

Homage to Alberto Tallone, 1898–1968

Jack W. Stauffacher

Poor Venice. It was in the grips of a foreign invasion during the late summer of 1956. One searched for clean air, for the old Venetian harmonies (actually, I was searching for Aldus Manutius' workshop and a local cafe). Glancing through a gallery window, I noticed a cluster of books on display that had something of the Venetian mood I was seeking. This was how I discovered a second Aldus: Alberto Tallone.

In the gallery Comune di Venezia, Opera Bevilacqua la Masa, was a large exhibition of Tallone's work, and at first I was puzzled—whose books where they? What unknown Italian had created them? Suddenly a man emerged from the gallery, greeting me with warmth. It was Alberto Tallone, artist and poet of those beautiful cased volumes. At once the scattered images of a Palladio, a Goldoni, and the measured sounds of Vivaldi fell into place. And there was Tallone offering his hand of welcome!

Some years before I read an article in *Signature*¹ about Tallone's work in Paris, and the designing of a typeface. What caught my attention at that time was the special Italian–French flavor of Tallone's development, and also that he was so involved with literature—the list of texts he selected reflected a civilized eye: Petrarch, Dante, Erasmus, Tasso, Rabelais, G. De Nerval, Valéry, Neruda, etc. I was attracted to the whole spirit of *la typographie pure* of the book typographer who attempts to make the subtle balance between the choice of type and the manner in which one reads the texts, whether Dante or Valéry.

The true beauty of a book must be understood from the beauty of the written work; without illustrations; in the beauty of the typography, in the beauty of the printing, in the absence of colors, in the beauty of the paper. Tallone had taken these lines from the French poet, Charles Péguy, as his motto and the opening statement in all his catalogues.

Essentially Péguy's statement leads to a profound purification of the book. It clarifies the role of the typographer, defining it as the thoughtful

transmitter of manuscript into print. It is like turning back to the beginnings of the art—saying, my god, I never realized the infinite beauty of the roman letters! The secret truth of Tallone's books was in the transparency of their typography which linked word to word. What a strange and wonderful mixture of selective typographic interpretation and love Tallone showed with these authors he so carefully brought to light.

Alberto Tallone emerged from a rich atmosphere of art. His father, Cesare Tallone, was a famous portrait painter ("the Italian Manet of his day"), and his mother had a deep love for poetry. Both influences were strong. Alberto was born at Bergamo (near Milano) in 1898, and later moved to Milano with his family. As a young man he worked until 1932 in the rare bookstores of Milano, when he decided to devote himself to the art of bookmaking. He left Milano in 1932 and went to apprentice himself to a master, Maurice Darantiere, in Paris.

It was during the second year with Darantiere that he produced his first volume, Dante's *Vita Nuova* in 4°. This choice had a significance that was to shape the whole spiritual voyage of his work. Dante was the one author that he always returned to: *The Divine Comedy*, 1939–41 in 4°; *Rime*, 1942 in 4°; *Convivio*, 1965 in 4°; and again *Vita Nuova*, 1965, and the *Rime*, 1965, and a *Divine Comedy*, 1951, in a pocket edition, 32°; and, separately, *The Inferno*, 1967 in 4°, with the recent critical text by Giorgio Petrocchi—the last book he worked on, and which remained unfinished. Thus Dante began and ended the span.

After five years of apprenticeship Tallone took over Darantiere's business, moved to the Hôtel de Sagonne (a beautiful seventeenth-century building designed by Mansart, the architect of Versailles), and established the Presses de l'Hôtel de Sagonne to further refine and shape his ideal typographic principles. In 1957 Tallone returned to Italy, opening his new atelier at Alpignano near Torino. This significant move after twenty-five years in Paris brought him back to his own cultural roots. There were many new titles: *Quattro Vangeli* (the Four Gospels), in a new translation from the Greek, 1962; *La Mandragola*, 1960, Machiavelli, in 4°; unedited poems by Pablo Neruda (*Sumario* in 8°), 1964, a poet with whom Tallone shared a strong and moving friendship.

How did Tallone achieve the evasive simplicity of his books? He had that subtle understanding and intimacy with letters—the beautifully formed geometric shapes of the roman alphabet, their density and coloring mirroring the "invisible signs" of memory; or, as F. M. Ricci has called them, "sintesi magiche di pensieri colti" (magical compressions of

tres, des planches pour les contenir, des vis et des poids pour les comprimer. Les mois et les années se consumaient avec sa fortune et avec les fonds des associés dans ces patiences, dans ces épreuves, dans ces succès et dans ces revers.

Enfin, ayant exécuté en miniature une *presse* qui lui parut réunir toutes les conditions de l'imprimerie, telle qu'il la concevait alors, il cacha ce modèle sous son manteau, et, entrant dans la ville, il alla chez un habile tourneur en bois et en métal, nommé Conrad Saspach, qui demeurait au carrefour Mercier, pour le prier de l'exécuter en grand. Il recommanda le secret à l'ouvrier, lui disant seulement que c'était une machine à l'aide de laquelle il se proposait

d'accomplir des chefs-d'œuvre d'art et de mécanique dont on connaîtrait plus tard les prodiges.

Le tourneur, prenant, tournant et retournant le modèle dans ses mains, avec ce sourire de dédain d'un artisan consommé pour une ébauche, lui dit d'un air un peu railleur:

« Mais c'est tout simplement un pressoir que vous me demandez là, messire Jean! — Oui, répondit d'un ton grave et exalté Gutenberg: c'est un pressoir, en effet; mais c'est un pressoir d'où jaillira bientôt à flots in-tarissables la plus abondante et la plus merveilleuse liqueur qui ait jamais coulé pour désaltérer les hommes! Par lui, Dieu répandra son *Verbe*; il en découlera une source de pure vérité: comme un nouvel astre, il

Figure 1.
A. De Lamartine,
Gutenberg. Torino:
A. Tallone, 1960.

Figure 2.
Tallone at the case,
Paris.



selected thought).² Only three styles claimed his attention: Caslon, Garamond, and Carattere Tallone—a type he designed himself in 1949, engraved by the skilled hand of Charles Malin.³

Commenting on Tallone's graphic visualization, Luigi Balsamo has written, "The page reveals proportions which unite a certain classical measure to an open balance, intense in its desire to avoid any danger of being static that could weigh down the reading; the preference for the oblong format is symptomatic and makes the Tallonian pages easy and inviting to read in the way that the eye of the present-day reader desires, without having to resort to capricious innovations. . . . His whole production is 'aristocratic' in its elegance—not ostentatious because the simplicity appears to be so spontaneous, natural. . . . Tallone's books illustrate a lesson of singular technique united to a rare taste; of artistic sensitivity which is sustained by authentic cultural interests. It seems to me, however, that one cannot understand the value of these precious, beautiful books in precise measure if it does not evolve from the true understanding of their most profound matrix, to the human condition in which they were created. I want to say that we cannot stop at the books. We must reap the lesson, which is just as precious, and comes from Tallone the man, for his life was lived with decision and courage in such a conformist period of history. The tenacious coherence with which he advanced in his obligation, without ever giving in to the temptation of the provisory, of current taste, was remarkable."⁴

Besides the careful and lucid style of Tallone's books, one cannot help but notice the exquisite papers the printer has used throughout his work. At the Cartiere Enrico Magnani mills at Pescia in Tuscany, I witnessed that rare chemistry of the "white art," whose craftsmen still look upon the making of paper by hand as a sacred act. There was a close link between the Magnani papers and Tallone's books. And it is through this relationship that one can understand the natural esteem that Tallone acknowledged in using these superb papers. I have in my library—a slim volume that speaks of this lasting collaboration between a papermaker and a printer. In *Ricordanze di un Cartaio* (Memories of a Papermaker) by the late Carlo Magnani—written when he was eighty, and printed by Tallone in 1962—Magnani begins, "A sheet of paper. A sheet of that good handmade paper, clear, velvety, which tastes like bread and has a soul and a voice. At present, few know about it, and less than a few love it, look for it,

Figure 3. Broadside of a sonnet by Christopher Plantin.
Pure Tallone. (Approximately $9\frac{1}{2} \times 15$ inches).

CHRISTOPHE PLANTIN

1520-1589

LE BONHEUR DE CE MONDE

SONNET

*Avoir une maison commode, propre et belle,
Un jardin tapissé d'espaliers odorans,
Des fruits, d'excellent vin, peu de train, peu d'enfans,
Posséder seul sans bruit une femme fidèle.*

*N'avoir dettes, amour, ni procès, ni querelle,
Ni de partage à faire avecque ses parens,
Se contenter de peu, n'espérer rien des Grands,
Regler tous ses desseins sur un juste modèle.*

*Vivre avecque franchise et sans ambition,
S'adonner sans scrupule à la devotion,
Domter les passions, les rendre obeissantes.*

*Conserver l'esprit libre, et le jugement fort,
Dire son Chapelet en cultivant ses entes,
C'est attendre chez soi bien doucement la mort.*

A. WALLONS, ÉDITEUR



Figure 4. Tallone's shop, Alpignano, Torino.

A B C
D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z
Æ Œ
Ç

caractère "Tallone"

remember it as if it were a lost love. It is perhaps like those brocades, damasks; those soft, golden fabrics which are still fresh today, though woven by the ancient Luccan masters. It is rare today to find a good sheet of paper among so many false ones, and so many substitutions. No one makes it anymore other than a few sheaves for people who have disappeared, held in suspension between desperate love and oblivious dementia.”

Alberto Tallone died on the 24th of March 1968, at the height of his creative energies. He had been waiting anxiously for Pablo Neruda’s manuscript, *La copa de Sangre*, which arrived just after his death. At the end of the book, Neruda attached a moving homage, which is printed here for the first time in English.

Jorge Guillen, the Spanish poet, has written of his poetic search, “In the present moment of time one looks not for conflict but for connection and maximum generosity.” I think it expresses what I felt when I met Alberto Tallone in Venice for the first and last time.

Adios a Tallone

From Alpignano, near Turin, Bianca writes to me: “Our Alberto was never able either to read your letter or to print your new book. He left us forever, two months ago.”

Alberto Tallone, printer, was supposed to print the prose of Leonardo da Vinci and went to the town of Leonardo to get a feeling for the town and to live in it. There, he saw Bianca pass between the field and the road for an instant. He found her to be so leonardesque that he followed her immediately to tell her of his love. They were married in that same place a few days later.

I passed happy days in this Italian house between the two printers, Alberto and Bianca.

The press was right there, in broad view, shining, mounted for manual work like Gutenberg’s for the illustrious examples of typography.

I felt honored because some of my books were printed by him, whom I consider to be the modern master of typography. And also because he chose by whim to print my poetry, and he made few exceptions for contemporary writers. But in the publication of the classics, he established a new spacious garden, severe and pure. Tallone’s type, drawn by himself, flowers on Magnani paper from Pescia. The Garamond type triumphs

over the fine splendour of Rives paper (filigranado) or on the Japanese Hosho paper. I have Petrarca, the poems of Dante, the Loves of Ronsard, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, the poems of Cino da Pistoia, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Zenon de Elea, Diogenes, Empedocles, printed by his marvellous hands. The severity imposed itself on the limpid beauty of his editions. . . .

We believe that the book should reach a wide public, it should be before everyone's eyes, and accessible to everyone's hands. It should be distributed in thousands of cities, towns, warehouses, and fishing villages. But we as poets, have the obligation to defend the perfection of the book, in its luminous body.

Some small groups have been against some of my own books, because they show that Chilean printing can compete in quality with other more famous [printing]. I don't mind this bitter reproach. My books are also published in the more popular and surely more economical editions. I encourage both types and for different reasons. The rest is decided at the discretion of the editors.

In addition to printing the most beautiful books of our times, Tallone had the simplicity, the poetry, and the touch of the ancient artisans to whose school he belonged. His conversation excited me. In his home,

Figure 5. Tallone (right) and Pablo Neruda, Alpignano, Torino, 1964.



instead of a dining room, he had a *trattoria*, with tables like a small restaurant. He explained to me that his father, a portrait painter of the court, was a great bohemian. He painted portraits of the king's children, but was so slow in finishing them that when they were finished, the princes and princesses had grown up remarkably. The money he earned would be used to buy expensive, beautiful furniture, but then the painter would disappear, surrounded by his happy friends; and the [bankruptcy] court would take all the Tallone furniture. For this reason Alberto ate for only short periods, rarely, in the family dining room. During the "dismantled" periods, his mother took the children to eat in the neighboring *trattoria* on credit. Because of this, the grown and famous printer put his own *trattoria* in his own home where we ate happily more than once.

He collected locomotives and loved them. Without knowing this, Matilde and I once had a great start when we entered the garden; right in front of us we met tracks and a little further along suddenly a big locomotive belching much black smoke. We thought we were in the wrong place; perhaps we were at the station of the town.

But Bianca and Alberto Tallone appeared smiling. The smoke was in our honor.

The new manuscripts arrived late so that he could not [mount] them in the press. Bianca, heroic and alone, tells me that she shall do it herself.

I read in my copy of *Galeazzi di Tarsia* (1520–1553), printed by Tallone in 1950, these splendid verses:

. . . *Donna, che viva già portavi i giorni*
Chiari negli occhi ed or le notti apporti. . . .
[. . . Lady, who once in life carried the days
Clear in your eyes and now you carry the nights. . . .]

Adios, Alberto Tallone, great printer, good friend, before you carried the light in your eyes, now the night travels through them. But in your books, small castles of man, beauty and clarity remain alive: through those windows, night shall never enter.

Pablo Neruda

1. John Dreyfus, "Alberto Tallone and His New Type," *Signature* 16, New Series, 1952.
2. Franco Maria Ricci, *Fregi e caratteri di G. B. Bodoni*, Pagina 7, 1964.
3. The Tallone types were recut in 1952 by Lanston Monotype Machine Company of Philadelphia.
4. "Ricordo di Alberto Tallone," *La Bibliofilia*, Ann LXX (1968), Disp. 1–2.

Correspondence

The editors welcome comments on articles, reviews, and letters that have appeared in past numbers. Communications should be addressed to the Editor, c/o The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA 44106.

To the Editor:

Although it is futile to wish that history could be altered, F. M. O'Hara's article (Spring 1971) on the development of the hyphen prompts me to repeat my wish (uttered nearly every time I need to excerpt a passage from a printed book) that the evolution of the hyphen had been somewhat different.

Mr. O'Hara shows that hyphens have taken on a variety of forms at different times and that the two functions of hyphens—to mark joined or compound words and to indicate word division at the end of a line—have not always been associated, for at certain times hyphens were used for one of these purposes but not the other. Since these two functions are so different and since various forms for hyphens have been current at different times, it is a pity that two separate standard forms did not emerge, each tied to one of these functions.

What we now have to put up with, since that did not happen, is a single symbol which reflects two concepts, with the result that its significance is sometimes ambiguous. When a word which is a possible compound has to be divided at the end of a line, the meaning of the hyphen may not be entirely clear. It marks a line ending, of course, but does it also indicate a compound word which should be hyphenated whether or not it is split at the end of a line? In some cases the question cannot be answered with certainty, because various words may be spelled either with or without a hyphen, and which way the author intended may not be clear if the word does not turn up elsewhere in the work. Thus anyone making a quotation from another person's writing may have to decide for himself whether or not to retain a line-end hyphen.

This problem is naturally of special concern to scholarly editors. Since their goal is to present a text as close as possible to the author's intention, they may have to engage in considerable research to make an intelligent decision about retaining a particular line-end hyphen. Then the new edition which they in turn publish is bound to contain a few line-end hyphens which will be similarly troublesome to its readers. For this reason careful modern editions, such as those issued under the auspices of the

Center for Editions of American Authors, find it necessary to include two hyphenation lists in their apparatus, one recording the ambiguous line-end hyphens in the original edition (or other copy-text) and the other recording those in the newly edited text. Without the first, the record of the editor's decisions is not complete; without the second, the text cannot be considered fully established, since the reader would have decisions to make on his own. Ideally, therefore, when such an edition is reproduced photographically for reissue without apparatus, at least that second hyphenation list should be included.

By extension, it could be said that any book needs such a list, if a reader is to be able to make accurate quotations from it. Obviously it is awkward to have to append a table explaining one's own punctuation. The sensible solution is to have two different symbols, each unambiguous. Publishing-house editors and proofreaders are well aware of this problem and employ the double hyphen (=), in marking manuscripts or proofs, to indicate line-end hyphens that are to be retained, wherever the word falls. Carrying this system over into the printed book would be a simple and effective way of solving the problem. But the double hyphen on the printed page would call attention to itself as an unfamiliar symbol and would bother readers until it became thoroughly established. The solution is therefore not a feasible one in the near future. (I have made some further comments on the problem of ambiguous hyphenation in "Some Principles for Editorial Apparatus," *Studies in Bibliography*, XXV [1972], 41-88.)

As Mr. O'Hara points out, double hyphens have been used from time to time in the past; it is unfortunate that they did not remain in use, along with single hyphens, and gradually assume the function, for the general reading public, now assigned to them by proofreaders. The process of evolution which lies behind most widely recognized symbols is a long one, and it is perhaps useless to contemplate the establishment of a new mark of punctuation. Nevertheless, it would be encouraging to see a few publishers, in at least a few of their publications, take the pioneering steps in this direction by employing the double hyphen, as well as the single hyphen, on the printed page.

G. Thomas Tanselle

Department of English, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis. 53706

Editor's note

Obviously the bibliographers have a point. Henceforth *Visible Language* will employ a double hyphen to indicate a compound word (e.g., "a fifth-century manuscript") which should be hyphenated and which is split at the end of a line.