

Oneleigh

Shinntype

This type

Self-reference is the theme of a specimen booklet for the typeface FF Oneleigh. What else is new?—type specimens have long played that game, says *Nick Shinn*

Learning to read, you become able to recognize certain images—first letters, then words, then phrases—as signs, and this process becomes a subconscious reflex. In fluent reading the medium (images) is engaged at a subconscious level, allowing consciousness to attend to the message (signs).

When conscious of a word as a sign, you are not conscious of it as an image. And vice versa. But it's hard to turn off a reflex, so you'll keep coming back to a message which signifies its own medium, such as the headline on this page, in a loop of feedback. Hence the fascination of self-reference.

Type specimens present words as images, showcasing the physical attributes of type, its size, detail, style, etc. But words are also signs, and whatever they may say, even if it's complete nonsense, they will be read as signs. So any

text in a type specimen will be viewed as both image *and* sign.

It's a peculiar effect, akin to self-reference.

Copy treatments such as alphabets, straight prose, and fake ads take no account of it. But the specimen's propensity for a kind of automatic concrete poetry has given rise to several unique genres, most evident in size declensions. "Look," they say, "these words don't mean a whole lot. They don't go anywhere. They're type-book words. Linger awhile, amused by the nonsense, and when that little bit of meaning wears off, you'll be left just looking at type."

Latin. *Quousque tandem...etc.* An unknown language to most these days, with connotations of typography's weighty history.

Pangrams. *The quick brown fox...etc.* These refer to their constituent letters as images, prompting a head count, with an inspection of distinguishing features.

Satire. Perfected by the Bard of specimen writers, Thomas MacKellar: *Driftsnow, Banker/Capital Invested in Ice Houses/Good for Sudden Runs* (MacKellar, Smiths and Jordan, 1868).

Magniloquence. Bombastic and exotic: *Incidental Notices of Manchooria & Kamschatka/ Great Amoor River Country* (James Conner's Sons, 1873).

Lyricism. Verse, with a haiku-like quality: *Perfect specimen/simple design exhibited/considered very artistic/for modern typography* (American Type Founders, 1923).

Surrealism. Strange tales: *Reporting/aliens land in Boston/crashed/jumper cables/interstellar engine troubles/63.2 volts/they require a mechanic, pronto...* (Frere-Jones, Font Bureau, 1997).

Junk. Collage of random snippets from mass media and/or the printer's lexicon: *Sixteen Automobiles/Wrecked/Perfect Register* (Bauer, 1936). Pure Dada, very Naked Lunch.

Self-reference has a key place in the history of art. Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, such as *Fountain* of 1917 (a urinal), mark absolute zero, the culmination of centuries of progress towards pure art-about-art. Denied the validity of the art object (it's junk, signifying nothing), the viewer is referred to the meta-medium of art—the social setup of artist, gallery, critic,

☞ "Of course, the bottle rack and the urinal are not art...Art has been thought through to a conclusion. Nothing, nihil, is all that is left."—Hans Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art*

☞ "...The choice of these 'ready-mades' was never dictated by aesthetic consideration. The choice was based on a reaction of *visual indifference* with a total absence of good or bad taste...in fact a complete anaesthesia."—Marcel Duchamp, *From the Green Box*



*Quousque tandem abutere, Catalina
patientia nostra? quamdiu nos etiam
furor iste tuus eludet? as Cicero said,
and Caslon, and Bodoni, and Oswald
Bruce Cooper, and Jonathan Hoefler.*

Venerable phrases these, lending a flavor of erudition to generations of type specimens, and now finding themselves paraded in the vulgar panoply of an “advertising” type. Indignity! For this, Reader, is a kind of pre-view of a new face—FF Oneleigh. The designer is conscious of its crudity, and of its irreverence for the best traditions. But he believes that there are enough good types already—that the need is for poor types that can be used! And since he admits this to be a poor one, there now remains to be found out only whether it is usable or not. FontShop is publishing it in three weights, Roman and Italic, with a small cap font for the Regular Roman, and the designer dares to hope they will sell enough to pay them for their trouble.

ABCDEF GHIJKLMN OPQR
STUVW XYZ €
abcdefghijklmnopqrstu vwxyz
\$1234567890!?

You crave the comfort of historical precedent

IN 1911, Mitchell Kennerley, the New York publisher, asked N.W. Shinn if he would care to plan the arrangement, and make whatever decorative features he deemed necessary, to an American edition of *The Sword of Welleran*, by the Irish author Lord Dunsany. Shinn initially set trial pages in 12-point Caslon Old Face, but was disappointed with the orthodox appearance of the page proofs. While the type was of suitable vintage, he nonetheless felt that the effect of the Caslon was too firmly associated with the genuine events of history to do justice to such an elaborate fantasy. Consequently Shinn produced a new type, true to the Old Style genre, yet with considerable idiosyncrasy of form and detail. This he named Oneleigh.

You crave the comfort of historical precedent.

It's 1966. Drop out of the rat race.
Go far away. Or long ago.
Use a funky old face. Something
weird and hand-made.
Like Nicky Shinn's Oneleigh.
But don't be shy about it. Make it
bold.
And blow it up.

You Crave The Comfort Of Historical Precedent.

It was more than sixty years ago that Oneleight was first released, to wide acclaim.

Now it is reborn.

After exhaustive study and trial development, Nick Shinn has created a new version of the classic, eminently able to meet

the needs of graphic usage in the 1980s.

New Oneleight exhibits a subtlety of line and tight fit which make it inviting and easy to read.

The face was drawn free of ruling pen and straight edge; natural nuances are seen in each letter, slight

differences in serifs and stroke weights which soften appearances when letters combine into words.

Each weight was drawn without computer software or re-proportioning camera shots.

Just good old style hand lettering.

You crave

the comfort of historical precedent

FF Oneleight is a post-modern parody of old style typefaces. Designer Nicholas Shinn has plundered the past in cut-and-paste fashion, cannibalizing characters, serifs, and thematic effects from the heyday of the old style revival, the 1920s.

The lower case 'l', for instance, with its cap-like upper serif and cursive foot serif, is appropriated from Rudolf Koch's *Antiqua*; the capital 'W', with its condensed central space, is sampled from the *Initials* of Emil Weiss; the eccentric angle of the stress in the lower case italic—'bottom left to top right'—comes courtesy of Frederic Goudy's *Companion*...and so on.

In all events, Shinn has sought the most recherché material, and for good measure has complemented his larceny of history by liberally rewriting it.

THE SWORD OF WELLERAN

Time stood the old house of Oneleigh.

I know not how many centuries had lashed against it their evanescent foam of years; but it was still unshattered, and all about it were the things of long ago, as cling strange growths to some sea-defying rock. Here, like the shells of long-dead limpets, were armour that men encased themselves in long ago; here, too, were tapestries of many colours, beautiful as seaweed; no modern flotsam ever drifted hither, no early Victorian furniture, no electric light.

Meanwhile, while it yet stood, I went on a visit there to my brother, and we argued about ghosts. My brother's intelligence on this subject seemed to me to be in need of correction. He mistook things imagined for things having an actual existence; he argued that second-hand evidence of persons having seen ghosts proved ghosts to exist. I said that even if they had seen ghosts, this was no proof at all. . . . Finally I said I would see ghosts myself, and continue to argue against their actual existence.

[5]

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nopqrstuvwxyz
[@fifB™ ›æœctst*†‡§-[©®]
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Speaking of earlier types,
Shinn says: The old fellows
stole all of our best ideas.

CRITICAL COMMENT

THE size of 12 Point Oneleigh is small compared with other faces cast upon the same body, which makes it desirable for use on an open page. There is a peculiar distinction in a page with wide leading provided the balance is kept harmonious. The small cap running head is from Aldus, who first felt the need of smaller characters which preserved the exact form of their larger prototypes. The margins shown here are for 30½ x 36 paper (untrimmed).

(9 Point Oneleigh, 2 point leaded)

THE SWORD
OF WELLERAN

I

THE GHOSTS

NOW Oneleigh stands in a wide isolation, in the midst of a dark gathering of old whispering cedars. They nod their heads together when the North Wind comes, and nod again and agree, and furtively grow still again, and say no more awhile.

The North Wind is to them like a nice problem among wise old men; they nod their heads over it, and mutter about it all together. They know much, those cedars, they have been there so long. Their grandsires knew Lebanon, and the grandsires of these were the servants of the King of Tyre and came to Solomon's court. And amidst these black-haired children of grey-headed

[3]

DESCRIPTION

Written Language

Means of Communication

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z a b c
d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
& \$. , - : ; ! ? ') " " 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

The fabulist's description portrays a traditional recital, a mythical narrative, history, memoir, memorial, specification, or saga. Delineation enters into particulars, describes the report. The exposé sets forth an epic scenario of life, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF FACTS

A well-drawn brief pictures the work of fiction, a short story, or a novelette. The romance is an expository story, a eulogy that characterizes monographs, historiography, realistic fortunes PENNY DREADFUL NECROLOGIES

Chronography unfolds autobiographical allegory, giving an account of details, recapitulating the shilling shockers of a GRAPHIC SPINNER OF YARNS

Confessions of a raconteur sum up circumstantial journals of legend and render an account of memoirs BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rehearsed and recapitulated the adventures and anecdotes of the fairy-tale romancers in PLOT AND VIGNETTE

Narrate Graphic Catalogs Descriptive Guide Books FABULOUS ANNALS

A Factual Statement Expository Parables STORIED MYTH

Fictional Tale Epic Novelette SCENARIO

Particularized

OBITUARY

Suggestive

EXPOSE 

Historic

FABLE

Relate

SAGA



“That poster reminds me . . . a horseback scene like this would make a good cigarette advertisement . . .”
“Sure, call it ‘Thoroughbreds’ and it would be perfect for Chesterfield!”



THEY'RE MILD
and yet THEY SATISFY

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