

LINES IN THE AMPERSAND

Chiara Nicolini visits a press near Verona that has a history of drawing on the best international talent in its quest for innovative texts and illustrations



Alessandro Zanella's Ampersand, now based in a delightful country house in Santa Lucia ai Monti, a village outside Verona, is one of the most important fine presses in Italy today. When Zanella set up the press in Verona in 1984, the city was already famous as a centre for fine printing. The man responsible for its fame was Giovanni Mardersteig, "the Prince of Printers", who founded his celebrated Officina Bodoni there in 1922, and then established the Stamperia Valdonega in 1948.

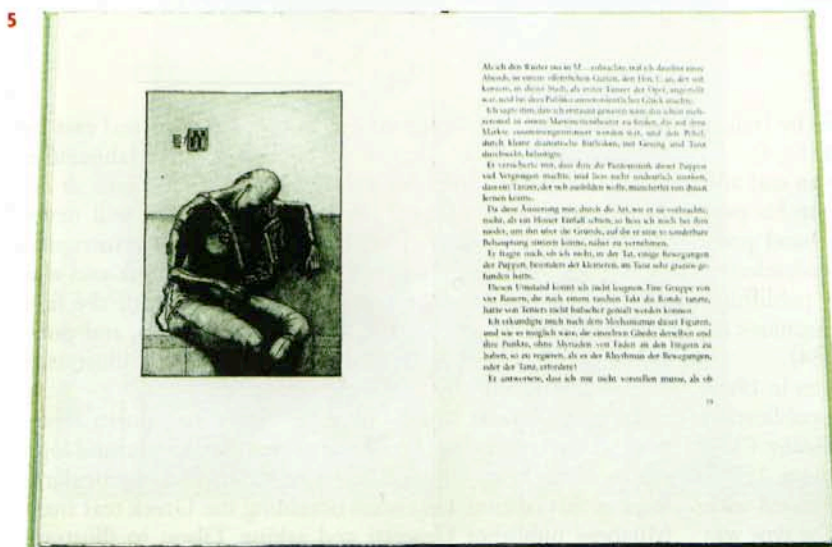
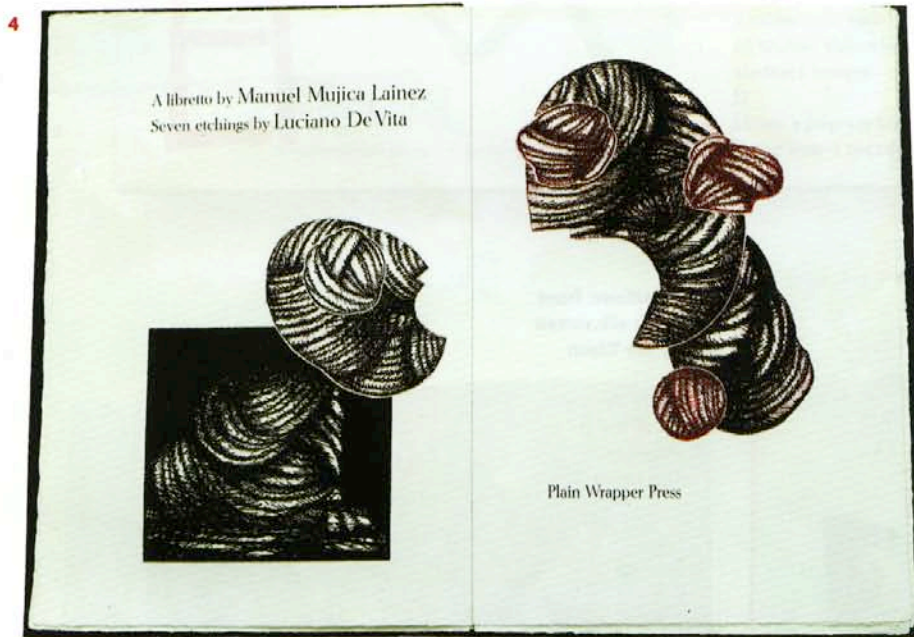
Mardersteig's talent for typography and layout, his choice of high-quality materials and the elegance of his books inspired others to set up presses in the city. The first of these was Franco Riva in 1954. He was followed in the early 1960s by Gino Castiglioni and Alessandro Corubolo with the Officina Chimèrea, then by Enzo Sommaruga, Jacques Vernière and, in 1970, by the American Richard-Gabriel Rummonds with his Plain Wrapper Press.

Young Zanella had no great interest in printing. He liked graphics and etching and was thinking of enrolling at the Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche (ISIA) in Urbino. Then he met Vernière, who introduced him to Rummonds and

the Plain Wrapper Press: it was love at first sight. Zanella abandoned the idea of going to Urbino and in 1976 followed Rummonds on a six-month visit to the University of Alabama, where he got to grips with the university's hand-press and attended Rummonds' lessons on book history and librarianship.

Initially as an apprentice, then as an associate, Zanella collaborated with Rummonds on a number of books, the first of which was Anthony Burgess's *Will and Testament: A Fragment of Biography* (Verona, Plain Wrapper Press, October 1977), illustrated with eight silk-screens by British pop artist Joe Tilson (fig 1) and limited to 86 numbered copies. This taught Zanella how to instigate and develop a complex editorial project, from choosing type and paper, to printing text and illustrations.

The title page of *Will and Testament* was reproduced after a calligraphic draft by Golda Fishbein, who also drew the title of Andrea Zanzotto's *Circhi e Cene* ("Circuses and suppers", Verona, Plain Wrapper Press, October 1979) as well as logos for both the Plain Wrapper Press and Ampersand. Zanella says that *Circhi e Cene* (fig 2), which was illustrated by Tilson, remains one of his favourite books. Subsequent Plain Wrapper Press editions of Luigi Santucci's *La Donna con la Bocca Aperta* ("The woman with the open mouth", May 1980) and Manuel Mujica Láinez's *Cantata de Bomarzo* ("Bomarzo's



- 1 **Will and Testament:**
one of eight silk-screens
by Joe Tilson
- 2 **Circhi e Cene:** title page
after calligraphic draft
by Golda Fishbein
- 3 **La donna con la Bocca
Aperta:** fold-out title
page by Emilio Tadini
- 4 **Cantata de Bomarzo:**
etchings by Luciano de Vita
- 5 **Über das Marionettentheater:**
etching by Neil Moore
- 6 **Ampersand's logo** designed
by Golda Fishbein



7



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Persefone: front cover silk screen by Joe Tilson

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Carte del cielo: six of the 11 volumes in this series

song", January 1981) contain, respectively, graphics by Italian artists Emilio Tadini (fig 3) and Luciano De Vita (fig 4).

In 1982 Rummonds' Veronese venture came to an end and Zanella decided he had enough experience to set up his own fine press. He bought a massive 1854 Stanhope hand press (which was joined in 1985 by a Vandecook proof press), selected a location and found his first customer – Milanese publishing house Verba, for whom he printed an edition of Ausonius's *La Mosella* illustrated by Leo Lionni (Milan, Verba, 1984).

The name Ampersand was taken from the last letter in 19th-century alphabets: "and per se and". The press's first publication was Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* ("On the marionette theatre", Verona, Ampersand, autumn 1984). The 32-page quarto, limited to 80 copies, was illustrated with four etchings by British artist Neil Moore (fig 5). The type was

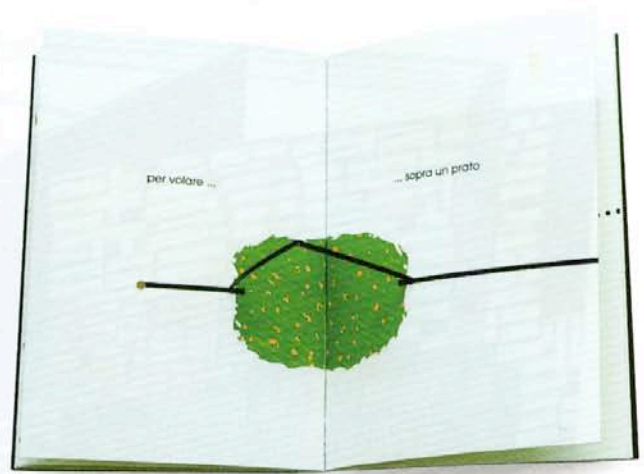
hand-set Spectrum designed by Jan van Krimpen and cast by Dutch foundry Enschedé, and the paper was ivory Hahnemüle.

An edition of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés Jamais n'abolira le Hazard* ("A throw of the dice will never abolish chance") followed in May 1987. Zanella was intrigued by the revolutionary typographic layout of this book and was determined to reproduce it. He borrowed a copy of the first edition from Lionni, bought a set of Caslon type, and published his own version limited to 115 copies and illustrated with four woodcuts by Jacques Vernière.

In 1990 Zanella issued Ghiannis Ritsos' long poem *Persefone*, which became the first book to bear the Ampersand logo – a swirling, heart-shaped "&" (fig 6). Zanella is particularly fond of this edition. He recalls obtaining the Greek text from Milanese publisher Crocetti and asking Tilson to illustrate



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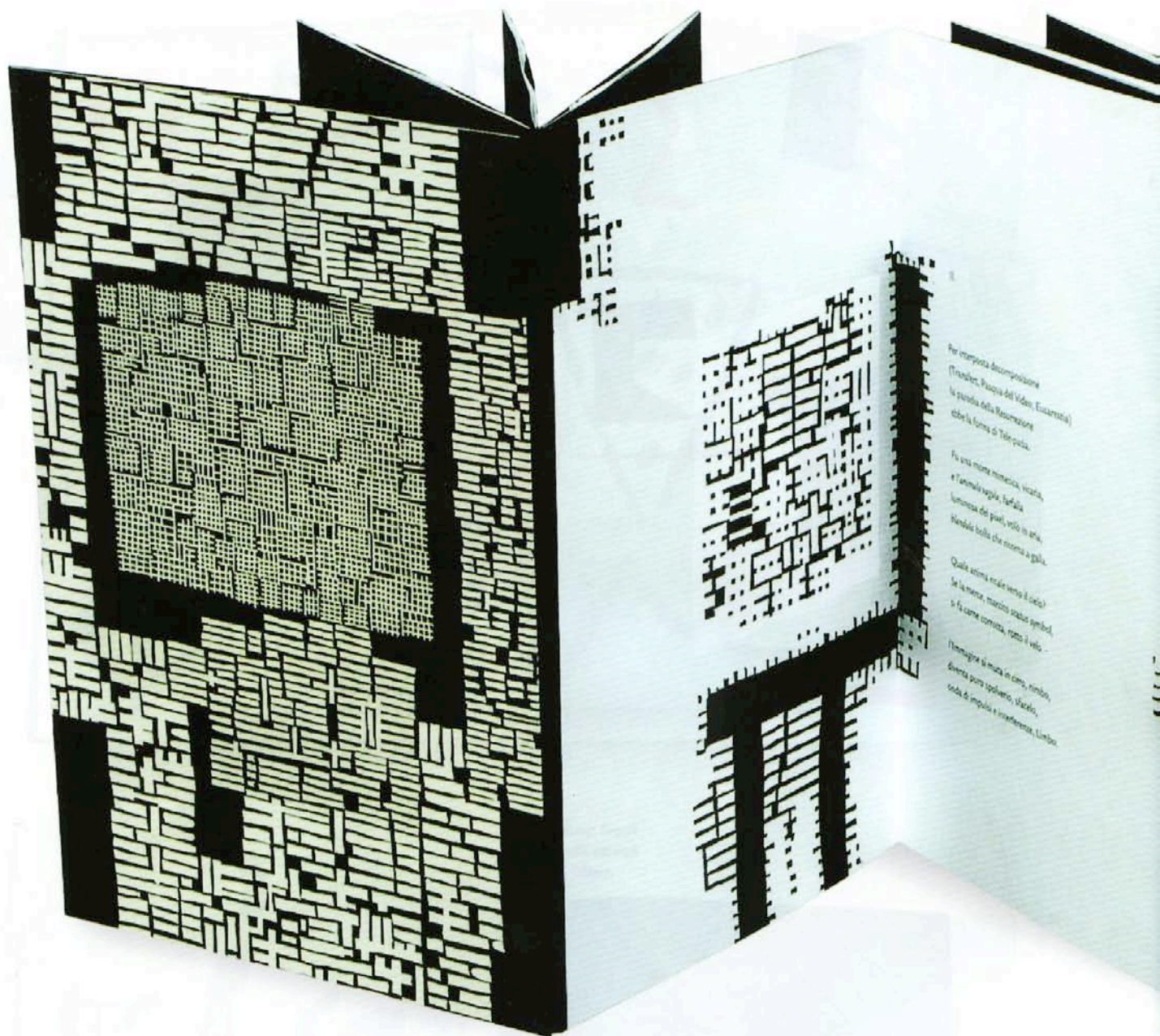
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Poemi Lirici: one of 18 woodcuts with pasted pieces of painted paper by Tommaso Cascella
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Vetrinetta
Accidentale: two of Walter Valentini's abstract images
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Linea: a pop-up line flying over a meadow

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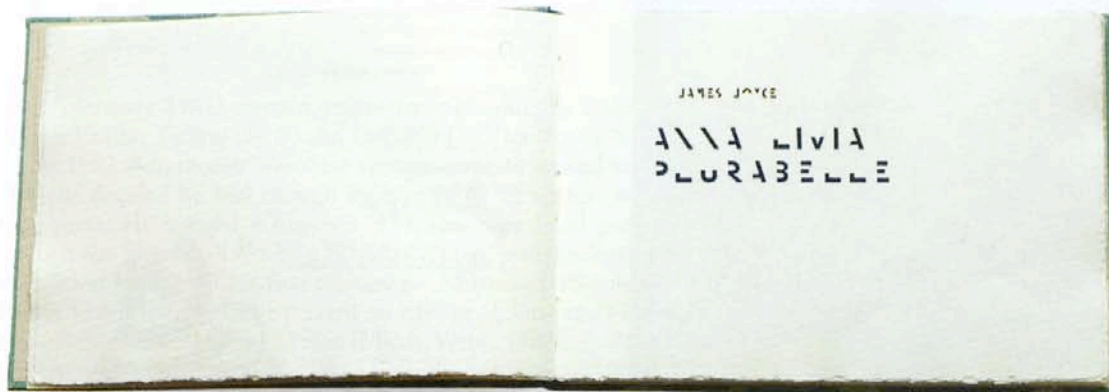


Partimmo - rischioso era il cammino,
 finimmo in questa fossa
 dove a stremo entra un barlume
 del giorno che lassù
 sentiamo, raggiu crotallino.
 Avanza lui nella penombra, io
 al buio lo seguo o lo precedo, incampo,
 sbando, ma il corpo ci presidia,
 da passi rovinosi ci trattiene,
 la memoria degli arti
 ci orienta e ci dirige
 attondi
 lontano è,
 se c'è il forame dell'uscita
 e lui già amana, anela
 la luce, la salvezza.
 La pazienza tace, non gli dice
 niente la scienza
 ma che non sia fallace...
 e io, fede che smuovi le montagne: facias.



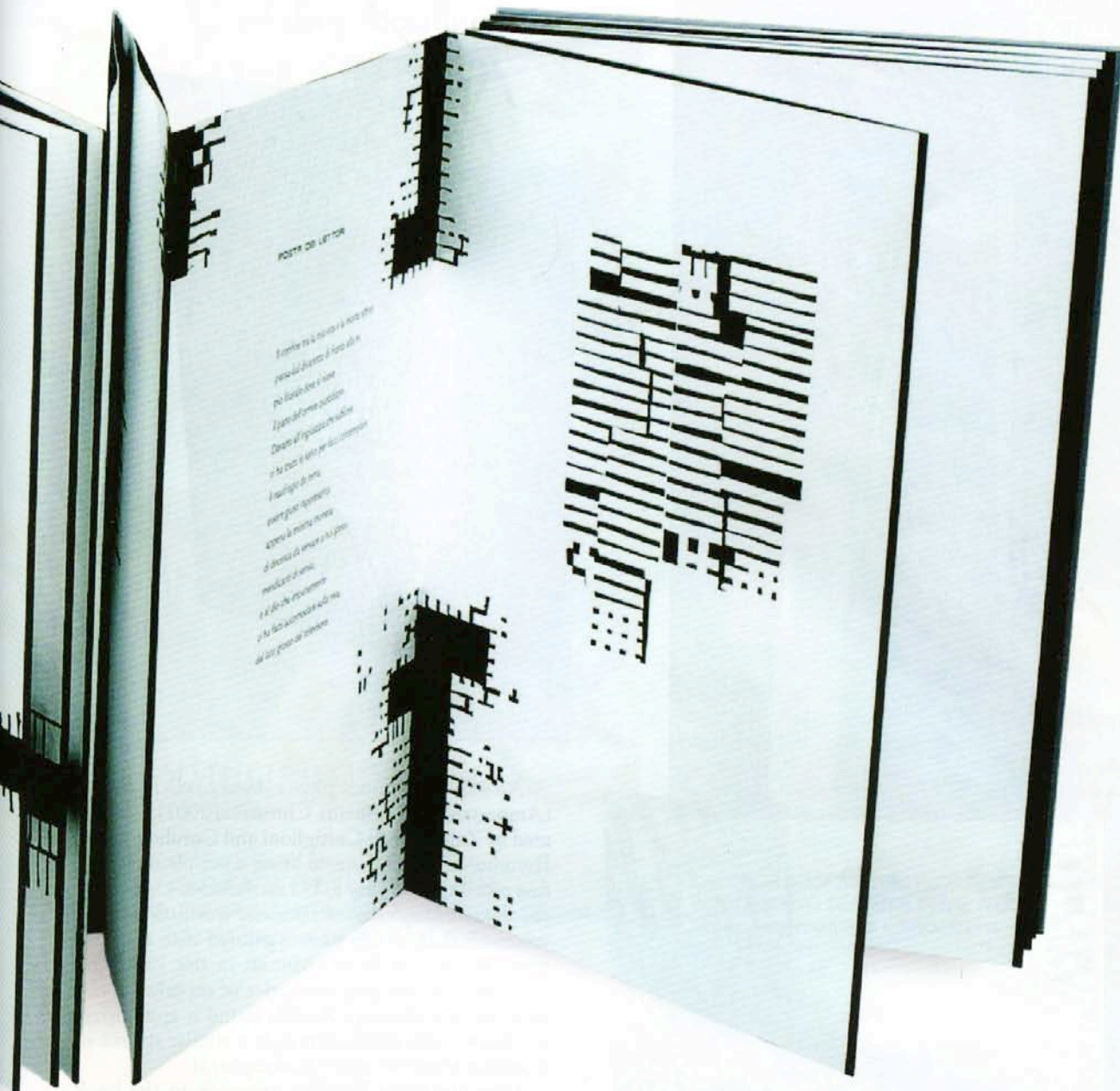


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11
Anna Livia
Plurabelle: title
 page with barely
 readable type
 designed by
 Munari
 13
Ecce Video



it. Tilson loves Greek culture and had already illustrated the myth of Persephone, so he was happy to collaborate. He created a series of small woodcut ornaments for the text, as well as a silk-screen for each cover – the one on the front cover is raised in relief (fig 7).

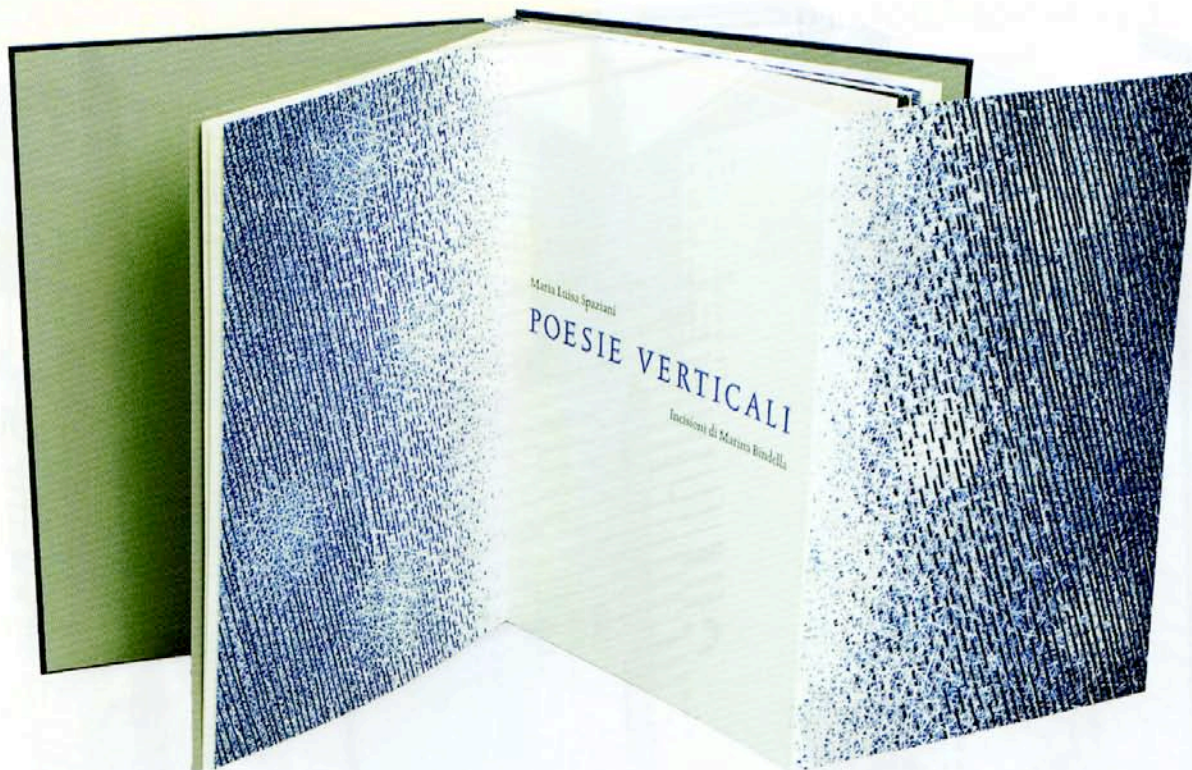
Persefone is an oblong folio limited to 80 copies. It contains the text in modern Greek with a parallel Italian translation. Zanella also made another edition limited to 80 copies, entitled *Persephone*, alongside a parallel English translation (Verona, Ampersand, spring 1990).

All the books printed by Zanella in the first years of his solo career were foreign texts accompanied an Italian translation. However, in 1994 he began to publish a series of 20th-century Italian literature called *Le carte del cielo* (“The papers of the sky”). Conceived and edited by librarian, collector and scholar Sandro Bortone, the series comprises 11 volumes issued between 1994 and 2002. The first 10 have an identical slim quarto format, bound in identical white wrappers, and are all illustrated with one chalcographic plate (fig 8). The eleventh volume is Riccardo Bacchelli’s *Poemi Lirici* (“Lyrical

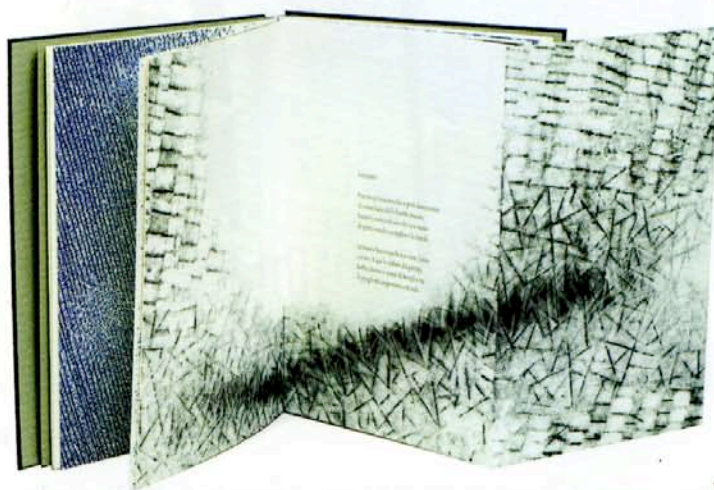
poems”, Santa Lucia ai Monti, Ampersand, 2002), a collection of poems illustrated by Tommaso Cascella with 18 black and white abstract woodcuts embellished with pasted pieces of painted paper (fig 9). The book is larger than the previous volumes, has red wrappers with an extra woodcut on the front cover, and is limited to 100 copies (the other titles in the series are limited to 135 copies).

Poemi Lirici was the first book printed by Zanella with photopolymer plates instead of hand-set movable types. The “biting” of the paper has the same tactile quality as moveable types, but the photopolymer technique allows the printer to make printing plates out of digitally designed types and layouts. It is a flexible system that enables Zanella to print long texts.

In addition to the Ampersand works, Zanella has printed books for colleagues and customers, including the bibliophile association *I Cento Amici del Libro* (“One hundred friends of the book”). He collaborated with the association on several works, including Mario Luzi’s *Vetrinetta Accidentale* (“Accidental little window”, *Centi Amici del Libro*, 2005), illustrated by Walter Valentini (fig 10).



14



14-15

Poesie Verticali:
fold-out title page
with relief image by
Marina Bindella and
another fold-out
spread from the
same book

Further information

Zanella also runs printing courses at Ampersand.
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15

An edition of James Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (Ampersand and Officina Chimerèa, 2001) was created by Zanella with Castiglioni and Corubolo when Rummonds asked them to bring a sample of Italian fine printing to display in US universities. One of the most interesting characteristics of this little oblong volume is that its title page is printed with a special type designed by Bruno Munari in the 1930s (fig 11). The type was part of a series of experiments by Munari on readability. Zanella found it appropriate for Joyce's text, which demands a similar degree of attention from the reader to decipher it.

Over the years Zanella's approach to the book has become more and more inventive and innovative. In 1999 he wrote, illustrated and printed for (and with) his daughters a little pop-up book called *Linea* ("Line", fig 12). In 2006 he created with Lucio Passerini *Ecce Video* (fig 13 – see *Illustration* issue 15), a leporello containing eight poems on television by Valerio Magrelli and eight linocuts by Passerini. It is printed with Monitor type, designed by Zanella after the famous "Brionvega" logo, on Tyveck, a tear-proof and waterproof material. And in 2009 he issued the spectacular *Poesie Verticali* ("Vertical poems", figs 14-15).

When Zanella asked Maria Luisa Spaziani, one of his favourite poets, to write a few poems on a subject of her choice, she came up with 14 religious compositions. Although surprised by the religious theme, he loved the title and began to work on the concept of verticality. He came up with a horizontal structure made of fold-out pages illustrated with relief images by Marina Bindella that have a strong vertical structure. Zanella hand-bound the 100 copies of *Ecce Video* and the 80 copies of *Poesie Verticali*.