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CHLORIS IN PLURAL VOICES: PERFORMING TRANSLATION OF A “MOONSTRIKING DEATH”

Jennifer Scappettone

In early 2014, after fourteen years of reading, researching, and translating the poet Amelia Rosselli, I found myself faced in terms more immediate than ever with the task of transmitting her voice to an English-speaking audience. Invited to give a reading at a salon in a colleague's home in Madison, Wisconsin, I decided to present a section of a work from my recently published collection of translations, *Locomotrix: Selected Poetry and Prose of Amelia Rosselli*. Yet lacking access to speakers or projection, I was forced to confront the heresy of relaying the “voice” of the Italian text with my own: faced with the limits not only of the usual semantic equivalents but of phonemes and beats detached from their sonorous manifestation via Rosselli's person, tuned by exile between four nations and three languages. Rosselli was the daughter of Marion Cave, an English Labour activist, and Carlo Rosselli, a Jewish hero of the Italian Resistance. She was born in Paris in 1930, in the wake of her father's escape from the penal colony on the island of Lipari; Carlo's brigade against Franco with his brother Nello six years later assembled a visible threat to Fascism on a global scale, likely triggering their assassination order. Following the Rosselli brothers' 1937 murder by French Fascists, Amelia was routed with her mother, grandmother, aunt, and cousins into a harrowing series of displacements that endured for the remainder of her childhood and adolescence: she grew up shuttled between France, England, and the United States before deciding to establish a life in Rome. Seeking to settle in Italy was a consequence of what she later identified as her love for that country but was not an obvious destiny; her older brother John chose England, while her younger brother eventually took up residence in Indiana.

Rosselli became a poet, translator, and cultural critic, her writing invoking the literary traditions of distinct epochs and continents with a liberty modeled by modernist American poetry (which she read in her early twenties in the original language[s]), though without recourse to the heavily citational collage effects of an Eliot or Pound. Composed chiefly in Italian and English but also, early on, in French, her poetry incarnates fascination with early Florentine vulgate lyrics and Metaphysical verse, while striking up colloquy with Hopkins, Lautreamont, Rimbaud, Joyce, Campana, Montale, Pasternak, confessionalism, and the Black Mountain school. But Rosselli's poetics were shaped equally by her training as a musician and years of musicological study, manifesting explicit structural and conceptual wellsprings in Bach through Chopin, Bartok, post-Webernism, the folk research of Diego Carpitella, and concrete and electronic music.¹ Her musical education was effectively more formal and advanced than her literary education: having begun in the late 1940s during her matriculation at St. Paul's Girls' School in London, it evolved through private studies with Luigi Dallapiccola and Guido Turchi, workshops with Karlheinz Stockhausen, David Tudor, György Ligeti, Henri Pousseur, and Luciano Berio at the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music and Dartington College of the Arts, and research at the RAI Phonology Studio founded by Berio and Bruno Madera, where works such as John Cage's

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"Fontana Mix" and Berio and Cathy Berberian's "Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)" were created, leading to an eventual "substructuralist" interest in pre- and non-tempered musics of the East and the global South. A performer of organ, piano, violin, percussion, and voice for theater as well as concert settings in the heady postwar years of interarts experimentation, Rosselli evolved a powerful practice of reciting her own poems individually—one noted for having struck a rowdy crowd dead silent during the epoch-defining poetry festival at Castelporziano of 1979. The performative aspect of her work is one with which strictly literary criticism and translation have proved unable to contend adequately, particularly insofar as it reaches beyond musicological conception into modes of recitation or even *canto* (song). Yet performance was a central element of both poetic composition and presentation for her, pervading her own exegeses in terms of linguistic rhythm, vocal timbre, and breath.²

Wishing to convey these crucial aesthetic, historical, and psychological contexts for a difficult body of verse in the bare intimacy of a living room in Madison, Wisconsin, I found myself feeling obliged to *reperform* as opposed to solely reading the original and translated texts of the polyglot poet/musicologist. The work in question was a *poemetto* or long poem in thirteen sections titled *Impromptu*, composed in a single morning in December 1979, according to a now-legendary narrative based on Rosselli's attestations—in a sort of rapture or "colpo d'ispirazione" (bout of inspiration) following a crippling seven-year interval in which she was unable to produce new work.³ First published in 1981, *Impromptu* was reissued in 1993, in an edition for which Rosselli proposed a companion cassette of recitations with commentary. Though only the recording of *Impromptu* itself materialized, it forms a precious testament to the text's musical aspirations—one that has received little attention in the critical record.⁴

Rosselli's performances of her poetry composed in English and Italian highlight the fact that her lines ply their way between linguistic systems. A comment on the displacing effect of Rosselli's language (*lingua*) by Alfonso Berardinelli in an RAI broadcast is symptomatic of her lasting marginality within Italian literary circles, indicative of the way her voice testifies to a hovering between the phonetic norms of nation-states: "non si capisce bene da dove venga" (one does not know where it comes from).⁵ In the seemingly homogeneous population of Italy, Rosselli's spoken accent, with its notable guttural *r* and other traces of alterity with respect to the faulty notion of a "standard" Italian, is the source of ample fascination, as well as some measure of provincial literary condescension; despite the fact that native speakers of several Northern Italian regions are known for the guttural *r*, I have heard Rosselli's pronunciation characterized as other to English, French, and Italian colleagues alike. Both criticism and translation—especially that of poetry—would benefit from contending directly with the challenge to the disembodied universal claims of logocentrism posed by Adriana Cavarero's *A più voci: Per una filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (2003, translated to lose the title's "Polyphony" as *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*), which builds on Hannah Arendt's political theory to distinguish an embodied and relational ontology of acoustic emission. Recuperating the channels of reciprocal communication between singular voices, whether semantically laden or not, from Western philosophical abstractions of logos, Cavarero then moves discussions of voice from ontology into the sphere of politics by emphasizing the resonance, music, and acoustic correspondence *a più voci* (in plural voices; in polyphony).⁶

Rather than measuring Rosselli's divergence from the phonetic norms of standard Italian—which were famously difficult to impose along the regionally divisive Italian peninsula, much less through its diaspora in a century of emigration—it would be more accurate to think of Rosselli's poetic and actual "voice," artifact of a singular fusion of world-historical and personal circumstances, as itself plural: comprising separate cantons of expression. A 1963 poem from Rosselli's

Palermo '63 titled “Chiesa” (published in the 1980 collection *Primi scritti*) suggests as much; detouring both devotional verse and the “fusedwords” of Futurism, this lyric addressed to “Jesusinthelimbs” closes with a bid to Hell to synthesize the cantons of the speaker’s experience:

Infernoimmobilesintetizza
Cantonidisintegratidella
miavita.

Immobileinfernossynthesize
Disintegratedcantonsof
mylife.⁷

The literally “Disintegratedcantons” of this poem mark as disintegral the cultural and linguistic subdivisions of nations in the speaker’s life—as well as the four corners (*cantonate*) that, once imposed on language and sound in her poetry’s “metrical spaces,” form cantos, or songs.⁸ While the etymological link between the two terms remains uncertain, *cantoni* harbors a distinct echo of *canzoni*, one that Rosselli elsewhere taps in serial variations of *Variazioni belliche* (1962). “Cantons” in the modern and in the obsolete senses are linked, and indeed Rosselli’s musicological studies throughout the 1950s were a result of the disintegrated tonal system, based on the perceived need to erect new musical systems to “save art from incommunicability due to the lack of a common and shareable language.”⁹ In the poem’s final dialectical movement away from “Jesusinthelimbs” expressed in these lines, the displaced speaker invokes the Inferno that synthesized an Italian vernacular—that of Dante’s *terze rime*, its magisterial architecture of cantos rationalizing the ethical and intellectual sphere of a poet in exile—to synthesize these cantons. But Rosselli’s own efforts of linguistic and architectonic synthesis will rupture and recombine from within, rather than consolidating, the Italian “national” language; they will sing the violent and ecstatic disintegration of cantons.

If reproduction of the bass hoarseness of Rosselli’s reading voice preserved in 1993, and of her accent at sea—the result of being born into exile and of willed (re)patriation in the face of cultural, psychological, medical, and economic challenges—felt like mimicry to me, echoing the rhythm, the melody of the recorded performance we have of *Impromptu* seemed suddenly indispensable in translation. After all, Rosselli’s recitations of *Sleep* in the original English and in Italian for RAI broadcasts in which she specifies that the translations are her own emphasize extraordinary melodic and rhythmic correspondences. The initial experiment in Madison led me to begin sounding the relation between translation and reperformance, recitation and the convocation of cantons: to honor in a more substantive way the performative dimension of transmitting texts from afar into the current moment.

Due to the obvious challenges of sonic equivalence across languages, the act of conveying linguistic creations across a distance—whether geographical or historical—is rarely expected to reproduce the sonic qualities of the sources in any strict sense. Homophonic translations like those of Louis and Celia Zukofsky’s Catullus, while at last being taken more seriously, remain marginalized as experiments—regarded as limit cases apt for theorizing, yet with which standard literary translation need not contend.¹⁰ Useful exceptions arise in the context of theater and performance, where (re)vocalization and the rhythmic, physical, and kinetic elements of language are of necessity foregrounded.¹¹ Yet questions of performance have generally been overlooked in discussions of poetic translation, as though verse were not to some extent conceived and continually reinterpreted as a conceptual and musical score. Salient critical efforts to amend this tendency arise in the writings of Barbara Godard, whose coined term

"transformance" implied without fully elaborating in 1991 that translation, like performance, can act as an event, a process: an enunciation in the present toward a possible future. Extending the implications of Godard's texts by examining conceptions of performativity in J.L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Caroline Bergvall's "Via," Sandra Bermann posits that translation constitutes "a re-writing across chasms of time, in dialogue with others" that points the way to generative dispossession, a first step in performatively queering and otherwise swerving from the archive. Translation, too, can enact "[t]he work of performing in the here and now" that Godard distinguishes as "a turning, a making strange through a recontextualization that opens new networks or fields in which to situate a gesture, a body, a word."¹² Performance thus addresses inexorably the uncommon temporality into which translation plunges us, or ought to, especially when carrying poetry across languages—striving to body forth the rhythm, the cognitive and musical pulse, of the text in multiple phases of reanimation.

Attention to performance gets to the heart of ensuring the continued life of a printed text once it has been "shelved." Though one always finds things to do differently in a book once it is out in the world—perhaps most intensely when it is a work of translation, wherein one has had to choose among many imperfect solutions for correspondence—both author and translator can continue to shape the life of a text after it is printed. Even while identifying translation as the expression of the innermost kinship of languages, Walter Benjamin admits that "all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages"—that "[a]n instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution of this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind."¹³ But this very provisionality can lead to more generative sustained engagement.

Poetry such as Rosselli's, which emerged in a context of dialogue and collaboration with artists and theorists in time-based media, obliges us to regard the performance of poetic texts as a vital aspect of both their composition and their reanimation—which is after all the driving impulse of translation. It invites us to regard poetic translation as an event: interpretation of a more or less lyrical score wherein moment-by-moment decisions inflecting rhythm, pitch, timbre, and tempo trigger a perpetual rearticulation. Many Rosselli pieces, in their making-polyphonous of national languages, present problems large enough that their solutions exceed the framework of an individual poem or book, as the translator seeks to maintain a network of correspondences across series of lyrics. Solutions that could not be undertaken in an anthology published by a university press often leaked into and molded my own writing; I continue to translate Rosselli not only directly but through the divagations of scholarship and poetry. Meanwhile, in founding PennSound Italiana, a new sector of the University of Pennsylvania's audiovisual archive of poetry, I have arranged to place the singular voices of poets out of Italy freely and directly into the public sphere, with a minimum of editorial and commercial mediation. I am hoping to include more translations as the project moves forward, in line with the challenges raised by this article.

Rereading the translation I published in *Locomotrix* in light of having to perform these poems in public once the book was published, and thus taking the time to relish the newfound access to her recording of *Impromptu* that the internet offered (my own copy, purchased through a wild-goose chase in Rome in the year 2000, was on cassette, and I hadn't listened to it for a decade when YouTube stepped in), it dawned on me that if I were really to be "faithful" to Rosselli as a multifaceted artist, as I asked of my audience, the text would need to be altered for reading aloud. To continue, it's imperative to listen to the recording of Rosselli's recitation, which I have cross-posted via PennSound Italiana at <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Italiana.php>.

Having to reperform the third section of *Impromptu* without the crutch of a sound system that would broadcast the original recording thus led me to change the translation

considerably—though there was one thing I felt I'd done particularly right in the first published version, and it had to do with time.

3.

questa notte con spavaldo desiderio
scesi per le praterie d'un lungo fiume
impermeato d'antiche abitudini
ch'al dunque ad un segnale indicavano

melma, e fiato. Solo sporcizia
sì, vidi dall'ultimo ponte, dubitando
d'una mia vita ancora rimasta al
sole, non per l'arrosto ma per

il fuoco è buona: se a tutti divenne
già prima ch'io nascessi indifferente

la mia buona o cattiva sorte, dall'altr'angolo
che non da questa visione crematorizzata

dalla mia e vostra vita terrorizzata
se resistere dipende dal cuore

piuttosto dalle sottane s'arrota
la *Mistinguette*, la vita sberciata
per un attimo ancora, se sesso
è così rotativo da apparire poi

vano a questo recitativo che mi
faceva passare per pazza quando
arroteandomi dietro ad ogni scrivania

sorvegliavo i vostri desideri d'essere
lontani dalla mia, rotativa nella
notte specchiata nel lucido del

vetro che copre le vostre indifferenze
alla mia stralunante morte.¹⁴

The way that Rosselli recites this section and others estranges listeners from the messages they bear. Her verse, with its turnings, and turnings again, enacts the sort of hovering over the semantic field that Gertrude Stein describes in the "emotional" paragraphs of Henry James (with an emphasis on "motion"): "his whole paragraph was detached what it said from what it did, what it was from what it held, and over it all something floated not floated away but just floated,

floated up there.”¹⁵ This effect is accentuated in performance. It is as if the melody, the pulsation of the text, of the recitative—“a musical declamation of the kind usual in narrative and dialogue parts of opera and oratorio, sung in the rhythm of ordinary speech with many words on the same note”¹⁶—exists on a plane above and beyond its semantic value, as an autonomous complex of assonant or dissonant phonemes. Rosselli’s reading, like her compositions, follows a musical and perceptual as opposed to narrative trajectory of association. It is inherently polyphonous.

There’s also something nearly liturgical in the way that she chants the poem, reminding us of an anecdote she relates in an interview about performing with David Tudor and Merce Cunningham in Rome’s Teatro Sistina in 1960, and breaking into a Gregorian chant (to John Cage’s displeasure).¹⁷ The rhythm of the translation needed to unfold in that defamiliarizing march of hers, to possess something of that Gregorian uncanniness and hammering about it. For Rosselli’s pitch and rhythmic irregularity, drifting away from the expected standards of spoken stress, veer from the images of mechanical rotation, and of spinning, that are embedded in this narrative—from the scene’s whirling of catastrophic time, redolent of Yeats’s “turning and turning in the widening gyre.”¹⁸ Mistinguette (the alias of Jeanne Bourgeois, 1875–1956, and Montale’s nickname for Rosselli), an actress, showgirl, and singer, the most popular French entertainer of her time, is being agitated by the axis of her underskirts rather than by her heart, ground as if on a lathe—and these images are delivered in an *Unheimlich*, unhomely, antique music.¹⁹ Chiara Carpita points out in a recent review of the Guernica edition that Rosselli’s personal library contains a 1979 edition of the musicologist Curt Sachs’s *Le sorgenti della musica* (*The Wellsprings of Music*), meticulously annotated.²⁰ In his section on “Rhythm and Form,” the two organizing principles of melody, Sachs writes that “Rhythm springs from man as a slowly developing psychophysiological urge,” born of the drive for ease and gusto in evenness. Though poetry is a “familiar carrier of regular rhythm,” Sachs is quick to note that “[a]ll versification depends on irrational respiration with a meaningful lengthening and shortening of individual syllables. As a spoken art, it requires a freedom in which both the stresses and the meters are little more than merely suggested.”²¹ While this is not the place to delve into a full reading of Rosselli’s tractate on meter, “Spazi Metrici” or “Metrical Spaces,” we can note that by establishing spatial rather than traditional metrical constraints, she sought a dialectic of control and rhythmic freedom that cannot be understood strictly in written terms; it requires analysis of rhythmic dilation and contraction out loud of the sort modeled in this recitation.

At the same time, in performance, the translation needs to strive for the quality named in the *poemetto*’s title: a free-form musical composition with the character of an *ex tempore* improvisation as if prompted by the spirit of the moment, usually for a solo instrument—thus unfurling as if unscripted, spontaneous, resisting inscription. In this sense, *Impromptu* radicalizes the problem with all poetic translation; for doesn’t all poetry, especially lyric poetry, strive to resist the sense that it was composed? Doesn’t all lyric long to appear *inspired* rather than labored over, planned, strategized? Rosselli said of the early poems of *Variazioni belliche* that “for some of them it was enough for me to play a prelude of Bach or Chopin to reinterpret it, almost immediately afterward, in poetic form.”²² Even her more “objective,” post-Romantic, modernist work, wherein words fill what she called a “*forma-cubo*,” was composed via a sort of improvisation on the typewriter, where she could “for a short time, follow a thought faster than light.”²³

Translating an improvisation and its reperformance must honor what Manfredo Tafuri—in a public address that led Giorgio Agamben to his post-Nietzschean reflections “On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living Among Specters”—named “la dignità dell’attimo” (the dignity of the instant).²⁴ Tafuri reads in Benedetto Antelami’s sculpted allegory for the south portal of the Baptistry of Parma that orientation toward life in which one chooses to taste the honey in the

hive, even as a dragon threatens from below and wolves eat away at the trunk that divides you.
My ongoing translation of this recitative currently reads:

3.
this last night with brazen desire
I descended through the grasslands of a long river
impermeated by ancient practices
that at a signal were finally pointing out

mire, and breath. It was only filth,
yes, seen from the final bridge, as I doubted
in a life of mine still remaining to the
sun, good not for roasting but for

the fire: if my good or bad fortune became —
even before I was born — a thing of indifference

to everyone, from any corner
other than that of this vision crematorized

of my and your life being terrorized
if resistance depends on the heart

Mistinguette is agitated
from her petticoats instead, life missing the mark
for an instant further, if sex
is so gyrate as then to appear

vain to this recitative that made
me pass for lunatic when
in gyring behind each desk

I surveilled all your desires to be
far from mine, gyrate in the
night mirrored in the polish of the

glass that covers your indifferences
to my moonstriking death.

The dignity of the instant is what Amelia Rosselli lends to the condition of being dazed: for as I pointed out in my notes to *Locomotrix*, the word she chooses for the speaker's death is not "agitated," "dazed," "wild-eyed," or as my more literal retention of the "luna" would have it, "moonstruck"—a *stralunata morte*, or "moonstruck death." This death is instead rendered the more durational through her otherworldly extension of the seemingly conclusive condition:

through use of the present as opposed to the past participle. A present participle makes the speaker's death *stralunante*, actively dazing—not merely dazed. In the essential Meridiano edition of Rosselli's works, as well as the valuable trilingual edition recently published by Guernica, the editors duly note that in cleaned-up manuscripts of this text, the word *stralunante* is "corrected" in favor of the term "*stralunata*."²⁵ It is therefore the more compelling that when Rosselli performs this text for the recording included in the 1993 edition, she not only retains the original term, *stralunante*, but emphasizes it by drawing out the action of bedazzlement vocally. The death in question is not an object moonstruck but an agent that keeps dazzling: it is aurally and visually moonstriking.

Impromptu ends on a resistance to history with a capital H. This resistance begins with an image that I read as a reinterpretation of Botticelli's *Primavera*:

13.

Sóffiati nuvola, come se nello
stelo arricciato in mia bocca
fosse quell'esaltazione d'una
primavera in pioggia, che è il
grigio che ora è era appeso nell'aria . . .

[. . .]

[. . .] quando vinta
rispècchiati nella vittoria, che

è l'indifferenza per tutto ciò
che riguarda la Storia, di quell'ebete
femmina ingaggiata per una storia

d'amore di cui mi racconterai
pur ancora un'altra volta, quando
l'avrai vista storta. E se paesani
zoppicanti sono questi versi è

perché siamo pronti per un'altra
storia di cui sappiamo benissimo

faremo al dunque a meno, perso
l'istinto per l'istantanea rima

perché il ritmo t'aveva al dunque

già occhieggiata da prima.

I want to pause on the first moment of this final section to try to unravel the picture being presented. There are several perplexing things about the first stanza: the unanticipated relationship between the cloud, the stalk in the speaker's mouth (which first appears in an earlier section), and



FIGURE 1

Sandro Botticelli, *La Primavera*, detail, tempera on panel, circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Image courtesy of Creative Commons.

the rainy spring; the extremely entangled temporality, with its opening imperative; and the assonance between *è* (is), *era* (was), *ora* (now), and *aria* (air, aria) that emphasizes this amalgamation of tenses.

As a child I lived with a reproduction of an image of Botticelli's Chloris—just the detail of her fleeing face, with the stalk in her open mouth—on the wall of my parents' living room. It disoriented and terrified me for years; I never ceased to try resolving in mind the image of a twisted stalk emerging from Chloris's throat. When at the very end of a dozen-year period of translation from half a continent's distance, I decided that I would be remiss not to include the final section of Rosselli's final work in my book, and began to translate, and to attempt to disentangle one line from another, and recognized—perhaps—the image of the woman absconding with the stalk in her mouth, I flushed with an overwhelming momentary sense of transit into Rosselli's orientation. To see that reticent image transfused into poetry, transmuted. To think that we had perhaps seen the same image. Of course we had; this is one of the most well-known paintings on earth, though also one of the most defamiliarizing if you actually look. Only perhaps. This is the desperation of the translator of an author who has died. Even more so when translating a person who has taken her own life, effecting a stupefying death.

Now let's zoom out.

Botticelli's *Primavera* reads from right to left. It pictures Zephyrus, god of the west wind, raping the nymph Chloris. Draped with a veil so insubstantial it dissolves into air, Chloris is made pregnant; in the resulting metamorphosis, she becomes Flora. Her pregnancy as Chloris is transmuted into the pregnant lap of flowers in the image of Flora her fleeing self overlaps. Zephyrus, in abduction, breathes into Chloris, whose name is related to chlorophyll: the result is the phenomenon of spring.

But Chloris's mouth is choked by this futurity—choked by this flowering.

I wish to propose the figure of Chloris as the chlorophyll of literature; I wish to propose this image of forced inspiration as a figure for translation. There is "a vital connection" between an original text and its translation; Benjamin, in his renowned essay, writes of a translation's issuing from the afterlife of the original, and ensuring its continued life.²⁶ In translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter, "the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding."²⁷ Metaphors of birth proliferate in tandem



FIGURE 2

Sandro Botticelli, *La Primavera*, tempera on panel, circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Image courtesy of Creative Commons.

with those of death: “even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to perish with its renewal . . . [O]f all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.”²⁸ However, Benjamin’s notion of the relationship between languages is highly ideal: “Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship between languages.”²⁹ Ultimately.

Zephyr can be compared productively with the translator who comes later but is figured as half dead, blue-grey. Zephyr forces breath, life into the textual matrix, the mold and vessel, again—but this act is a sort of rape whose violence cannot be neutralized. Jonathan Galassi noted in a keynote lecture at Harvard last April, where I first presented this text, that translation is like sex: Perhaps. But it is often nonconsensual. There is a fundamental incommensurability between the parts in commerce, often an injurious one. And Chloris—like Mary in the later myth to be invoked by Hopkins in “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe”—didn’t necessarily ask to be the bearer of a new world. Responding to George Steiner’s naming of rape as one of the four stages of translation in *After Babel* (trust, penetration, incorporation, and restitution or “rapture”), Lori Chamberlain writes that it is necessary for new metaphors of cultural production to contest the gender binaries implicit in authoring metaphors and *storie d’amore* “that have made women, like translations, mistresses . . .”³⁰

However, in the case of *Impromptu*, the author’s first person herself—a translator, polyglot but perennially exiled in her *patria* (fatherland) of choice—has imagined the stalk transplanted in her mouth. As a subject between languages, strategically deploying French and English throughout her poem, she confuses the power dynamic of author and mistress, resembling Steiner’s description of those who have ceased the work of translation, “sometimes too late, because the inhaled voice of the foreign text had come to choke their own.”³¹ I stalking aspire to translate that image, that voice and its obstruction, its crowding with the shoots of regeneration. In order

to do so without raping the original, I need to perform a rhythmic and melodic deformation of English—a deformation all the more necessary given the dominance of English-language products in a context of global capitalism. Translation ought not to further the transitive act of violation entailed in so much cross-cultural contact; it must instead contend with the wounded body of the source. It should add a strain to the discomfiting polyphony, resonating with speech choked by the stalk transplanted which gives rise, in pain, to a new language.

The violence of translation is made most obvious when I attempt to perform my poem with its Anglophone syllabics and syntax in the place of that extremely Latinizing mode of the Gregorian chant, to forge a recitative in an English-language oratorio or opera—musical forms whose names have been directly imported from the Italian, as if English syllables and signifiers would not do. I will never get the music right, and my own breath in the matrix of the original will always be that of an interloper. Still, if I am lucky it will flower and lead to music, dance. Even Shelley asked for inspiration from the west wind.

Let's return to time. I noted that *Impromptu* demanded reanimation in the present moment: that it encompasses incommensurable temporalities: that it ends on a resistance to history with a capital H.

13.

Cloud, fill yourself with breath, as if the
twisted stalk in my mouth
were that exaltation of a
spring in rain, which is the
grey that now is was suspended in air . . .

[. . .]

[. . .] when defeated
mirror yourself again in victory, which

is indifference toward everything that
has to do with History, of that idiot
female enlisted in a history

of romance you'll tell me all about
yet one more time, once
you have seen it aslant. And if hobbling
paisans are these verses it is

because we're ready for another
history [. . .]

There are three moments encapsulated in this eyeing of Chloris: the moment of Zephyrus's embrace and her flight, prior to abduction; its consequence, her pregnancy; and her ultimate transformation into Flora. The moment of the rape is missing here but is deduced from the moments that come before and after:

[. . .] that exaltation of a
spring in rain, which is the
grey that now is was hung in the air . . .

In Botticelli, we have three moments unfolding in one *mise en scène*; in Rosselli's poem, the confusion of the temporalities of *è, ora, era, aria* is expressed in their uncanny rhymes.

Botticelli's painting is known for its symmetry, but in fact it is somewhat asymmetrical. This trinity of violence and rhythmic disjunction mirrors the more perfect harmony of the three graces dancing at left: joyously spinning, no longer turning in the widening gyre of life missing the mark for an instant further. Still, we remain

[. . .] pronti per un'altra
storia di cui sappiamo benissimo

faremo al dunque a meno, perso

l'istinto per l'istantanea rima
perche il ritmo t'aveva al dunque

già occhieggiata da prima.

[. . .] ready for another
history we know perfectly well

we'll ultimately do without, the instinct
for instantaneous rhyme lost

because rhythm had ultimately

been eyeing you from the start.

If the translator succeeds, her belatedness is temporarily suspended; present music emerges, even dance. Yet to translate Amelia Rosselli without the curled stalk in her speaker's mouth, without the stumbling feet of Chloris and transitively dazzling death, would be perjury. Through translation that tries to be true to the formal and musical distortions of her work, I have tried to show that this author who stages the displacement of one language through another makes musical a fact that has always been felt, but that has been amplified by the migrations of the last half-century or so: the fact that national languages and their speakers are at their core *paesani zoppicanti*, hobbling, half-patriated paisans on uneven feet, faulty syntheses of collapsed cantons.

To reflect this churning of language as a process, the vision in translation, its frame, needs to contend with the sounds of a language *crematorizzata/dalla mia e vostra vita terrorizzata*. Out of the ashes produced by the terrorizing of the life of the first person merged with a second person plural—the ashes of Pasolini, Gramsci, and their animated predecessors—the canto, the canton, cycles between disintegration and reintegration, death and regeneration, choral.

NOTES

1. See for example Valentina Peleggi, "Amelia Rosselli: Musica in poesia," *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli* 30, no. 107 (2010): 67–104, and Chiara Carpita, "'Spazi metrici' tra post-webernismo,

etnomusicologia, Gestalttheorie ed astrattismo. Sulle fonti extra-letterarie del 'nuovo geometrismo' di Amelia Rosselli," *Moderna* 15, no. 2 (2013): 61–105. I have written in English of Rosselli's relation to music in "'Cantonidisintegratidella / miavita': Closure and Implosion of the Canto(n) in Amelia Rosselli, and the Dream (or Nightmare) of a Transnational Language," *Moderna* 15, no. 2 (2013): 131–54.

2. See, for example, her interview for *Videorivista di poesia diretta da Elio Pagliarini* no. 1 (1989), archived at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYitmHoE-W0&list=PLE1E11A737881A1C4>, accessed December 1, 2015. In this interview, Rosselli also notes that Joyce, Montale, Musil, Pasternak, and even Dante all received some form of musical education.
3. Citation is from "Non si può diventare poeti forzati," a 1991 interview with Maria Pia Ammirati, in Monica Venturini and Silvia De March, eds., *È vostra la vita che ho perso: Conversazioni e interviste, 1964–1995* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2010), 157.
4. "Impromptu" appears in Amelia Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, ed. Stefano Giovannuzzi, et al. (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), 884. (This Meridiano edition of Rosselli's works is hereafter cited as *OP*.) The first editions were published by San Marco dei Giustiniani and Carlo Mancosu in 1981/2003 and 1993. A trilingual edition edited by Gian-Maria Annovi containing translations into English and French in collaboration with Diana Thow and Jean-Paul Vegliante was issued shortly after the composition of this article (New York: Guernica Editions, 2014).
5. Andrea Cortellessa, "I libri, la poesia," (February 6, 2006), Broadcast #1 of the series "Con l'ascia dietro le spalle: 10 anni senza Amelia Rosselli," RAI Radio 3, https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/groups/Italiana/Amelia-Rosselli/Amelia-Rosselli_01_Con-l-Ascia-Dietro-le-Spalle_February-06-2006.mp3. Reposted at PennSound Italiana: <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Italiana.php>.
6. Adriana Cavarero, *A più voci: Per una filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003), available in English as *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translated and with an introduction by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
7. *OP*, 666.
8. "Spazi Metrici," first published as an appendix to *Variazioni belliche*, was reprinted most recently in the Meridiano edition of her collected works: see *OP*, 181–89. Among the crucial analyses of "Spazi metrici" are Paolo Cairoli, "Spazio metrico e serialismo musicale. L'azione dell'avanguardia postweberniana sulle concezioni poetiche di Amelia Rosselli," *Trasparenze. Triple issue devoted to Amelia Rosselli*, edited by G. Devoto and Emanuela Tandello 17–19 (2003): 45–58; "La poetica" in the introduction to Tatiana Bisanti, *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli: Un distorto, inesperto, espertissimo linguaggio*, Letteratura Italiana (Pisa: ETS, 2007), 28–55; Francesco Carbognin, *Le Armoniose Dissonanze: "Spazio Metrico" e intertestualità nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli*, 1. ed. (Bologna: Gedit, 2008), 15–44.
9. See Valentina Peleggi, "Amelia Rosselli: Musica in poesia," *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli* XXX, no. 107 (2010): 68.
10. Gaius Valerius Catullus, Celia Thaew Zukofsky, and Louis Zukofsky. *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber)* (London, UK: Cape Goliard Press, 1969). See, for example, David Wray, "'cool rare air': Zukofsky's Breathing with Catullus and Plautus," *Chicago Review* 50, nos. 2/3/4 (Winter 2004/05): 52–99.
11. See, for example, Roger Baines and Fred Dalmaso, "Musical Realizations: A Performance-Based Translation of Rhythm in Koltès' *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*," in *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theater Practice*, ed. Roger Baines, Cristina Marinetti, and Manuela Perteghella, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49–72.

12. Barbara Godard, "Performance/Transformance: Editorial," *Tessera* 11 (1991): 11; Sandra Bermann, "Performing Translation," in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 295.
13. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Selected Writings, Volume 1 (1913–1926)*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1996), 257.
14. For an introduction in English to "Metrical Spaces," see my introduction to *Locomotrix: Selected Poetry and Prose of Amelia Rosselli. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Jennifer Scappettone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1–47.
15. Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 53.
16. This is the 2011 American Heritage Dictionary definition.
17. See "Partitura in versi," in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, 145. Rosaria Lo Russo offers a compelling argument for the way that Rosselli's "glorious and violent mystical-erotic inspiration" occupies the tradition of feminine mystic "oral writing"—particularly the trope of the mystic marriage to Christ—in order to "seduce the Father-God into a 'parity' of communication." This argument stresses the way that phonic dissolution of the poems in *La libellula*, *Variazioni belliche*, and *Serie ospedaliera* enacts a parodic de- and resemanticization of the paternalistic Canon. See "I Santi Padri e la Figlia dal cuore devastato," in *La furia dei venti contrari: Variazioni Amelia Rosselli, con testi inediti e dispersi dell'autrice*, ed. Andrea Cortellessa (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), esp. 69–74.
18. William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Vol. 1: The Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner), 189.
19. Paolo Canettieri points out the detail about Rosselli's nickname in "Impromptu di Amelia Rosselli," in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, *Dizionario delle Opere*, vol. 1 of 2 (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), 570. For Rosselli's work as a "homicide," unhomey, see my introduction to *Locomotrix*, 1–47.
20. Chiara Carpita, "Amelia Rosselli, *Impromptu. A Trilingual Edition*," *Nuovi argomenti* (October 21, 2015), <http://www.nuoviargomenti.net/poesie/nota-introductiva-a-a-rosselli-impromptu-a-trilingual-edition/>.
21. Curt Sachs, *The Wellsprings of Music*, edited by Jaap Kunst (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff/Springer Netherlands, 1961), 49–131.
22. "Fatti estremi," an interview with Giacinto Spagnoletti, first published in *Antologia poetica* (Milan: Garzanti, 1987), and translated in *Locomotrix*, 260.
23. "Spazi metrici," first published in *Variazioni belliche*, and reprinted in *OP*, 189; translated in *Locomotrix*, 252.
24. Agamben's essay is collected in *Nudità, or Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 37–42. The citation is from Manfredo Tafuri, "Le forme del tempo: Venezia e la modernità," *Università IUAV di Venezia, Inaugurazioni accademiche, 1991–2006* (Venice: IUAV, 2006), 180–193.
25. *Opera poetica*, 1424.
26. Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," 254.
27. *Ibid.*, 255.
28. *Ibid.*, 256.
29. *Ibid.*, 255.
30. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language & Translation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 312–319; Lori Chamberlain, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 327.
31. Steiner, *After Babel*, 315–16.

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