



Giambattista Bodoni: His Life and His World

Valerie Lester

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This is the first English-language biography of the relentlessly ambitious and incomparably talented printer Giambattista Bodoni (1740-1813). Born to a printing family in the small foothill town of Saluzzo, he left his comfortable life to travel to Rome in 1758 where he served as an apprentice of Cardinal Spinelli at the Propaganda Fide press. There, under the sponsorship of Ruggieri, he learned all aspects of the printing craft. Even then, his real talent lay in type design and punchcutting, especially of the exotic foreign alphabets needed by the papal office to spread the faith. His life changed when at age 28 he was invited by the Duke of Parma to abandon Rome for that very French city to establish and direct the ducal press. He remained in Parma, overseeing a vast variety of printing, some of it pedestrian, but much of it glorious. And all of it making use of the typefaces he personally designed and engraved. This fine book goes beyond Bodoni's capacity as a printer; it examines the life and times in which he lived, the turbulent and always fragile political climate, the fascinating cast of characters that enlivened the ducal court, the impressive list of visitors making the pilgrimage to Parma, and the unique position Parma occupied, politically Italian but very much French in terms of taste and culture. Even the food gets its due. The illustrations—of the city, of the press, of the types and matrices—are captivating, but most striking are the pages from the books he designed, especially pages from his typographic masterpiece, the *Manuale Tipografico*, which displayed the myriad typefaces in multiple sizes that Bodoni had designed and engraved over a long and prolific career. Intriguing, scholarly, visually arresting, and designed and printed to Bodoni's standards, this title belongs on the shelf of any self-respecting bibliophile. It not only makes for compelling reading, it will be considered the biography of record of a great printer for years to come.

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