THE STORY OF PERPETUA

Tiffany Wardle
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This essay relates the origins of the typeface Perpetua and Felicity italic which were designed by Eric Gill and produced by The Monotype Corporation. Although the type and the collaborators are well known, the story has had to be pieced together from a variety of sources—Gill's and Morison's own writings and biographical accounts. There are accounts similar to this, but none could be found that either takes this point of view, or goes into as great detail.

In 1924, an essay directed towards the printers and type founders was calling for a new type for their time. Entitled 'Towards An Ideal Type,' Stanley Morison wrote it for the second volume of *The Fleuron*. In the closing statement there is an appeal for "some modern designer who knows his way along the old paths to fashion a fount of *maximum* homogeneity, that is to say, a type in which the uppercase, in spite of its much greater angularity and rigidity, accords with the great fellowship of colour and form with the rounder and more vivacious lowercase."[1] Two years later, in 1926, again Morison is requesting a "typography based not upon the needs and conventions of renaissance society but upon those of modern England."[2] Only two years previous had the Monotype Corporation assigned Stanley Morison as their Typographical Advisor. Once assigned he pursued what he later came to call his "programme of typographical design"[3] with renewed vigour. For he had planned to "fuse the talents of a living designer of lettering with those of an expert engraver of punches and create a new type-design."[4] At this time, Morison already had an 'artist' in mind.

From the beginning of his career, and indeed earlier, Eric Gill appears involved with lettering and writing. It has been noted that "as a child he was fond of drawing locomotives." Even perhaps of more import is the fact "that his [drawings] concentrated on *form* rather than upon the engineering *function*," and that "the lettering has been worked out in beautiful detail."[5] Indeed his parents recognised his skill and enrolled him at the Chichester Art School, and this was when Eric's 'madness' for lettering began.

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[1] Morison, Stanley (1924) p. 75
[2] Morison, Stanley (1926) p. 110
[3] Barker, Nicolas, and Douglas Cleverdon (1969) p. 17
[4] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 197
[5] Warde, Beatrice [Paul Beaujon] (1930) p. 31

With his growing interest in lettering, at the age of seventeen, he became apprenticed to W.H. Caroë, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in Westminster. Shortly thereafter, he began carving letters in his spare time, and enrolled in the evening classes given by the master calligrapher Edward Johnston. It was while in these classes that Gill received his first job, that of an inscription on stone. "So it was the lettering enthusiasm, begun in connection with engine names, and continued at the Art School at Chichester, which gave me the opportunity."[6] This enthusiasm would continue to grow through his work, as he became more involved with other people "who were professionally concerned with the production of printing types."[7]

The style of Gill's lettering, in his stone work and engravings, may have at first been much affected by the lettering classes under Johnston. This was noted by Paul Beaujon [Beatrice Warde], "his capitals, in this early manner, are those of a technically brilliant stone-cutter–who has been trained by a calligrapher."[8] This rapid transition, from calligraphic to epigraphic, could be attributed to the amount of work he was doing during this time. Not only was he still busy with the stone inscriptions, but he had begun to expand the media upon which he practised his lettering skills to include, among others, the fascia done for W.H. Smith in Paris; wood engraved book plates, commissioned and for friends; and both illustrations and entire alphabets for various presses. It was in 1914 from "an unusual drawing," that his obvious interest in designing a type could be found. He had enlarged a setting of *Old Style Long Primer* and "drawn his own variations and adaptations to the letter-forms."[9]

Morison and Gill had first met in 1913 when Morison was working for the Catholic Publishing House of Burnes & Oates, for whom Gill had been doing some small wood engravings. From Morison's own appreciation for the alphabet, it seems likely that he had "admired [Gill's] ability to engrave smaller letters on wood."[10] Possibly from Gerard Meynell, Morison had learned of the collaboration of Gill with Johnston in designing the Underground Alphabet. It was through Meynell that he must also have known of the alphabet drawn by Gill for the

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[6] Gill, Eric (1944) p. 115
[7] Brewer, Roy (1973) p. 10
[8] Warde, Beatrice [Paul Beaujon] (1930) p. 33
[9] Harling, Robert (1979) p. 23

Westminster Press. In a radio interview about Morison's life, Beatrice Warde recalled "his pulling out for my admiration some of the little books produced at the Ditchling Press in Sussex."[11] Not until after Gill had a final falling out with Hilary Pepler at the St. Dominic's Press in Ditchling, did Morison finally approach him.

It was during this time, according to Barker, "no one interested in lettering could ignore Gill's rapidly growing fame as an engraver of inscriptions."[12] In 1924, having known Gill for a little over ten years, when Morison wrote about the 'ideal roman', he most probably "had his eye on Gill as a potential type designer."[13] Both men were "natural rebels, who found themselves obliged to define the boundaries and discipline they were prepared to accept,"[14] in order to concentrate their passions for taking pride in their work.

These men shared many beliefs that would enable them to work well together. Having both recently converted to Roman Catholicism; they shared religious convictions as well. Self-trained in their respective fields, and yet at the same time self-proclaimed experts in everything they attempted, they did nothing halfway. They both "enjoyed vigorous arguments about religion, art, politics and many other subjects."[15] Perhaps one area that they strongly differed was in the implementation of modern day machinery. Morison had strong beliefs in what the world of printing could do to help modern man. It seemed only a matter of teaching the people. On the other hand, Gill could not tolerate, at this time, mass production. Although this is somewhat at odds with the young boy who loved trains. Despite this apparent hindrance, Morison was not the kind to take no for an answer.

Morison had asked Gill to write an article for *The Fleuron*. Gill had refused at the time, claiming that 'typography is not my country.' Perhaps because Morison felt strongly about his decision, he would not give up so easily on Gill. Shortly thereafter, Morison approached Gill with an entirely different task. In the afore-mentioned radio interview given on the life of Stanley Morison, Beatrice Warde recalled that "he asked Gill to do no more than draw out for him the Roman

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[10] Dreyfus, John (1990) p. 14
[11] Barker, Nicholas and Douglas Cleverdon (1969) p. 23
[12] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 196
[13] Barker, Nicholas and Douglas Cleverdon (1969) p. 23
[14] Dreyfus, John (1990) p. 14
[15] Dreyfus, John (1990) p. 14

alphabet that Gill had been cutting on memorials."[16] Nevertheless, with what has been understood as "little interest,"[17] in his journal entry dated 25 November 1925 is written 'Drawing alphabets for Stanley Morison in afternoon and evening.' The next day, 'Ditto all day long.'

While Gill began working on the drawings, Morison was taking the steps necessary to see that this alphabet, his contribution to modern typography, was developed perfectly. He had already had problems with the last typeface, Fournier, worked on with the Works in Salfords. What had transpired was that they at Salfords had cut two designs, Series 185 and Series 178. Morison "favoured the latter, but owing to some confusion during his absence in America, Series 185 was approved and cut."[18] However, it should be noted that this cutting still became a popular face. Morison was still relatively new at Monotype. "At this period, his position at Monotype was by no means secure, and he had to battle against the opposition of the Works at Salfords. Morison could only propose: Salfords disposed."[19]

Because of Morison's beliefs about an 'ideal type', "Gill was both, and thus the natural choice. Retention of the chiselled quality of Gill's letterforms became of primary importance to Morison."[20] With his goals in mind, Morison contacted a French punch-cutter living in Paris, Charles Malin. Morison would have us believe that by having the letterforms cut in the traditional manner, that is to say into punches, and then handing these over to Monotype, the type would retain that 'chiselled quality'. He also felt that "no original from a drawing-board could be as satisfactory as a design adapted from existing type."[21] The Dutch Historian, G. W. Ovink, wrote of Morison and his questionable reasoning in a review about two books written on Morison.

> "The importance … which Morison and his friends Jan Van Krimpen and Giovanni Mardersteig attached, at one time, to using the skill of the hand-punchcutter for trying out a pilot model of a type design before the drawings for machine-cutting were made, went far beyond the actual usefulness of the data so obtained. They could have been obtained more quickly and cheaply and with

[16] Barker, Nicholas and Douglas Cleverdon (1969) p. 23
[17] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 197
[18] Moran, James (1968) p. 16-17
[19] Carter, Sebastian (1990) p. 8
[20] Haley, Allan (1984) p. 17
[21] Moran, James (1968) p. 19

> more informative results by the intelligent use of existing machine-cutting routines. In fact, the hand-cutting was quietly dropped in the preparation of some of the most difficult productions. The mystique of tradition handed down from Master to Apprentice; of craft secrets inexplicable to modern science but still so miraculously effective; of the dying race of venerable handworkers who have got it, in their fingertips, suggesting an unbroken line of arcane skills since the Middle Ages—all this Morison should have seen through, since he knew more about William Morris than most, and so must have known not only the breaks in that line and the abuses of craft traditions, but also the absolute lack of any creative talent in all the most skilled punchcutters of this century: Prince, Friend, Plumet, Malin, Rädisch, Hoell, Eichenauer, and so on, who, when left to their own devices, have only produced the crudest misconceptions."[22]

While this seems highly critical of his decision to use Malin, it does give Morison the credit to have known better. However, his reasoning was probably due to the problems with Salfords and the Managing Director, Frank H. Pierpont. As far as Gill is concerned, it probably did serve to "ease him"[23] into the idea of designing type by having another craftsman work from his drawings. Whatever reasoning Morison may have had, "only when the type was in existence would he entrust it to the mechanical processes of Monotype."[24] By the end of November 1925, the typeface design of what was to become *Perpetua* was underway.

The one man with whom Morison could not avoid confrontation was Frank H. Pierpont. He had been running the Works at Salfords from the onset of Monotype's opening in England. Having a "formidable standard of perfection,"[25] he had redesigned the entire Works to have them operating to his standards. From all accounts, Morison had the most problems with him. Morison incorrectly believed that he was at Monotype to improve their type output. He need not have worried about the quality of work; it was Pierpont who had successfully developed Monotype's Imprint and Plantin. One account of the differences in opinion would be "when making Fournier, a model that was undoubtedly Morison's choice, the Works took advantage of his absence to put in hand a version of which he

[22] Ovink, G.W. (1973) pp. 229-43
[23] Mosley, James (1996) p. 13
[24] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 197
[25] Mosley, James (1996) p. 12

disapproved. Frustrations of this kind were to continue to plague Morison's relation with Monotype from time to time."[26]

Malin had sent the first set of smoke proofs for the 14-pt punches, the second set for the 12 pt were sent in May of 1926. In July, Morison had written to Gill to assure him that he would soon have smoke proofs for most of the characters. After reviewing them, Gill had responded somewhat positively seeing it to be 'a decent and legible type'. Everything seemed to be on schedule. With Morison's interest in the Bell fount, he was becoming increasingly convinced that "Perpetua was to be its twentieth-century equal."[27] As Morison hoped, "the co-operation of designer and engraver had come about."[28] Morison, it should be told, had gambled by paying for the punchcutting himself, and now it appeared to be paying off.

In December 1926, everything started to fall apart. Malin had completed the 24 pt punches and sent smoke proofs to Morison. After reviewing them for himself, he sent them to Gill, who had been less than pleased. In a letter sent to Morison, Gill berates them as "decent but very dull, an excellent model for a *shop sign writer*," and on the whole "in themselves good letters but bad type." [29] It appears that Morison had no choice but to proceed because the Monotype Works had already begun their own trials by January 1927, with founts cast by Ribadeau Dumas. Then an odd turn of events occurred. Instead of staying near to the trials of his 'ideal type', Morison went abroad to "console himself."[30] By this point Gill had seen proofs printed with the type and had additional changes. In a letter written to Morison, Gill stated:

> "I think a very nice fount can be made from these letters, but agree with you in thinking that several details must be altered before it can be passed, and certainly before I should like to see my name attached to it. Not that I think it unworthy of me, but simply that it makes me shy at present."[31]

He then proceeded to list different items that need changing. In June, Morison had returned, and he now had a new problem with which to deal.

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[26] Mosley, James (1989) p. 56
[27] Warde, Beatrice (1958) p. 10
[28] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 204
[29] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 211
[30] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 215
[31] Mosley, James (1989) p. 57

The additional changes that Gill now wanted after the type had already left Malin posed a problem. William Burch, the Managing Director at Fetter Lane, had requested the original drawings of Gill be sent from Malin in Paris. It is at this point that a second set of drawings appears. In July 1926, by which time Malin had already started cutting the punches, Gill had evidently done some drawings of an alphabet, both roman and italic, to be used by Gerard Meynell at the Westminster Press. What has yet to be resolved is why Gill had done the drawings for Meynell. Westminster did use some of the capitals, but only in the form of a 'line block.' Morison and Meynell had apparently been discussing the sloped italic that Gill had drawn. Whatever they had been discussing, it had been concluded that the drawings could be used, with some alteration done to the italic capitals. In August 1927, the Works had "learnt what was in [Morison's] mind."[32] "Morison was asked to report on these drawings to Burch."[33]

In 25 October, a meeting occurred to discuss new drawings sent from Gill, more drawings sent from Meynell and Malin's punches. It was decided that they would continue with the 'roman' type punches from Malin, and have Gill draw some additional changes. It should also be noted here that in the daily records of Dora Laing, working from The Monotype Drawing Office on the Gill drawings, on 21 October all work stopped which corresponds with the meeting. The records did not start again until 14 January 1928.[34]

While most dates can be tracked for the creation of the roman fount, it is the italic that remains evasive. It was during this time that Gill also started working with the Golden Cockerel Press. In fact, Gill had started his association with Monotype around the same time in 1924. However, in 1928 Robert Gibbings requested a typeface to be designed by Gill. Initially, Gibbings had only wanted an italic to be drawn for use with the Caslon type he was currently using. Nevertheless, after some discussion, it was decided they needed a type that would be "robust enough in its design"[35] to be used with their illustrations, and settled upon doing a new roman as well. With "some embarrassment" Gill now had to tell Morison of his new agreement with Gibbings "which appeared to prevent him from

[32] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 220
[33] Mosley, James (1989) p. 57
[34] Saunders, David (1990) p. 14
[35] Mosley, James (1996) p. 16

designing new types for Monotype."[36] Gill had first made the suggestion of giving Gibbings exclusive rights to Perpetua for five years. This obviously did not happen. Gibbings did not force the issue; perhaps he saw the work Gill was doing with Monotype as beneficial to the type that Gill was designing for him. Whatever the reason, Perpetua was completed and so in retrospect it can be said that the agreement was a "friendly one and not rigorously enforced."[37]

Before the agreement with Gibbings had become an impediment, Gill had drawn out an italic for Morison. In September 1927, the Works at Salfords had not yet decided if they should use the drawings of Morison or those of Meynell. They had been doing tests not only on the roman fount but also on the italic of both. They had done an experimental cutting of Meynell's italic, "presumably to see if they would work with the Perpetua roman."[38] Pierpont, at this time, had thought Meynell's were usable with minor alterations, but flatly rejected those of Morison. From a letter reproduced in Morison's Biography, it appears that Gill's drawings had been rejected. At the end of June 1928, Gill wrote to Morison suggesting that he could "redesign certain letters" [39] without being in violation of his agreement with Gibbings.

Whatever the case might be, an italic was completed and used to print the insert of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* for the seventh volume of *The Fleuron*. Incidentally, it was from the insert that the names for the founts, Perpetua and Felicity italic, had come. Not only was this the first viewing of the types, but it also mentioned the future availability of a Felicity script. Had this 'script' come to fruition it would have followed along nicely with Morison's prescription for an 'ideal italic.' This insert was dated 1929 although the edition was not published until November 1930.

From within the opening pages of the article written on Eric Gill in the seventh volume of *The Fleuron,* one can tell that it is not only a piece praising Eric Gill, but it is also publicity for the new Perpetua type. Written by Paul Beaujon, it speaks of this face as having the ability to "bestow beauty and distinction upon books"; it gives the type the ability to improve the reading " as if through clear

[36] Mosley, James (1996) p. 16
[37] Carter, Sebastian (1987) p. 79
[38] Mosley, James (2000)
[39] Barker, Nicolas (1972) p. 235

tinted glass, upon an author's thoughts."[40] Gill commented on the outcome of Perpetua in the opening page of the insert of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity.*

> "The 'Perpetua' type, in which this translation of the Passio is printed as the first specimen, was cut by the Lanston Monotype Corporation from the drawings of alphabets made by me. These drawings were not made with special reference to typography—they were simply letters, drawn with brush and ink. For the typographical quality of the fount, as also for the remarkably fine and precise cutting of the punches, the Monotype Corporation is to be praised. In my opinion 'Perpetua' is commendable in that, in spite of many distinctive characters, it retains that common-placeness and normality which is essential to a good book-type."[41]

It is odd that neither Beaujon nor Gill gives any mention of Malin. Full credit was being given to Monotype, but more specifically to Morison. After all, Morison was the Typographical Advisor to Monotype. Later Morison was to say of the type, "these things were not *ad hoc* designs, they were designs that he had been cutting on stone for a generation."[42]

In January 1931, it appears that Felicity was rejected and Gill was asked to do a new set of drawings. Did Pierpont concede to the creation of Felicity only to change his mind later? In 1932, Monotype Perpetua and Felicity Italic were finally released to the printing trade. Felicity had been given a "greater incline and the capitals now had some decorative elements."[43]

Given the unorthodox manner in which Perpetua and Felicity italic were created, it still came to the Drawing Office at Salfords, not Morison, to create a successful type. Pierpont did have the "ability to extract sound, working typefaces from the sketches of hopeful artists," and this "required sensitivity as well as technical competence."[44] Gill was a lettering artist, but until this time had had no experience with the creation of type. If Gill's original drawings were still in existence, it would be easier to measure the amount of work that the technicians actually put into the type.

The long and overwrought creation of Perpetua was finally completed, but not without difficulty. Problems perhaps easily avoided had Morison put aside his

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[40] Warde, Beatrice [Paul Beaujon] (1930) p. 41
[41] Warde, Beatrice [Paul Beaujon] (1930) p. 2 of Insert
[42] Barker, Nicolas and Douglas Cleverdon (1969) p. 24
[43] Mosley, James (1989) p. 58
[44] Mosley, James (1996) p. 14

problems with Pierpont and Salfords and used his knowledge of the technology in that day to his advantage. The people surrounding the creation of this type, Gill, Morison and Pierpont, each one with a unique ability and strong opinion of his own; had something to lose should it fail to be popular. It was Morison's first 'modern' design for Monotype. He had told the printing world what he thought they needed for an 'ideal type,' and proceeded to create a "type-design of the twentieth century worthy of a permanent place in the history of typography."[45] In Gill not only did he find those letters, but also he found someone who understood his vision and wanted to participate. It came to Pierpont and the team of people at the Works, who in the end received no true credit, for taking the vision of Morison and the drawings of Gill to create Perpetua and Felicity italic.

[45] Fleuron VII p42

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Monotype Perpetua, Release 1991.

Perpetua Regular and Expert — 20 point

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ&
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyzfifl
1234567890
.:;!?-‘’()–“”—

Perpetua Italic and Italic Expert — 20 point

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ&
abcdefghijklmno
pqrstuvwxyzfifl
1234567890
.:;!?-‘’()–“”—

Perpetua Titling Light — 24 point

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ

Perpetua Titling Bold — 30 point

ABCDEFGHIJKL
MNOPQRSTU
VWXYZ&

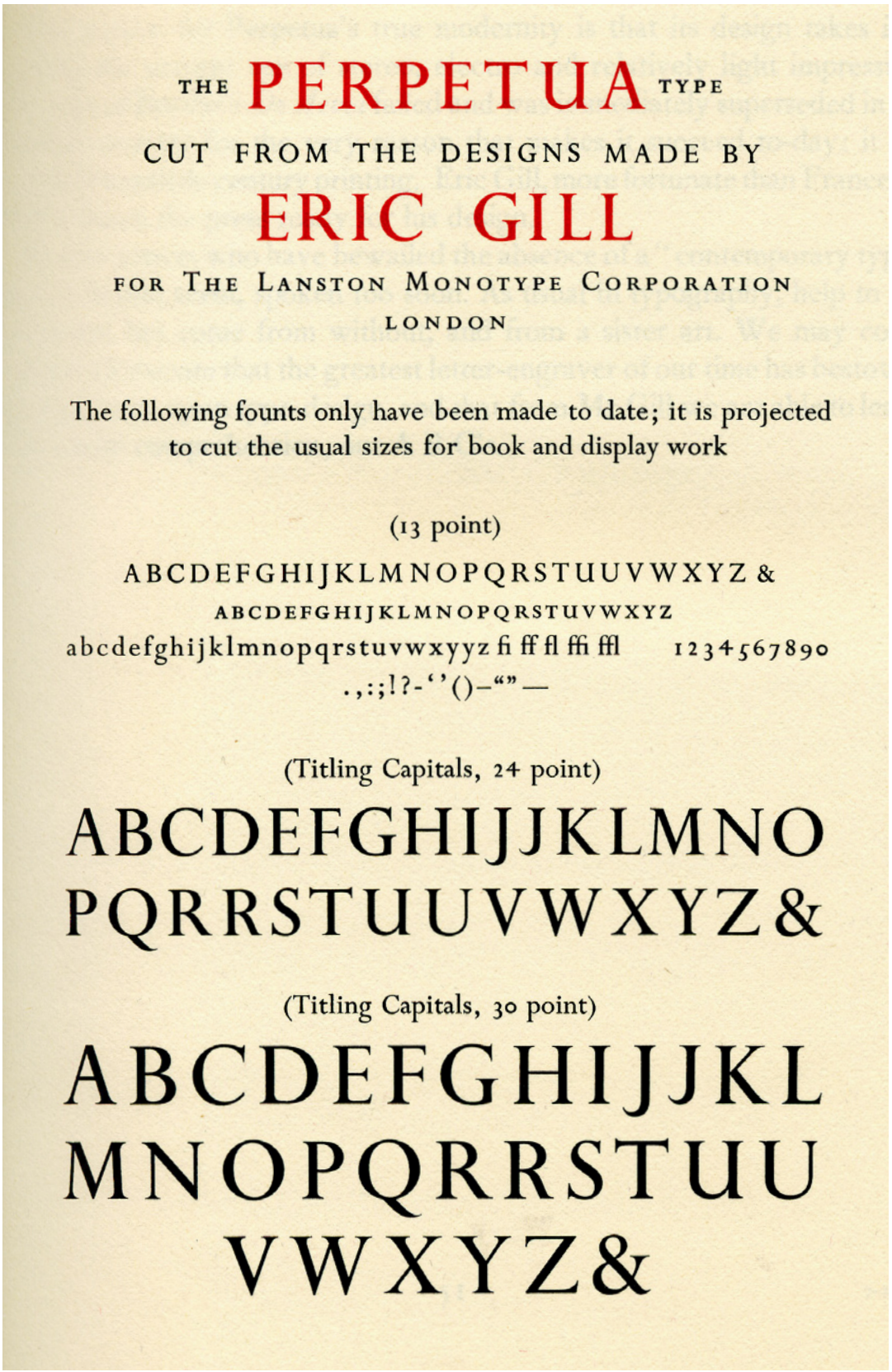

Image from The Fleuron VII, 1930. Shown at 80% of actual size. Scan courtesy of Richard Kegler.

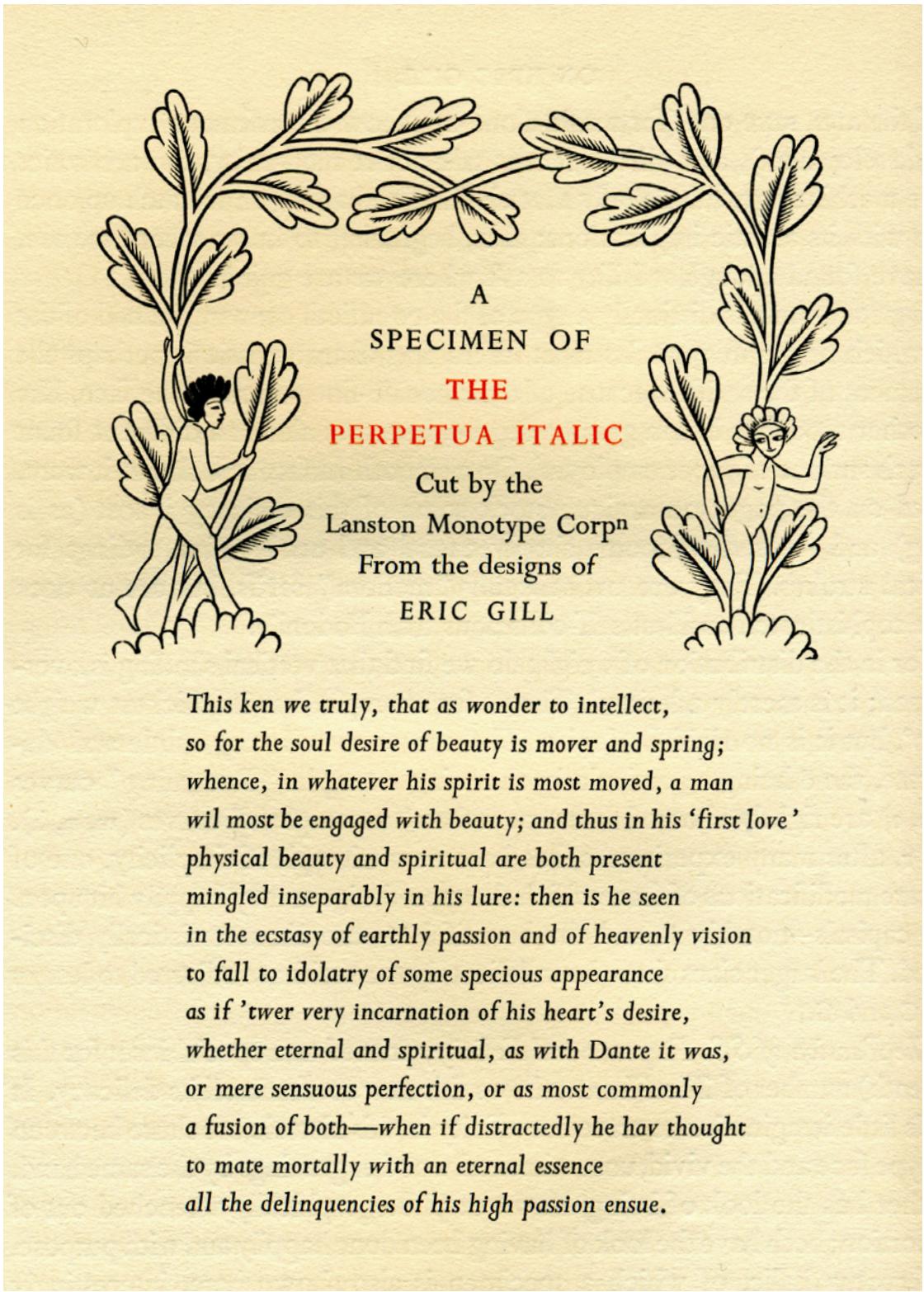

Image from The Fleuron VII, 1930. Shown at 80% of actual size. Scan courtesy of Richard Kegler.