Leaf

by Daniel Brockman

Friday, March 13, 2026

U PON a leaf A6, one hundred and five millimeters in the width and one hundred and forty-eight in the height, being a pocket book fit for the hand, compiled under XeLaTeX and under no other engine whatsoever, the margins are disposed thus: ten millimeters sinister and ten millimeters dexter, fourteen millimeters at the chief and fourteen at the base, the surplus of four millimeters vertical providing clearance where the thumb rests upon the leaf. The text block so bounded and so disposed upon the field yields a measure of forty-five to fifty-five characters per line, which is on the short side of comfortable but meet for the intimate format and no wider.

The body is charged with TeX Gyre Pagella, which is the OpenType revival of Palatino, summoned through

the fontspec package, at ten points. Pagella is borne for its warmth and its legibility at small sizes, possessing a larger x-height than most old-style serif faces, which tells greatly upon a page this small. No separate sans-serif is declared and no monospace is declared. The template is prose-only and admits no other face. When the text is composed in a language other than English, whether Russian, Swedish, or any tongue possessing its own hyphenation patterns, the appropriate babel hyphenation package for that language shall be installed and loaded, for the measure is narrow and good hyphenation is not a courtesy but a necessity, and without the correct patterns for the language in question the justification engine cannot do its office. If and only if no hyphenation package exists for the language in question may this requirement be set aside, but in all other cases it is compulsory.

The line spacing is 1.15, achieved through the setspace package, tighter than the 1.5 of a manuscript but looser than the solid setting of a traditional book, cleaving the difference so that the page feels published without suffocating. Paragraphs are indented 1.2em at the first line with zero parskip, no space between them, this being the oldest and most tested convention in Western typography and remaining the finest for

sustained prose. The indent signals the new paragraph without introducing vertical gaps that would fragment the page, and on A6 where vertical space is scarce, parskip would devour the layout entire.

The microtype package is enabled in full, activating both optical margin alignment, which is to say hanging punctuation, and font expansion, which is to say imperceptible adjustments to the width of glyphs for the betterment of justification. Upon a measure this short, microtype is compulsory, not elective, for without it justified text upon a narrow column produces visible rivers and uneven color throughout. With it the justification approaches invisibility, which is the sole and proper goal. The widow penalty and the club penalty are both set to ten thousand, which is the maximum the engine permits, so that no paragraph shall leave a single line stranded at the chief of any page nor at the base, this being catastrophically visible upon a small leaf and therefore not subject to negotiation or exception. Hyphenation follows the babel English patterns, or the patterns of whatever language is loaded as aforesaid, with a hyphenpenalty of three hundred, a tolerance of twelve hundred, and an emergencystretch of one em. The hyphenpenalty is set low enough to permit hyphenation freely, which the short measure demands,

but not so low that every second line breaks a word in twain. The tolerance is elevated above the default to grant the justification engine room to maneuver before resorting to desperate and unsightly solutions. The emergencystretch of one em serves as a safety valve of last resort: rather than producing an overfull box, TeX shall distribute up to one em of additional stretch across the offending line, which is invisible in justified setting but sufficient to prevent the occasional word from jutting beyond the margin into the field.

The headers and footers are governed by the fancyhdr package and are disposed as follows. There is no content at the head. There is no rule at the head and no rule at the foot. The sole element of the apparatus is a centered page number at the base of each page, set at the footnote size. The first page, which is the title page, bears the plain pagestyle redefined to complete and utter emptiness, displaying no number and no mark of any kind whatsoever. The effect thereby achieved is that the text block floats upon the leaf with no furniture above or below save a small centered folio, and this is the correct and only treatment for a pocket essay, where any running head would crowd the page and where the text is short enough that no wayfinding is required of the reader.

The opening of the text bears a drop cap achieved through the lettrine package, spanning three lines as declared by DefaultLines, and set in the selfsame TeX Gyre Pagella as the body through the LettrineFontHook. It is tuned with a loversize of 0.05, meaning the capital sits very slightly proud below the baseline of the third line rather than aligning with mechanical exactness, which reads more naturally to the eye, and a hang of 0.1, providing a minimal protrusion into the sinister margin sufficient to optically align the cap with the text block without making it appear indented from it. The drop cap is employed solely at the very beginning of the text, once and never again, signaling "this is where it starts" and no other place.

Sections are divided each from each by a centered kome, which is the Japanese reference mark ※, employed here in the office of a fleuron, that is to say a typographic ornament of section division. The vertical spacing about the kome is asymmetric: 0.6 baselineskip above and 0.4 baselineskip below, so that the greater space closes the preceding section and the lesser space opens the next. The fleuron command includes an everypar trick that suppresses the paragraph indent upon the first paragraph following the break, setting it flush left, this being standard book typography, for a para-

graph that follows a visible break requires no indent because the break itself signals the new beginning, and to indent after a break is redundant and amateurish. The kome was preferred over more conventional fleurons, asterisms, and ornamental dingbats for its clean geometry and its handsome appearance at small sizes, carrying none of the fussiness that attends a decorative ornament. At the very end of the text, a final kome is set centered at LARGE size, preceded by two baselineskips of vertical space, serving not as a section break but as a colophon mark, signaling that the text is complete in a manner more deliberate and more ceremonial than merely stopping.

The title page bears no page number, as has been declared. It is structured as a centered block disposed thus. At the chief, a vspace of 0.3 centimeters, positioning the title block slightly below the optical center of the leaf rather than at the mathematical center, this correction being necessary because text centered mathematically upon a page appears to sag below center to the eye, and a slight upward shift redresses the illusion. The title itself is set at LARGE size, which is the largest named size below Huge, and shall be quite prominent upon the small page. Below the title, a gap of 0.8 centimeters. Then the author line, in normal size

and normal weight, neither bold nor italic. When the authors are two humans, the format is "by" followed by their names joined with a plain ampersand. When one author is human and the other is Claude, the byline omits the word Claude and names the model and its version directly, as for example "by Daniel Brockman & Opus 4.6," for Opus requires no introduction and the version is the relevant particular. Below the author line, a gap of 0.15 centimeters, then the date rendered as a full calendar date giving day of week, month, day, and year in full, grounding the text in a specific moment rather than presenting it as timeless, for the essays concern themselves with contemporaneity and with being inside a particular moment, and therefore the date is part of the meaning and not mere furniture.

The epigraph upon the title page is set in a centered minipage at 0.75 of the textwidth. There are no quotation marks upon the epigraph, neither opening nor closing. The text of the epigraph is set flush left within the minipage, in italic, and the attribution is set flush right by means of hfill and preceded by an em dash. The minipage width is narrow enough to distinguish the epigraph visually from the body text without requiring any change in font size. Vertical spacing of 0.8 centimeters above and 0.8 centimeters below sets the epigraph

apart as a standalone element situated between the date and the beginning of the text proper, belonging neither to the title block above it nor to the body below.

Block quotations within the body are set using the adjustwidth environment from the changepage package, indented 1.5em sinister and 1.5em dexter. The text within is set in small size and italic shape, being one step reduced in size and shifted in style, both signals distinguishing the quoted matter from the surrounding body without recourse to a different font or a visible rule. A noindent at the commencement prevents an indent inside the quotation block. Vertical space of 0.5 baselineskip above and 0.5 baselineskip below separates the quotation from the body on either side. This is a conservative treatment in the book-standard manner, the quotation rendered distinct through three simultaneous signals of size, style, and indentation, no single signal overpowering the others.

The template implies and enforces a pacing in which the text opens with a concrete image or scene before any thesis is stated. The thesis when it arrives is stated in plain language and then supported by further concrete material rather than by abstraction. Sections are self-contained enough that the fleuron breaks feel earned, each section completing a thought entire before the next

begins, the movement alternating between narrative passages and analytical passages, with the narrative arriving always first and the analysis growing from it organically rather than being imposed upon it from without. Epigraphs are chosen for resonance rather than for authority, creating a harmonic relationship with the text such that the reader encounters the epigraph, reads the essay, and upon reflection understands the epigraph differently than before, the epigraph thereby earning its place retroactively rather than prospectively.

The template must be compiled with XeLaTeX and with XeLaTeX alone, on account of the fontspec dependency, and the font TeX Gyre Pagella must be installed upon the system. The compilation chain is simply xelatex invoked upon the filename, requiring no bibliography pass, no index pass, and no auxiliary passes of any kind. The template is self-contained and compiles in a single pass, and so it is blazoned.

❋