



The Guide

A Theatergoer's Resource

Edited by Kathleen Conners for the
Education & Community Programs department
at Portland Center Stage

Futura

A play by Jordan Harrison

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Synopsis

Futura opens with a college lecture in which Professor Lorraine Wexler presents the history and importance of typography in a time when computers have eliminated books, paper, pens and pencils. She fights to convince us that technology has destroyed creativity and reveals that it possesses the power to change everything written down (read: typed up) even history. But the Professor remembers the solid reality and rush of writing something down, of holding a book instead of tapping away at a keyboard.



Professor Wexler leads the audience on a journey to re-discover the beauty of paper versus digital pages and to solve the mystery of her husband's tragic death.

About the Artists

Jordan Harrison

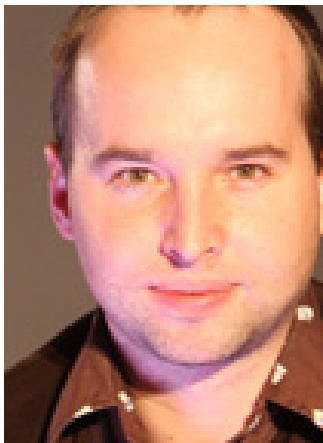
Jordan Harrison was born and raised on an island near Seattle, WA and currently lives in Brooklyn. He received his MFA from Brown University's MFA Playwriting program and has taught playwriting at his alma mater, The Playwrights' Center and SUNY Purchase. Harrison's plays are filled with "multiple storylines, fastidious

font selections, sexual initiation scenes, props with emotional arcs, and an even number of actors" (*New Dramatists*).

His list of authored plays includes *Act a Lady* (which had its world premier performance at Portland Center Stage), *Kid-Simple*, *Finn in the Underworld*, *The Museum Play*, *Doris to Darlene*, *Fit For Feet* and *Amazons and Their Men*. Harrison has also received commissions from various theatres throughout the country, including Actors Theatre of

Louisville/Berkeley Rep, Playwrights Horizons, the Arden Theatre, South Coast Rep, Guthrie Theater/Children's Theatre Company and Perishable Theatre.

Harrison's playwriting endeavors have been encouraged and aided by various funds including a Kesselring Fellowship, two Jerome Fellowships, a McKnight Grant from The Playwrights' Center, a Lucille Lortel Fellowship and a NEA/TCG Playwright-in-Residence Grant.



Paul Renner

Paul Friedrich August Renner was born in Wernigerode, Germany on August 9th, 1878. Growing up into his teenage years he studied Greek and Latin for 9 years, and then moved on to study art at a higher level, finishing his formal education in 1900. Following this Renner became involved with design and became concerned with typeface and book design.

During the summer of 1924, Renner started to work on what would become a typeface called Futura, his most well-known work. Futura was a very important type of the time, especially in Germany, as it was a movement towards the modern roman letter and a departure from the Blackletter. Renner's Futura has also become the inspiration and foundation

for many geometric types to date, and for that alone he deserves mention. During his career he designed two other typefaces, Plak and Tasse, which like Futura are also commercially available.

Furthermore, throughout his time, he wrote a number of books; *Typographie als Kunst (Typography as Art)*, *Die Kunst der Typographie (The Art of Typography)* and *Color Order And Harmony* to name a few. After a long career at the age of 78, Paul Renner died on April 25th, 1956 in Hödingen, Germany.



The World of the Play

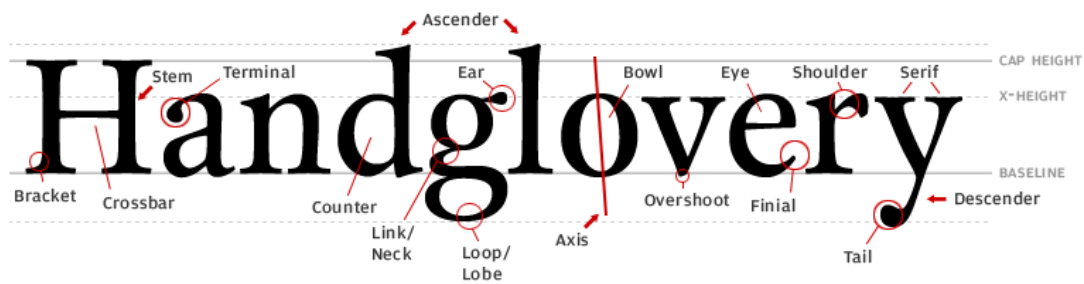


Image from fontshop.com/glossary

TYPOGRAPHY GLOSSARY

Ascender The part of some lower-case letters, such as a “b” or a “d” which rises above the x height.

Axis The real or imaginary straight line on which a letterform rotates.

Baseline The line on which letterforms rest. (Round letters like “e” and “o” normally dent it, pointed letters like “v” and “w” normally pierce it, and letters with foot serifs like “h” and “l” usually rest precisely upon it.)

Blackletter A general name for a wide variety of letterforms that stem from the north of Europe. Blackletters are generally tall, narrow, and pointed. In architecture, comparable to the gothic style.

Body size The height of the face of the type. Originally, this meant the height of the face of the metal block on which each individual letter was cast. In digital type, it is the height of its imaginary equivalent, the rectangle defining the space owned by a given letter (different from the dimension of the letter itself).

Cap Height The distance from baseline to cap line of an alphabet, which is the approximate height of the uppercase letters. It is often less, but sometimes greater, than the height of the ascending lowercase letters.

Character Width The horizontal dimension of a character, including its assigned white space on both sides.

Descender The part of some lower-case letters, such as a “g” or a “q” which drop below the baseline.

Font A set of characters. In the world of metal type, this means a given alphabet, with all its accessory characters, in a given size. In the world of digital type, it is the character set itself or the digital information encoding it.

Hairline The thinnest strokes within a typeface which has strokes of varying weight.

Italic A class of letterforms more cursive than roman but less cursive than script. It was originally designed to replicate handwriting.

Lowercase Noncapital letters such as a, b, c, etc. Derived from the practice of placing these letters in the bottom (lower) case of a pair of typesets.

Meanline An imaginary line that establishes the height of the body of lowercase letters.

Sans serif Letterforms without serifs, generally with a straightforward, geometric appearance.

Serif A stroke added to the beginning or end of one of the main strokes of a letter.

Stem A main stroke that is more or less straight, not part of a bowl. Ex: the letter “o” has no stem, and the letter “l” consists of a stem alone.

Typeface The raised surface carrying the image of a type character cast in metal. Also used to refer to a complete set of characters forming a family in a particular design or style.

Uppercase Capital letters such as A, B, C, etc. Derived from the practice of placing these letters in the top (upper) case of a pair of typesets by printers when laying out text.

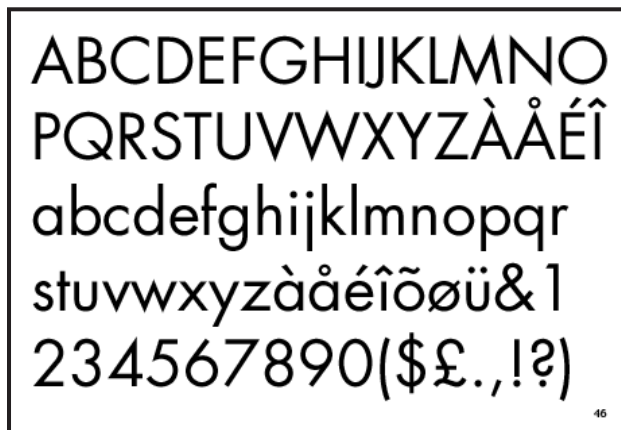
x-height The distance between the baseline and the midline of an alphabet, normally the approximate height of the unextended lowercase letters (a, c, e, m, n...).

The World of the Play

FUTURA (TYPEFACE)

Excerpt from Wikipedia

Futura is a geometric sans-serif typeface designed in 1927 by Paul Renner. It is based on geometric shapes that became representative visual elements of the Bauhaus design style of 1919–1933. Commissioned by the Bauer type foundry, Futura was commercially released in 1927.



The family was originally published in Light, Medium, Bold, and Bold Oblique fonts in 1928. Light Oblique, Medium Oblique, Demibold, and Demibold Oblique fonts were later released in 1930. Book font was released in 1932. Book Oblique font was released in 1939. Extra Bold font was designed by Edwin W. Shaar in 1952. Extra Bold Italic font was designed in 1955 by Edwin W. Shaar and Tommy Thompson.

Although Renner was not associated with the Bauhaus, he shared many of its idioms and believed that a modern typeface should express modern models, rather than be a revival of a previous design. Renner's initial design included several geometrically constructed alternative characters and ranging (old-style) figures, which can be found in the typeface Architype Renner.

Futura has an appearance of efficiency and forwardness. The typeface is derived from simple geometric forms (near-perfect circles, triangles and squares) and is based on strokes of near-even weight, which are low in contrast. This is most visible in the almost perfectly

round stroke of the o, which is nonetheless slightly ovoid. In designing Futura, Renner avoided the decorative, eliminating non-essential elements. The lowercase has tall ascenders, which rise above the cap line. The uppercase characters present proportions similar to those of classical Roman capitals.

AN EXCERPT FROM

ARE WE LOSING OUR WRITTEN LANGUAGE SKILLS?

By Bruno Somerset

As a culture our written language skills have deteriorated to an alarming degree. We have become so addicted to instant communication that the simple act of writing someone a letter seems as ancient as 8-track tapes (if you don't know what those are, ask your mom). Even the speed of text messages and e-mails isn't fast enough for some people, giving rise to a host of abbreviations that I can't even begin to keep up with. And whether we realize it or not, there is a great danger in the loss of our ability to communicate via the written word.

The long-term danger is that we will become the first generation in history to leave no written record of ourselves. If George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Ernest Hemingway had only used e-mail, would we have the same record of them that we possess through their letters and journals today? If Jefferson had sent text messages to Adams, think what would have been lost to history.

I realize the irony of saying this as I write an article that people I have never met will read. But will anyone go to the trouble of printing the article and filing it away for posterity? Not likely. Because it's just one of possibly hundreds of articles, e-mails, and text message they will encounter over the course of the day. It may have good information, and they may even put some of it to use, but no one will keep the article.

From a more short-term perspective, consider what we have lost by abandoning the handwritten letter. A letter

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is a personal thing, even more now because we receive so few of them. They matter because they are personal in an increasingly disconnected world, and because they take time and effort to produce.

In business dealings, the deterioration of written language skill is even more obvious. People have become so reliant upon spell-check that spelling is no longer of any concern. This leads to any number of errors (using “then” instead of “than” or “it’s when “its” is actually correct, to name a few). From news articles to business papers we come across looking like idiots who can’t spell, and grammar is completely ignored as well.

There are some ways to start improving your writing skills, from journaling to writing for websites like Helium and Associated Content. Perhaps the easiest place to start is by writing letters, which has the added benefit of leaving a personal record that you really existed.



IS THE INTERNET MAKING US STUPID?

From NPR

Right now, you’re probably happy that you have the vast resources of the entire Internet at your fingertips. It’s a feeling of power, isn’t it? All that information, all that content, right there for you whenever you want it?

You probably shouldn’t be feeling so good about it, says writer Nicholas Carr, who has just written an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* with the provocative title, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Carr says that while the Internet allows us to get lots of information very quickly, it also encourages us not to look at it very thoughtfully.

In fact, Carr argues, when we give in to the natural impulses to click and skim, rather than to read and think, the Internet may actually doing us a disservice: It shortens our attention spans and even inhibits our ability to read longer books and articles.

In fact, if Carr is correct, you may never even make it to the end of this article.

Carr says it’s not just about people scanning and jumping around very quickly. He says that the Internet is actually beginning to change the way we think. “It makes it harder even when we’re offline to read books, as skimming takes over and displaces our modes of reading,” he says.

It’s not just Google Carr is talking about, but rather the structure and nature of the whole Internet. But he says that Google is very much the dominant player, and it both governs and symbolizes the way information is structured. “The way we gather information is by jumping around,” he says, “and that’s governed not only by Google but by the whole economic structure of the Internet.”

Just as the arrival of Gutenberg’s printing press helped to make reading universal, in the process ushering in enormous social revolutions, Carr says the Internet is producing a revolution of its own that is once again changing how we structure everything. While much of the revolution is positive, Carr says, he thinks that we should be aware that there might be some casualties, including prolonged reading and time for contemplation.

Carr tries to find time for more of what he calls deep reading, but he says that many of his friends are also facing difficulties in fighting Internet-influenced attention deficit disorder. In the article, he quotes one friend of his who told him: “I can’t read *War and Peace* anymore. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it.”

Futura: The
Quick Brown Fox
Jumps Over The
Lazy Dog. g

Discussion Questions and Exploration Activities

1. Do you believe that this play portends our future? Are we really losing touch with the written word? Why or why not? If so, how could this be prevented?
2. Why do you think the playwright chose the “smudge” to be the Professor’s strongest argument as to why computers can never perfectly mimic the human hand? Why not the indentation of the paper or the color of the ink?
3. What is the best part about reading a book? Is there a worst part?
4. What is your favorite type font? Why?

Original Sources and Links to Further Research

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<http://www.rsub.com/typographic/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futura_\(typeface\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futura_(typeface))

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<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91543814>