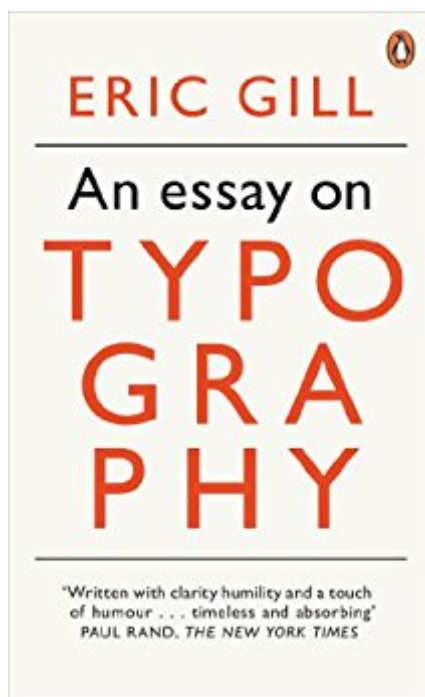


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An Essay On Typography (Penguin Modern Classics)



Synopsis

Eric Gill's opinionated manifesto on typography argues that 'a good piece of lettering is as beautiful a thing to see as any sculpture or painted picture'. This essay explores the place of typography in culture and is also a moral treatise celebrating the role of craftsmanship in an industrial age. Gill, a sculptor, engraver, printmaker and creator of many classic typefaces that can be seen around us today, fused art, history and polemic in a visionary work which has been hugely influential on modern graphic design. 'Written with clarity, humility and a touch of humour . . . timeless and absorbing' Paul Rand, The New York Times 'His lettering was clear, confident and hugely influential on the development of modern type design. The world has now caught up with Gill' Guardian How do we see the world around us? This is one of a number of pivotal works by creative thinkers like John Berger and Susan Sontag whose writings on art, design and the media have changed our vision for ever.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This essay on typography is actually an essay on far more. It goes well with William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, in its nostalgia for the 'humane' individual craftsman over the commerce

and industry. Gill comes back, again and again, to question the proper places of mass production and handwork with respect to each other. He was an idealistic, but still realized that industry was here to stay - it could not (and still can not) simply be wished away. The real goal is "an industrialism ... [with] many noble and admirable features." Gill uses typography and printing as the vehicle for his social thoughts, and offers a good bit of advice on typography throughout. He discusses letter forms as ethetic, practical, and historical objects - especially interesting from a man who made so much typographic history himself. I never did quite work my way through all of his social arguments, however. He seems to hold "engineers" as the opponents of art and perhaps creativity. I know that many engineers then and now lack training in esthetics and visual presentation. Anyone who's seen the Brooklyn Bridge or Eiffel Tower knows, however, that engineering is also a creative act. Gill ridiculed the practice of one worker designing a font, a second preparing it for transfer to metal, another cutting the master tools for each letter, and so on. I have to agree, the assembly line mentality is not suited to all tasks, especially when each product is as unique as a letter form. Still, among all arts, printing is perhaps the one most typified by team effort and division of labor. It would be a very rare individual who could create a text worth reading, create the font in which it is presented, set the type and run the press, and carry out all the other tasks needed to create a bound book.

Eric Gill was one of the greatest experts in typography, printing and book design that the 20th century produced, and the typefaces that he designed -- Gill Sans, Joanna, Perpetua -- are still in common use, and are among the most successful of all typefaces. The book itself is set in Joanna, and gives a very pleasing appearance. I'm not fond of Gill Sans myself, but that just reflects a general dislike of sans-serif typefaces (apart from Optima) on paper, though they work very well on the computer screen and Underground stations. So a short book in which Gill explained his general view of printing and book production is very welcome. He was much concerned with the state of craftsmanship in any era of increasing mechanization. He believed that no matter how dehumanizing a modern job in a factory might be a worker would still go home and create things: "in his spare time he will make something, if only a window box flower garden." In several places he refers to the big changes that he saw between the state of industry in 1930 and in 1936: given the enormous increase in mechanization that has happened since 1936 one can only wonder what he would think of the state of book production today. Like many experts in book design, but unlike most modern publishers, Gill preferred a ragged right-hand edge to the page, as it allows better spacing between words than one can have with justified margins. Nearly all of the book is

printed with unjustified lines, but on pages 88 and 89, in a section entitled The Procrustean bed, the lines are justified. Why this exception? Because this is where he discussed why unjustified lines were better.

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