Drop cap. Design, pleasing to the eye

Have you noticed how the drop caps in the Gutenberg Bible were designed?

Here is an artist-drawn letter in the Gutenberg Bible. *The main text was typed in such a way that space was left for the drawing.*

Here is another design of the letter P:

As you can see, in both pictures, the text under the bowl is approaching the main stem.

Such a hand-drawn letter had its own name — **versal**, and it remained only in the history of European printing, since the typesetting letter began to be called **drop cap**, and we see this term in InDesign.

Drop caps in XXI century

Now InDesign places the drop caps in the layout. This has become a standard option, but there is no grace of wrapping letters around the edge of the drop cap.

If a letter with a vertical right stem is such as I, H, M, N etc, then the tool available in the InDesign works flawlessly. But there is always a problem with the design of drop caps that have oblique or rounded stems on the right — A, O, D, Q, V, P, etc. Such drop caps, look like a separate object in layout due to the large white space to the right of the drop cap.

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The text should go around, repeat the right edge of the letter. But there is no such thing in the standard solution. Technology has killed harmony.

The script will help!

But obviously, this is a task that just requires a lot of calculations, then why not try to solve it with a script. And such a script was made.

Here are examples of the standard design examples shown earlier, processed by this program:

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It is action of **Place_DropCap.jsx**, when it starts, the cursor should be in the paragraph with original drop cap.

Processing takes about one to two minutes for each drop cap: it's just as a design game.

Placement of the drop cap

When the drop cap is created and placed in its former place, absolutely exact repetition of the position will not work. But it's easy to put it in place with a few clicks of the arrows on the keyboard, you just need to select the desired radiobutton.

Increment. When radiobutton **Default** is active, the step set by the user is used (**Preferences > Units&Increments > Cursor Key**). You can move selected objects with one of the other three steps. When this window is closed, the step set by the user will be restored. The scale that was at the time of closing the window is remembered, it will be set when making the next drop cap.
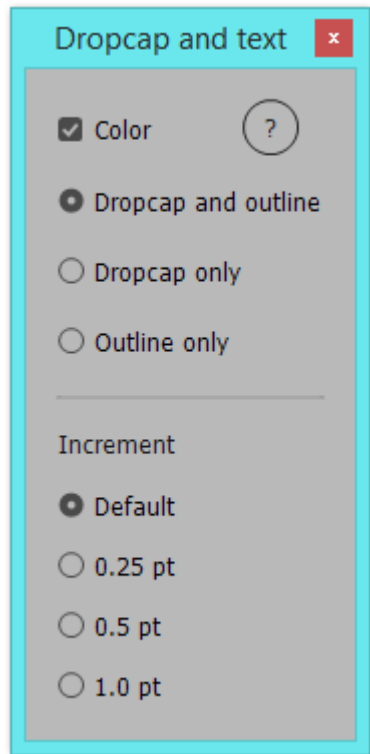
Service colors

At the time of the creation of the drop cap during the presence of the window **Dropcap and text** on the screen, the first and last lines of the text of the height of the drop cap will be marked with green and red guides, this will help to accurately place the drop cap vertically.

The color of the drop cap, while this window is open, is cyan (100-0-0-0). The outline, of course, is invisible, but the **Color** checkbox turns it on for now, it is light yellow.

Gap between drop cap and text

The initial shift of the text from the drop cap is equal to 5 points. What is the gap between drop cap and the text at the moment, you can find out in the popup tooltip to the radiobutton **Outline only**: when you select it, the lower right X-coordinate of the drop cap and the lower right X-coordinate of the letter contour are read, the difference is calculated, recalculated into points and placed in the text of the tooltip.

Anchor drop cap to the text

The drop cap in the execution of this script is a group of frames, their dimensions and flow parameters are such

that the text goes along the right edge of the letter.

When this is the first paragraph, and there is a drop cap in it, then there is no reason why the text will move down, and the drop cap will remain in place.

And if there is a text or a title above the drop cap, then this group need to be anchored to the paragraph above. To do this, after closing the window, the drop cap and outline group remains selected.

Search and indexing

The drop cap is created, placed next to the text, but the text in terms of search or indexing does not change.

This is implemented as follows: the letter or letters converted to drop cap are not removed from the paragraph. They are made with a 0.1 pt size, a hor-izontal scale of 1% and colorless. These values of the size, scale and color are set in the service character style **EmptyInvisibleDropcapChar**.

The eye does not see them, but the search works flawlessly.

To restore the original drop cap there is a script **Restore_DropCap.jsx**. It deletes the previously created drop cap, if there is one.

Extra spaces are not needed

My belief is that the layout designer should not add spaces to the text if this can lead to failures in the search for the text.

But sometimes the big first character collides with the body text that follows. This often happens when a decorative font is used for the drop cap.

And may be you see advices to add space after drop cap and kern it to move the drop cap from text. But this extra space changes text, and letter in drop cap and word after it become nonsearcable.

This script solves this task, because it saves original text without any addition spaces. On top picture original drop cap produced by InDesign, but characters collide. And the same drop cap processed by this program. No overlap, the text wraps around the outline of the drop cap.

The search action find the word Yesterday, because letter *Y* is in the text, decorated by special character style named **EmptyInvisibleDropcapChar.**

How the drop cap edit

If you need to correct the design of the drop cap made, for example, to move the text further away from it, then you need to select this group and run the **Fit_DropCap.jsx** script.

The **Dropcap and text** window shown on page 3 will open. The only difference from the previously described work with this window is that there are no green and red guides.

To create a drop cap/stick-up cap hybrid you need to select Dropcap and outline group, set left bottom anchor point and scale the group.

Why such name: 'Gutenberg Drop Caps'

The beauty of the design of the big letters in the first books, by Gutenberg in the first place, was the trigger that launched the work on the creation of these scripts. Despite the fact that there was no term drop cap at that time, I perceive these drawings that way. As Getenberg drop caps.

* * *

Johann Gutenberg and his followers understood the importance of the eye-catching design of the drop caps, and and they were masters of their craft.

Why are we worse than them?

Only by the fact that this feature is poorly implemented in InDesign? Let's make books and magazines that are even nice to look at.

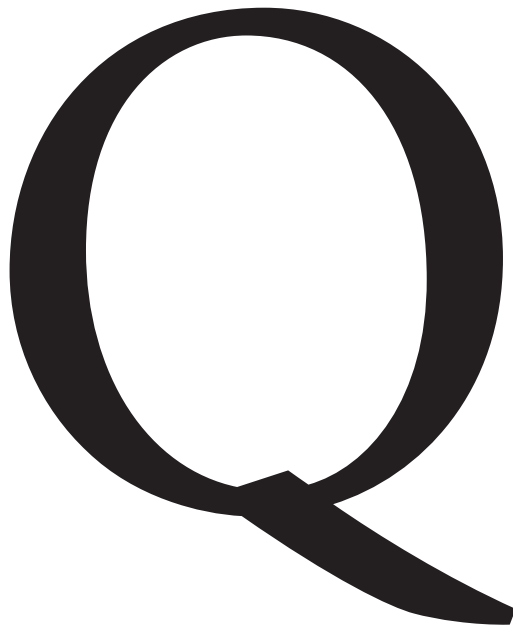**Mikhail Ivanyushin**
dotextok@gmail.com
https://shop.dotextok.ru/en/

For inspiration

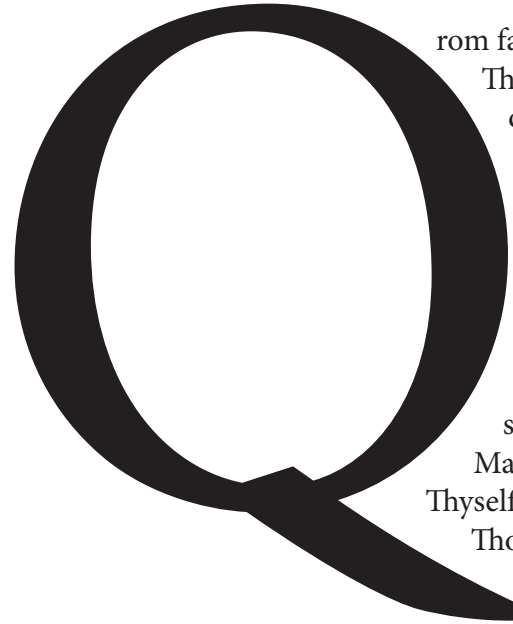Thumbnails of magazine pages with large letters and the implementation of this idea with the script.

*f*rom fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light'st flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

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