

## **Reclinations and Reckless Inclinations in Amelia Rosselli's Poetry of Resistance**

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### **Abstract**

The long-standing work of Adriana Cavarero has provided an original and insightful perspective to investigate the poetics of Amelia Rosselli. The many theoretical and ethical challenges posed by Adriana Cavarero throughout her career have enabled an intensified and deeper understanding of the reasoning beyond poetic creation and, above all, of the ethical posture Rosselli assumed. The aim of this article is to observe and analyse the intertwining textual and sexual politics in Rosselli's production, in light of the most recent theories offered by Adriana Cavarero on the concept of inclination, particularly in the dual acceptions of *emotional* inclination and *poetical* inclination, both to be interpreted as political postures, so as to reconstitute into a *unicum* what has been historically separated in and by the patriarchal discourse.

*Keywords: Amelia Rosselli; gendered mimesis; inclinations*

### **Biography**

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Con la sua morte si è riposata la fatica, si è stesa la lotta.  
(Amelia Rosselli, *Impromptu*)

I don't want to lean in: I want to lie down.  
(Ali Wong)

### Mimesis, Gender, and Gendered Mimesis

Received ideas and practices have ineluctably marked the general trend of common academic thought, often in a totalising manner. In the cracks laboriously generated by the existence and production of the subaltern subjects of *universalising* thought, cross-disciplinary studies have become a fundamental instrument for revision. This is the case for (political) philosophy and entwined branches of studies such as literary theory. Not surprisingly, as womxn and scholars, we owe Adriana Cavarero many of the steps taken in the direction of awareness, which she initiated and pursued with impeccable precision and solidity.

The interdisciplinary approach of this article wants to contribute to the ongoing elaboration of a paradigm shift in thinking of the world and knowledge, rather than applying feminist critique to traditional disciplines. However, still nowadays, hegemony's continued impact defines the spaces open to and for feminist debates and projects, which tend to be still isolated and undervalued in the broader academic context, and often encounter obstacles or even controversy due to an outdated but still fashionable scepticism, as remarked by Nidesh Lawtoo. In an interview with Lawtoo (2021), Cavarero clearly summarises concepts that have been explored in depth since the publication of *Nonostante Platone* in the 1990s to the present day. As Cavarero writes in *Inclinations*:

[i]n my theoretical perspective, subjectivity is entirely constituted by others. Therefore, there is a relationship with others that is not something added onto the self-sufficient subject: there is no self-sufficient and autonomous subject to start with (Cavarero, 2016: 11).

Despite the difficulties encountered, Lawtoo insisted on developing a debate on gendered mimesis in order to problematise the masculine and supposedly autonomous subject, and the related assimilation of alternative subaltern subjects (e.g. the female subject): “[a]mong the various geometries of modernity, the prevailing one involves precisely the individualistic ontological model, which can be found in Kant” (*ibid.*).

This function is imposed in a patriarchal order within which, willingly or unwillingly – but more carefully, we will observe, unwillingly – non-male subjects find themselves in a forced condition that equates to homologation by assimilation (in which, however, sexual difference is nevertheless recognised and valued as a negative feature), or to the conscious choice not to reproduce this apparently solid monolithic, upright identity that expresses a solitary power through its verticality. Without wishing to take up too much space here,<sup>2</sup> it seems important to present here a series of keywords indicative of and supplying insight into culturally rooted human behaviour since at least the 19th century and with a media resonance that is particularly worrying for today’s context.

In order to circumscribe the concept of mimesis to our specific interest here, and to be able to more accurately employ the feminist lens necessary to understand the gender dynamics that are enacted within and beyond philosophical discussion, we will refer to Adriana Cavarero herself who, on several occasions, with her ability to speak the language of philosophy in transversal public contexts, reminds us that *mimesis* is a Greek word that we translate, approximately, as “imitation”. The

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<sup>2</sup> We refer to the careful analysis conducted by the aforementioned research group, and in particular to the free online lecture and discussion presented by Willow Verkerk (see References, video last checked on 31st July 2022).

concept of imitation – to be considered in the structured and cultural behaviour of the subjects that make up the social community, rather than the use of techniques to represent ideas, as Plato employed the term – is closely linked to today’s policies that push non-male subjects to imitate forms of existence proper of male subjects, emulating masculine behaviours instead of creating new paradigms. In the current system, one is compelled to *mimic* behaviours to succeed, and the most synthetic form of thinking is that condensed in the “lean in” philosophy promoted by Sheryl Kara Sandberg, an American business executive, billionaire and COO of Facebook (2013).

Despite the use of the verb *to lean* – which could confuse the discourse of inclination hereby presented through the reasoning of Adriana Cavarero – the most currently widespread “feminist philosophy” that the mainstream media has promoted in the system of capitalistic and patriarchal order guides non-male subjects to the emulation of poses considered the only ones possible in the social scheme of things that allow for the achievement of success. Obviously, in order to understand how deeply interconnected these truths that are given as natural actually are – and to address them in their function, which is, the continuous re-presentation of a pattern of oppression and exploitation – a careful deconstruction of each of the elements is necessary.

Instead of reinforcing individual actions, which entail a homologation to the given system and a personal path to success that does not change the context of oppression, *de facto* limiting and hindering the collective struggle for liberation, Cavarero shifts the focus to a non-mimetic form of existence that breaks the cycle of reproduction of today’s dysfunctional mechanisms. Underlying this educational model, which refers to the form and formula of inclination, is the concept of empathy, which is fundamental to centralising the relationality of subjects beyond the individualism proposed as a positive horizon by the Kantian, capitalist, patriarchal model:

emphasizing vulnerability is not a matter of correcting individualistic ontology by inserting the category of relation into it. It is rather to think relation itself as

originary and constitutive, as an essential dimension of the human, which – far from limiting itself to putting free and autonomous individuals in relation to each other, as the doctrine of the social pact prescribes – calls into question our being creatures who are materially vulnerable and, often in greatly unbalanced circumstances, consigned to one another (Cavarero, 2016: 13).

In this article, it will be argued that Amelia Rosselli, by refusing to emulate male behaviour and by offering an alternative to the latter's "bellicose" modalities, is showing us a path for a communal existence based on reciprocity, and suggests a new posture in the world and an ethical behaviour to the readers.

### **Amelia Rosselli**

Amelia Rosselli was born in 1930 in Paris, where her family was sheltering under the status of political refugees. In that same city in 1940, her father and uncle – respectively, Carlo and Nello Rosselli – founders of the anti-fascist party *Giustizia e Libertà*, were assassinated under the direct orders of Benito Mussolini. At the time only ten years old and already a refugee in France, Amelia was uprooted once again and began a journey that took her to England, the United States, then finally to Italy – the place she held closest to her heart – and then back to England (to study), and Florence (at her grandmother's). She spent the last years of her life in Rome, specifically in Via del Corallo, where she died on 11 February 1996, choosing to throw herself out of the window of her flat on the same date on which thirty-three years earlier Sylvia Plath had committed suicide. Between the 1940s and the 1950s, she devoted herself to composition, ethnomusicology, and music theory, not without compiling a few essays on the subject. In the meantime, in 1948, she began working for various publishing houses in Florence as a translator from English. Later on, through his fraternal friend Rocco Scotellaro, whom she met in 1950, she became acquainted with Carlo Levi and other prominent names in Roman literary circles, coming into contact with the artists who would generate the avant-garde Group 63. In the 1960s, she

joined the Italian Communist Party, while her texts attracted the attention of Pier Paolo Pasolini, among others. In 1963, she published twenty-four poems in “Il Menabò”, and it is on that occasion that her name was indelibly associated with the term “cosmopolitan”, as defined by Pasolini in the introductory note to her poems. However, as she claimed and strongly affirmed:

The definition of cosmopolitan goes back to an essay by Pasolini that accompanied my first publications in “Menabò” (1963), but I reject this appellation for us: we are children of the Second World War. When I returned to Italy, I attached myself to Rome. Cosmopolitans are those who choose to be. We were not cosmopolitans; we were refugees (Zacometti in Cortellessa, 2007: 220).

The nomadism practiced by the Rossellis, in fact, was not a form of freedom and liberation but rather a continuous state of escape (from war, persecution, repression) that inevitably became part of her poetics because it was an imposition that fell from the public domain onto the personal one. Her experience as a stateless person – *apolide*, as she preferred to define herself – was the result of the condition of exile that she experienced at length. The historical and collective trauma permeated the family context, her personal growth, and regularly returns and is returned to in her writing.

In the anthology, *Poeti italiani del novecento*, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo includes one woman only: Amelia Rosselli. Mengaldo defines Rosselli’s experimentalism as the expression of something “intensely informal, in which for the first time that drive towards the absolute reduction of the language of poetry to the language of the private sphere is realised” (Mengaldo, 1981: 995). Like Pasolini, Mengaldo also reduces Rosselli’s voice to the expression of a language that is “feminine” and therefore, inevitably, confessional and irrational, where it is not even a direct expression of illness. The choice of adopting Italian as a “lingua d’elezione” – the language of his father, a martyr in the very first resistance to fascism – rather represents a political as well as an affective stance, and it is a strongly conscious choice. The particular education she received did not allow Rosselli to have an idiom of reference that could be considered a “mother

tongue”; at the same time, however – unlike her older brother, John, often defined as an *enfant prodige* – Amelia’s familiarity with languages in a structured manner was absolutely reduced, a manifestation of the precariousness in which she lived, and which found a new form and controlled expression in her poetic writing. Famously, she spent most of her life pursuing a universal form of poetic communication; in the critical-theoretical text entitled “Spazi Metrici” (1964), Rosselli theorises a rhythmic-phonetic regulation that offers a universalising system of poetic language:

The language in which I write from time to time is a single one, whereas my logical and associative sound experience is certainly that of all peoples, and reflective in all languages. And it is with these concerns that I set out at a certain point in my adolescence to search for universal forms (Rosselli, 2012: 1245).

The essay focuses on the use of geometric concepts in relation to the ideal material of words: their graphic permanence and sonorous enunciation must be chosen carefully by the poet, because these elements will trigger a response beyond the purely visual and sonorous: poetry activates thought.

### **Inclinations**

As previously mentioned, the work of Adriana Cavarero has been enlightening for approaching the poetics of Amelia Rosselli in many ways. For this investigation, we have chosen to focus in particular on the concept of inclination that is so widely discussed in *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* (2016). In this book, as so often in Cavarero’s ways of understanding knowledge and critical thinking, many references to the arts are present, offering suggestions as to ways in which to implement the connections between philosophical thinking and applied reading. Cavarero’s combative and tellurian ability to describe political thought as inextricably an expression and an action of communal relational existence finds a new lease of life in the belligerent choice to entrust poetry with the ethical as well as

the aesthetic communication of Rosselli's political thought. This combination of successful intentions makes the terrain particularly fertile.

Before exploring the relationship between social geographies and poetic geographies, it is important to emphasise that the role assumed historically by the poet has a strongly male-dominated history. The very concept of the *madwoman*, in the various meanings explored in detail by the seminal text "The Madwoman in the Attic", offers us a narrative and critical cataloguing of the deviances imputed to female subjects practising ways of writing and, in particular, poetry. The status of poet rather than writer has remained fortified in its masculine sense, this because – as suggested – the role of the poet in European societies was a privileged one, and a "quasi-priestly role";

How then – since poets are priests – can women be poets? The question may sound sophistic, but there is a good deal of evidence that it was consciously or unconsciously asked by men and women alike as often as women suffering from "the poetic passion" have appeared in the antechamber of literature (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 546).

The latter reflection is an elaboration of Virginia Woolf's well-known thought on the canonical absence of Judith Shakespeare, a pindaric yet exact critique of the formation of an alternative genealogy of existence and writing practice. As Cavarero comments on Woolf's further note,

the "I" is straight, lone, self-sufficient, independent, domineering, deadly, and prevaricating. Focussed on itself and wrapped around the rigid vertical axis of his erect posture, the "I" does not need others (Cavarero, 2016: 40).

Although a similar grammatical consideration cannot be applied to the Italian language, in which the first person is indicated by "io", I believe that the reasoning behind such an intuition remains nonetheless valid when it comes to analysing the profound solidity of the poetic subject and the authorial subject. This, however, is particularly true for the poet intended



as a man, developing a poetics of the singular subject, expressed in the first person, that claims for itself the right to universality instead of working towards a flowering of co-presences and co-existences, of elaborating a potential (poetic) self that stands out in its uniqueness but remains open, relational, and consciously chooses not to stand out by emulating the male tradition.

### **Emotional Inclination(s)**

In this section of the article, dedicated to emotional inclination(s), it is my intention to consider two specific passions: the first filial – with a critical focus on the relationship with the dead, as per biographical and poetic data – the second erotic-amorous. Although both themes can be traced in the Rosselli's *opera omnia*, we will dwell here only on the poem *La Libellula (Dragonfly)* in order to circumscribe this first reading operation – that could be extended in the future – and to put the initial hypotheses to use.

*(Always) A Daughter. Rejection of verticality with respect to the dead*

As it is well known and as I previously mentioned, Rosselli's life was marked by tragic deaths since her early childhood: personal, such as the murder of her father, and collective, such as the Jewish persecution and the victims of the Second World War. The political nature of her father's all-too-brief existence ineluctably links the personal and political levels, placing Rosselli before the inevitable mingling of the two already at a very young age. It would then be limiting to place the political and poetic reasoning of the author – who is continually confronted, in verse, with her survivor's guilt – solely in the direct relationship with the trauma of her father's death.

Amelia Rosselli continuously absorbs and re-enacts the moment of trauma, rather than working towards overcoming it. If in part this is a melancholic function, as Freud would have it, the choice to write in total adherence to this condition manifests an awareness that reaches the essential, and allows one to hypothesise a political choice of not letting go, of

continually reintegrating the trans-generational and collective trauma, that would otherwise risk being forgotten. This is clearly not a form of paranoia similar to those Rosselli experienced due to her mental condition; in fact – and unfortunately – although we promised as a community never to let genocides happen again, the historical conditions in which we find ourselves are a sad testimony to the fact that human memory is, actually, all too often, too short.

Definitively encapsulated in his selfish verticality, when the survivor enjoys the moment of triumph over death, he also experiences an elating “sense of invulnerability” (Cavarero, 2016: 83).

In Rosselli’s extensive poetics, however, we find above all a positioning of the poetic subject as lying in the grass (“io ero stesa nell’erba putrida”/“I was laying in the rotten grass”, v. 14, in that same position of “le salme dei nostri morti”/“the corpses of our dead”, v.7, *La Libellula*), anchored to the earth, sometimes kneeling (“non posso più muovere le ginocchia pieghe”/“I can no longer move the bent knees”, *Serie Ospedaliera*). The gaze cast upon the world always comes from below, if not from a horizontal position, equal to that of the dead resting beneath the earth. Thus, vulnerability becomes a chosen positioning, a human and ethical posture through which to let the sense of collective history flow in the relationship between subjects. What is particularly interesting in Rosselli is that the relational subjects through which she constitutes her own self are as much the living as the dead, if not more significantly the latter. A movement of exchange is demanded of the ghosts who have not said their farewells, and towards them Rosselli herself moves.

She embodies the bridge in between these worlds, something towards which the poetic subject of Rosselli also seems to aspire. Rosselli, in fact, articulates a relational poetics with the dead, to the point of establishing a literally named “Dialogo con i Morti” (Dialogue with the Dead) in which the poetic subject is, once again, a *daughter*. In this poem, the poetic subject invites a plural “you” (in Italian, explicitly “voi”) to descend and reach for her with open

arms: “scendete voi, abbracciate questa vostra | figlia che annaspa”/“come down, from you, embrace this daughter | of yours” (D’Amico, 2022: 98).

A clear example of the assumption of the role of daughter as a poetic statement is the recurrence of three figures from the Greek mythical pantheon, nominally: Electra, Cassandra, and Antigone. The disquieting presence of death in their youth is what Tanello calls the recurrence of a Persephone’s curse (Tanello, 2007); the maidens are invoked not as muses but as possible doubles who enact a cyclical recurrence of the archetypal experience. This continuous attempt to relate to a female pantheon affirms a practice of alignment with tradition within the perspective, however, of reformulating its characteristics for a conscious, debated, and rich identification with authorial agency.

Moreover, Cavarero’s analysis of the dual etymology of the word “vulnerability” lends itself in both meanings to this reading. If, on the one hand, the eternal daughter – girl, *la fanciulla*, *figlia* – is an example of the “human body in its absolute nakedness, without hair, covering, or protection” (Cavarero, 2016: 159), the sought-after vulnerability understood as an open wound is a perfect metaphor for the contamination that Rosselli undergoes in the beginning, and that then, consciously, germinates by transforming it into hybridisation. The language of the adolescent, of the girl in becoming, is a metaphor for language itself, which only partially identifies with the forms of the past, and therefore aspires to free itself from constraints. Rosselli’s poetic language, in its hybridisation of languages, music, styles, aspires to be communitarian. For it to be so, the uniqueness of the expressions of the many that make up the community must be recognised. Rosselli’s community of reference is the inclusive one that, not by chance, speaks to the people and speaks the “[d]ifficult language of the poor!” (*La Libellula*, v. 474).

*(Actively) A Lover. The passionate turn that makes one dance*

One quality of Rosselli’s poetry is certainly that of choosing to put herself at stake in the poetical context of love lyrics, without

eschewing but indeed confronting the European and more specifically the Italian tradition (just think of the Petrarchan songbook that is the Document), through an elaborate rewriting constituted by homages and critical attacks, dispossession and re-appropriation. Love is a neuralgic point in Rosselli's writing, as much as the death drive, which is a specular theme. The amorous inclination, driven by passion, is a central element that is never repudiated but rather selected as a theme of confrontation with the historical-literary context of patriarchal imprint.

The challenge to the lyrical amorous hegemony that always sees the woman as the object of the male's desires is analysed by Tandello in her studies on the Campanian *calchi* in the poem *La Libellula*, and which presents one of the greatest experiments in the inversion and subversion of amorous and erotic tensions and drives in the classically heteronormative dynamic.

Io non so se tra le pallide rocce il tuo  
sorriso m'apparve, o deo dalle fulvide chiome  
o cipresso al sole io non so se tra le pallide  
rocce del tuo sguardo riposavano l'incanto e  
la giovinezza. Io non so se tra le ruvide guance  
del tuo sguardo riposavano gli addii o la pietà.  
Io non so ringraziarti e non so la tua dimora  
e non so se questo grido ti raggiunga. Io non  
so se l'infante che ti cerca è la vecchia che  
ti tiene in balia  
(*La Libellula*, vv. 248–56).<sup>3</sup>

As established by Tandello, for a woman writer, engaging in amorous discourse, whether in its erotic or stilnovistic forms

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<sup>3</sup> I know not if among the pale rocks your / smile appeared to me, O god of radiant locks / O cypress in the sun, I know not if among the pale / rocks of your gaze rested enchantment and / youthfulness. I do not know if between the rough cheeks / of your gaze rested farewells or pity. / I do not know gratitude and I do not know your abode / And I do not know if this cry reaches you. I do not / know if the infant who seeks you is the old woman who / keeps you in her thrall. (*Where not otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's own*).

(the two designated major modes), presents significant challenges. It entails adopting a discourse that positions her as the desired object and muse rather than as the creator herself, “and it implies the problem of establishing a poetic identity through the dialectic of desire and response” (Tandello, 1989: 33). Through a series of correspondences and just as many mismatches, Rosselli’s literary product plays on the instability of the male and female subject in an interrelation that breaks away from the previous literary datum that saw the feminine as a symbolic you – only a receiver, an object, never subject – and brings it into the centre of the scene, finally granting agency to the female subject. This is certainly the case for the re-writing of Scipione’s “Sento gli strilli degli angioli”, one of the most explicit passionate passages of the poem.

Calpestata io l’avea. Nella tua barca, l’unica  
tua. Nel tuo cuore, nel sangue olivastro e già  
imbrattato di amore! Abbracciata io l’avea! Io  
l’avea abbracciata! La tua serena stanca voce  
da uomo che carpisce: io ti cerco e tu lo sai!  
Io ti cerco e tu lo sai e non muovi l’aria per  
raggiungermi! Sento gli strilli degli angioli  
che corrono dietro di me, sento gli strilli degli  
angioli che vogliono la mia salvezza, ma il sangue  
è dolce a peccare e vuole la mia salvezza; gli  
strilli degli angioli che vogliono la mia salvezza,  
che vogliono il mio peccato! che vogliono ch’io  
cada imberbe nel tuo sangue strillo di angelo.  
Sento gli strilli degli angioli che dicono addio,  
l’ho sverginato io, ritorno questo pomeriggio  
(*La Libellula*, vv. 332–46).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I had trampled it. In your boat, the only one / yours. In your heart, in your olive-coloured blood, already smeared with love! I embraced her! I / embraced her! Your serene, tired voice / of a man who grasps: I seek you and you know it! / I seek you and you know it and you do not move the air to / reach me! I hear the cries of angels / that run after me, I hear the cries of the / angels who wish my salvation, but the blood / is sweet to sin and wants my salvation; the / shrieks of the angels who want my salvation, / that want my sin! that want me / fall inexperienced in your blood shrieks

However, in the few chosen verses, how can we perceive the desire of the author to explore and let the female lust explode in verse (“Io ti cerco e tu lo sai e non muovi l’aria per / raggiungermi!”, which states clearly her desire, and also adds the passionate swirling movement to reach her lover who, on the other hand, does not move the air – he remains instead motionless: indifferent, or waiting); a lust that is often dominated by a sense of guilt (“Sento gli strilli degli angeli / che corrono dietro di me, sento gli strilli degli / angeli che vogliono la mia salvezza”, the angelic figures hold back the sweetness of carnal sin and the explicit desire, they attempt to contain the passion to keep the subject in the position of the innocent, saved and sanctified maiden); and which indelibly marks the tradition of female (rather than male) education in the various religions, and which, in turn, have also marked the secular socio-cultural context.

*Eros & Thanatos: the passionate maiden, the dead maiden*

To conclude this first part of the investigation, a further example from *La Libellula* comes in handy, which – more explicitly than in the cases presented above – holds together the threads of childhood inclinations, to be read equally as erotic drives and death drives and to be observed, jointly, as feminist rebellion.

In *La Libellula*, we find the case of Hortense, the maiden of Rimbaud’s text who is not only “a misogynistic representation of the feminine governed by the more than vaguely sadistic symbolist iconography of erotic waste” (Tandello, 2007) but also, Rosselli herself observes, an emblem of the social misery within which the female condition is forced. At the root of this denunciation is Rosselli’s rewriting, which subtracts the feminine from the functionality of every relationship – even the sexual one – restoring the dimension of reality in her verses, and the noble expression of desire as an autonomous and valid form.

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of angels. / I hear the cries of angels saying farewell, / I have deflowered him, I will return this afternoon.

In the text, this image gets challenged in two main ways: first, the interpretation reclaims Hortense as an unequivocal feminine symbol, eliminating any ambiguity; second, it reappropriates the feminine fender as a symbol associated with female symbology (Tandello, 1989: 74).

Trovate Ortensia: la sua meccanica è la solitudine  
eiaculatoria. La sua solitudine è la meccanica  
eiaculatoria. Trovate i gesti mostruosi di Ortensia:  
la sua solitudine è popolata di spettri, e gli  
spettri la popolano di solitudine. E il suo amore  
rumina e non può uscire dalla casa. E la sua  
luce vibra pertanto fra le mura, con la luce,  
con gli spettri, con l'amore che non esce di  
casa  
(*La Libellula*, vv. 430–8).<sup>5</sup>

Having completely erased the idea of the enchanting receiving love figure, Hortense's physicality, as presented to us by Rosselli, is composed of "monstrous gestures" (v. 433), and her amorous passion "rumbles and cannot leave the house" (v. 435). By emphasising the abnormality of the movements and the declared physical constriction, Rosselli undertakes to "unmask the 'suppression' of the *fanciulla-in-fiore* as a conduit to the Beyond by a narcissistic and voyeuristic male subject" (Tandello, 2007: 60), restoring agency (and desire) to the poetic female subject instead.

The solution to this narrative node lies precisely in the transition from inside to outside, a classic *topos* of female confinement and a socially imposed "natural disposition" to private life, and in what we might imagine to be the passage from a vertical to a horizontal position. In fact, as early as v. 450, we find Hortense "[s]miling and fragile among the lilacs of the valley", where the direct relationship between the maiden and

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<sup>5</sup> Find Hortense: her mechanism is ejaculatory / solitude. Her solitude is the ejaculatory / mechanism. Find Hortense's monstrous gestures: / her solitude is populated by spectres, and the / spectres populate her solitude. And her love / ruminates and cannot leave the house. And her / light therefore vibrates within the walls, with the light, / with the spectres, with the love that does not leave / the house.

death is not interrupted but rather takes on a more intense nuance, reinforcing the fundamental link between the abandonment of the aforementioned “ejaculatory solitude” (now open to relational possibilities) and a horizontal position reminiscent of that same Rosselli – a poetic subject stretched out like the dead, who refuse vertical participation in a certain existence.

Rosselli inhabits the burial home of her father, and exposes her poetic subjectivity, constituted by a multiplicity of selves and languages, those of victims and exiles: she maintains, in fact, that history lives in the fragmented subject. In such poetic labour, her voice strives to penetrate the inner core of language itself, only to denounce its precarious existence, on the brink of collapsing into the meaninglessness and foolishness of destructive and annihilating acts and events: the triumph of the death drive. Nonetheless, hers is a chant full of volcanic passion, compounded by the intermingling of Eros and Thanatos, whose revolutionary power subverts, parodies and dismembers well-established, institutionalized discourse; it is power fuelled and nourished by her only reliable love, her love of the phonosyllables (Antinucci, 2017: 1342).

### Poetical inclinations

Another aspect relevant to the investigation suggested up to now is the discourse on the political value of reclaiming one’s authorial role – as a woman – in the literary field, as well as of assuming a position (expressed in verse) of difference with respect to the masculine, within both the literary and the political tradition. It will once again be useful to examine the verses of the long poem *La Libellula*, with some inserts from poems in English<sup>6</sup>, and then move into the wheat fields of the only other long poem written by Rosselli, *Impromptu*.

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<sup>6</sup> These are extensively analysed by Zungri in her doctoral thesis (*Il corpo insonne. Ritmi e visioni nella poesia in inglese di Amelia Rosselli*, Scuola



*Authoriality rather than authority: violence and power do not  
belong in the new paradigm*

Once again in the poem *La Libellula*, we find a fundamental statement for the deeply ethical interpretation of the inexorable combination of the personal and the political, the literary and the communal.

[...] Io sono una che  
sperimenta con la vita e non può lasciare nessun  
rivale toccargli il cuore, le membra insaziabili.  
Io sono una che lascia volentieri la gloria agli  
altri ma si rammarica d'esser trattenuta dagli  
infelici nodi della sua gola. Io sono una fra  
di tanti voraci come me ma per Iddio io forgerò  
se posso un altro canale al mio bisogno e le  
mie voglie saranno d'altro stampo!  
(*La Libellula*, vv. 209–17).<sup>7</sup>

The insistent repetition of the subject's being expresses not only the state of pure essence but also awareness of it. It is the subject herself who defines the subject, and acknowledges her central position in the narrative, by outlining the very qualities of being and her actions. "I am", in fact, "one who experiments" (v. 210): experimentation, in life as in art, is resolved here in an intricate experiential correspondence. Experimentation itself becomes a vital act, and an expression of the desire for extroversion: it experiments "with life" and with the text. And yet this experimentation, this extroversion, is sometimes held back by an act of censorship operated by the subject herself, a behavioural education systematically demanded of the female

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Normale Superiore di Pisa, 2019), not yet published at the time of the release of this volume.

<sup>7</sup> [...] I am one who / experiments with life and cannot let any / rival touch their heart, their insatiable limbs. / I am one who willingly leaves the glory to / others but regrets being held back by the unhappy knots in her throat. I am one among /so many voracious like me but by God I will forge / if I can another channel to my need and / my cravings will be of another mould!

gender and here internalised – and elaborated in the signalling of the same – so much so that she suffers its not total expression; what makes the subject suffer is not the possible absence of glory, but the regret that to moderate her own inspiration and consequently her own success is her “being held back / by the unhappy knots of her throat” (vv. 213–4). The solution seems to be found in the next verse, in which Rosselli as an author partly escapes the agony of the male-descended battle, and defines the space for a new expression – one that develops in the consciousness of tradition but also in the autonomy of the female subject: “another channel” (v. 216). An original channel of expression that can only be reached through that desired extroversion, by placing the awareness of one’s own existence in the relational function with one’s fellow man (the community) but in a perspective that is, at last, as conscious as it is mutual: achieving a completeness of existence that occurs not *against* the Other – according to the patriarchal tradition – but together with it.

As mentioned, in the studies conducted on the poems in English, we find examples that articulate what has been proposed, and that usefully serve as steps in the reconciliation of such a vast and well-defined poetics as Rosselli’s. In particular, Zungri here proposes an interesting reading of these short verses, which are chosen as a mirror of what was anticipated in the analysis of *La Libellula*.

Why cry, why stamp  
your feet on this hot ground, rain  
ridden, of the tears which fall beloving  
on your hot head  
(*Sleep*, p. 994).

In her wider study of Rosselli’s poetry in the English language, Zungri comments on the selection of this verse:

The subject wonders [here] to whom their rebellious, miserable and material poetry is directed, and what use is there in violently stomping the ground to leave one’s footprints on the earth, which is only moist because it is watered by a universal weeping and not really fertile. The

question, then, is where does the desire for revenge against the injustice and slaughter of the world lead [...]? (Zungri, 2019: 315).

That same blasphemous glory, made up of fighting among peers to get to the top of the social-literary hierarchy is dismissed. How can the poet worry about their own glory and stamp their feet on the ground offended at not being recognised as high and as important as they believe themselves to be, when that same ground they tread is wet with the tears of the victims of the society within which the poet writes? What is instead the opportunity to stand out, poetically and politically, in this context of vertical elevation and aggressive grandiosity?

*“Paesani zoppicanti” and the “clown faunesco”: a political and poetical metaphor*

Amelia Rosselli's writing is not without further postural poses of the poetic subject that largely differ from phallic verticality. This observation of solid, vertical development often returns in the architectural structures (such as the Eiffel Tower “che / non resta in piedi se non fosse per la sua permessa / bruttezza”, towering over Paris with its ugliness, as mentioned in *La Libellula*), that impose themselves in the context and imagination of the author. A limpid example of male personification with the verticalisation of elements, in this specific case “natural” rather than architectural, is a passage dedicated to her fraternal friend, Pier Paolo Pasolini, towards whom gratitude is never lacking but with whom an intellectual diatribe remains suspended, fuelling a continuous poetic and political reasoning that is tested precisely in the pose/position assumed in the world.

[...] al sole di tutti i splendidi  
soldi che hai riconosciuto  
nella Capitale del vizio

che era Roma? E tu frassine  
oh lungo fratello d'una volta  
chiamato Pierpaolo, un ricordo

soltanto ho delle tue vanaglorie  
come se in fondo fosse l'ambizione  
a gettar l'ultimo sguardo  
dall'ultimo ponte  
(*Impromptu*, 2).<sup>8</sup>

The political invective is here combined with the poetic invective, and the generic “you” is transformed into a specific nominal “you”: Pierpaolo Pasolini. Against the backdrop of a malignant Rome that corrupts souls with vice, a theme already present in *La Libellula*, the “long brother of once upon a time” (v. 2.16) stands out: the poet, friend and companion, is directly called into question despite the death of the latter separating them. The choice of staging the possible decisive dialogue with the dead in verse is not an occasional choice in Rosselli’s poetry, but a real pillar of her poetics. The dialogue is not limited to the personal and political level of the two poets; Rosselli also makes this text interact with *The Ashes of Gramsci* through a series of intertextual references (first and foremost, the use of the word “brother”) that create a horizontal dialogicity. The botanical reference itself (“ash tree” 324, v. 2.15) contains significant twinning: firstly, the wording contains the correct, or at least the current variant (“ash tree”) as a note in the margin of the documents preserved in Pavia – despite the fact that the final choice is to maintain a “dead” version of the term; at the same time, the English translation of *frassino* is “Ash Tree” – the reference to ash contained in the English equivalent insists on the mortuary theme, and it more explicitly refers to the Gramscian ashes addressed by Pasolini (a poem which opens a dialogue similar to that undertaken here by Rosselli). “But ‘vanaglorie’ and ‘ambizione’ deny it the ‘reverenziale’ aura that surrounds the figure of Gramsci. If the tone is still affectionate, it is also bluntly critical” (Tandello, 1989: 193).

Far from seeking glory, Rosselli here seems to be pointing the finger at her poet friend who – subjugated by the vain (and

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<sup>8</sup> [...] in the sunshine of all the splendid / money you recognised / in the Capital of vice // that once was Rome? And you, oh ash / oh long-time brother / called Pierpaolo, a memory // only I have of your vainglories / as if after all it were ambition / to cast the last glance / from the last bridge.

useless and evanescent) aspiration of poetic glory – loses sight of the truth of political action. The glory of poetry is inevitably linked to vanity, but also to its inconsistency. Rosselli thus reflects on how far poetic action can really act on the context of the real, or how far it does not recreate alternative worlds that distance it from the truest being of the real. Pasolini is the “long ash tree” that stands out, who is recognised, celebrated (and in fairness, also attacked) because he is able (and above all, allowed) to stand in that vertical position which is the one required of poets for success, in order to gain a presence in the events of literary history. A phallic position that, despite his queerness, Pasolini assumes for the sake of glory, prioritising the patriarchal structure to which he can be assimilated more easily than Rosselli, who is instead “storta come un ramo” / bent like a branch (*Serie Ospedaliera*).

Rosselli's posture, on the other hand, is clearly ascribable to a rejection of verticality to be understood as a dominant force, as an ascension of rectitude. Rather, it is important to focus on the statement in verse that comes from the same poem that mentions Pasolini in the second section quoted above, *Impromptu*.

... E se paesani  
zoppicanti sono questi versi è  
perché siamo pronti per un'altra  
storia [...]  
(*Impromptu*, 13).<sup>9</sup>

This short extract condenses the teaching received from the poet and friend Rocco Scotellaro, the socialist and anti-fascist lessons of her parents, the fine work applied to the language in an attempt to make it truly completely accessible, and the aspiration – if not, in fact, the conviction – that the time is ripe for a new history, literary and material.

It is the villagers, the common people, the workers (probably of the land) who inhabit the small marginal spaces that are called upon, rather than the big cities' structures and

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<sup>9</sup> And if limping / fellow countrymen are these verses it is / because we are ready for another / (hi)story.

residents that, as in the case of Rome – mentioned above and repeatedly addressed in her work – often lead to political corruption and exclusionary intellectual salons that reinforce the dynamics of hierarchisation of knowledge and exclusion of minorities. The key word, however, remains that *limping*, a true indicator of an apparently flawed poetics and posture. Making limpness one's own posture is a cultural and revolutionary act that breathes new life into the possibility of constituting structural and social alternatives, a way to embrace a more uncertain trend and slowed-down mobility. In a social dimension within which showing oneself to be vulnerable corresponds to a risk of total overpowering, Rosselli chooses to identify her own existence with this manifested vulnerability, and with the strength that comes from enacting this practice of vulnerability and sharing of the same.

At the same time, it is made explicit how the linguistic counterpart is a fundamental component of the poetics: it is Rosselli's verses that find form in the "limping villagers". The correspondence between human and poetic postures remains intrinsically related; it is therefore useful here to return to a discussion of Pasolini's famous note introducing Rosselli's poems in 1963.

Uno dei casi più clamorosi del connettivo linguistico di Amelia Rosselli è il lapsus. Ora finto, ora vero: ma quando è finto, probabilmente lo è nel senso che, formatosi spontaneamente, viene subito accettato, adottato, fissato dall'autrice sotto la specie estetica di una invenzione che si fa da sé (Pasolini, 1963: 66).<sup>10</sup>

However, Pasolini's intuition denies the work of caring for the words that takes shape between the mind and the action of making the word choice poetic and public, effectively removing authorship from Rosselli's considered choices both on the surface and in the linguistic substratum – a personal baggage

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<sup>10</sup> One of the most striking cases of Amelia Rosselli's linguistic connective is the slip. Now fake, now real: but when it is fake, it is probably so in the sense that, as it forms spontaneously, it is immediately accepted, adopted, fixed by the author under the aesthetic species of a self-made invention.

that, however, binds her to the historical trauma of (forced) dislocation caused by the second World War. Instead, by looking at the option of the slip of the tongue as a term that opens up the authorial choice of adapting language to understanding rather than vice versa, we can better understand the intent of formulating a limping linguistic path as it is really common, a linguistic vulnerability of mixture and exposure of the trauma through which we might recognise each other in the attempt at a direct, intense, horizontal connection.

Another valid example of the rejection of verticality and masculine solidity in the poses and postures assumed by Rosselli's poetic subject can be found in the figure of the Shakespearian fool, as extensively investigated – *inter alia* – by Chiara Carpita, whose figure of the truthful jester also recalls that of the nominally mentioned “clown faunesco”. Through an interesting analysis that, as intended here, makes ample reference to Cavarero's theories and in particular the text *Inclinations*, Chiara Carpita proposes her own reading of the staging – which almost coincides with a real putting into play – of Rosselli's poetic self.

The Rossellian self in the various literary masks assumed, in the confusion of I/you and the male/female exchange, is always characterised as a voice from the margins, the fool who speaks out against the power of logos and violence, the social injustice of the polis (Carpita, 2017: 23).

In her punctual investigation published in 2019, Sara Sermini also develops a relevant contribution to the definition of the Shakespearean fool in Rosselli's poetics, dating it to a letter to Scotellaro written in 1952. In Rosselli's work, the fool resembles the figure on the tarot card: a wondering subject, unafraid to experience the world and to describe it independently from societal constructs. Through this double, the poetic self finds the freedom that is necessary to report on the world, and reaches the most truthful ways of (re)presenting it in its radical unfairness and mystical devastation. By adopting the mask of the fool for itself, the poetic self can unveil society's masquerade, and challenge the restrictive norms through irony. This parodic pose of the poetic self offers an alternative way to

overcome the inadequacy and the political injustice that affects the marginalised elements of society. Through numerous quotations from Rosselli's *opera omnia*, Sermini tracks the disenchanting literary artifice of *creating* a fool by presenting her poetic self *as* a fool, as a "clown faunesco". As Sermini shows, these methods of Rosselli's poetic practice reveal her authorial approach to the question: "And are you crazy really?" (*Sleep*).

Against the backdrop of these very solid investigations already conducted by Carpita and Sermini, this contribution intends to reinforce their theories by also mentioning a passage from *Variazioni Belliche* (1964). Although the connection to the fool or "faunal clown" of the *Impromptu* poem is not immediate, we find the poetic subject here performing unusual and playful movements: literally, somersaults.

Se per il caso che mi guidava *io facevo capriole*: se per  
la perdita che continuava la sua girandola io sapevo: se  
per l'agonia che mi prendeva io perdevo: se per l'incanto  
che non seguivo *io non cadevo* [...]  
(*Variazioni Belliche*, p. 84, my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

A different form of instability than limping, and yet providing for the same rejection of the stoic male posture. In the paradoxical framework constituted by the concatenation of sentences that follow one another in a presumed logic dictated by "if"... "then", the poetic subject performs astonishing gestures of physical freedom, disarray, mayhem: an act of (an attempt at) joyful time. In a whirling movement that takes up the entire poetic narrative (as indicated by fortune – the wheel, on closer inspection another card of the major arcana like the fool – and the pinwheel), assisted by the somersaults, the subject manages not to fall despite the agony and in the context of loss, precisely thanks to his whirling non-conforming movement.

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<sup>11</sup> If it was the destiny that led me, I somersaulted; if it was the ongoing whirl of loss that I comprehended; if it was the overpowering anguish that claimed me; if it was the awe I refrained from chasing, I did not falter. [...].



## Conclusion

Just as in Cavarero, who uses art history and in particular the figurations of Artemisia Gentileschi as a starting point, similarly we will start from the bourgeois framework within which the Rossellian scene painted in the poem *Impromptu* occurs. In the 10th section of the poem, the actions performed by the subject and nature are articulated according to concession: the grammatical structure functions as that of the hypothetical generating consequence. In verses 10.1–4 we read: “If I allowed my knee to / touch the earth, it was with the permission / of the corn that bowed / to my passage”; the subject’s induced action of kneeling is mirrored in the action of the corn. The relationship between the female subject and nature is direct, honest: to rest and recollection (kneeling recalls the religious theme of prayer, but also a refusal of the verticality of the aggressive crossing of the fields like militia), nature indulges the act and responds with extreme respect and supports and celebrates (with a similar bow) the subject’s choice of inclination.

Nonetheless, the cornfield in which the subject finds “rest with / her legs not in the air but spread” (v. 10.8-9) is not a true place of abandonment, and her body burdens the “belly of that pictorial / field made of others” (v. 10.10-11). This painting of which her image is a part therefore does not belong to her, and indeed it is that plural you (*voi*) that represents the otherness that created it – painted it – in an attempt, once again, to control the frame of its existence. Every perception is distorted, the place itself is unreal for those who observe it from the outside (aware now that it is a painting: “[...] rimane curva nel salotto / borghese del campo squadrato del pittore in borghese”, vv. 11.1-3) but also within it; in this orchestrated to the detail: staging of roles, actions, and responses, the person who works the field is absent. The gaze of the bourgeois erases the truth of the world from his representation of the world.

The field is “squared”, as the frame that contains it wants it to be, and has been painted by a “pittore in borghese”, which,

playing on the polysemy of the term,<sup>12</sup> emphasises the condition of the class criticised in the poem, but also adds to it a feeling of mistrust given by the attempt not to pass as such. In this fragment, the choice of declining the composing figure to the masculine (“the painter” is explicitly “il pittore”, who imposes his gaze and handles the context within which the female subject is enclosed) becomes of particular relevance. The choice is therefore not only to define the collective universal through the masculine but rather to create a distance between the binary expressions of gender.

In particular, the descriptive experience of the pictorial image stratifies the encroachment on several levels: not only horizontally between the arts, but also vertically between the different dimensions of the real (and unreal); and above all, this continuous encroachment is dictated by the female subject’s ability – both poetic and authorial – to use nomadism (as per Rosi Braidotti) to her own advantage. The subject responds to constraint with mobility: on the one hand, she exercises her alterity outside the frame, outside the ranks, outside the categories, outside pure lyricism. On the other hand, dispossession as a constitutive practice of a new social formulation, as well as the encroachment of gender – sexually, literary, and artistically – and as an aspiration to represent the universal, are but further ways of “experimenting with life”, to quote Rosselli herself. But it is always an experimentalism of commitment, aimed at reconstituting the meaning of the word and of being in the world. As observed by Mengaldo, in his introduction to the anthology *Poeti Italiani del Novecento*, when confronting Rosselli’s poetics it can be observed:

Rejection, far more immediately existential than programmed, in short, of a general alienation and (self-) marginalisation from the upper levels of history and culture where Capital and Power dwell (Mengaldo, 1981: LXI).

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<sup>12</sup> The expression is played on the ambivalence of the meanings of both the bourgeois painter and the painter in disguise.

However, Mengaldo is once again missing the point when it comes to highlighting the substantial gender-afflicted constrictions which Rosselli is forced into.

Rosselli's poetry claims precisely [the] need for a relational ontology that opposes the logic of violence. Rosselli's poetic "I" is a decentralised subject, which rejects binary oppositions and is not afraid of its own vulnerability, which indeed becomes a political instrument of denunciation, "mute resistance" as Cavarero says (Carpita, 2017: 30).

That is the case expressed in *Impromptu*, in which what is not at all improvised is in fact the use of the movement between inside and outside (from time, from space, from the frame) to indicate the extraneousness from the History of the winners, and at the same time reinforcing the principle of internal/external dichotomy that afflicts the female subject in her position as a lyrical object.

Lo spirito della terra mi muove  
per un poco; stesa o seduta guardo  
non l'orologio; lo tocco e lo  
ripongo al lato della testa, che  
non sonnecchiando ma nemmeno  
pensando, si rivolse al suo dio  
come fosse lui nelle nuvole! Rinfiacchita  
l'infanzia muraria di questi versi  
non sono altro che pittorica immaginazione  
se nel campo di grano rimango  
a lungo stesa a pensarci sopra.

Con la sua morte si è riposata la fatica, si è stesa la lotta  
(*Impromptu*, 12).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The spirit of the earth moves me / for a short while; lying or sitting I watch / not the clock; I touch it and / place it by my head, which / isn't dozing but nor is it / thinking, turned to its god / as if it were in the clouds! Weakened / the walled childhood of these verses / are nothing but pictorial imagination / if in the cornfield I remain / long stretched out

The access to the dimension of *Impromptu* occurs, as demonstrated, through painting, an image – giving art that is an imitation of reality. Likewise, poetry is an imitation of the real world, and as such can be devalued to mere representation incapable of activating change, but Rosselli, as we have seen, stages this imitation, and recognises its limits; above all, however, she shows its layers of investigation, of breath, of access to forms of thought otherwise difficult to discuss. As it can be guessed, despite the relaxed pose that the poetic subject takes on in the context of the poem, contemplative philosophy does not interest the author. This false pose of letting the world happen is in fact the result of a public presence and a political and *authorial* choice.

Rosselli does not make herself a model to follow but makes herself recognisable, observable; she exposes herself and thus becomes a model. Unlike the masculine model that forcibly induces emulation for survival, Rosselli does not impose but suggests her own postural choice: she teases the reader's unconscious and conscious mind through emotional and cultural stimuli. Compassion and politics come together to create a new system of existence, a performance of gender and action different from that of men, which opens up the possibility of a queer revolt.

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thinking about it. // With their death the toil rested, the struggle stretched out.

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