



Blackletter: Type and National Identity

By P. & Shaw P Bain

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Blackletter type, also known as Fraktur or German Gothic, originated with Gutenberg's moveable type, and was based on the contemporary calligraphy of that time. From the sixteenth century on, it shared the spotlight with roman type in German-speaking countries and was even adopted for the printing of Martin Luther's writings. Yet by the twentieth century it was increasingly spurned by both commercial artists, who embraced roman type for its classical associations, and modernist designers, who championed sanserif type for its universal and democratic qualities. At the close of the Second World War, the identification of blackletter with failed Nazi ideology was inescapable, thus effectively ending the four-hundred-year tradition of blackletter as a distinctive national script.

The essays in *Blackletter* investigate the rise and fall of blackletter type, examining its uses and cultural significance at various points throughout history, including the Reformation, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime, and the post-Berlin Wall period. This title, illustrated with numerous color examples of blackletter typefaces and their implementation, is a necessity for anyone interested in the history of type.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Traces blackletter's intriguing history and relationship to German national identity. Peter Bain and Paul Shaw...definitely have politics as well as design on their agenda....[This book] details how antagonism between speakers of German and Romance languages fueled blackletter's vitality." -- *Michael Z. Wise, The New York Times Arts & Leisure*, March 1, 1998

The essays are excellent and enlightening, covering a lot of information in a few pages. Of particular note is Phillip Th. Bertheau's "The German Language and the Two Faces of Its Script: A Genuine Expression of European Culture?" where he concludes, "The only reason for blackletter not to co-exist with roman today. -- *Communication Arts*

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