

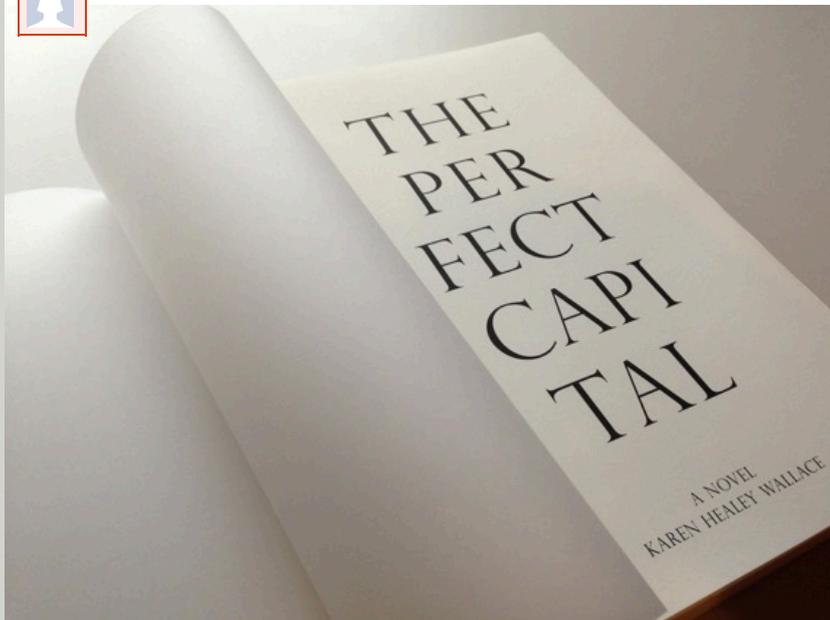
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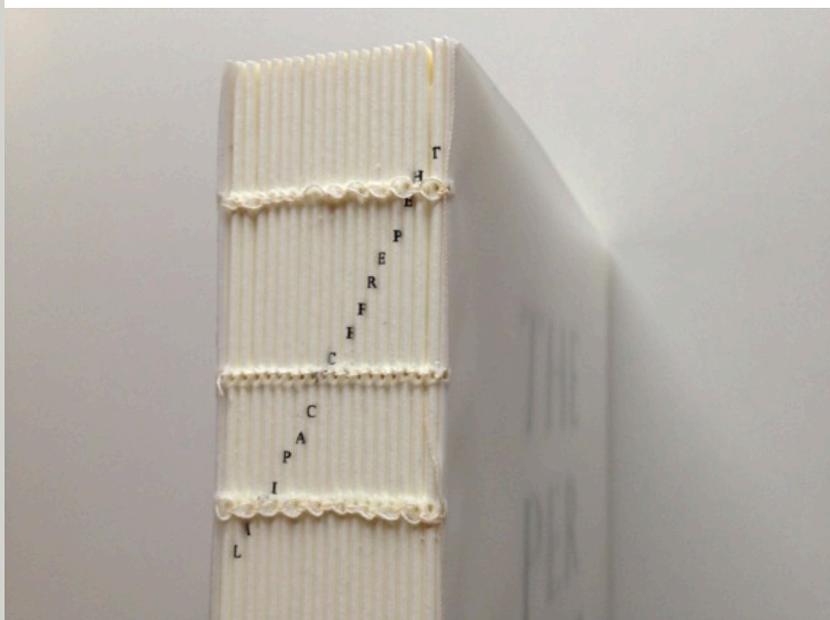
A novel tribute to Eric Gill

Books, Graphic Design, Type / Typography

Posted by Mark Sinclair, 29 November 2013, 15:47 [Permalink](#) [Comments \(2\)](#)



Designed and typeset in accordance with Eric Gill's [An Essay on Typography](#), the debut novel from Karen Healey Wallace is a celebration of letterforms. Unsurprisingly, the book itself is a lovely object – using Gill's Joanna typeface throughout, it has 'golden ratio' margins and just wait until you see the spine...



With the binding exposed, the title runs down the spine across each of the book's sections

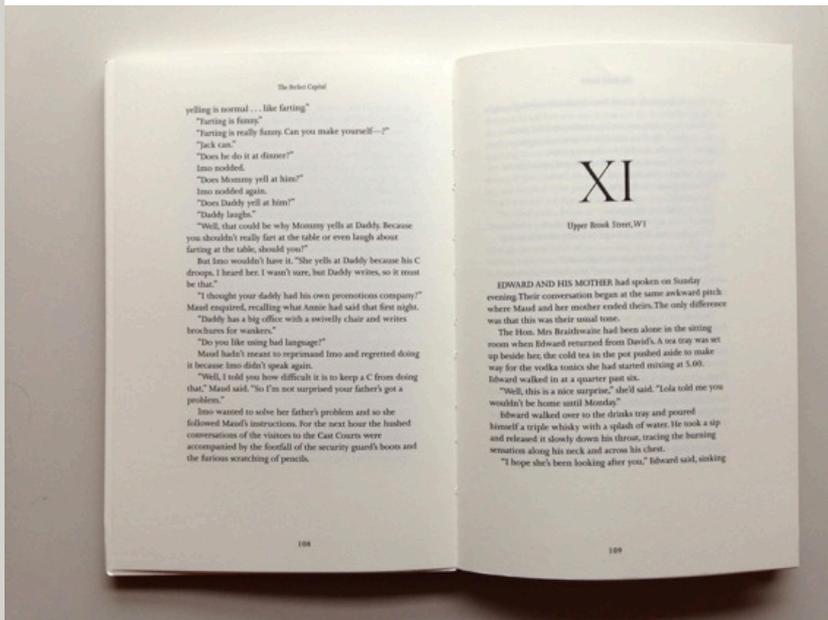
The Perfect Capital is self-published through Acorn Independent Press and tells the story of Maud, a lettering obsessive, who enters into a relationship with Edward – her sense of precision and discipline seemingly drawn to both his hedonism and imperfection.

The novel has lettercutting and carving at its heart (with many of Gill's stone inscriptions illustrated on the page), and the subject matter has clearly informed the book itself.

Designed by Jon Muddell, typeset by Ali Dewji, and printed and bound by Smith Settle Printing & Bookbinding Ltd,

the book even contains an interesting Note on the Typography which explains how its production adheres to Gill's 1931 treatise.

"The truth about books to Gill," Healey Wallace writes, "was that they are things to be read, not looked at." In the design of the book, she says, "Gill's views either formed the design or at least concurred with it."

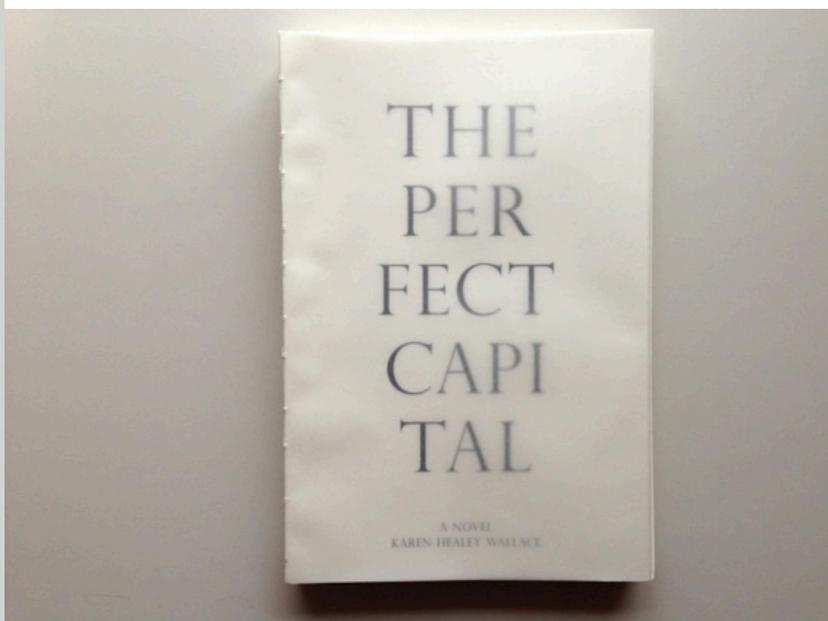


Listing the design decisions based on Gill's theories, the author highlights the margins, in particular the very deep one at the bottom of the page (see above image).

This, she writes, derives from laying out the text according to the principles of the 'golden ratio' – the "mathematical proportion [that] appears in nature, art and was once the norm for printed books."

She continues:

Whether 'intrinsically pleasing' or not, it seemed to answer the 'physical reasonableness' Gill required of book margins: 'to separate a page from the one opposite to it' on the inner; from 'the surrounding landscape of furniture and carpets' on the top; and to make room for the thumbs on the bottom and side. Hold a few recent books in your hand and see how your thumbs cover the bottom few lines of the very thing you're supposed to be reading.

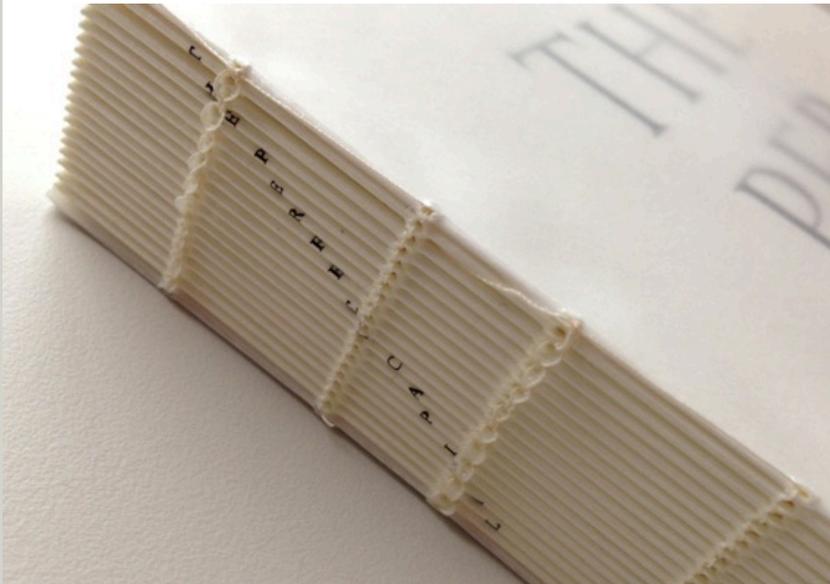


Another aspect of the page layout is more subtle: the text is set with a 'ragged right' edge, which deviates from more commonly used justification. Again, Gill's influence comes through here as he argued that even spacing between words aided easy reading.

Finally, the typeface – Gill's Joanna. It is, writes Healey Wallace, a font that had what Gill referred to as "commonplaceness" or a lack of pretension. And it's a beautifully legible text font with a nice quirk when "The" or "That" opens a sentence: the capital Ts are shorter than the uprights of the 'h', "bringing", the author says, "an evenness of colour to the page".

In addition to Joanna and its Italic form, Perpetua Titling Light is also used in the book when stone carving is

represented in text.



And while I have to admit to having only read a few pages of the novel itself, adhering to Gill's beliefs in this way makes for a highly enjoyable reading experience.

And the spine? Well, it looks great exposed like that, but by good fortune it also refers back to the great typographer. "The cover and binding emerged naturally from the story itself," writes Healey Wallace. "It was a happy coincidence that Gill agreed: 'As to binding: simply sewn with a paper wrapper, is much to be praised'."

Ironically, while *The Perfect Capital* has been made to be read, in doing so it inevitably draws attention to the way it looks as well. No bad thing at all.

The Perfect Capital is published by [Acom Independent Press](#); £14.99. Printed and bound by [Smith Settle Printing & Bookbinding Ltd](#) in West Yorkshire. *Eric Gill's An Essay on Typography* has also just been republished by Penguin – more [here](#).

2 Comments

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