. Once bound, the visible page proportions are the narrow double square, 1:2. This copy is heavily foxed and stained, as is one of the British Library's three copies; its other two are almost completely clean.

Right: The text block, when scaled down to fit the rectangle resulting from Tschichold's canon, is remarkably similar in proportions though significantly smaller in type size. It is hard to believe this is a coincidence. Baskerville has maintained the canon's ratio of text area to page dimensions. The proportions of the text area allow for the header & 32 lines of body text.

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John Baskerville's initiative to improve the processes of printing and to create the finest books available did not extend, as does the scope of today's publisher, as far as binding all his books for sale. Generally, he sold his printed work 'in sheets', straight from the printing press, and the purchaser made his own arrangements for the binding of the sheets into books, with whatever instructions were preferred by the collector.

Baskerville's books are known for their wide margins which are a selling point for those now offered online. Wide margins were an expensive, luxury feature in the time of hand-made paper. If well-made from clean linen rag, printing paper was hard to come by and formed a high proportion of the cost of printing. Wide margins of themselves are no guarantee of balance or beauty, though Baskerville ensured it was the case for his books.

However, as Baskerville sold his books in sheets, the bookbinder or his client had the final say in how much paper would remain; too often, and especially in the nineteenth century, binding or re-binding

trimmed off more paper than Baskerville judged appropriate for the relationship of page area to text block, the final result in those cases extinguishing that hope of balance and harmony.

[Illustration] Right: The title-page of Volume II of Fournier's Manuel Typographique, 1766. Its decorative design was copied in detail by Bodoni for his Fregi & Majuscoli collection of letterforms, 1771. Wellcome Library, London.

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Bodoni, similarly, had particular concern for the text-to-page relationship and he had control over the binding. His margins were generally larger than Baskerville's, framing the text area in a way similar to a mounted drawing. This, to me, is a difference in approach; on the one hand, Baskerville makes his dark letterforms interact with the colour of the whole area of paper, while Bodoni's type block seems to have a discrete existence, presented formidably enough by the paper surrounding it. In this sense, Bodoni chose to retain the framing devices he had copied from Fournier early in his career. This framing, if only formed with eye-catching, plain paper mounts, was used to effect in the spectacular presentation of his texts.

Given that margins are so important – their investigation by Tschischold is his confirmation – it is all the more remarkable that the two versions of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* that Baskerville printed for the Molini brothers in 1774 in two formats, octavo and quarto, using the self-same type-setting, both succeed as they do: the margins of the octavo are not mean and suit the format, while in the quarto they are larger than in any other of Baskerville's books. At a time when libraries were formed in this

[Illustration] Right: A double-spread from the 4^o Orlando Furioso. Maggs Bros.

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way, with bindings independent of the printer, it is understandable that differences abound in surviving volumes from Baskerville's press; as a result, the copies we see today will have rather different formats for the same edition, some of the variations – and not just in their covers – being aesthetic, concerning the sizes of the margins, others material, affecting the preservation of the paper in good condition.

Occasionally, one comes across a Baskerville quarto that was bound untrimmed and uncut, the deckle edges of the paper remaining on all

its pages; more often, a few deckle edges remain where the bookbinder trimmed the pages as little as possible (the *Virgil* shown in this book), leaving untrimmed just those edges where the sheet had not been positioned exactly upon the press for printing; the majority seem to have had cut away all such rough edges. Often, the edges were gilded. This choice, when combined with good storage conditions, has protected the paper from oxidation whereas the deckle edges have given the air access to the paper, with a gradual browning in such books of about half a centimetre around the edges of each page.

[Illustration] Right: The headings of the final three books of the Æneid, two of which depart from the standard layout for titling throughout the volume. I presume this was a slip in production but it is a useful indicator of the skill involved in setting the titles & shows how the spatial structure of Baskerville's pages relies upon the correct setting of its elements working in concert with appropriate choices made by the binders.

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As a consequence of trimming, the proportions of the pages and the relationship of the text area to the page area are variable in Baskerville's books, though one hopes there may have been a common standard of some sort among the better bookbinders in how they trimmed. Thus there can be a marked difference in page size between one binding of a book and another from the same edition – or between volumes in the same set ! Trimmed copies of the *Addison* I have measured vary between a page size of 297 | 236 mm and 278 | 222 mm, while Philip Gaskell gives the sheet size as 'at least 23.75 | 19 in.', a page 301 | 241mm. This would mean there may be differences up to at least 19 mm in the outer margin, and as much as 23 mm difference shared between top and bottom margins. Two copies of the *Horace* of 1770 in the British Library vary between 303 | 236 mm and 286 | 225 mm. Copies of the *Juvenal's* pages I have measured range from 283–294 mm high, outer margins from 47–54 mm wide.

Severe cropping turns fine pages into ones that are disappointing, where one bridles at the greatly altered format that upsets the relationship of paper to print.

*[Illustration] Right: Browning to the deckle edges of the paper which have been left untrimmed by the binder (the *Catullus* shown in this book).*

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[Illustration] Three outcomes for the proportions of text area & page area of Baskerville's Addison.

Green: the untrimmed paper.

Pink: trimmed to a page size of 297 | 236mm, as in two British Library copies.

Blue: trimmed to 278 | 222mm, the smallest page size seen.

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[Illustration] Baskerville's 4^o page size, about 297-300 mm | 225-236 mm.

The coloured rectangles show the proportions of text areas of seven books:

Grey–Virgil, Brown–Addison, Magenta–Horace, Red–Catullus, Green–Terence,

Blue–Lucretius, Turquoise–Juvenal. The width of the Juvenal's text area results in

only thirteen lines in 240 pages being too long to fit the measure.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Assessing Baskerville's achievements is a backwards-looking activity, a writing of history from the perspective of the present and as much to do with now as then. Inevitably, an interpretation of a time we would seek to know but cannot know, leads to distortion of the past.

“Altogether, the classifications of historians need to be continually re-checked, and though we speak of Baskerville's design as transitional, it cannot be regarded as going far along the road to ‘modern face’.”

William Webb, *Print in Britain*, October, 1967.

Some of the juxtapositions of photographs in this study will make it clear that Baskerville could have had no such intentions as those of Didot or Bodoni, nor would he have wished to link his thoughts on letterforms to the calculated austerity of their later typefaces. It is unsympathetic to fit Baskerville into a notion of historical progression for the convenience of categorising typefaces because it does not do him justice as a man or as a designer.

Baskerville's instincts and actions place him firmly in the Enlightenment as Kant was to describe it in his essay of 1784, with its strong exhortation

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville (top), & Didot (bottom), in small sizes of type.

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to be daring and act on your own understanding, something Baskerville had intuited long before determining how he would approach type and book design and production. Baskerville did not lack resolution or the courage to use his own understanding without another's guidance, rather he revelled in it. There cannot be a much

better or surprising demonstration of his capacity to think and act for himself than this ‘express condition’ from his *Will and Testament*, 1773:

“That my wife in concert with my executors do cause my body to be buried in a conical building in my own premises, heretofore used as a mill, which I have lately raised higher and painted, and in a vault which I have prepared for it. This doubtless to many may appear a whim, perhaps it is so, but it is a whim for many years resolved upon, as I have a hearty contempt for all superstition, the farce of a consecrated ground, the Irish barbarism of sure and certain hopes etc. I also consider revelation as it is called, exclusive of the scraps of morality casually intermixt with it, to be the most impudent abuse of common sense, which ever was invented to befool mankind.”

Baskerville has been damned too often or given fainter praise than he deserves in comments such as he “was not an inventor but a perfecter”, whereas he was very much a person to do as he perceived the

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville’s freer approach sees his letters well-grounded (top), unlike Didot’s, whose characters are like tin soldiers in a shooting gallery, ready to topple over backwards.

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situation demanded, whether to invent or to perfect. Writing in 1930 about Martin’s types, (William Martin who had worked briefly for Baskerville), H. V. Marrot makes this comparison:

“Baskerville’s delicate femininity remained an essential characteristic of the Figgins and Jackson types, whereas Martin’s evolutions on the line of Bodoni led to its elimination...Martin’s fount is unquestionably one of the best ever evolved, both for intrinsic beauty and for its unequalled combination of marked individuality with general applicability....Martin might be of Baskerville’s school, but in his hands that master’s sweet and readable, but somewhat enervate and pot-bellied, letter became hardly recognisable, so great and so important are the modifications which it underwent. It is transformed into a nervous masculine letter of which the power and vigour are manifest at every stroke of its restrained floridity. Baskerville’s loose and sprawling fount disappears to make room for one taller and narrower in proportion, hence squarer, showing thus far a distinct anticipation of ‘modern face’, and suggesting a close

knowledge, if not an actual imitation, of Bodoni's work between 1780 and 1790."

One wonders at Marrot's expression of Baskerville's "delicate femininity", given Sutton and Bartram's description of his typeface as serene and masculine.

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[Illustration] Right: Compare with Baskerville this example of Bulmer's printing in his *Juvenal*. I struggle to understand the pumped-up praise Marrot bestowed on this form of charmless type favoured by Bulmer & Martin.

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While writing, I have been leafing through volumes containing images of fine books, exceptional examples of typography in their way but when, inevitably, one turns a page to reveal Baskerville's work, commonly the *Virgil* or the *Juvenal and Persius*, the same shock of recognition occurs; it is that sense of an invitation to read, of being welcomed into Baskerville's typographic home by the man himself and put at ease. His own writing was that of a man penning a personal story to someone; this element is inseparable from his book design.

He was a great artist in type, wearing his skill and humanity lightly, with no self-congratulation or self-consciousness in his books, neither self-effacing nor self-aggrandising. His pages have a gigantic plainness. Every element sits assuredly and comfortably within the page with no regard for the kinds of soul-searching that would inhibit a typographer today; so letters slip a little up or down, nearer or further from the next, the line may bend a little, &c.—, but so strong is the whole that none of these would-be imperfections upsets the spellbinding effect of his typographic intention to reach the reader; indeed, he seems so much the more convincing by accepting those bits of grit. His pages are such a good-hearted offering that sweeps all before them

[Illustration] Right: Baskerville's Long Primer type from the *Index to Vol. I of the Addison*, 1761.

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in creating and maintaining our trust in his aesthetic judgement based upon a natural, perfect sense of space and proportion. 'Baskerville', in today's typefaces named after him, is demonstrably a popular choice but there is a great difference between looking at one

of his original volumes and reading texts printed in any of the Baskerville types now available in digital form. Indeed, the whole publishing process is different. Further, metal type produced from Baskerville's own matrices, printed by modern methods, would be sharper, less prone to variation from the spread of ink that was inevitable in the eighteenth century; it would look more regular. Perhaps that in-built randomness of earlier printing processes is an aesthetic and material quality we should value and do miss; the unvarying nature of modern systems which I am beginning to think is regularity for regularity's sake, is arguably a worse defect for the reader than the so-called imperfections of older letterpress processes. The reader's eye could not become bored when reading eighteenth century letterpress – there was so much to take in, even when absorbed subliminally – and what does it matter that recognizability of words, phrases or sentences is a little slower if the

[Illustration] Right & following pages: Example details of marbling on endpapers from late eighteenth or early nineteenth century bindings of Baskerville volumes (shown actual size).

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alternative is the tedium of a false perfection that reads more as if it had been produced by an automaton than by an author because its type and layout are so unvarying. One is exhausted before starting to read and, I think, feels abused at being treated as a prisoner of a book's format that makes engaging with the story such a test of strength.

Baskerville did much to shed the frivolity of the pictorial decoration of his time in favour of the picture of the type alone, but he is not the father of minimalism of the kind one associates with the most unyielding of Swiss typography. Tschichold saw the light: Less is not enough. But the wheel turns again and again; it is interesting to compare Baskerville's aims set out in his Milton preface with William Morris writing about his aims as a printer concerned with clarity and simplicity:

“I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty, while at the same time they should be easy to read and should not dazzle the eye, or trouble the intellect of the reader by eccentricity of form in the letters.”

John Baskerville had the good fortune to live in the Georgian era when learning, fashion and good taste became the goal of many in society; his japanning business developed strongly in the climate

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giving him fortune enough to fund his printing office; change was rapid but the benefits came at a cost as commerce, population and wealth spread wider. What should have been for Baskerville a lasting achievement, was swept aside by powerful forces, a mix of political change, imperial bombast and the effects of industrialisation. His refined, humanist letterforms gave way to modern types that symbolise the ascendancy of a stiff Neo-classicism. A weariness of the superficial and the decorative, which Baskerville sought to overcome with the clearing of the printed page, led to a mechanical sterility by the nineteenth century & the falling-away of his name.

Although as a manufacturer of japanned goods, Baskerville must have had a keen eye for decorative items, when it came to his printed works he had a preference for no decoration at all or for token amounts. In his hands, simplicity and restraint were more than a non-conformist's focus away from frivolous matter; they emerged in a positive new approach to designing and setting type that was inventive, stylish, clear and direct.

Baskerville was a moment rather than a movement and though he was influential there was no 'School of Baskerville' in the way that Old Style

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or Modern types persisted. But after many years, Baskerville re-emerged – and remained a little controversial in the trade. I think he would have enjoyed his continuing status.

As nineteenth century printing increasingly declined in quality, the impetus had grown across Europe for a new cleansing of the stables and in the early twentieth century, thanks very much to Americans passionate about type, Baskerville was re-discovered and has maintained a foremost position in providing book types modified for contemporary means of production.

It seems to be that Baskerville, though he was serving a wealthy clientele, was more democrat than aristocrat in his attitude, just as he was an atheist and free-thinker when it came to his personal life. His subscribers included academics and aristocrats, his books were

presented to the King, but the bourgeois and the lesser clergy bought from him, too. His wanting to print Voltaire, going so far as to correspond on the prospect with that “most hated man of the eighteenth century”, and his printing of Shaftesbury, are enough to separate him from Bodoni’s clientele. Nor did he work for a university, as did the Foulis press, and his association with Cambridge University was simply a necessity

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given the restrictions on the printing of religious texts and his strong personal wish to create an impressive *Holy Bible* and *Book of Common Prayer*.

Baskerville’s seems always to have been a personal service; his was not a large publishing house like that of the Didots, nor was he a printer to the ruling élite in the manner of Bodoni. Baskerville, in conversation with friends such as Shenstone and Dodsley, chose the books he wanted to print; friends and acquaintances chose him; printers in England turned themselves against him.

Where formerly there was heated debate over Baskerville or Bodoni or the Arts and Crafts movement, we now see all these styles working side-by-side with many newer fonts, each being used to what are thought their own particular strengths.

Arguments do, however, reveal enviable passion supported occasionally by reason; the partisan is fascinating to observe demonstrating the underlying power of the not-so-simple printed letter.

[Illustration] Right: In his *Englische Miscellen*, 1801, Johann Christian Hüttner wrote in praise of English bookbinders: a considerable number were Germans who migrated to England for the opportunities given by its growing prosperity; many more in society could afford to send books for binding. Google scans of the title-page & pp. 1 & 5.

Opposite: An extract from the article on English bookbinding (trans. Bettina Reiber), set as examples of two fonts made for this book – Great Primer roman, & the English roman with 18th century long ‘s’ characters.

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APPENDIX A.

[Illustration] A note on Baskerville’s textual accuracy. After reading Sally Power’s analysis of the textual accuracy of Baskerville’s *Paradise Lost*, I took a few lines of his quarto Lucretius and compared them with a range of other editions of the time and with two recent online versions of the Latin text.

In the last lines of De Rerum Natura on the right, the up-to-date text in black is taken from thelatinlibrary.com & perseus.tufts.edu, online editions, 2013. Words underlined relate to the notes, in blue, that indicate differences (excluding punctuation), in nine earlier editions, including Baskerville's quarto Lucretius (B), of 1772.

There are from three to seven editions that support Baskerville's version where differences arise between his edition & the most recent texts.

Of the 14 differences in nineteen lines in Baskerville's edition, 4 are common to 7 editions, 1 to 6 eds., 5 to 5 eds., 2 to 4 eds., & 2 to 3 editions. Only the 1717, Creech edition contains all the variants in Baskerville's volume, though Baskerville did not include all the Creech variants.

Baskerville's edition followed the Creech punctuation fairly closely and if the similarity holds throughout the work, it seems possible that the text of Baskerville's Lucretius is a careful copy of the Creech 1717 edition.

The editions of Lucretius used for the comparison are:

1659 Paris

1717 Creech, London

1744 Paris

1751 Patavia

1769 Creech, Glasgow

1772 Baskerville

1797 Bentley, London

1821 Wakefield, London

1853 Lachmann, Berlin

2013 The Latin Library, online

2013 Tufts University, online

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APPENDIX B.

[Illustration] A selection of punches held at the University Library, Cambridge (reversed, not to scale).

Italic Double Pica size punches.

Italic Great Primer size punches.

Right: English size italic punches, with a modern '5'.

Opposite: English size roman punches (left-hand column), & Great Primer roman punches; the '7' in the lower right hand column is a modern punch. All numerals in these sets are recent punches

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