Jan van Krimpen and Bruce Rogers: 
two approaches to traditional typography 
in a modern perspective

The American book and type designer Bruce Rogers visited the Netherlands for the first time in 1905. He and his wife were so obviously charmed by Amsterdam that they seriously considered moving there a few years later.2

Rogers's typographic work was appreciated in the Netherlands at quite an early date. S.H. de Roos (1877-1962) had reviewed his work in *Het drukkers jaarboek* [the printer's annual] for 1907, the year in which De Roos joined the Typefoundry Amsterdam, where he worked as (type) designer until his retirement. After beginning a correspondence with Rogers, De Roos discussed his work more extensively in a survey-article, 'Amerikaansche boekkunst' [American book arts], in *Het drukkers jaarboek* for 1908. In this article, De Roos says that Rogers, in his 'sometimes archaically conceived projects', never falls into the trap of slavish copying: 'he has the knack of giving everything that comes from his presses a personal stamp that bears witness to his remarkably refined taste for arrangement, choice and combination of types, and other important virtues that a book printer needs.'3

Rogers and Jan van Krimpen (1892-1958) appear to have begun a correspondence around 1928. Rogers had used Van Krimpen's Lutetia type (1925) in 1927. It had seen its first use in an American book earlier that year – Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The golden touch*, printed by the Grabhorn Press in San Francisco – and D.B. Updike was to acquire it for his Merrymount Press in the same year. In 1929, Rogers and Van Krimpen met each other several times in England, where Rogers was supervising the production of his Centaur by the Monotype Corporation in Surrey. Rogers lodged in London for a while when working on the Oxford Lectern Bible, and Van Krimpen visited him at Emery Walker's office in Clifford's Inn. Work on the Monotype versions of the typefaces Centaur and Lutetia, both originally issued as

---

1 This article originally appeared in Dutch in the *Bulletin Stichting Drukwerk in de Marge*, 20 (1992). A revised version appeared as a separate booklet that also served as a type specimen of the typeface *Lutetia*. Documenta: *Jan van Krimpen & Bruce Rogers*, published by the Dutch Type Library ("s-Hertogenbosch 1994). It was slightly revised again for this English translation.

2 See the letter from Rogers to De Roos, 30 July 1910, published in: *Four unpublished letters by Bruce Rogers to S.H. de Roos*, introduction by John Dreyfus (Haarlem 1975), unpaginated.

foundry type, began almost simultaneously: Centaur has the series number 252 and Lutetia 255. Rogers and Van Krimpen were very difficult clients for the Monotype Corporation: Rogers because he constantly changed his original design; Van Krimpen because he insisted that the Monotype version reproduce every letter of every size of Lutetia exactly, without regard for the practical limitations of the Monotype unit system.

Bruce Rogers was as decorative and imaginative in his design work - he went far beyond De Roos in this respect - as Van Krimpen was sober and reserved in his. Their published writings about typography demonstrate these differing views of book and type design. This opposition made a world of difference, especially in the eyes of the dogmatic Van Krimpen. Yet they appreciated and admired each other's work. Van Krimpen referred to Rogers regularly in his writing and, even though he was often (mildly) critical, described Rogers as 'one of the greatest living typographers'. Among books from Van Krimpen's own reference library now (partly) preserved in the Library of the Royal Dutch Book Trade Association at the Amsterdam University Library are two books signed by Rogers, namely the catalogue *The work of Bruce Rogers* (1939) and his own *The Centaur types* (1949), the latter with a written dedication.

There is no correspondence between Van Krimpen and Rogers in the Amsterdam University Library, where a large portion of Van Krimpen's papers survive, or in the Museum Enschedé (Haarlem). I have found two letters from Rogers: one concerning Van Krimpen's Lutetia, written around 1928, was published in a type specimen intended for the American market; the other, reproduced here as illus. 1, survives in Van Krimpen's copy of Irvin Haas's *Bruce Rogers: a bibliography* (1936). This last letter, dated 28 June 1952, is in Rogers's virtually unreadable handwriting and is accompanied by two transcriptions, the first with Van Krimpen's corrections. Rogers wrote in response to John Dreyfus's monograph, *The work of Jan van Krimpen: a record in honour of his sixtieth birthday*, which appeared in that year. He unequivocally expresses his great fondness for Monotype Van Dijck, whose production Van

---


6 I have not located letters from Van Krimpen to Rogers in American collections.

7 *First showing of the Lutetia roman & italic designed by J. van Krimpen*, printed by Joh. Enschedé en Zonen for the Continental Typefounders Association (New York [c. 1928]), p. 4. The letter is reprinted in Bruce Rogers, *Pi: a hodge-podge of the letters, papers and addresses written during the last sixty years* (Cleveland, etc. 1953), p. 49.