Voices from a Minor Literature

Reading the Poetry of Elsa Morante, Amelia Rosselli, Patrizia Cavalli and Biancamaria Frabotta in Context (1968-1982)



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ABSTRACT

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This thesis constitutes the first monograph to analyse the poetry of Elsa Morante, Amelia Rosselli, Patrizia Cavalli, and Biancamaria Frabotta in context. It investigates the entangled networks of personal, political, and literary exchanges between these poets and their texts in the 'long seventies' (1968-1982). With the aim of problematizing the difficult heritage of the category 'scrittura femminile' within the Italian context, it uses the categories of 'minority' and 'minor literature' – as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – as an aid for the revaluation of women's poetry. One of the most common tendencies of literary criticism sees women's poetry as the product of a series of isolated, eccentric, and exceptional 'cases'. Conversely, the category of 'minor literature' allows us to produce a contextual reassessment of their poetic work following two main threads: first, the 'de-territorialization' of their poetic language which entails several innovations introduced in their metrical systems, the macrostructures of their books, and the cultural references at the core of their poetry collections; second, the 'political aim' intrinsic in the treatment of their lyric subject. This thesis contributes an innovative viewpoint to existing scholarship on Italian women's poetry, gender studies, and lyric theory by further problematising received notions of 'scrittura femminile', literary reception, and anti-canonicity. In turn, it also allows us to relocate the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta within an interconnected system of transnational, transcultural, and transhistorical literary influences.

LONG ABSTRACT

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This thesis challenges the dialectic of exclusion that has characterised the treatment of Italian women's poetry within academic discourse and the literary market. It investigates how most literary critics have depicted Italian women poets as a series of exceptional and isolated cases, shaping a semantics of otherness and exclusion. This is the first study to contextually analyse the work of four 20th-century Italian women poets. The thesis investigates the work of four poets based in Rome in the seventies: Elsa Morante, Amelia Rosselli, Patrizia Cavalli, and Biancamaria Frabotta. It reconstructs the entangled network of cultural, political, and transnational literary exchanges in a dense period of Italian history known as the 'long seventies' (1968-1982). It does so by proving the translation of historical narratives into lyric poetry, the persistence of an interest in metre and form, as well as an inner tension towards stylistic inventiveness and 'de-territorialization' of domesticated literary traditions. The category of 'minority', as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, provides a more appropriate lexicon to examine the stylistic and thematic difference of Italian women's poetry.

Chapter 1: *A Poetics of Femininity? Otherness, Voice, and Female Writing*

Two main factors contributed locating these poets outside the canon, and on the margins of academic interest. Firstly, the place of women poets within anthologies has always been significantly limited compared to that devoted to their male counterparts. Secondly, when women poets have been included in such collective works, they have been invariably described as displaying a marked 'otherness' in both their style and thematic choices. As a result, the recurrent use of limited expressions highlighting the diversity of women's writing has become a veritable myth, creating a semantics of exclusion. This chapter helps to reconstruct a critical genealogy that spans over thirty years and encompasses Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo's *Poeti Italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978) and Giorgio Manacorda's *La poesia italiana oggi* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2004). These anthologies worked on the same underlying assumption that Italian women

poets are not worth mentioning because their style supposedly tends to refuse any fixed metrical structures and avoid also any representation of history in their poetry.

This linguistic tendency of literary criticism has informed the general academic discourse on this topic, as well as the criticism produced after the revolution introduced by gender studies: women poets are still read as independent, exceptional, and isolated cases. We must, therefore, acknowledge the lack of a comprehensive study that analyses and assesses stylistically, thematically, and genealogically poetry written by Italian women authors in the second half of the twentieth century. With the purpose of filling that gap, this chapter develops an analysis of the major poetic anthologies published in Italy since the mid-sixties. It subsequently investigates the notions of 'voce femminile' and 'scrittura femminile', and how they were used in order to craft the myth of the 'otherness' of women's poetry.

Chapter 2: *Towards a Poetics of Minority: Writing on Difference*

Originally theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in their book dedicated to Kafka, the category of 'minor literature' covers the object of this research, while also providing an answer to the origin of its 'stylistic difference'. By relying on the notion of 'stylistic difference' rather than that of 'otherness', this thesis will employ a lexicon that can better support a coherent linguistic analysis of the authors considered. At the same time, the notion of 'minority', as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, provides a motivation for the exclusion of women poets from the Italian canon. The category 'minor literature' can overcome the dialectical system of opposition at the basis of feminist literary criticism, while developing its own phenomenology based on the concept of 'difference'. A survey of both the poetic texts and the poets' critical essays reveals how the category of 'minor literature' is mirrored by the individual poetics of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta.

The first section of this chapter investigates how these poets aim to 'deterritorialise' their poetic language, by introducing innovative traits into their linguistic system. None of these linguistic innovations can be encompassed under two of the main poetic tendencies in the second half of the century: on the one hand, hermeticism – which can be included under the tag of *novecentismo* and would lead to the New-Orphism between the second half of the seventies and the eighties; and, on the other hand, the New Avant-garde that would stimulate the New-Metricism in the eighties.

The second section retraces their 'political aim' through the 'collective utterance' intrinsic to their poetic production. This emerges from an analysis of the intersections between their writing and the constant overlap between the two dimensions of the 'personal' and of the 'political'.

Chapter 3*: 'Sono un passaggio di barbari divini': Lightness and Gravity in Elsa Morante's 'Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini' and Patrizia Cavalli's 'Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo'*

The first chapter dedicated to textual analysis focuses on Morante's *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968) and Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). The two poetic collections share a strong bond: not only was Cavalli convinced by Morante to publish her first collection (which is retrospectively

dedicated to Elsa), but *Le mie poesie* also represents a direct answer to the questions raised by *Il mondo* six years before, at the earlier stage of the revolution of '68. The process behind this 'minorising' dialogue is the object of enquiry in this chapter. This is filtered through Morante's reception of Simone Weil's thought by looking at how 'gravity' and 'lightness' are not only useful stylistic categories, but also encompass an ethical dimension in Morante's and Cavalli's poetry.

The first two sections concentrate on reconstructing the genealogical connection between the two books: *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*. In the second section, an analysis of the titles of both poetic collections reveals a set of complementary discontinuities even at a liminal level. This leads to the second core component of my analysis, in which the two concepts of lightness and gravity in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non salveranno il mondo* are investigated as a source of 'de-territorialization' of Morante's and Cavalli's style.

The third and fourth sections of the chapter comprise a stylistic analysis of the two collections. The Weilian concepts of *grâce* and *pesanteur* are turned into stylistic categories: 'gravity' and 'grace' as concepts inherited from Morante's reading of Simone Weil's texts, and are here used in the form of *gravitas* and *levitas,* as stylistic categories. This pair is then used to investigate how Morante and Cavalli managed to 'de-territorialise' their language through the metrics, the semantics, and the structure of the books.

Chapter 4: *'Non v'era pubblico più disattento': Clarity and Obscurity in Amelia Rosselli's 'Documento (1966-1973)' and Biancamaria Frabotta's 'Il rumore bianco'*

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of Rosselli's *Documento (1966-73)* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976) and the *plaquette Affemminata* (Rivalba: Geiger, 1976) by Frabotta, published in 1976 and later included in her first collection *Il rumore bianco* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982). The similarities between these two collections are shown to be extraordinarily strong. *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco* seem to be affected by a similar stylistic preoccupation regarding lightness and gravity that is, in the case, instantiated in the 'pair' of clarity and obscurity. Both authors shared a very peculiar interest regarding two main questions: the unity of the 'libro di poesia' echoing the architecture of a Petrarchan *canzoniere*, and the dialogue between the lyric subject and her audience.

The first part of the chapter centres on the analysis of Rosselli's and Frabotta's relationship with their audience. This is investigated through the dichotomy between the dimensions of the public and of the private in their poetry and, concurrently, between clarity and obscurity of expression in poetic writing.

The second part carries out the analysis of Frabotta's and Rosselli's 'de-territorialization' of language: this relies on their attempt at conjugating a certain degree of linguistic experimentalism to a solid renegotiation of the Petrarchan and Leopardian lyric models. To this end, this chapter studies the metrics of the two collections – with a focus on their recasting of the sonnet –, the semantics, and the structures of the books.

Chapter 5: *A Political Lyric Subject*

The final chapter is devoted to the analysis of the 'political aim' intrinsic to the the poetry collections published by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta in the seventies. The 'political aim' of their poetry is demonstrated through a comparative analysis of their works. The *corpus* of texts include Rosselli's *Impromptu* (Genoa: San Marco Dei Giustiniani, 1981) Cavalli's *Il cielo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), and Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*.

All these collections share a renegotiation of the rendering of the lyric subject. As a matter of fact, these authors were still able to theorise a lyric subject after the sixties – the watershed identified by Enrico Testa as the end of the lyric genre in his anthology *Dopo la lirica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005). I argue instead that there is a continuity in the treatment of the lyric subject, thanks to the introduction of a certain degree of novelty. As far as the protagonists of this study are concerned, the uniqueness of their lyric subject pertains to its characterization as 'woman' and its relationship with a collective and, thus, 'political' dimension.

The chapter is accordingly developed in two main parts. The first part of the chapter focuses on how these authors reached a new self-depiction in poetry through the process of 'becoming-everything', producing an 'expanded lyric subjectivity'. This section focuses on the many ways through which the gender of the lyric subject gets displaced, entangled, and confused with other identities. This movement functions as a fundamental premise used by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta to 'de-territorialise' their treatment of the lyric subject and, concurrently, to connect this 'expanded subjectivity' to the 'political' dimension of the others.

In the second section, this section analyses how the lyric subject is portrayed as a 'woman' subject. We witness here to a hyper-feminisation of the lyric subject – a practice of self-representation which discloses a certain degree of proximity with the Deleuzian process of 'becoming-woman'. These lyric subjects are: 'la ladra delle notti' who then becomes 'la Carlottina' in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, 'una fanciulla' in *Impromptu*, 'Patrizia' in *Il cielo*, and 'Eloisa' in *Il rumore bianco*. Moreover, this self-portraiture reveals a common tension towards what Robert Pogue Harrison has called 'juvenescence': all the subjects are described as young and, when not, they aspire at a regeneration of a youthful bodily experience through poetry.

A mia madre e a mio padre,
la mia àncora ed il mio ancóra

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CONCLUSION **270**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Elsa Morante, *Alibi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010)
MSR	Elsa Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012)
DOC	Amelia Rosselli, *Documento* (1966-1973) (Milan: Garzanti, 1976)
IMP	Amelia Rosselli, *Impromptu* (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1981)
LMP	Patrizia Cavalli, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974)
IC	Patrizia Cavalli, *Il cielo*, in *Poesie 1974-1992* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992)
AFF	Biancamaria Frabotta, *affemminata* (Rivalba: Geiger, 1976)
RB	Biancamaria Frabotta, *Il rumore bianco*, in *Tutte le poesie 1971-2017* (Milan: Mondadori, 2018)

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INTRODUCTION

The seventies were a period of radical change in Italy. This 'long decade', starting in 1968 and ending in 1982, is central to the creation of a modern Italian identity. The nature of this threshold was determined by a series of revolutions whose borders are extremely blurry. Following the positivistic drive of the early sixties, its 'anthropological mutation'[1] stimulated by the economic boom, and the consequent outbreak of what Franco Fortini defined as 'mass Surrealism',[2] one can identify a series of cultural shocks that were still at the core of the seventies. Those contrasts would remain dominant within the late sixties, acting as a ghost-like presence in the following decade. As powerfully described by Alberto Arbasino in a reportage published in 1977, *Fantasmi Italiani*, these phantasmatic presences acted as subconscious undertows to Italian cultural production:

> […] nuovissimi fantasmi della psicoanalisi fantasmatica (scenari immaginari in cui è presente il Soggetto – l'Italia- e che raffigurano, in modo più o meno deformato dai processi difensivi, l'appagamento di un desiderio e, in ultima analisi, di un desiderio inconscio, Laplanche & Pontalis.[3]

Literature – and lyric poetry in particular – worked as part of a sublimation process meant to fix, analyse, and digest those fast-paced historical transitions. Even if limited to cultural objects, any attempt at putting together a historical narrative must consider the complex correlation between each historical event and its social actors. Most of the time, these paced transitions were registered by newspapers and other media. Yet, the ominous developments in Italian contemporary history engaged the concern not only of prose writers, who traditionally had been looking for apt material in social history, but

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[1] Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Studio sulla rivoluzione antropologica in Italia', *Scritti Corsari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), pp. 40-42.

[2] Franco Fortini, 'Introduzione', *Il movimento surrealista* (Milan: Garzanti, 1987).

[3] Alberto Arbasino, *Fantasmi italiani* (Rome: Cooperativa Scrittori, 1977) p. 67.

also of poets. Tellingly, poets often used history as their main theme in the seventies and, by using history and a collective enunciation, they opened up their poetry to a political dimension. Phantasmas, in the way in which Arbasino intended the term, are a conceptual metaphor employed to picture the inconsistency and immateriality of the subjective experience of contemporary historical events. The notion of spectrality, together with the Deleuzioguattarian concepts of 'deterritorialization'[4] and 'becoming',[5] is something that would allow us to rethink the relationship between poetry (and specifically lyric poetry), new social actors, and the political context. To this extent, history and politics entered the domains of lyric poetry in many ways but always engaged with one core characteristic of the poetic discourse: contemporary history merges with poetry through a renegotiation of a collective experience filtered through a subjective discourse. In this sense, the procedure adopted by poets is a metonymic one: from plurality to singularity and vice versa.[6]

During the seventies, this way of experiencing lyric poetry is omnipresent. Not limited to poets belonging to new generations, as is the case with poets such as Eros

[4] Deleuze and Guattari define 'de-territorialization' as the movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory, where a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, literary poetics, social, or affective. See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* trans. by B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 508. In the next chapters, this conceptual metaphor will be helpful to understand some of the unorthodox characteristics of the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta, while also further problematizing their critical reception.

[5] The notion of 'becoming', as introduced by Deleuze an Guattari firstly in *Kafka; Pour une littérature mineure* and then expanded in *Mille Plateaux*, will allow us to rethink the ontological opposition between the categories of 'female voice' and 'female writing' and, more broadly the opposition between female and male. The movement towards the *devenir* creates a space of indiscernibility that allows women's writing to flourish and propel an intrinsic revolution that can relocate the power relationship between the lyric subject and object. All becomings create zones of indiscernibility that undo such binary power oppositions as man-woman, adult-child, human-animal, and eventually open up becomings that venture into the molecular and the imperceptible. Cfr. G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 84.

[6] Ezio Puglia, 'Introduzione', in *Ritorni spettrali. Storie e teorie della spettralità senza fantasmi*, ed. by Massimo Fusillo, Stefano Lazzarini, Angelo M. Mangini, Ezio Puglia, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018).

Alesi,[7] this phenomenon branches out to poets belonging to the so called second and third generations of Italian poets. Examples of this subjective posture can be found in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Trasumanar e organizzar*, Mario Luzi's *Su fondamenti invisibili*, and Attilio Bertolucci's *Viaggio d'inverno*.[8] All three books were written soon after 1968 and published in 1971. This reinforces the idea that, on the one hand, these books were written under some sense of urgency or pressure exerted by 1968's events, and, on the other hand, that poetry was an effective medium to welcome historical narratives and to fix their fleetingness and ephemerality. It is important to note that poets' interest is not limited to the representation of events from the near past, as one could expect. Most of them aimed to write poetic texts which could encompass and describe their historical present. From this decade onwards, the borders between what is legitimate to convey through art and what is not had become increasingly blurry. It is not just a matter of 'inclusive poetry',[9] as Eugenio Montale foresaw already in the sixties, or even 'spontaneismo', as Andrea Afribo suggested while referring to young poets publishing their first collection in the seventies.[10] It was, specifically, a matter of representation of new social actors and contemporary historical events, forced by an external urgency and by the poets' willingness to register these events.

As a result, new ways of approaching contemporary history were brought onto the scene by younger poets who felt this urgency of representation and self-representation even more than the older generations. Moreover, poetry was no longer limited to official artists but also performed by non-professionals who were willing to intervene. This occurred in lyric poetry too. As effectively reconstructed by Guido Mazzoni, the poetry

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[7] Andrea Afribo, 'Spontaneismo', *Poesia postrema* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 26-27.

[8] The relationship between historiography and poetry in these three books has been investigated in Keala Jewell's *The Poiesis of History. Experimenting with Genre in Post-war Italy*, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1992).

[9] Eugenio Montale, 'Poesia inclusiva', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 June 1964, now in E. Montale, *Secondo mestiere. Prose 1920-1979*, ed. by Giorgio Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), vol. II, pp. 146-148.

[10] A. Afribo, 'Spontaneismo', *Poesia postrema*, p. 27.

festival of Castelporziano in 1979 is to be considered the epitome of these new dynamics characterising poetry.[11] The festival stands out as a symbolic threshold: on this occasion, the audience of 'non-professional' poets wanted to be actively involved in the creative process by taking the floor and interrupting the 'official' poetry reading.

Considered the literary genre destined to register a subjective experience, lyric poetry evolved rapidly towards a far more inclusive definition, also encompassing the dimension of the others and its addressees – and thus of history as a fast-moving and phantasmatic present.[12] Reality could no longer be reduced to the experience of a mono-vocal subject but had to evolve into something more receptive to the dimension of other voices.[13] What were the other voices in this period of Italian cultural and literary history? Who are these new social actors conquering the space of the speaking subject?

One of the most interesting answers comes from women's poetry. This literary phenomenon is entangled with several socio-economic developments regarding women's roles in Italy, from the struggle for women's rights that led to a new jurisdiction on fundamental matters such as divorce, through the laws promulgated by the parliament in 1970 and then in 1974, to the legalization of abortion in 1978. These events are profoundly intertwined with the emergence of international feminist movements of the so called 'seconda ondata', in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Strictly speaking, the series of cultural, intellectual, and political phenomena related to feminism in Italy find a first concrete expression only from 1968 onwards; indeed, the Italian feminist movement has a younger history compared to its expressions in countries such

[11] Guido Mazzoni, 'Sulla storia sociale della poesia contemporanea in Italia', *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, n. 8 (Trento: University of Trento Press, 2017), pp. 1-26.

[12] Andrea Cortellessa, 'Poesia. Per riconoscerla: tre connotati', *Alfabeta2*, IV, September-October 2013, n. 32, p. 24.

[13] The word 'others', in the seventies, indicates two main entities: the audience — as testified by the anthology *Il pubblico della poesia*, published by Franco Cordelli and Alfonso Berardinelli in 1975 — as well as the historical present – as Giancarlo Majorino states in his anthology *Poesia e realtà* published in 1977.

as the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. This means that part of the Italian movement was inspired by its international counterparts in what was, in fact, a 'first wave'.[14]

Many events can bear witness to this international network and exchange of ideas. In 1970, *Rivolta Femminile*, 'Women's Revolt', was formed in Rome and Milan by Carla Lonzi – one of the leading intellectuals of the feminist movement in Italy – and published its manifesto. In 1972, the International Feminist Collective was founded in Italy by Selma James, Brigitte Galtier, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Silvia Federici, to promote political debate and action around the issue of housework. Moreover, the *International Wages for Housework Campaign*, which grew out of the *Collective*, was a feminist global social movement founded in Padua in 1972. The campaign aimed to raise awareness on how housework and childcare are the base of all industrial work; concurrently, it staked the claim that these unavoidable tasks should be considered as a form of waged labour. Consequently, in 1975, family law in Italy was reformed to remove adultery as a crime, as well as making male and female partners in a marriage equal by the law. Specifically, Law 151/1975 provides for gender equality within marriage, abolishing the legal dominance of the husband.[15] These reforms were stimulated by new movements fighting not only for women's rights but also seeking a fair recognition of women's role within Italian society: no longer seen just as mothers or wives, Italian women struggled for their assimilation as an independent social subject within society. At the core of this movement, there was a drive towards auto-definition and self-representation, resulting,

[14] Rebecca Clifford, Robert Gildea, and Anette Warring, 'Gender and Sexuality', *Europe's 1968. Voices of Revolt*, ed. by Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Anette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 244-57.

[15] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 369–370.

in most cases, in an actual philosophy of subjectification:[16] a philosophy of 'becoming', as the following chapters will explain.

Being a genre based on the subjective experience of reality, lyric poetry was one of the most fertile modes of communciation approached by women to communicate this project of subjectification and self-representation. In this sense, lyric poetry has functioned as a fundamental exercise of self-consciousness. A clear-cut example of this relationship between the Italian feminist movements and lyric poetry is provided, among others, by Dacia Maraini. In the first stanza of the long poem *Donne mie*, Maraini directly targets Italian women as her main audience:

> Mie donne assoggettate che io amo per
> somiglianza e rancore perché vi fate
> mettere nel sacco mille volte al giorno
> come sciocche sbadate buffe sordomute,
> silenziose carnefici di voi stesse,
> senza sapere che siete malnate, malvissute,
> maleamate in questa società di soli uomini
> che amano se stessi in voi, come un riflesso. […][17]

The accumulation of adjectives listed at the very beginning of the poem functions as a lyric apostrophe, but then Maraini turns this figure of speech into something else. The audience is no longer a lover or a fictional character but a category that the subject wants to address.

> Donne mie illudenti e illuse che frequentate
> le università liberali, imparate latino,

[16] With the term 'subjectification', I refer here to the process of becoming a subject through the access to the domain of the word as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Thinking is not for Deleuze the expression of in-depth interiority, or the enactment of transcendental models; it is a way of establishing concrete material and semiotic connections among subjects. This intensive redefinition of the activity of thought entails in fact a vision of subjectivity as a bodily, affective entity. The embodiedness of the subject is for Deleuze a form of bodily materiality, not of the natural, biological kind. Deleuze rather takes the body as the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces, such as the one informing the normative structures of lyric poetry. Cfr. Rosi Braidotti, 'Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze and the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy', *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 111-113.

[17] Dacia Maraini, *Donne mie*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 14.

greco, storia, matematica, filosofia;
nessuno però vi insegna ad essere orgogliose,
sicure, feroci, impavide. A che vi serve
la storia se vi insegna che il soggetto
unto e bisunto dall'olio di Dio è l'uomo
e la donna è l'oggetto passivo di tutti
i tempi? […][18]

Maraini dedicates one of the following stanzas to the discussion of the theme of difference and its relation to gendered categories. Men are portrayed as subjects while women are depicted as subordinated objects. Even a broader access to education has not led to an improvement of women's condition and independence, according to the poet. Not even lyric poetry seems to work as a space of reconciliation. If Maraini's text is read along with the manifesto of *Rivolta Femminile*[19] by Lonzi, Accardi, and Banotti, one may find a similar argumentative structure. This structure developed in three main motives: criticism of the movement for women's emancipation, critique of the phallogocentric paradigms of culture,[20] and a new pathway heading towards a liberation movement. The same reasoning can be extended also to the role of women poets within the academic discourse, the literary market, and contemporary society. Each one of these sectors is governed by the same kind of dynamics that we will find in the texts written by women poets.

In light of this socio-cultural background, this thesis aims to reassess some of the most important Italian women poets of the second half of the twentieth century. More

[18] D. Maraini, *Donne mie*, p. 14.

[19] *Rivolta Femminile* was officially born in Rome in 1970 with the publication of its first manifesto, which the group posted on the walls of Rome. The text was meant to express the identity of the collective and, by extension, that of the movement for women's liberation. The manifesto is included in the third edition of Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel*: Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo Su Hegel, La Donna Clitoridea E La Donna Vaginale: E Altri Scritti*, (Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1974).

[20] The word 'phallologocentrism' was coined by Jacques Derrida – a portmanteau of the words in which it could be recognised the words phallocentrism and the word logocentrism. With 'phallologocentrism', Derrida defines a 'discours' that belongs 'au système des oppositions méthaphysiques' and refers to the masculine privilege in the construction of meaning. Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 32.

specifically, I consider four poets who were writing, publishing, and living in Rome during the 'long seventies' (1968-82): Elsa Morante, Amelia Rosselli, Patrizia Cavalli, and Biancamaria Frabotta. This is the first study in any language to 'contextually' analyse, rediscuss, and problematise the poetry of four contemporary Italian women poets.

What does in 'context' mean? Although most Italian women poets in the second half of the twentieth century have always refused the existence of a particular style of 'female writing', many literary critics started using such a definition – which was inherited from French Poststructuralist thought and, in particular, from the work of Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva[21] – from the mid-sixties onwards. Surprisingly, this framework is still productive within the Italian context nowadays, while it has not yet stimulated a reassessment of women's poetry based on a stylistic and contextual reconstruction. Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta have not yet conquered a solid place within the Italian canon. Conversely, they are still the target of a tendency of literary criticism that celebrates their 'female otherness' and focuses on metrical 'informality' and their disengagement with history as the core characteristics of their poetic discourse. Moreover, literary criticism has treated women poets as a list of isolated 'cases'. Conversely, reading these authors 'in context' entails an investigation developed on three distinct levels:

1. within the cultural context of Rome: by showing the mutual connections, personal and artistic exchanges between these poets in this specific historical period;

2. within a transnational[22] literary canon: by exploring the many ways these poets

[21] I am referring here to two essays by Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva: Hélène Cixous, *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 1976); Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1974). Published for the first time in the mid-seventies, the two essays address the questions related to the 'otherness' of female writing.

[22] I rely, here, on the definition of 'transnational poetics', as given by Jahan Ramazani: '[a transnational poetics] proposes various ways of vivifying circuits of poetic connection and dialogue across political and geographic borders and even hemispheres, of examining cross-

started a dialogue with the literature of the past and of the present not only on a national level but also on a transnational one;

3. within collective history: by investigating the impact of the historical context on these poets and how they represented historical events or socio-cultural phenomena in poetry.

A stylistic and contextual investigation of their poetry written by four women authors during the seventies achieves a threefold goal. Firstly, it offers a better understanding of the literary value, themes, and stylistic peculiarities of these authors. Secondly, it contributes to the literary criticism of the authors involved, which also considers the historical context wherein these texts where produced. Lastly, it re-evaluates women's poetry written in this period.

This analysis moves back and forth between a series of comparative close readings of the texts, and an investigation of the historical, geographical, and artistic context in which these poets crafted their poetic collections. My analysis will reveal an entangled system of cultural exchange, reciprocal influences, and literary coteries. These events happened in a concrete and real context: Rome, in the seventies, was a city brimming with poetry readings, performances, theatres, gatherings organised by American artists, independent publishing houses. In the background, however, there was the long shadow of collective history in a long decade that saw Italian society revolutionised dramatically. For all these reasons, Rome represents an extremely stimulating case study: in the seventies, this city was characterised by a bourgeoning poetic environment, and was one of the main centres of the Italian cultural industry. Here, different generations of poets used to live and write, and were deeply influenced by one another.

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cultural and cross-national exchanges, influences, and confluences in poetry.' Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), pp. X-XI.

There was also a proliferation of new publishing houses that gave particular attention to poetry written by women. One of them was Savelli Editore which, between the mid-seventies and the early eighties, printed most of the anthologies, essays, and translations of women writers. Savelli Editore was founded in 1963 by Giorgio Savelli and rapidly became the most representative publishing house close to the New Left. In 1974, Savelli published *Poesia femminista*, the first translation of poems by American feminist poets which was edited and translated by Nadia Fusini and Mariella Gramaglia;[23] in 1976, the anthology of Italian women poets *Donne in poesia*, edited by Biancamaria Frabotta with an introduction by Dacia Maraini;[24] and, in 1978, the volume *Poesia femminista italiana*, edited by Laura Di Nola.[25] To this publishing house, we have also to add feminist journals based in Rome such as *DonnaWomanFemme* and *Differenze*, both founded in 1976.

Rome was also one of the main stages for the feminist movements. This political and social environment was crucial for the artistic protagonists of the poetic scene. Within this pluralistic context, poetry became an elected medium for the representation of the woman's self/women's selves, whereby even private or individual stories took on the mantle of collective history. As highlighted by Nanni Balestrini, everything contributed to a movement of re-signification – especially, those activities that were intricately connected to writing and self-expression. Lyric poetry was no exception to this:

> Cercare l'identità di un sesso, il proprio, attraverso un paziente scavo nella memoria; un'attenzione ai prodotti (letteratura, cinema, poesia delle donne); un'altrettanto dura negazione 'io non sono come voi' che serviva a dimostrare l'alterità del sesso maschile.[26]

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[23] Nadia Fusini, Mariella Gramaglia, *Poesia femminista: antologia di poesia del Movement* (Rome: Savelli, 1974).

[24] Biancamaria Frabotta, *Donne in poesia* (Rome: Savelli, 1976).

[25] Laura Di Nola, *Poesia femminista italiana* (Rome: Savelli, 1979).

[26] Nanni Balestrini, Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro 1968-1977: La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988), p. 479.

This thesis is informed by two theoretical premises: firstly, the category of 'female writing' is not compatible with our case study and, within the context of Italian literary criticism, was used to cast the myth of the 'otherness' of Italian women's poetry; secondly, the category of 'minor literature' – as enucleated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe* (Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975), *Mille Plateux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980) – provides a more solid lexicon to discuss the stylistic peculiarities of the poetry of Elsa Morante, Amelia Rosselli, Patrizia Cavalli, and Biancamaria Frabotta.

This research is articulated in five chapters: the first chapter offers a theoretical discussion of the myth of the 'otherness' implied in the label of 'female writing'. The second chapter sets out the theoretical framework, namely the category of 'minor literature'. The Deleuzoguattarian concepts of 'domestication', 'de-territorialization', 'becoming', and 'political aim' provide a more correct lexicon for a better understanding of the texts that are analysed in the three subsequent chapters. The following chapters are dedicated to a series of close readings of Morante's, Rosselli's, Cavalli's, and Frabotta's poetic collections. The third chapter focuses on a comparative analysis of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*[27] by Elsa Morante and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*[28] by Patrizia Cavalli. The fourth chapter carries out the same analysis on Amelia Rosselli's *Documento (1966-1973)*[29] and Biancamaria Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*.[30] The third and fourth chapters are profoundly interconnected as they both explore the stylistic techniques used by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta to de-territorialise their poetic language. The fifth chapter studies the strategies used by Morante, Rosselli,

[27] Elsa Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968).
[28] Patrizia Cavalli, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974).
[29] Amelia Rosselli, *Documento (1966-1973)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1976).
[30] Biancamaria Frabotta, *Il rumore bianco* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982).

Cavalli, and Frabotta to create a new 'political lyric subject' in their poetry and how this operation is characterised by an inner tension towards the self-representation of women's selves. It will be at this stage that a full picture of the interactions between these authors, their texts, their stylistic choices, and thematic preferences will become readable, while also propelling a reader of contemporary Italian women's poetry as informed by an expanded and interconnected subjectivities.

1. A POETICS OF FEMININITY?

Otherness, Voice, and Female Writing

> Je n'ai pas la voix d'une personne qui cache quelque chose ... Non. J'ai décidé d'avoir du courage et j'en aurai ... J'ai ce que je mérite. J'ai voulu être folle et avoir un bonheur fou.
>
> (Jean Cocteau, *La Voix Humaine*)

The history of Italian women poets is a difficult one. It is a history characterised by exclusions, partial inclusions, and problematic critical treatment. It is a cluster of movements that, in most cases, resulted in a paradoxical collocation of Italian women's poetry within the academic discourse and literary market. Overall, this produced what could be defined as a 'presence-in-absence' of women poets within the literary canon. Women poets were present in high numbers in the seventies, but they entered the Italian canon with difficulty and their position within it is extremely precarious to this day.

This problematic collocation of women poets has been informed by a critical discourse which stemmed from the myth of the 'otherness' of women's poetic writing. From the late sixties onwards, one can recognise a solid presence of women poets in the Italian context. Mostly concentrated around Rome, which was a bourgeoning cultural centre for poetry at that time, the presence of women poets is remarkable not only in terms of numbers but also of quality and stylistic originality. This abundance was met by little academic interest, which produced studies grounded only in the constitutive 'otherness' of the singular voice. Little has changed between the seventies and today; 'otherness' is a category which is still in prolific use in the present critical discourse on women's poetry. How is the concept of 'otherness' still so productive? Why is there not yet any critical discourse based on the intrinsic characteristics of poetic texts written by women? Why shall we base our readings of these texts only on super-structural and extrinsic elements? We are dealing here with a problem of perception

and, possibly, misrepresentation. As we are to investigate this broader mechanism in relation to the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta, we also must recognise that two elements helped to craft the perception of women poets' stylistic 'otherness': the numerical presence of women poets in critical discourse and the definitions that are attributed to them by literary criticism.

The first section of this chapter investigates the treatment reserved for Italian women poets by literary criticism and academia. Women poets were almost absent from any historical reconstruction, academic discourse, and poetic anthologies up until the late seventies. Even after this threshold, which corresponded to a series of studies carried out by young feminist critics,[31] Italian women poets did not officially enter the academic discourse, except as a series of case studies. Furthermore, they were not just cases, but a constellation of isolated cases that were to be read through their supposed exceptionality, self-informed otherness, and impossible canonicity. Allegedly, women poets could not be included in the historicist canon of Italian literature due to an a-systematic tension towards anti-canonicity that was informing their poetics. In light of this intrinsic character of Italian women's poetry, it was not possible for literary criticism to design a critical discourse on several voices in dialogue with each other: there was no dialogue, and, in most cases, each voice was to be investigated out of context. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five of this thesis, the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta is contextually analysed by examining a decade that reshaped not only the panorama of Italian poetry but also Italian society as a whole.

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[31] The majority of these studies were published by Savelli Editore – a publishing house based in Rome that devoted particular attention towards feminist literary criticism: Nadia Fusini, Mariella Gramaglia, *La poesia femminista: Antologia di testi poetici del Movement* (Rome: Savelli 1974), Biancamaria Frabotta, *Donne in poesia: Antologia della poesia femminile in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi* (Rome: Savelli, 1976), Laura Di Nola, *Poesia femminista italiana* (Rome: Savelli, 1978), Biancamaria Frabotta, *Letteratura al femminile. Itinerari di lettura a proposito di donne, storia, poesia e romanzo* (Bari: De Donato, 1980), Beverly Allen, Muriel Kittel, Keala Jane Jewell, *The Defiant Muse: Italian Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1986).

To further reinforce the centrality of 'otherness' in women's poetry, several Italian literary critics had to come up also with an effective formula to circumscribe this phenomenon – a phenomenon that did not fit the traditional streams and coteries of Italian lyric poetry. The label of 'voce femminile', as theorised by Aldo Gargani in his homonymous essay, came in handy;[32] it functioned as a sort of golden cage able to bring together and, concurrently, keep separated the symbolic capital of diverse voices. Consequently, this critical posture must be problematised together with the definition of 'scrittura femminile': these two elements rely on extrinsic and extratextual categories. This brings us to the second section of this chapter in which I examine various definitions of 'scrittura femminile' in connection with the myth of the alterity of the 'voce femminile'. Is it possible to recognise a woman poet just from the style adopted in her writing? Or has this more to do with the content and thematic preferences in her poetry? Is it legitimate to draw a parallelism between the sound of a 'voce femminile' and a text that adopts certain stylistic traits? Is there, eventually, any element that allows us to refer to the category of 'scrittura femminile'?

[32] Aldo Gargani, 'La voce femminile', *Alfabeta 64*, September 1986, p. 16.

1.1. A QUESTION OF CANONICITY

Why should we focus on the anthology genre to investigate women poets' 'otherness' in the Italian context? Is not an anthology profoundly dependent on the subjective taste of the author?[33] Quite simply put, anthologies are crucial to the formation of any canon,[34] by pursuing three different purposes: first, anthologies of poetry aim at preserving the vestiges of past literature;[35] second, in the case of anthologies of contemporary poetry, they propose a poetic tradition *in fieri,* which has not yet been fixed in a definitive form;[36] third, anthologies have a great impact also on the creation of school manuals and university courses, especially in establishing a selection of the most representative texts from an author.

The three-fold aim intrinsic to the anthology genre produces an unavoidable paradox. When an editor selects some authors instead of others, he always tends to promote his personal interpretation over a limited selection of poetic works. Eventually, this interpretation is based on aesthetic values that are not intrinsic to the textual object itself but are dependent on social and extra-linguistic constructs. Hence, the genre of the anthology consists primarily of a sort of attempt to mirror this interpretation and

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[33] 'L'antologia, genere, improprio, gode di cattiva fama, si sa, e sembra inutile elencarne le imperfezioni, i limiti. Va da sé che un'antologia di poesia è prima di tutto un fatto personale, e nello stesso tempo la realizzazione di un progetto che vuole farsi interprete della storia letteraria.' Antonio Porta, 'Introduzione', *Poesia degli Anni Settanta* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), p. 23. A similar statement can also be found in the introduction to *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom: '[…] to ask what makes the author and the works canonical. The answer, often, has turned out to be strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us when we cease to see it as strange.' H. Bloom, 'Preface and Prelude', *The Western canon* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 3.

[34] 'Da almeno un secolo l'antologia costituisce il principale veicolo di formazione del canone letterario e di scontro delle interpretazioni della poesia italiana'. Claudia Crocco, 'Le antologie della poesia italiana del XXI secolo', *Enthymema XVII* (Milano: Università degli Studi di Milano, 2017), p. 60.

[35] Massimo Onofri, *Il canone letterario* (Rome: Laterza, 2001), pp. 54-64.

[36] Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Premessa' in *Poesia italiana del Novecento*, ed. by E. Sanguineti (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), V. 1, p. XXVII.

fulfill the pleasure principle elicited by the text.[37] As a matter of fact, many critics that approached this genre can be easily labelled as 'critici militanti'. The idea of literature displayed by authors who locate themselves under this label is precise, clear-cut, and oriented towards aesthetic values that a critic wants to promote. Authors of anthologies tend to analyse contemporary literary texts according to a subjective reading of the present by giving structure and order to a magmatic – and thus not-yet-historicised – chorus of voices. By promoting these segmented readings, numerous literary critics tend to endorse some literary movements, tendencies, or coteries: some literary critics focus on the avantgarde and experimental poetry, some of them prefer the 'linea lombarda', others would rather analyse the persistence of symbolism and hermeticism in the Italian lyric tradition.[38] As a consequence, this aesthetic impulse appears even more evident amongst critics who are also poets devoted to their own ideal poetics; indeed, they often tend to read poetry written by other authors through their own lens.[39]

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[37] According to Frank Kermode, the design of a poetic compendium could be read as specular to the artistic sublimation that is sought by the poet, following the path of its own *jouissance*. Frank Kermode, *Pleasure, and change. The Aesthetics of Canon*, ed. by Robert Alter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 18-20.

[38] For a definition of 'critica militante', see Emanuele Zinato, 'Oltre la crisi: sei forme praticabili del lavoro critico', *La parola mi tradiva: Letteratura e crisi*, ed. by N. di Nunzio, S. Juričić, F. Ragni (Perugia: Perugia University Press, 2017), pp. 369-380. For an analysis of the different approaches dealing with the idea of 'critica militante', see Romano Luperini, *Controtempo: critica e letteratura fra moderno e postmoderno: proposte, polemiche e bilanci di fine secolo* (Naples: Liguori, 1999). For two examples on how the 'critica militante' became a tool to analyse contemporary Italian poetry outside the context of the anthological genre, cfr. two studies recently published in 2018: Maria Borio, *Poetiche e individui. La poesia italiana dal 1970 al 2000* (Venice: Marsilio, 2018) and Andrea Afribo, *Poesia italiana postrema dal 1970 a oggi* (Rome: Carocci, 2018). Borio adopts a syncretic approach, analysing each poetic voice independently; Afribo uses a stylistic approach to investigate and re-order several texts according to the presence of linguistic elements typical of certain poetic schools or authors from the so-called second and third generations, such as Mario Luzi, Vittorio Sereni, and Giorgio Caproni.

[39] This tendency is shared by a consistent number of Italian literary critics, who are used to reading and interpreting the poetic texts through they own idea of what literature should be. During the sixties, a storm of controversies on the anthology genre arouses between poets who were also critics (such as Franco Fortini, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Pierpaolo Pasolini). See Niccolò Scaffai, 'Altri canzonieri. Sulle antologie della poesia italiana (1903-2005)', *Paragrafo I* (Bergamo: University of Bergamo Press, 2006), pp. 76-77.

If we consider all the institutional actors engaged in this practice, a similar operation could never be completed with an unbiased view. As suggested in two celebrated essays by Frank Kermode,[40] there are several institutions hiding behind the construction of a literary canon. Italy constitutes an even more exceptional case because of the social and cultural forces displayed in Italian society. In effect, Catholic church[41] as well as primary and secondary school – and even university –[42] have been playing a crucial role in canonisation.[43] And, as a result, canonisation had a key role in the systemic exclusion of women poets from the literary discourse. It is a question of access to places that had been inaccessible to women for centuries and that still remain governed by certain secularised power-dynamics. These institutions were significantly responsible for crafting a solid canon of what should be read or not. Again, these institutions have constantly been shifting from moral to aesthetic premises that have often ended up justifying personal or subjective choices.

The power dynamics at the basis of the Italian literary scene seem to perfectly overlap with the ones that have led to the civil rights movement. To this extent too, literature could be read as a metonymic expression of Italian society as a whole. Biancamaria Frabotta provides an effective definition of this phenomenon; she does so

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[40] F. Kermode, *Pleasure and change*, and *The Classic: literary images of permanence and change* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[41] As suggested by Remo Ceserani, even the word 'canon' deals with the religious practice of 'canonisation'. This shows significantly how this secular process is characterised by a strong bond with the literary field and has produced consequences on its current shape. Remo Ceserani, 'Le antologie e le grandi opera come contributo alla costruzione dei canoni', *Enthymema, XVII* (Milan: University of Milan Press, 2017), pp. 16-18.

[42] On this topic, cfr. Maria Serena Sapegno, 'La critica letteraria femminista: dentro o fuori dalle istituzioni?', *Critica clandestina? Studi letterari femministi in Italia*, ed. by M. S. Sapegno, Ilenia De Bernardis, Annalisa Perrotta (Rome: La Sapienza University Press, 2017), pp. 11-20.

[43] One of the most famous cases in the Novecento is that homoerotic themes in Umberto Saba's poetry and posthumous novel, *Ernesto*. On this topic, see Luca Baldoni, *Man and Boy: Homoeroticism and Mythmaking in Umberto Saba's Canzoniere*, PhD dissertation (UCL, 2005). For an analysis of the repression of some biographical traits of modern Italian poets, see also Franco Buffoni, *Silvia è un anagramma: Per giustizia biografica* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 2020), and Luca Starita, *Canone ambiguo della letteratura queer italiana* (Florence: effequ, 2021).

by comparing the sense of sacred detachment elicited by poetry – and the consequent exclusion of women poets from it – to the secular structure of the catholic church:

> Curialesca, o clericale che sia la poesia invece, specialmente la lirica, è sempre, come ci ha ricordato Santagata ad apertura di questo convegno, un'esperienza se non proprio sacra, assoluta, e le donne in Italia, non leggono messa. Un animo più lieto e uno sguardo più limpido non sono dunque così scontati. E se benvenuti restano gli studi, le pazienti analisi, le minute ricostruzioni dedicate a quello che sempre di più viene tollerato, ma come un codice separato, autosufficiente, autarchico e dunque ininfluente sull'andamento generale del borsino, cosa succederebbe se io affermassi (come infatti lo affermo) che la poesia di Fernanda Romagnoli (e chi sarà mai mi pare già di udire) vale quanto, se non di più, di quella, oggi così celebrata di Caproni o di Bertolucci? Probabilmente i consensi sarebbero meno unanimi e convinti.[44]

Both as an expression of a system – 'curialesca' – or of a singularity – 'clericale' –, the notion of secularity has been informing every representation of Italian lyric poetry. This parallelism allows Frabotta to detect a further reason for the exclusion of women poets from the academic debate and thus from the Italian canon. The question is not just about the attention that has been dedicated, in some cases, to women poets; it rather lies in the creation of a parallel, self-contained, and independent system in which women's poetry happens to be secluded.

1.1.1. ANTHOLOGIES: THE NUMERICAL OTHERNESS

When even the *medium* is imprisoned in the playful clash between extra-textual forces, the place destined to women's poetry could not have resulted less marginal.[45] If we are to investigate the second half of the twentieth century, we probably would discover that

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[44] B. Frabotta, 'Il canone nella poesia italiana del Novecento', Amedeo Quondam, *Il canone e la biblioteca costruzioni e decostruzioni della tradizione letteraria* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 135-136. Cfr. also, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their 1979 essay 'Gender, Creativity, and the Woman Poet', *The Lyric Theory Reader*, ed. by V. Jackson, Y. Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 527.

[45] Frabotta highlights this aspect in a footnote of the anthology *Donne in poesia*: 'In generale la presenza delle donne nelle antologie della poesia italiana del dopoguerra è tradizionalmente quasi inesistente'. B. Frabotta, 'Introduzione', *Donne in poesia*, p.18.

the poetic anthology genre started to gain a new fortune since the mid-fifties. Several anthologies of contemporary poetry were published in this decade. However, the presence of women poets in those anthologies was highly limited. *Lirica del Novecento* was published by Anceschi e Antonielli in 1953 and the two editors did not include any woman poet in this volume.[46] Only a woman poet is included in Spagnoletti's *Poesia italiana contemporanea*, published in 1959 by Guanda,[47] whereas thirteen women poets out of 140 are included in *La giovane poesia* by Falqui, published in 1956.[48]

In the sixties, even militant anthologies such as *Poesia italiana del Novecento* by Edoardo Sanguineti ended up being based on an all-male canon: women poets such as Giulia Niccolai, Amelia Rosselli, and Patrizia Vicinelli, who were close to the Gruppo 63 and the Italian New-Avantgarde, do not appear in Sanguineti's anthology.[49] An all-male canon is promoted by two other members of Gruppo 63, Elio Pagliarani and Guido Guglielmi, in their *Manuale di poesia sperimentale*, published in 1966.[50]

A fundamental turning point occurred in the seventies. From this point on, the existence of women's poetry was noticed by literary critics and was gradually starting to gain traction within poetic anthologies. Central to this weak revolution is the publication of *Poeti italiani del Novecento* by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo,[51] which partially dismisses the previous historicist model. Published in 1979 by one of the most influential critics of Italian academia, *Poeti italiani del Novecento* has contributed to the creation of a fixed

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[46] Luciano Anceschi, *Lirica del Novecento* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1953).

[47] Giacinto Spagnoletti, *Poesia italiana contemporanea,* (Parma: Guanda, 1959).

[48] Enrico Falqui, *La giovane poesia* (Rome: Colombo, 1956). In this period, the internal organisation of some of the main anthologies seems still deeply affected by a Desanctisian idea of literature. As a result, all the anthologies published in this decade reserve scarce attention to women's poetry. Examples of anthologies mirroring this structure are Giacinto Spagnoletti's *Antologia della poesia italiana. 1909-1949* (Milan: Guanda, 1954), Salvatore Quasimodo's *Poesia italiana del dopoguerra* (Milan: Schwarz, 1958), and Gianfranco Contini's *Letteratura dell'Italia unita. 1861-1968* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968).

[49] Edoardo Sanguineti, *Poesia italiana del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969).

[50] Guido Guglielmi, Elio Pagliarani, *Manuale di poesia sperimentale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1966).

[51] P.V. Mengaldo, *Poeti Italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1979).

canon of contemporary Italian poets. The same list of canonised authors would be progressively mirrored by the parallel publication of several volumes of *La tradizione del Novecento*, published between 1975 and 2017.[52] This ended up producing a monolithic canon of poetry which would be transmitted and promoted by literary criticism and academia.

As Mengaldo highlights in the introduction, his anthology is designed to favour the linguistic and stylistic originality of each author, while trying to avoid a nuclear history of each poetic movement. Despite his initial purposes, an unquestionably marginal place is destined to women poets within this anthology. Amongst the consistent number of analysed poets, the only inclusion of a women poet is limited to Amelia Rosselli, representing only the 1,96% of the total. As Lucia Re pointed out, Rosselli's inclusion as the unique representative of poetry written by women became, eventually, a sort of exclusion.[53] For instance, Mengaldo manages to avoid mentioning authors such as Antonia Pozzi, Margherita Guidacci, Maria Luisa Spaziani, and Cristina Campo who could be considered more stylistically original than other authors who are actually included.

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[52] The series *La tradizione del Novecento* has been published between in five volumes between 1975 and 2017: P.V. Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), *La tradizione del Novecento: nuove serie* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1987), *Terza serie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), *Quarta serie* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001), *Quinta serie* (Rome: Carocci, 2017).

[53] In the introduction to her translation of *Variazioni Belliche*, Lucia Re highlights how the inclusion of Amelia Rosselli in one of the most important anthologies of the second half of the century, *Poeti Italiani del Novecento* by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, should instead be regarded as a form of disqualification: 'Because Rosselli's voice is made to speak in this anthology on behalf of women and on behalf of a certain poetic tendency, rather than on its own behalf, her inclusion amounts in effect to an exclusion, a form of silencing and dispossession. The fact that she has been given as a representative (indeed, the sole representative) of woman (while at the same time being deprived implicitly of her individual poetic voice) is in and on itself a form of exclusion', Lucia Re, 'Introduction to Amelia Rosselli', A. Rosselli, *War Variations,* ed. and trans. by L. Re, P. Vangelisti (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1992), pp. 363-364.

In the same decade, anthologies such as *La parola innamorata*[54] or *Il pubblico della poesia*[55] produced another historical break. Because they comprise younger poets who had not been included in previous anthologies, the two works focus on the construction of a canon of contemporary and living authors. These two anthologies can be easily considered as the first works that aim at initiating a dialogue between the different voices participating in the poetic discourse: the analysed poets, the targeted readers, and the historical present. Moreover, these critics are amongst the first to acknowledge the perception of the posthumous essence of contemporary Italian poetry, as Franco Cordelli theorised in his *Il poeta postumo*:[56] In both the cases, the literary canon rests on a young generation of authors who publish their first book in that decade.

The seventies brought into the scene also a new conflict between the previous generation of fathers and the present generation of sons and daughters.[57] This conflict evidently resonates within Italian lyric poetry: in this context, we may find dynamics similar to those we find outside the literary field. Lyric poetry could be considered as a sublimated way of documenting – or at least representing – history and its conflicts. Nevertheless, according to several literary critics, women poets excluded the

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54 In the introduction, the two authors openly take a position against the historicist model of anthologies: 'Dunque no alla critica storicistica ed alle sue diramazioni sociologizzanti, secondo la linea nazionale De Sanctis-Gramsci (con contaminazioni ora crociane, ora lukacsiane) che istituisce un avvicinamento tattico della poesia alla storia […].' Giancarlo Pontiggia, Enzo Di Mauro, 'La statua vuota', *La parola innamorata. I poeti nuovi 1976-78* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 9-10.

55 A. Berardinelli, F. Cordelli, *Il pubblico della poesia* (Cosenza: Lerici, 1975).

56 According to Cordelli, the Italian literary context witnesses a deconstruction of the figure of the 'poeta vate' in the seventies. The phenomenon of the poetry readings allows for a re-discussion of the institutionalized boundaries that had kept separated the poet from his audience. Within this dynamic, Cordelli recognizes a further loss of halo in contemporary Italian poetry that he defines as the 'posthumous essence' of poetry. F. Cordelli, *Il poeta postumo. Manie, pettegolezzi, rancori* (Cosenza: Lerici, 1978), pp. 12-23.

57 E. Testa, 'Introduzione', *Dopo la lirica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), pp. XVI-XVII.

representation of history from their poetry, favouring instead a more lyric diction connected to the dimension of the private.[58]

A third fundamental turning point is the publication of the volume *Donne in poesia*, which was edited by the poet Biancamaria Frabotta. This book represents the very first anthology of contemporary poetry characterised by an all-women canon, pushing the silencing constraints of literary exclusion towards a new form of expression. A questionnaire is also appended to the anthology. In this questionnaire, poets are asked to answer questions regarding the position of women within the literary field and society. More broadly, they are asked about the existence of a concept such as 'scrittura femminile', a label that Italian literary criticism borrowed from French theorists in the seventies and, more specifically, by Hélène Cixous.[59] Although Frabotta was accused of

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[58] In the introduction to their poetic anthology of American poets, Nadia Fusini and Mariella Gramaglia ponder on the legitimacy of this definition, identifying some themes in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton that cannot be reconnected to the dimension of the private only. N. Fusini, M. Gramaglia, 'Femminismo fra denuncia e progettazione', *La poesia femminista*, pp. 5-28. The same contrast was present in Rosselli's essay *Istinto di morte e istinto di piacere in Sylvia Plath*, written against an article written by Rossana Rossanda and published on in 1979 on *L'Espresso*. In that article Rossanda reads Sylvia Plath's poetry through her biography, reinforcing the idea of a poet devoted to 'confessionalism' only. Rosselli, on the other hand, tries to liberate Plath's poetry from these extrinsic prejudices. Cfr. A. Rosselli, 'Istinto di morte e istinto di piacere in Sylvia Plath', A. Rosselli, *Una scrittura plurale* (Novara: Interlinea, 2004), pp. 176-180.

[59] In her book *Le rire de la Méduse*, the French philosopher Hélène Cixous defines the literary nature of women's writing by isolating common themes and consonances between her biographical experience of life and her own writing. According to the philosopher, this parallel between the two voices of factuality (life) and sublimation (writing) mirrors the story of every woman who has experienced her life through writing. When it comes to the definition of the distinctive qualities of this writing experience, Cixous develops a comparison between the style of feminine writing and that of male writing, obviously intending to define the exceptionality of the former. Indeed, the former is described in the light of the latter. Cixous develops her critique over an antithetical definition, describing her object – feminine writing – only in relation to the male counterpart. The characteristics of what Cixous defines as *écriture feminine* are supposedly describing the autonomous nature of this writing experience. In fact, the use of 'feminine' still suggests a derivative and therefore relativistic correlation. The experience of *écriture feminine* exists but cannot be defined because every attempt to define it would be a constituent part of the dominant – and thus male – discourse. According to the French philosopher, even if men and women speak the same language, women must find their place within the linear, grammatical and phallogocentric system that has been ordered by men through the construction of the symbolic order. Hélène Cixous, 'The laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* vol. 1, n. 4 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), pp. 887.

fostering an even more problematic ghettoisation[60] of women's poetry, the courageous architecture of *Donne in poesia* stimulates one of the very first forms of critical reasoning over the collocation of women poets within Italian literature. Even after a glimpse at the corpus of authors hosted in *Donne in poesia*, one can recognise a strong presence of historical themes in Italian women's poetry. This is even clearer if one look at texts that were written in the seventies only. Dacia Maraini and Amelia Rosselli, but also Biancamaria Frabotta, Rossana Ombres, Patrizia Cavalli, Mariella Bettarini, Marica Larocchi, Chandra Livia Candiani, just to name a few, dedicated a consistent part of their production to the representation of political events by locating a woman subject within Italian contemporary history.[61]

Except for Frabotta's and Maraini's volume, the ground-breaking potential of poetic documentation remains partially unexpressed, when we look at women's numerical presence in anthologies. If a poet is not reserved a place in works that are supposed to give shape and order to a national history of literature, it is then extremely easy to be marginalised or even excluded from the dynamics of historical representation: these two dimensions are, indeed, deeply intermingled. For instance, only three women poets are included in *Il pubblico della poesia* (Maraini, Frabotta and Bettarini – namely 15% on the total of 20 poets). Conversely, the authors of *La parola innamorata* introduce again a canon in which only male poets are included.

This anthology would become a fundamental point of reference for subsequent anthologies, inspiring a different treatment of poetry written by women. Antonio Porta's *La poesia degli anni Settanta* is partially affected by the work of Frabotta: as a matter

[60] *Dal fondo. La poesia dei marginali* is the first example of an anthology that engages with the problems related to the marginality of women's poetry that had been highlighted by Frabotta. *Dal fondo. La poesia dei marginali. Antologia,* ed. by C. Bordini, A. Veneziani and I. Nigris and C. Troianelli for the section related to women's poetry (Rome: Savelli, 1978).

[61] Dacia Maraini, 'Nota Critica', B. Frabotta, *Donne in poesia*, p. 18.

of fact, an increase in the number of women poets in his anthology can be noticed; this anthology also includes poets of the new generation such as Bettarini and Ombres.[62]

1969	Sanguineti, Edoardo	Poesia italiana del Novecento	0%	All-male canon
1978	Pontiggia, Giancarlo; Di Mauro, Enzo	La parola innamorata. I poeti nuovi (1976-78) (Milan: Feltrinelli)	0%	All-male canon
1978	Mengaldo, Pier Vincenzo	Poeti Italiani del Novecento (Milan: Mondadori)	1,96%	Amelia Rosselli
1975	Berardinelli, Alfonso; Cordelli, Franco	Il pubblico della poesia (Cosenza: Lerici)	15%	Dacia Maraini Biancamaria Frabotta Mariella Bettarini
1979	Porta, Antonio	Poesia degli anni Settanta (Milan: Feltrinelli)	14%	Elsa Morante Giulia Niccolai Dacia Maraini Rossana Ombres Amelia Rosselli Biancamaria Frabotta Marica Larocchi Marta Fabiani Mara Alessi Jolanda Insana

Figure 1. Presence of women poets in anthologies (60s and 70s)[63]

After the seventies, we can notice a substantial increase in the number of anthologies that were published in Italy. This stimulus unarguably derived from works that were published during that period. During the eighties and nineties, the model crafted by Mengaldo in *Poeti italiani del Novecento* became one of the most imitated. A consistent number of authors would not only imitate its structure or purposes, but also

[62] A. Porta, *Poesia degli anni Settanta* (Turin: Feltrinelli, 1979).

[63] The right column shows the women poets included in each anthology. Percentages were calculated using the unitary method – the only exception remains *Poeti italiani del Novecento* by Mengaldo in which I have decided to also include the decimals in order to highlight the fact that the presence of women poets in that anthology does not even reach the 2%.

its selection of authors and its proposed canon. This editorial posture was well received by Italian literary critics and academics. As a result, many anthologists started to apply Mengaldo's stylistic approach to poetry written in the following decades.

In the anthology published by Stefano Giovanardi and Maurizio Cucchi within the Meridiani Mondadori series in 1995*, Poeti italiani del secondo Novecento,*[64] the authors employed the structure of Mengaldo's anthology with the aim of continuing the analysis begun in 1979. Here, the authors include only seven women poets, representing 13% of the total. Interestingly, this is the only anthology, after *Poesia degli anni settanta* by Antonio Porta, to host the poetry of Elsa Morante, whose poetic production had been erased from the Italian canon – Morante the novelist frequently forced Morante the poet out. A similar percentage is to be found also in Roberto Galaverni's *Nuovi poeti italiani contemporanei*,[65] where the only two poets included were Patrizia Valduga and Vivian Lamarque.

In the new century, 2004 and 2005 were two *anni mirabili* for the publication of a series of anthological works: the names of poets vary in each anthology, sometimes even with original inclusions such as that of Jolanda Insana in Ciro Vitiello's *Antologia della poesia italiana contemporanea (1980-2000)*,[66] and that of Bianca Tarozzi in Giorgio Manacorda's *La poesia italiana oggi*.[67] Nevertheless, the overall percentage of women poets never surpasses the 15% in the most 'generous' and enlightened anthologies.

The most devoted imitator of Mengaldo's structure is Enrico Testa, who adopts Mengaldo's periodisation and extends it over the next decades. *Dopo la lirica* is based on a theoretical premise which gives an overall interpretation of the selected period (from the mid-fifties to the mid mid-nineties); this interpretation identifies the end of the lyric

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[64] Maurizio Cucchi, Stefano Giovanardi, *Poeti italiani del secondo Novecento 1945-1995* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995).

[65] Roberto Galaverni, *Nuovi poeti italiani contemporanei* (Rimini: Guaraldi, 1996).

[66] Ciro Vitiello, *Antologia della poesia italiana contemporanea (1980-2001)* (Rome: Tullio Pironti, 2004).

[67] Giorgio Manacorda, *La poesia italiana oggi. Un'antologia critica* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2004).

genre in that decade. Testa identifies this threshold in the publication of exemplar works such as Sereni's *Gli strumenti umani*, Luzi's *Nel magma*, and Rosselli's *Variazioni Belliche,* which were able to dismiss the principal features of the lyric genre.[68] Nonetheless, in terms of numbers and equality, Testa's anthology does not impose a revolutionary break: he includes only five women poets in *Dopo la lirica* (11,67% of the total of 43 poets).

Figure 2. Presence of women poets in anthologies (90s and 00s)

1995	Cucchi, Maurizio; Giovanardi, Stefano	Poeti italiani del secondo Novecento 1945-1995 (Milan: Mondadori)	13%	Maria Luisa Spaziani Alda Merini Amelia Rosselli Patrizia Cavalli Elsa Morante Vivian Lamarque Patrizia Valduga
1996	Galaverni, Roberto	Nuovi poeti italiani contemporanei (Rimini: Guaraldi)	8%	Patrizia Valduga Antonella Anedda
2004	Manacorda, Giorgio	La poesia italiana oggi. Un'antologia critica (Rome: Castelvecchi)	17%	Antonella Anedda Patrizia Cavalli Vivian Lamarque Alda Merini Amelia Rosselli Bianca Tarozzi Patrizia Valduga
2004	Vitiello, Ciro	Antologia della poesia italiana contemporanea (1980-2001) (Rome: Tullio Pironti)	15%	Maria Luisa Spaziani Alda Merini Jolanda Insana Vivian Lamarque
2005	Alfano, Giancarlo; Baldacci, Alessandro; Bello Minciacchi, Cecilia; Cortellessa,	Parola plurale. Sessantaquattro poeti italiani fra due secoli (Rome: Sossella)	18%	Patrizia Cavalli Biancamaria Frabotta Vivian Lamarque Patrizia Valduga Rosa Pierno Rosaria Lo Russo

[68] E. Testa, 'Introduzione', *Dopo la lirica*, pp. XI-XII.

	Andrea; Manganelli, Massimo; Scarpa, Raffaella; Zinelli, Fabio; Zublena, Paolo			Franca Grisoni Antonella Anedda Elisa Biagini Giovanna Frene Florinda Fusco
2005	Piccini, Daniele	La poesia italiana dal 1960 a oggi (Milan: Rizzoli)	9%	Amelia Rosselli Vivian Lamarque
2005	Testa, Enrico	Dopo la lirica. Poeti italiani 1960-2000 (Turin: Einaudi)	12%	Amelia Rosselli Alda Merini Patrizia Cavalli Patrizia Valduga Antonella Anedda

1.1.2. ANTHOLOGIES: THE SEMANTIC OTHERNESS

The numerical disparity between men and women poets in contemporary anthologies represents one of the major causes of the 'otherness' of women's poetry. This lack of balance has contributed to depict poetry written by women as a literary anti-canon. When a group is less represented, this stimulates a perception of a substantial diversity compared to the main literary streams. This is evident in the context of Italian criticism, where the existence of main artistic movements or schools has always been regarded as a captivating shortcut.

The perception of the constitutive otherness of women's poetry should not be limited to its numerical presence or the supposed ghettoization promoted by all-women anthologies. A myth must be created through a strong narrative.[69] This must be set up through an accurate layout of characteristics or attributes which enhances the narrative

[69] In the essays collected in the volume *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes explains the centrality of the triangulation between the signifier, the signified, and the sign, in the context of myth-creation. Moreover, he distinguishes between two linguistic levels on which a myth is crafted, that of the language as an object and that of metalanguage, which is the myth itself. The creation of the myth of women's poetry's 'otherness' is based on the same mechanical interaction between semiotic systems: elements that are intrinsic to the text but, above all, a series of elements that are actually extrinsic. Cfr. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1972), pp. 113-114.

outline of this phenomenon. The creation of a 'mythologem' is something that Carla Locatelli explains in her useful essay on what she calls 'sex(t)ualities':

> Il polimorfismo irriducibile del mito 'sessualità', un mito per definizione semanticamente irrisolvibile (come tutti i miti), viene articolato da specifiche discorsività (storiche e culturali), e come mito si manifesta con inevitabili testualizzazioni. […] Nel 'sistema sessualità' le testualizzazioni sono semplicimente imprescindibili, ineluttabili, interminabili, proprio per porre in essere il 'sistema mitologico.[70]

In Locatelli's words, the 'mythical system' adheres, overlaps with, and, eventually, becomes the text itself. Moreover, as the author explains, this system is even more complex when it comes to the representation of gender matters: the representation of gendered difference not only contributes to myth-creation, but it is a pivotal part of its reality engine.

Getting back to our specific case, the anthology became the literary genre responsible for the creation of several myths regarding women's poetry. I use the word myth here in the sense of a narrative (a textuality) which is not grounded in the intrinsic categories of the object to be studied, but rather in extrinsic narrative elements that the object stimulated. For these reasons, it is not important only to determine how many women poets are included in an anthology, but also to look at the specific definitions that are used to describe them. It is possible to recognise a character of redundancy in the definitions used in reference to women's poetry. Many of the images used to describe women's literature formed, eventually, an actual semantic field dealing with the intrinsic idea of 'otherness'.

An example of this critical posture can be found the introduction to the anthology *Poeti Italiani del Novecento* by Mengaldo. Not only women poets were almost excluded from this anthology, but the editor supported his choice with a critical note on this matter in the introduction to the volume:

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[70] Carla Locatelli, 'Dalla Sessualità alla Sess(t)ualità', *Sex(t)ualities: Morfologie del corpo tra visioni e narrazioni*, ed. by Silvia Antosa e Mirko Lino (Milan: Mimesis, 2018), p. 47.

> Detto in altri termini, un connotato fondamentale della poesia recente appare l'abbandono così frequente a una scrittura «informale», ma non già ricercata per calcolo sperimentalistico e volontà di interrompere i circuiti comunicativi normali, quanto piuttosto prodotta da libera fluttuazione psicologica e dall'immersione nello scorrere indifferenziato del vitale e del quotidiano. Osando una formula, si potrebbe parlare di identificazione tendenzialmente assoluta della lingua poetica col registro del privato, del vissuto-quotidiano personale: equazione realizzata per la prima volta e coi risultati finora poeticamente più efficaci, io credo, dalla Rosselli, un'iniziale atipica che anche per questo oggi si rivela un'anticipatrice. E forse si possono già indicare i pericoli di tale atteggiamento. Che non stanno tanto, direi, nel fatto che i tentativi di ricostruire un tessuto «espressivo» (e comunicativo) e di recuperare dimensioni diaristiche comportano spesso scivolamenti in forme di intimismo neo-crepuscolare. Quanto proprio nel venir meno del senso della specificità del linguaggio poetico.[71]

In Mengaldo's introduction, the label 'poesia recente' ends up overlapping with that of women's poetry. This is caused by the fact the only example provided to support his statement is that of Amelia Rosselli. As Rosselli is the only woman poet included in Mengaldo's anthology, Rosselli's poetry is made to coincide with women's poetry at large. According to one of the most prominent literary critics of Italian poetry, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, women's lyric poetry is not worth mentioning because of two main flaws. First, contemporary women's poetry happens to be detached from any preoccupations about metrics and style. A thematic urgency intrinsic to women's poetry compromises any attempt at engaging with a secular tradition of studies in stylistics and metrics. Women poets do not write sonnets; they do not include any hendecasyllable or septenary in their poems. Second, women's poetry does not engage with any representation of the dimension of the collective and, therefore, history is excluded from their texts. This reinforces the impression that, in Italy, literary canons are male-dominated, as is control of publication in the seventies.[72] Drawing on the reception of Mengaldo's essay and anthology, it is possible to connect the limited presence of women

[71] P.V. Mengaldo, 'Introduzione', *Poeti Italiani del Novecento*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), p. LXI.
[72] Beverly Allen, 'Introduction', B. Allen, M. Kittel, K. J. Jewell, *The Defiant Muse. Italian Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1986), pp. XV-XVI.

poets in poetic anthologies to the definition used to label them. A strong narrative must be reinforced through time and developed by several actors. This is precisely what happened with many Italian literary critics after Mengaldo.[73] Many of the images used to describe women's literature formed, eventually, an actual semantic field dealing with the idea of 'otherness'.

Rosselli embodies the unresolved target of this rhetoric, which stems from the foundational works by Mengaldo[74] and Pier Paolo Pasolini.[75] In the first line of his introductory chapter to *Dopo la lirica,* Testa describes Rosselli as 'un caso anomalo della poesia novecentesca'.[76] In his essay, Testa connects the biography of the poet to the results of her poetic production by giving a pathological reading of Rosselli's poetry. This approach represents an attempt to retrace Pasolini's *Notizia su Amelia Rosselli*: 'il carattere apolide della sua cultura, la frequentazione di lingue diverse, gli interessi eccentrici alla tradizione italiana'.[77] When Testa progresses into the second half of her production, he defines it as 'meditazione metafisica sganciata dal reale.'[78] Similar definitions can be found also in the volumes edited by Niva Lorenzini and Cucchi and Giovanardi. Here, she is defined as 'caso isolato',[79] characterised by 'una pulsione dell'inconscio che approda a lapsus incontrollato',[80] 'una scrittura caratterizzata da molto minori consapevolezze'.[81] Even when the editors address the characteristics of Rosselli's language, they define them as the 'formazione di un linguaggio radicalmente *autre*,

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[73] For instance, it is possible to identify a similar treatment of the poetry of Patrizia Cavalli in the recent *Poesia postrema* by A. Afribo. There, Cavalli is encompassed in the chapter that introduces the notion of 'spontaneismo' – a term that rapidly becomes a synonym with 'otherness'. A. Afribo, *Poesia postrema* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 131-132.

[74] P.V. Mengaldo, 'Amelia Rosselli' in *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, p. 363.

[75] P. P. Pasolini, 'Notizia su Amelia Rosselli', *Il Menabò n.6* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), pp. 66-69.

[76] E. Testa, 'Amelia Rosselli', *Dopo la lirica*, p. 197.

[77] E. Testa, 'Amelia Rosselli', p. 198.

[78] E. Testa, 'Amelia Rosselli', p. 198.

[79] Niva Lorenzini, 'Introduzione', *Poesia del Novecento italiano* (Rome: Carocci, 2002), p. XXII.

[80] N. Lorenzini, 'Introduzione', p. XXII.

[81] M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, 'Introduzione', *Poeti Italiani del Secondo Novecento (1945-1995)*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), p. XXXV.

inverato in una matrice antropologica del tutto indipendente dalla storia e dall'ideologia'.[82]

The rhetoric used to define Rosselli's poetic experience has been extensively applied and extended also to other poets. Testa defines the style of Patrizia Cavalli is defined as 'gioco iterativo che coinvolge l'io in uno stato di duplicità'.[83] When compared to other contemporary poets' stylistic features Cavalli's is described as 'fisionomia particolarissima, rispetto alla lirica coeva' by Cucchi and Giovanardi.[84] Manacorda defines her collections as a 'diario in pubblico',[85] contaminated by the 'verità della piccola cronaca'.[86] While describing Cavalli's metrical system, Galaverni refers to the development of a 'cantabilità elementare'.[87]

The lyric language of Biancamaria Frabotta is characterised through 'forti eterogeneità linguistiche', and 'violenta espressività di sostanza eminentemente emotiva' by Cucchi and Giovanardi.[88] As already highlighted, Morante is the only one that has been hardly anthologised among the poets that are object of this study. This reveals a further problematic disconnection operated by critics between Morante the novelist and Morante the poet. Morante can be found only in Antonio Porta's *Poesia degli anni Settanta* and Cucchi's and Giovanardi's *Poeti italiani del secondo Novecento*, where several passages from *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzin*i were included by the editors. According to Cucchi and Giovanardi, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* is 'un'opera di difficile definizione',[89] while *Alibi* 'sembra rimandare più che altro a un esercizio di alta imitazione'.[90]

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82 M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, 'Introduzione', p. XXXVI.
83 E. Testa, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Dopo la lirica*, p. 167.
84 M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, *Poeti italiani*, p. 212.
85 G. Manacorda, *La poesia italiana oggi*, p. 116.
86 G. Manacorda, *La poesia italiana oggi*, p. 117.
87 R. Galaverni, *Nuovi poeti italiani contemporanei*, p. 56.
88 M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, *Poeti italiani*, p. 4.
89 M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, *Poeti italiani*, p. 737.
90 M. Cucchi, S. Giovanardi, *Poeti italiani*, p. 737.

1.2. FROM VOICE TO WRITING

What makes a poem written by a woman recognisable? Are there stylistic markers that could reveal the identity behind the pen? In a poem included in the collection *Donne mie*, published in 1974, Dacia Maraini discusses how the treatment reserved for Italian women's poetry is not sheltered from the same dynamics that have seen women subordinated to men in Italian society. Thanks to the re-enactment of a fictional dialogue, the male-subject impersonates a literary critic – a character-type whose function is to advocate for the stylistic inconsistency of Italian women's poetry.

> "Le poesie delle donne sono spesso
> piatte, ingenue, realistiche e ossessive,"
> mi dice un critico gentile dagli occhi a palla
> "Mancano di leggerezza, di fumo, di vanità,
> sono tutte d'un pezzo come dei tubi,
> non c'è garbo, scioltezza, estro;
> sono prive dell'intelligenza maliziosa
> dell'artificio, insomma non raggiungono
> quell'aria da pomeriggio limpido dopo la pioggia."
> Forse è vero, gli dico. Ma tu non sai
> cosa vuol dire essere donna. Dovresti
> provare una volta per piacere anche se
> è proibito dal tuo sesso di pane e ferro.
>
> Ride, strabuzza gli occhi. "A me non importa
> se sia donna o meno. Voglio vedere i risultati
> poetici. C'è chi riesce a fare la ciambella
> con il buco. Se è donna o uomo cosa cambia?"
> Cambia, amico dagli occhi verdi, cambia;
> perché una donna non può fare finta
> di non essere donna. Ed essere donna
> significa conoscere la propria soggezione,
> significa vivere e respirare la degradazione
> e il disprezzo di sé che si può superare
> solo con fatiche dolorose e lagrime nere.[91]

[91] D. Maraini, *Donne mie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 24.

The literary critic attributes several characteristics to women's poetry that motivate his lack of interest: the critic refers to the absence of any 'artifice' in women's poetry – 'artificio', here, is synonym with metrics. Even if he refuses the separation based on gender in the second stanza, the enumeration of the various flaws of women's poetry makes his aesthetic judgement lean towards the label of 'scrittura femminile'. We are eventually led to believe that textual markers revealing the poet's gender do exist. Central to contemporary literary criticism in the seventies, the theme of 'otherness' remerges in the second stanza. According to the man, women's different approach to style and content has not to be read as a cause for their exclusion from the literary canon: different approaches to style, for instances, are to be interpreted as a representation of social dynamics involving the literary market[92] and the academic discourse. For this reason, Maraini's poem stands out as the perfect steppingstone for the analysis whish we will carry out in the following chapters.

[92] All four poets, as documented in their letters and interviews, encountered considerable difficulties, caused by the power dynamics of the publishing world. Rosselli struggled to find a publishing house that was able to publish her poetic collections while also respecting her requests regarding the *mise-en-page*. The initial mediation of Pasolini with Garzanti was necessary at that time but produced one of the first most dangerous readings of Rosselli's poetry which was published on *Il Menabò* by Pasolini in 1962. In this essay, Pasolini describes Rosselli's poetry by connecting some of its stylistic traits to her neuroses.
Frabotta published the first plaquette *affemminata* with an independent publishing house, Geiger Edizioni, founded by Adriano, Maurizio, and Tiziano Spatola. The books and plaquettes published by Geiger were handcrafted and in limited editions. Geiger was also publishing literary magazines such as *Tam Tam*, edited by Adriano Spatola and Giulia Niccolai.
While Morante's novels were all published by Einaudi thanks to the initial mediation of Alberto Moravia and Natalia Ginzburg's help in 1948, her first poetry collection, *Alibi*, was published with a different publishing house, Longanesi. Furthermore, *Alibi* was published in a new poetry series thanks to the mediation of Nico Naldini.
Cavalli's case is slightly different. Her first book, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* was published in 1974 by Einaudi but mainly thanks to the support and mediation of Elsa Morante. As mentioned in the thesis in Chapter 3, Morante attempted at first an appropriation of Cavalli's first collection with an introductory note that was not included in the book only in the last stages of its publications.

1.2.1. VOCE FEMMINILE

The editors of poetic anthologies often connected the 'otherness' of women's poetry to a set of intrinsic characteristics: first, the informality of their metrical system; second, the tension towards the preeminence of the content over form; third, a thematic introflection developed on the centrality of the dimension of the private, of confessionalism, and of diarism. If we follow the path traced by this critical posture, we can easily recognise how informality and confessionalism became stylistic traits intrinsic to any attempt to define women's poetry. The 'scrittura femminile' is often depicted as an independent and 'other' stylistic system somehow pre-determined by a 'voce femminile'.

Indeed, the question of the 'voice' is central to the critical treatment of 'otherness' reserved for Italian women's poets – and, more in general, of Italian women's writers. Based only on emission of sounds, a certain colour or tone of voice is recognisable even without being able to see the source of emission. Even if the sound is disembodied and disjointed from the body, it still provides a trace, a clue that leads to the identity of the author. The parallelism between the female style of writing and a tone of voice becomes a fortunate metaphor from the seventies onwards. As in Maraini's poem, a literary critic could argue to being able to recognise a woman poet by just reading a text.[93] To this extent, the myth of the 'voce femminile' has been used as an argument to support the supposed stylistic 'otherness' of women's writing.

In the opening chapter of *For More Than One Voice*, the philosopher Adriana Cavarero introduces her discussion of the categories of alterity and uniqueness of voice

[93] This has been a fortunate topic of discussion among linguists and literary critics who are studying Elena Ferrante's novel, trying to demonstrate with the help of stylistic analysis the identity – and therefore the gender – of the author hiding behind this *nome de plume*. See Arjuna Tuzzi, Michele Cortellazzo, 'What is Elena Ferrante? A Comparative Analysis of a Secretive Bestselling Italian Writer', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, Volume 33, Issue 3 (Oxford: OUP, September 2018), pp. 685–702.

by quoting a short story by Italo Calvino, titled *A King Listens*.[94] Calvino narrates the story of a king seating on his throne with his ears pricked to seize and interpret the voices surrounding him. The only action of the king consists of an acoustic control of his reign: each sound must pass through his ears. One day, 'when in the darkness a woman's voice is released in singing, invisible at the sill of an unlighted window,' the king manages to catch this sound, this female voice. He is instantly awakened by the sound and decides to follow that trace. This voice makes him remember his life as he eventually re-experiences in her voice an object of his long-lost desire for the sensible world. Through the performance of the voice, the story becomes an allegory of the process of recognition: the sound stands as the trace that allows the reader to identify the source as female, that is to say to fetishize the invisible presence of the source of those sounds. This triggers a process of awakening in the listener, who is finally able to channel his own desire and, most importantly, his expectations.

Cavarero introduces Calvino's short story to discuss the author's anti-philosophical intuition: the male ear ignores the semantics – the content of what the voice is singing – and focuses on the tone only. Thanks to a reference to a well-established mythical tradition – a myth of 'sextuality' in Locatelli's words –, the singing voice is the trace leading towards a stereotypical female identity:

> The tradition of interpreting sexual difference from the point of view of the semantic thus gets replaced by a perspective that reinterprets this difference from a vocal perspective. Through an obligatory homage to a tradition that wants the woman to be a corporal, singing, and apolitical creature, the revolutionary privileging of the phonic allows Calvino to signify in another way precisely these stereotypically feminine qualities.[95]

Tellingly, the symbolic patriarchal order identifies the masculine with reason and the feminine with the bodily experience of reality. This movement of intuition and

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[94] Adriana Cavarero, 'Introduction: The Voice According to Calvino', *For More Than One Voice. Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-13.
[95] A. Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, p. 6.

dispossession resonates in the transition from the verbal to the written word: in both the two mechanisms one could identify the same process of recognition, appropriation, and separation performed by the male listener or reader in front of the 'voce femminile' or 'scrittura femminile'.[96]

A paradigm of this argumentative approach could be find in the short essay *La voce femminile* by Aldo Gargani: 'Ciò per cui le donne riconoscono o, in ogni caso, detengono la loro specificità consiste nella loro inesorabile tensione verso i fatti come tali, ma verso l'intenzione e la volontà che dà a essi il loro significato.'[97] Here, the philosopher tries to define some typical traits of the 'voce femminile' by building on some characteristics that he identified in the style of Virginia Woolf and Ingeborg Bachmann. Again, his reasoning is grounded in the stylistic homogeneity of different 'voci femminili', not in the differentiation of certain stylistic traits to be read contextually.

As we will explore further in the following chapters, several women poets problematise the existence of a so called 'voce femminile'. They tend to refuse the causative relationship between gender and voice/style. Voice, in their view, is a tool to experience, investigate, and question the alterity of women's writing, but not from a

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[96] This treatment of the voice resonates with the theory of the *semiotic chora*, as is discussed by Julia Kristeva in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*. The *chora* consists of a preverbal linguistic space located outside the sphere of the conscious. This concept had also been defined as the symbolic order by Jacques Lacan – a linguistic dimension which is not yet inhabited by the law of the sign, where rhythmic and vocalic drives reign. Kristeva also adds that difference is not yet conceptualized in the 'semiotic chora': this is, in fact, a place where the paternal or preoedipal order of separation between the subject and the object, the signifier and signified, and consequently between the mother and the child is not already in place. Moreover, Kristeva describes the language of poetry where the opposing separation between what can be described as male, or female has still not occurred. Nevertheless, she ends up defining this semiotic space as grounded in the notion of femininity – the 'semiotic chora' is characterised through a series of terms dealing with the semantic field of 'femininity'. While she is still using an adjective, Kristeva abolishes the terms of this opposition locating the feminine character of writing outside this opposition, introducing a sort of preverbal and necessary stylistic premise to the language of poetry. J. Kristeva, 'The Semiotic and the Symbolic', *Revolution in Poetic language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 26-27. Cfr. also, Adriana Cavarero, 'Truth sings in Key', *For more than one voice,* p. 145.

[97] Aldo Gargani, 'La voce femminile', *Alfabeta 64*, September 1986, p. 16.

deterministic point of view. This is evident in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* by Morante, a poetry collection in which the lyric subject embodies several voices of those that are defined as 'the happy few'. In so doing, Morante creates a gender interplay whereby the authorial voice merges with those of different fictional and real characters: Bill Morrow, Oedipus, La Carlottina, and many others.

This allusion is present also in Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, where the lyric subject is always caught in the act of mimicking the voice of other characters within the theatre of everyday life: 'Mi darà la mano mi dirà: «ciao bella ci vediamo»'.[98] The alleged femininity intrinsic to the poetic voice is turned here into a parodical element. In the short story *Con passi giapponesi*, the 'voce femminile' occupies the very centre of Cavalli's social satire:

> Ma poiché in lei vigeva l'ambizione della voce liscia, della voce tonda – ruota di miele che libera sciroppi – o perlomeno che svagata allude a signorie benevole, la protervia materiale di quei suoni era cupa zavorra all'ambizione. A questa inconcepibile durezza originaria cercava tuttavia rimedio con un fraseggio che si intrideva di merletti, si impennava di trilli e, quale prova suprema d'incorporeità.[99]

In Cavalli's parodic representation of the 'voce femminile', the protagonist uses the voice to fit into an ideal character type: the voice became, thus, an element of conformism meant to express an allegiance to a certain position, social status, and even gender role.

The theme of the voice is central also to one of the closing poems from *Documento (1966-1973)* by Rosselli. This text works as one of the several metaliterary discussions on the theme of the woman's voice in Rosselli's third book. Within this framework, it is of particular interest looking at the second stanza of *Continenza europea*:

Continenza europea, semmai venne

[98] In *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, the voice, especially in reported speech, is often disconnected from the identity of the person and, therefore, from any gendered traits. P. Cavalli, 'Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo', *Poesie 1974-1992* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 32.
[99] P. Cavalli, 'Con passi giapponesi', *Con passi giapponesi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019), pp. 4-5.

con un carico di bestiame
come la terapia della scienza
che fu questo nostro pensare ogni
dì, la libertà di pensare.

Si travagliavano in vano corto
e spento quel che mai fu scritto
su di creta neutra
egiziana inaspettata
o semplicemente ambizione di propria
voce? (DOC, 205)

Rosselli discusses what she defines as the 'continenza' of European culture – its 'sprezzatura', the ability to dissimulate its cultural references. In the following stanza, the reflexive pronoun 'si' may be connected to a plural subject, probably referring to writers and intellectuals pursuing their ambition for a free and independent voice. However, there is no reference to a gender perspective: this is described as a dimension of freedom, wherein each singular voice remains independent and at the same time interconnected within this collective European literary identity. In this case, we are caught in the domains of indistinct and undetermined plural voices.

In Frabotta's poetic diary, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, the voice is the element meant to shape an entire biography:

> Questa croce dell'identità cominciò ad assillarmi negli anni universitari […]. Il lavorio dell'autocoscienza mi rimandava una figura ambigua, femmina nel corpo, sicuramente. Ma nel cervello? Maschio effemminato? E il cuore? Neutro, come la parola 'poeta'?[100]

In Frabotta's writings, voice is the mirror in which one's identity is rebuilt. Frabotta problematises the embodiment of the voice, as she rediscussed the notion of a blurred, fluid, and open identity. We can find trace of this 'croce dell'identità' also in her first poetry collection, *Il rumore bianco*:

Voce casuale, percorso dicono gli innocenti

[100] B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola* (Rome: Donzelli, 2012), p. 4.

che scartano il moto fugace che ti dà la vita
purissima particola bianca in conflitto
fluttuazione, step, walk, random flight
probabilità identica di avanzare nel pieno
o arretrare, subire, soffrire il vuoto spettro
trasparente alle prescrizioni
versetto, salmo, o particella. (RB, 17)

Frabotta draws here a parallel between the instinctiveness of the poetic voice and the 'white noise', the phenomenon that gives the title to the collection. In physics, 'white noise' consists of a random signal having equal intensity at different frequencies. This constant intensity is what, in Frabotta's view, may define the identity and uniqueness of a voice in writing. Nonetheless, thanks to the fluctuation caused by many different physical forces and voices, the poet's voice is freed from any gender traits, gaining independence from any gendered dynamics of representation.

1.2.2. SCRITTURA FEMMINILE

In his history of twentieth-century Italian literature, Robert Gordon poses a pivotal question regarding the relation between 'scrittura femminile' and its thematic choices:

> An important open question remains as to whether the distinct concerns, styles, and modes of narrative in display in this array of work – centred variously on the private, the fantastic, the hidden, on desire and the body and only obliquely connected to history, society and public world – could ever amount on a feminine or female voice in literature.[101]

Is it legitimate to limit our reading of contemporary Italian women's poetry to these themes only? Could these themes represent a fundamental condition to determine whether we are in front of a text written by a woman or not?

I argue that this is not only a problematic approach, but it is also informed by a dangerous tension between reductionism and exactitude. Women's poetry does not give

[101] Robert S.C. Gordon, 'Women's Writing', *An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Culture. A Difficult Modernity* (London: Duckworth, 2005), p. 129.

up any hermeneutics of history, contemporary events, and politics. This is even clearer if we dedicate attention to the seventies, a decade in which the urgency for critical readings of history is embraced by poetry as well. Women poets are involved in these dynamics of representation. Nonetheless, many of them face the problem of being under-represented – and, in most cases, even not represented or silenced – within the academic discourse, the literary market, and the public debate. The power-dynamics at the basis of a system grounded in a series of exclusion seem to perfectly overlap with the ones that have led to the civil rights movement. Again, literature could be read as a metonymic expression of Italian society.

In the questionnaire attached to the anthology *Donne in poesia*, Frabotta interrogates several women poets regarding the existence the 'scrittura femminile'. Frabotta poses two questions:

1. What is the concrete link between your 'femininity' and your activity?
2. Do you think it is possible to retrace a specific 'stile femminile' in you linguistic and poetic outcomes in your collections?

Most of the poets who agreed on answering Frabotta's questions were trying to problematise the existence of 'scrittura femminile' as an element pre-determined biologically and subconsciously. Amelia Rosselli, for instance, answers by using the term 'differentiation' in regard to the adjective 'femminile', avoiding thus to touch on the 'otherness' of women's poetic writing: 'Che esista una differenziazione linguistica femminile è da sospettarsi, sia essa da quarto mondo o biologica, addirittira in origine, anche se rimane da studiarsi in campo sperimentale, secondo me.'[102] In a later interview with Marina Camboni, Rosselli seems even to negate a causative bond between gender and writing: 'io non so fino a che punto senza volerlo il mio linguaggio abbia qualcosa

[102] B. Frabotta, *Donne in poesia*, p. 160.

di femminile o meno. Avendo frequentato anche un ambiente di psicologi, mi ero posta con *Variazioni belliche* il problema di esprimere la corporalità.'[103]

A similar posture can be found also in the answer offered by Maria Luisa Spaziani: 'Fra la mia presunta femminilità e il mio concreto operare posso, sì, vedere un rapporto […]. Ma in poesia è diverso: vedo il mondo così, una foglia così, e in quel momento non saprei come vederli in modo diverso. E non dico nemmeno più virile, termine ambiguo, viziato, abusivo, stravolto e frastornante.'[104] Giulia Niccolai questions more openly the existence of a cause-effect bond between 'scrittura femminile' and the author's gender. Indeed, she even proposes a test to be conducted blindly over an array of texts written by authors whose identity must remain unknown: 'Propongo di usare dei testi come cavia: testi maschili e testi femminili mescolati all'insaputa del pubblico. Il quale dovrà indovinare quali sono gli scritti di origine maschile e quali sono gli scritti di origine femminile, *indipendentemente dall'argomento*.'

While Italian leading literary critics prefer the adjective (i.e., 'female', 'femminile', 'feminine'), almost the totality of Italian women poets are inclined to avoid this or, at least to rediscuss it. As is obvious from the questionnaire appended to the anthology *Donne in poesia*, most of the poets included in this project tend to despise or even to reject any reference to the adjective 'femminile'.[105] Frabotta states clearly in the title, *Donne in poesia*, that the nature of this collective work cannot simply be reduced to the category of 'femminile'. As suggested by Loredana Magazzeni:

> Le prime a diffidare dell'etichetta 'scrittura femminile' sono le donne stesse, quelle però cui sfugge il senso totalmente politico e culturale di tale sottolineatura di genere, e che temono, giustamente, nel pronunciarla di scavarsi automaticamente la fossa, una voragine, di firmare la propria autocondanna a una deportazione di massa e di serie B.[106]

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[103] Marina Camboni, 'Incontro con Amelia Rosselli', *DonnaWomanFemme*, 29/1 (Rome: Utopia, 1996), pp. 81.

[104] B. Frabotta, *Donne in poesia*, p. 143.

[105] B. Frabotta, *Donne in poesia*, p. 128-150.

[106] Loredana Magazzeni, 'Difesa semiseria di una letteratura invisibile', ed. by Alessandro Broggi, Carlo Dentali, Stefano Salvi, *I mondi creativi femminili* (Como: Lietocolle, 2005), p. 35.

Therefore, one should rediscuss the legitimacy of the label of 'scrittura femminile' and ask whether it is preferable to other expressions. We should consider if the stress put on the adjective 'femminile' is useful. The use of the adjective 'femminile' in reference to women's writing has often elicited suspects and biases both in the reader as well as in writers themselves.

This problem is particularly central to Italian language in which the adjective 'femminile' suggests a 'diminishment'. In Salvatore Battaglia's *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* published in 1968, 'femminile' is defined only by being the opposite of 'maschile'. The author of the dictionary tends also to stress how the adjective 'rivela in modo spiccato le doti caratteristiche dell'indole femminile; che è tipico della psicologia, del modo d'essere, della sensibilità o delle funzioni della donna.'[107] The use of the adjective seems to lack rigour in this context, stimulating only a vague idea of what a 'scrittura femminile' may consist of. Moreover, in Italian, the adjective 'femminile' is often characterised by a certain degree of semantical indeterminacy, meaning both 'female' and 'feminine' at the same time. In fact, as highlighted by Lucia Re, a piece of writing by women shall not be considered as something 'feminine' as such.[108]

1.3. CONCLUSION

For all these reasons, the notion of 'scrittura femminile' does not pertain per se to our reading experience of women's poetry; it does not favour a stylistic analysis based on some intrinsic traits of the texts, and neither it deals with the object of this study. Nonetheless, the adjective 'femminile' has extensively been used by literary critics and, in some cases, even by some theorists. Similar doubts have been risen by several poets

[107] GDLI, vol. V (Turin: Utet, 1968), p. 807.
[108] Lucia Re, 'Mythic revisionism: Women poets and philosophers in Italy Today', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, Vol XIV, n. 1 (Toronto: The Canadian Society of Italian Studies, 1993), p. 75.

regarding the use of the noun 'poetessa' which originates even more problems than the adjective.[109] In Italian and in other romance languages, the word 'poeta' can be used for both women and men without any difference. On the other hand, 'poetessa' stimulates the same reactions as 'femminile' and, when it appears in a text written by a woman poet, it is often used polemically.

As a result, the problematic definition of this complex phenomenon is polarised between two main opposed conceptions: that of 'otherness' and that of 'scrittura femminile'. To liberate the texts written by Italian women poets from the preconceptions that informed Mengaldo's aesthetical judgement and the tradition of literary criticism stemming from it, I will propose to analyse those texts by detecting the stylistic traits that may have determined their 'difference'.

My examination of the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Frabotta, and Patrizia Cavalli will be based on the theoretical debate sparked by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1975 *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. The following chapter will examine the creative practices of these poets as a 'minorising force' challenging canonical normativity and 'domestication' of the lyric genre. In contrast with the critical myth that see women poets not engaged with historical narratives and the dimension of the real in their poetry, I propose, instead, to re-evaluate the 'political' dimension of a revolutionary lyric subject.

[109] It is extremely useful looking at how Xavière Gauthier introduces the same dispute in the French context: 'In French the word "writer" does not have a feminine form. For "poet", there is "poetess", a ridiculous word, it is synonymous with foolish innocence, nature […], or old-lady respectability.' X. Gauthier, 'Existe-t-il une écriture de femme?', *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 161.

2. TOWARDS A POETICS OF MINORITY
Writing on Difference

Dubbio a posteriori:
i veri grandi poeti
sono i "poeti minori"?

(Giorgio Caproni, *Res amissa*)

Developed in Chapter 1, the analysis of the problematic definition of 'scrittura femminile' is a fundamental premise to our analysis. It is now possible to determine that there are three main problems related to any discourse on contemporary Italian women's poetry.

First, the reception of the category of 'scrittura femminile', as approached by several Italian literary critics, is highly problematic. This category has been rejected by many Italian women poets, but the label of 'scrittura femminile' produced studies focused mainly on the system of differences related to gender issues,[110] fostering the myth of 'otherness' of Italian women's poetry – a myth that has been based on qualities that are actually extrinsic to the texts.[111]

Second, poetic texts written by women became eventually overshadowed by a theoretical discourse as such. As a matter of fact, less attention has been given to the intrinsic textual specificities of poetry written by women. Instead, the lack of stylistic

[110] Within the critical discourse of Poststructuralist theorists, sexual difference is often characterised as a dialectical system that mirrors the one they try to deconstruct. See Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (London: Verso, 2015), pp. 6-8.

[111] According to Daniel Smith, the risks of creating a myth on minorities is highlighted by Deleuze: 'Those minorities are colonised […] by their own myths that have passed into the service of the coloniser from within.' Daniel W. Smith, 'A life of pure immanence: Deleuze's *Critique et Clinique* project', Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1998), p. XIV.

studies dedicated to such poetry in favour of contributions oriented to thematic analysis is to be considered deeply problematic and biased.[112]

Third, even less consideration has been given to the relationship between Italian women's poetry and history. Due to their exclusion from anthologies, these authors also ended up being completely excluded from the history of literature *tout court*. If we are to trust this critical posture, poetry written by women would not have any concerns with its historical present. On the contrary, it would be rather centred variously on the private, on biography, and confessionalism,[113] and only obliquely connected to history, society, and the public world.

A new theoretical framework is therefore needed; this must be capable also of dismissing the myth of 'otherness' of Italian women's poetry and stimulate a stylistic and historical analysis of the epiphenomenon of contemporary women's poetry. Returning to the text can facilitate an assessment which is not limited only to a super-structural level.

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[112] For instance, if we look at Mengaldo's *La tradizione del Novecento*, - an encyclopaedic work characterised by a stylistic approach to textual analysis – we notice that only two of the essays included in the volumes are dedicated to a woman author: Elsa Morante. Nevertheless, these essays focus on Morante's linguistic originality in her novels only: the first essay develops a linguistic analysis of her overall production, while the second essay, published in the last volume of the series, is entirely centred on *Menzogna e sortilegio*. P.V. Mengaldo, 'Uno sguardo su *Menzogna e sortilegio*', *La tradizione del Novecento. Quinta serie* (Rome: Carocci, 2017), pp. 265-80. The problem of the presence of women poets within an anthological work emerges in the essay 'Per un'antologia della poesia italiana del Novecento' which was used as an introduction to Mengaldo's own anthology *Poeti italiani del Novecento*. P.V. Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento. Seconda serie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), pp. 58-59.

[113] The label 'confessionalism' was firstly introduced by M. L. Rosenthal in reference to the poetry written by several American authors such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. See Eleanor Spencer, *American poetry since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). When employed within the Italian context, this definition has been refused also by some Italian poets such as Rosselli. In the interview dedicated to her translation of Sylvia Plath's poems, Rosselli discusses the label of 'confessional poetry': Marco Caporali, 'Donne che traducono donne. Amelia Rosselli e Sylvia Plath', *La furia dei venti contrari. Variazioni Amelia Rosselli*, ed. by Andrea Cortellessa (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), p. 69.

2.1. WRITING ON DIFFERENCE: BECOMING-WOMAN

Theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the category of 'minor literature', was initially introduced in the volume dedicated to Kafka, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*, then developed in *Critique et Clinique*[114] as well as in other works of different nature such as *Dialogues* and *Mille Plateaux*.[115] For this reason, it is fundamental to investigate how the concept of 'minority' and 'minoritarian' are introduced, while also verifying the points of contact between these concepts and the poetry written by the poets included in this study.[116]

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[114] *Critique et clinique* is the last book published by Deleuze before his death in 1993. It consists of a selection of essays on literature focusing on themes already explored in his previous works, developing further a parallel between the linguistic and extra-linguistic nature of the literary objects he analyses. G. Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1993).

[115] While in *Kafka* the two authors apply the category of 'minority' to different literary cases, in *Mille Plateaux* the discourse is rather focused on politics, sociology, and psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, in his last book *Critique et Clinique*, Deleuze does bring together themes introduced early in his career. The two poles of literature as a linguistic practice and life as the extra-linguistic object are kept together in the essay 'Literature and Life' which opens the collection. See Ronald Bogue, 'Deleuze and Literature', *Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. by Daniel Smith, Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 286-87.

[116] As Francesca Southerden and Manuele Gragnolati highlighted in their co-authored volume *Possibilities of Lyric*, theory should enter a literary analysis for the way it is implicated in the primary source and not applied to the text. On this point, see the chapter 'A Miscellaneous Enterprise' which opens *Possibilities of Lyric* – cfr. M. Gragnolati, F. Southerden, 'A Miscellaneous Enterprise', *Possibilities of Lyric: Reading Petrach in Dialogue* (Berlin: ICI Press, 2020), pp. 1-5. It is from this viewpoint that this study sees Deleuze's presence in my analysis of Italian women's poetry: the poetry and poetics of Rosselli, Morante, Frabotta, and Cavalli mirror a particular part Deleuze's thought and reading of his reflections on 'minor literature' and, more broadly, of 'minoritarian'. Naturally, feminist, and postcolonial readings of Deleuze's work have recently brought to the light interesting critique of these concepts. Nevertheless, for those interested to know more about recent postcolonial and feminist reading of Deleuze's notions of 'minority and 'minoritarian', please see the following list of texts. As far as a feminist approach to these concepts is concerned, the work of Rosi Braidotti on 'nomadic subjectivities' have had a great impact on recent feminist scholarship: among others, see Pelagia Goulimari, 'A Minoritarian Feminism?', *Hypatia*, 14:2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 97-120; Jill Marsden, 'Deleuzian Bodies, Feminist Tactics', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 15:3 (London: Taylor&Francis, 2004), pp. 308-319; Erinn Cunniff Gilson, 'Responsive Becoming: Ethics between Deleuze and Feminism', Juan Nathan, Daniel W. Smith, *Deleuze and Ethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp. 63-83. A similar fortune of the concept of 'minoritarian' together with that of 'deterritorialization' can be recognised also in postcolonial scholarship: see Mrinalini Greedharry, 'Nati-dote: Deleuze and Guattari's Critique of Psychoanalysis', *Postcolonial*

While introducing the category of 'minority', Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the use of the pair 'minority/majority' and the two adjectives 'minoritarian/majoritarian'. The former pair refers to a 'state' as a sort of intrinsic characteristic fixing two extremes, while the latter couple entails a conscious 'process' or poetics based on a mutual relation between two parts.[117] As far as the opposition 'minority/majority' is concerned, the difference between a minority and a majority is not a quantitative, but a qualitative one. A majority is not defined by its large numbers but by a standard measure by which it can be evaluated and imitated.[118] Any determination that deviates from this axiomatic model – by definition and regardless of numbers and quantities – is thus considered 'minoritarian'. The notion of 'minority' encompasses a broad range of fields, having not only musical, literary, artistic undertones but also juridical and political ones. A 'minority' is always characterised by a particular relation of powers to the majoritarian discourse in each one of those fields. Minorities are described as a disturbance within the major discourse, which originally serves as a standard measure and gives shape to the world. Compared to the minoritarian state, majorities gain a 'state of power and domination'.[119]

Within their discussion of the notion of 'minority', Deleuze and Guattari introduced the attributes of female and male. When the opposition between 'minority' and 'majority' refers to gender identity and its common dialectical representation, the difference between the male-dominant discourse and the female-minor one becomes a

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Theory, and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 105-134; Réda Bensmaïa, 'On the Concept of Minor Literature: From Kafka to Kateb Yacine', *Gilles Deleuze, Postcolonial Theory, and the Philosophy of Limit* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 99-112; Rey Chow, 'Postcolonial Visibilities: Questions Inspired by Deleuze's Method', Deleuze and the Postcolonial (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 62-77.

117 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 469.

118 G. Deleuze, "Introduction", *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), p. XIII.

119 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, 'Postulates of Linguistics', *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 105-106.

significant part of Deleuze's discussion on the concept of 'minoritarian'.[120] In a less known passage of *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari employ the key-concept of 'minoritarian' to introduce the opposition between male and female, and stress how the relationship between these two opposite poles is ancillary – the female 'minoritarian' being contingent in respect to the male 'majoritarian'.

Again, Deleuze and Guattari do not build their critical analysis relying on a quantitative model. In *Mille Plateaux*, they introduce this opposition avoiding a model based on any ontological difference. Conversely, they prefer grounding their argument in a phenomenological basis, introducing the notion of 'becomings':

> Man is majoritarian *par excellence*, whereas *becomings* are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian […]. In this sense women […] are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that *becomings*, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman. It is important not to confuse 'minoritarian', as a becoming or process, with a 'minority', as an aggregate or a state. Jews, Gypsies, etc., may constitute minorities under certain conditions, but that in itself does not make them *becomings*. One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is de-territorialised.[121]

Here, the stress is put on the concept of 'becoming' as the key-element responsible for differentiation, which is firstly discussed as sexual difference. Only after this stage, 'becoming' is connected to the minoritarian position of women as opposed to men. By stating that 'minority as a process' is intrinsic to the process of 'becoming-woman',

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[120] In *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze's and Guattari's reflection on gender identities aims to overcome the bilateralism of binary identity formations which would be grounded in an ontological opposition between two sexes, between male and female. Within their philosophy of 'becoming', Deleuze and Guattari moves from a dialectical system of separateness towards a phenomenological merging of different genders. Cfr. R. Braidotti, 'Nomadic Ethics', *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. by Daniel W. Smith, Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 188-190.

[121] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, 'Becoming-Intense', *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 291.

Deleuze and Guattari are reconstructing a phenomenology based on the experience of this relation of powers and, thus, on the process of 'differentiation'.

Deleuze and Guattari are outlining a philosophy based *on difference*, while Italian literary critics built their definition of 'female' and 'femininity' on a philosophy *of difference*, as they are still relying on a Hegelian dialectic of opposition.[122] However, in approaching the 'scrittura femminile', they end up grounding their definition in the category of 'otherness'. In the Deleuzian discourse, difference displaces dialectics along with its system of ontological oppositions and accedes to a status of principle. Deleuze's notion of 'becoming' is inherited from Nietzsche's philosophy; it therefore is deeply anti-Hegelian. 'Becoming' is neither the dialectical opposition of opposites nor the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to a synthesizing identity. In this sense, it is not a discourse limited to differentiation but rather built *on difference*, on the process more than on the result, which is interpreted as the basis of each discourse on gender. Indeed, the focus is put on a quality – that of minority – which is given as the foreground to the discourse on the collocation of the 'female', and not as an antithesis – as it would have happened in dialectical arguments.[123] In this sense, the concept of 'minoritarian' – and the connected category of 'minor literature' – are part of the broader Deleuzian philosophical system based *on difference*: also in this case, the focus is put on the process rather than on the product of differentiation.[124] Opposed to a model

[122] This critical position produces a series of contradictions: for instance, several French feminist theorists tend to criticize the Hegelian dialectical system of opposition in which they recognise one of principal linguistic cause of patriarchy. Nevertheless, such structuration is still present and identifiable in their texts (see Cixous' and Kristeva's texts published in the seventies). The same argument could be identified also in one of the principal Italian feminist manifestos, namely Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel* which was published during the mid-seventies. See Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1974), pp. 19-62. Cfr. also Antonio Moretti, *Gilles Deleuze e l'ideologia del Sessantotto. Dialettica e Differenza* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 29-32.

[123] 'We live in an age that no longer thinks in terms of primordial Unity or Logos that we have lost (Platonism), or some future Totality that awaits us as the result of a dialectic or evolution (Hegelianism) […]'. D. W. Smith, 'Introduction', G. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. XII.

[124] Cfr. James Williams, 'Introduction', *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction*

based on a static system of differences between male and female, this opposition becomes intrinsic to the overall Deleuzian philosophical – and then hermeneutical – system. To this extent, this can be defined as a philosophy *on difference*.

The concept of 'minoritarian' also affects the opposition between women and men. We must acknowledge even a tension towards the abolition of the opposition male-majoritarian/female-minoritarian, favouring a sort of twilight-zone:

> Minority as a universal figure or becoming-everybody/everything *(devenir tout le monde)*. Woman: we all have to become that, whether we are male or female.[125]

Here, Deleuze and Guattari push their argument even further by drawing a parallel between the position of women in society and the one of 'minor languages'. The 'minoritarian' position of women within the world functions the same as 'minor languages' by being both grounded in a process – that of 'becoming' – and not in a state – that of 'being'. Their relation is thus more dynamic and not simply based on a heavy system of opposition of states.

> Women, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of humankind, men, and women both. The same goes for minor languages: they are not simply sublanguages, idiolects, or dialects, but potential agents of the major language's entering into a becoming-minoritarian of all of its dimensions and elements.[126]

To this extent, 'minor languages' and 'minor literatures' engage with the same system of relations as the one grounded in the opposition between male/female.

2.2. THE DOMAINS OF A MINOR LITERATURE

and Guide (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

[125] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 470

[126] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 106.

According to the two philosophers, a 'minor literature'[127] should not be considered as a literature written in a minor language, but a literature which has been written in a major language by a minoritarian group.[128] It is through this 'minor' use of language that literature engenders a decomposition of the 'major' language and, at the same time, generates a new minor language within the writer's own language. 'Minor literature' is not defined by a local language, but by a treatment to which it subjects the major language.[129] As indicated by one of most eminent of Deleuze's commentators, Ronald Bogue, the concept of 'minor literature' intersects at least two categories: the literature of small nations or groups, and the literature of oppressed minorities.[130] If we extend these two categories to our case study, contemporary Italian women's poetry and, specifically, the authors investigated in this study belong to at least one of these two categories: that of oppressed minorities. The definition of 'oppressed minorities' can be thus reconnected to our previous discourse on the relationship between the 'male-major' and 'female-minor' positioning.

Being grounded in 'qualitative' intrinsic characteristics and conscious choices, the positioning of the 'minoritarian' discourse seems to have more than one point of tangency with our case study. Overall, a complementary movement could be detected in the system of Italian lyric poetry. On the one hand, lyric poetry stands out as a minoritarian mode of communication in the second half of the twentieth century, in open dialogue with the majoritarian mode of prose writing. As a matter of fact, the former is a speech act governed by norms, figures of speech, and detournements that make it independent, while the latter is closer to the degree zero of communication.

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[127] From now on, the adjective 'minor' will be used instead of 'minoritarian' but with the same meaning.

[128] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 15.

[129] 'Re-Presentation of Masoch', G. Deleuze *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 55.

[130] Ronald Bogue, 'Minor literature', *Deleuze and literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 112.

Moreover, the poets included in this study – Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta – are minoritarian in the sense that they develop a linguistic system that is only tangential to the majoritarian tradition of lyric poetry. In the case of these poets, their 'minoritarian' style is a choice before becoming a condition. This makes the case for a series of stylistic traits which has been consciously pursued.

Deleuze and Guattari identify two main characteristics of 'minoritarian literatures'. Firstly, 'minor literatures' are not written in a 'minor language' *per se* but make a minor usage of language by inducing a wide range of instabilities within it, from syntactical to semantic ones or even deeper disturbances in the series of their literary references or in the treatment of their subjects. The system of variants introduced by 'minoritarian' authors undoes grammatical conventions as well as traditional references and thereby 'de-territorialise' language, detaching the new 'minor language' from its native and maternal textuality;[131] this goal is accomplished by de-territorialising the authors' relationship with the canon and literary tradition.

Secondly, 'in minor literatures everything is political'.[132] In 'major literatures' authors tend to address issues related to their very individual experience of society, whereas in 'minor literatures' each of these segments of experience gets immediately connected to the broader political sphere.[133] The 'political aim' intrinsic to every 'minor writers' produces a particular mode of communication that Deleuze defines 'collective utterance'.[134] This entails a diverse treatment of the lyric subject, which tends to become

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131 Deleuze investigates the difference between maternal and mature language in the preface to the volume *L'Aliénation Linguistique* by Henri Gobard. Here, Deleuze discusses the opposition between the two extremes of maternal and mythical language: the first represents a fundamental premise to the second and they are described as two interconnected phases within the same process of self-representation. Cfr. G. Deleuze, 'Préface', Henri Gobard, *L'Aliénation Linguistique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), pp. 10-14.

132 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka,* p. 16.

133 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka,* p. 32.

134 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka,* p. 33.

more inclusive towards the dimension of the others and, at the same time, displays an inner drive towards self-representation. This inclusion creates a new way of narrating events connected to history, by giving voice also to other historical characters external to the subjective dimension of poetry.

2.3. A DE-TERRITORIALISED POETRY

The definition of 'de-territorialization' firstly appeared in the book dedicated to Kafka. Thanks to this study, Deleuze and Guattari identify the process of 'de-territorialization' as intrinsic to the experience of all 'minor literatures'. Again, the notion of 'becoming' is fundamental for the extension of the categories of 'minoritarian' and 'majoritarian' to the literary field. As highlighted in the previous section, the main object of Deleuze's enquiry is not the single entity or object, but a 'becoming', a series of linguistic acts expressed in a certain style. Unsurprisingly, the word for style used in French is *écriture*; however, the word *écriture* has a totally different meaning here. According to Deleuze, *écriture* does not stand either for diction, or for a structure of signifiers, but for the discord, the disequilibrium, the tension towards stuttering which keeps a language alive and diachronically in evolution.[135] There is here a strong connection with the concept of 'minoritarian'.

Deleuze criticises the category of *écriture feminine* even more directly. Firstly, he introduces a reference to Virginia Woolf's style, then he says that *écriture feminine* is not a separate form of writing, based on the 'otherness' of women writers' style – as a sort of an expression of feminine identity – but rather the development of a process of

[135] In the second phase of Deleuze's production, the concept of 'style' seems closer to a qualitative definition based on the performativity of language and literatures. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, 'Style and Stuttering', *Deleuze and Language* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 220-221.

'becoming-woman'. As already pointed out while discussing the difference between 'minority' and 'minoritarian', the process of 'becoming-woman' involves both men and women. In this sense, *écriture feminine* does not pertain uniquely to women authors, but it is more a stylistic process which is willingly fostered by some authors.[136] This led us to investigate how *écriture* is defined through its tendency towards 'de-territorialization'. The two philosophers describe what they call a 'territorialising', well-established set of forces that act as conservative elements within the linguistic boundaries of 'major literature'. These 'continuative drives' have always attempted to limit the intrinsic and natural variations that each language experiments in its diachronic development. The linguistic space of 'territorialization' is the place of grammar, of stable syntax, of a fixed semantics, and of a stable canon of literary references – something that has to be challenged within the scope of 'minor literatures'.

Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari describe a 'de-territorialising' drive which is typical of 'minor literatures'. This process consists of a way of inhabiting a 'major' and 'territorialised language' by making space for the author's own idiolect which often has different external influences. 'De-territorialization' functions as a way of appropriating a 'majoritarian' idiom while undermining its fixed structure. The desire to escape such codification by decoding and 'de-territorialising' a language seems particularly crucial for minorities who want to remain minorities and affirm perspectives that are external to the 'majoritarian' culture they are inhabiting.[137]

Eventually, literature is not 'de-territorialised' because it is produced by a restricted minority – which would entail, again, a state of quantitative opposition –, but because it is the literature of minor usage, of a 'minorisation' of the dominant power

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[136] Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, stress the fact that such a process is present also in authors considered as 'models' of 'male writing' as Miller and Lawrence. See G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276.

[137] Robert Brinkley, 'Towards a re-definition of minor literature', *Mississippi Review*, V. 11, n. 3 (University of Southern Mississippi, Winter/Spring 1983), pp. 14-16.

structures of language. This strategy is characterised by an attempt at being 'a foreigner in [their] own language' by making 'use of polylingualism in [their] own language, to make of this a minor-intensive usage, to oppose the oppressed character of this language to its oppressor character, to find points of non-culture and under-development'.[138] Even if Deleuze and Guattari describe the process of 'de-territorialization' in depth, they do not provide strict stylistic examples of such use of language.[139] This gives us the opportunity to stretch and test this category while working on our selection of poets and texts.

The subversive use of given structures, the adoption of extremely selective semantic fields, and the innovations introduced in the linguistic macro-structures are all features that contribute to making a comparison between poetry, as a stylistic category, and the 'de-territorialised' language of 'minor literatures'. Plus, the fact of being women poets locates our authors in a position even closer to the definition of 'minor literature'. But this is still no more than a matter of vague resemblances. We still need to analyse the way in which this 'de-territorialising' act is performed by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta. What specific techniques do they use? How do they face the opposed 'territorialising' force of 'major poetry'?

The extension of this category to the analysis of these poets is made possible thanks to two main practices mirroring their 'de-territorialised' use of language. Firstly,

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[138] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a minor literature*, pp. 26;48.

[139] As a matter of fact, the examples of 'de-territorialised' languages are disseminated within Deleuze's entire *ouvrage*. Nonetheless, Deleuze does not supply us a well-rounded and definitive definition of the features characterising this concept. He alludes to Artaud's 'cries breaths' that Deleuze defines in *The Logic of the Sense* as a word in which all literal values are replaced by non-written allusion. Céline's *Guignol's Band* is given as an example of 'de-territorialised' French in the book dedicated to Kafka. In *A Thousand Plateus*, Deleuze and Guattari comment on the 'de-territorialised' syntax of Cummings in the verse 'he danced his did'. Cf. G. Deleuze, *The Logic of the Sense*, trans. By Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 108;88. See also G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 49, and *A Thousand Plateus*, p. 125.

we must recognise a reduced pressure of the 'anxiety of influence'[140] towards the existing and 'territorialised' Italian lyric canon. Within this framework, some of these poets – such as Amelia Rosselli and Patrizia Cavalli – were profoundly influenced by the experience of translating some French, English, and American authors.[141] Secondly, these poets built independently their own idea of linguistic experimentalism; this cannot be ascribed to contemporary poetic tendencies[142] such as, on the one hand, the 'Neoavanguardia'[143] and its linguistic experimentalism, and, on the other hand, 'Ermetismo' along with its 1980s revival, 'Neo-orfismo'.[144] Eventually, these poets do not fit even in the already problematised label of 'poesia femminile'. All these elements have contributed to a new language of poetry that will be analysed thoroughly in the second part of this study.

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[140] Bloom's idea of 'anxiety of influence' consists of the ambiguous relationship between the creative process of poets belonging to different generations. The poet is inspired to write by reading the work of his precursors, and then he experiences the risks of producing a derivative work. This movement stimulates a sense of anxiety in living poets. Such poets can respond to this perception in two ways: most poets continue what can be called a tendency or coterie, while a small minority of poets manage to cultivate their own original voice. See Harold Bloom, 'Preface', *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 6-15.

[141] Translation represents a key element for the selected authors as well as for the development of their language. In this sense, translation allows Rosselli and Cavalli to dialogue with a different cultural context – a context allowing for a linguistic re-elaboration (or renovation) of their own poetry. It is thus possible to recognise a mechanism which dismisses Bloom's idea of anxiety of influence towards a national canon of literature; see L. Venuti, 'Heterogeneity', *The Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 8-13.

[142] As highlighted in the introduction to *Donne in poesia*, women poets frequently do not feel to fit in poetic movements, with a special regard to the 'Neoavanguardia'. B. Frabotta 'Introduzione', *Donne in poesia*, pp. 26-27.

[144] A complete stylistic analysis of the linguistic features of 'Ermetismo' is provided by Mengaldo in 'Il linguaggio della poesia ermetica', *La tradizione del Novecento – Terza serie*, pp. 62-83*;* and also by A. Soldani, 'Ermetismo ed ermetismi', A. Afribo, A. Soldani, *La poesia moderna. Dal secondo Ottocento a oggi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), pp. 94-100. The main linguistic features of 'Ermetismo' consist of the use of imperative tenses addressing the reader or and external audience, the use of the analogy between two elements, and the use of prepositional syntagms (such as, for instance, 'silenzio di grida'). On the other hand, a stylistic analysis of the poetic tendency of 'Neo-orfismo' is developed by Milo De Angelis, 'Andare a capo. (Autobiografia)', *Poesia e destino* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1982), pp. 16-17. In this essay, De Angelis argues that wrapping lines or even syntagms is one of the main characteristics of some of the poets ascribable to Neo-orfismo. This syntactic innovation echoes the semantic resourcefulness of hermetic poets.

2.3.1. DE-TERRITORIALISING THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: BECOMING-SELF

Tradition is a keyword that can better define the experience of Italian women's poetry. As Deleuze and Guattari highlighted, national literary traditions are the expression of dynamics of power that have seen women poets excluded from poetry anthologies, school textbooks, and literary canons. Their indirect experience of tradition – which they define as an expression of the national, symbolic, and patriarchal order – has been dealing with a direct manifestation of dynamics of exclusion, neglection, and marginality. As a consequence, the absence of dominant figures is a constituent part of the experience of being 'minor'.[145] By being excluded from the canon, Italian women poets have challenged the idea of literary tradition as an imitative process by expanding their system of references beyond the national and therefore 'territorialised' national boundaries. Their position as outsiders allows them to build their own idea of poetry; from this standpoint, they do not receive straight influences, developing a relationship with their models which is profoundly dialogic instead. If we were to adopt a Bloomian vocabulary, we would say that our poets act as *tesserae* within the Italian literary scenario, filling an existing void with their own poetic voice.[146] In Deleuzian terms, the *tessera* is the 'de-territorialised' place of renegotitation between the poet's own style and the pre-existing 'majoritarian' canon.

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[145] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a minor literature*, p. 35.

[146] According to Bloom, the notion of *tessera* 'is completion and antithesis; I take the word not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment says of a small pot which with the other fragments would re-constitute the vessel. A poet antithetically completes his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.' Cfr. H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 28. A similar noetic metaphor is emplyes by Lacan, when he discusses the role of language in shaping one's subjectivity; in this context, he recurs to Mallarmé's metaphor of the coin – 'an effaced coin hand in silence' –: 'Cette métaphore suffit à nous rappeler que la parole, même à l'extrême de son usure, garde son valeur de tessère.' J. Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 251.

The anxiety of influence is basically developed over a mimetic process,[147] whereas such poets are not keen on imitating authors already canonised. At the same time, they advocate for a hybridized system of references external to the Italian lyric canon. This posture dislocates our authors outside the dynamics of 'majoritarian literature'. Within the framework of 'major literature', a younger author often imitates the stylistic features of his ancestors and then adds his voice to an already existing poetic discourse. This forms a sort of vocal chain governed by the stabilising influence wielded by previous 'major' poets. Conversely, 'minor' poets have a freer exchange with the literary history of the 'major language' in which they write. These poets inhabited their own language by rerouting it in a new 're-domesticated' space. 'Minor poets' are, for instance, more inclined to structure their system of influences through a different kind of association with the canon. A canon which is not simply rooted in historicised and national authors. It is indeed quite common that 'minor' poets should refer to authors external to the national dimension. Moreover, some of their references can also be found outside the literary field.

2.3.2. AMELIA ROSSELLI

The experience of 'de-territorialization' is central to the poetry of Rosselli not only as a choice but also owing to historical necessity.[148] Rosselli's foreignness must be interpreted as a willingly attempt at de-familiarising her poetic voice by transforming her segmented

[147] Alistair Heys, *The Anatomy of Bloom. Harold Bloom and the Study on Influence and Anxiety* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 117-18.

[148] As stated by Rosselli, 'La poesia non si addice alla vita normale, quella di tutti i giorni. Ora mi dibatto nella realtà, la osservo con altri occhi. Scrivere è chiedersi com'è fatto il mondo: quando sai com'è fatto forse non hai più bisogno di scrivere'. A. Rosselli 'Non chiedetemi troppo, mi sono persa in un bosco', interview ed. by Sandra Petrignani, *Il Messaggero*, 23 June 1979.

history into a 'minor' narrative. Her education and her approach to the Italian language are integral parts of the linguistic system of her poetry. For instance, Amelia Rosselli read a diverse array of English poets who had a pivotal role in her poetic education.[149] Being educated firstly in France and then in England and in the US, Amelia Rosselli was exposed to literature which had less resonance in Italy in that period. On the one hand, she was trained in the classics of English literature such as William Shakespeare, John Donne, and the metaphysical poets, who deeply influenced her poetry written in English. On the other hand, she had the chance to read poets, such as T.S. Eliot, E.E. Cummings, and G.M. Hopkins, whose broader influence can be extended further to her first collections written in Italian.[150] Rosselli's poetic corpus is indeed trilingual: French, Italian, and English are significantly used in her work and, for this reason, the system of interferences and influences is even more complicated.[151] It is thought-provoking that Rosselli had access to these authors and to their stylistic background even before the same authors were to become fundamental for the 'Neoavanguardia'.[152]

In the Italian context, Rosselli was particularly interested in the poetry of Scipione[153], Rocco Scotellaro,[154] and, at a later stage, of Sandro Penna. While the first has inspired the hallucinatory texture of Rosselli's metaphors, the second is fundamental for shaping her idea of linguistic pauperism – what she used to define as 'grammatica dei

[149] This complex system of references and its bond with Rosselli's biography has been effectively analysed by Silvia De March in *Amelia Rosselli tra poesia e storia* (Naples: L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2006).

[150] Emanuela Tandello, 'Alle fonti del lapsus: pun, portmanteau, wordscape. Appunti sull'inglese letterario di Amelia Rosselli', E. Tandello, G. Devoto, *Trasparenze 17/19* (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 173-190.

[151] For a complete catalogue of these linguistic inferences Cfr. Tatiana Bisanti, *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli: un distorto, inesperto, espertissimo linguaggio* (Pisa: ETS, 2007).

[152] Giacinto Spagnoletti, 'Intervista ad Amelia Rosselli', Amelia Rosselli, *Antologia Poetica* (Milan: Garzanti, 1987), p. 160.

[153] E. Tandello, 'Un discorso appena un po' più largo: Scipione', *Trasparenze 17/19*, pp. 193-205.

[154] Franco Vitelli, 'Amelia e Scotellaro', *Trasparenze 17/19*, pp. 65-73.

poveri'.[155] Furthermore, Rosselli's language shows an even more interesting proximity to the category of 'minor literature' and, in particular, to Kafka. In an interview released to Giacinto Spagnoletti in the late eighties,[156] Rosselli confesses that one of the prominent sources of inspiration for *Variazioni Belliche* was Kafka's *Diaries*.[157]

This literary background was also fundamental for the second part of her career, with a particular regard to *Documento (1966-73),*[158] and the long poem *Impromtu*.[159] In *Documento*, the metrical system and the structure of the collections are, for instance, built upon a recasting of the Petrarchan sonnet over her pre-existing *spazio metrico*, which she innovates through the poetry of Charles Olson and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

2.3.3. ELSA MORANTE

In an interview published in 1987, Enzo Siciliano highlights Elsa Morante's precise attitude towards other authors she used to read:

> Ogni lettura di libro era per Elsa motivo per scuotere il segreto di uno scrittore, e il suo orgoglio era di ignorare tutto di lui se non ciò che lo stile […]. Leggere, per Elsa, era un atto decisivo della vita; essere letti da lei significava trovarsi a repentaglio di una esclusività che programmaticamente non amava il perdono.[160]

Elsa Morante pursued her own creative process by reading other authors through her own poetic lens. The influence of French novelists such as Proust, Cocteau, and Alain-

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155 See, for instance, the closing verses of *Impromptu*: 'E se paesani / zoppicanti sono questi versi è / perché siamo pronti per un'altra / storia […]". A. Rosselli, 'Impromptu', *L'opera poetica*, ed. by E. Tandello, S. Giovannuzzi (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), p. 686. Cfr. also T. Bisanti, 'La grammatica dei poveri: particolarità morfosintattiche', *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli* (Pisa: ETS, 2007), pp.121-22.

156 G. Spagnoletti, 'Intervista ad Amelia Rosselli', p. 156.

157 Roberto Binetti, 'La Funzione Rosselli. Genealogia poetica di una letteratura minore', in *Studi Novecenteschi, 95* (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2018), pp. 146-47.

158 A. Rosselli, *Documento (1966-73)* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976).

159 A. Rosselli, *Impromtu*, with an introduction by Giovanni Giudici (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 1981).

160 Enzo Siciliano, 'La cravatta, ultimo ponte tra l'uomo e la fantasia', *Corriere della sera*, 26 lug. 1987, p. 12.

Fournier on her first novels[161] has already been demonstrated by Giacomo Debenedetti and by more recent works by Stefania Lucamante and Elena Porciani.[162]

Her poetry collections are highly idiosyncratic and reveal a complex act of weaving: 'una tela favolosa', as she loved to describe her art. Her first poetry collection, *Alibi*,[163] is characterised by references to artists such as Michelangelo, Carpaccio, the movie director Luchino Visconti, and the beloved American painter Bill Morrow. The second collection, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini e altri poemi*,[164] is characterised by more sophisticated intertextual practices. The consistent number of references spans from classical antiquity to contemporary American poets such as Allen Ginsberg and other *beatnik* poets.

Even if the system of external references is really complex in Morante's poetry, the major dialogue occurs between her poems and her narrative texts; indeed, the novels constitute a huge and pervasive hypo-text, [165] while *Alibi* and *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* represent two crucial watersheds in her literary career.[166] Morante herself

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161 *Menzogna e Sortilegio* and *L'Isola di Arturo* are both published by Einaudi respectively in 1948 and 1957.

162 Stefania Lucamante, *Elsa Morante e l'eredità proustiana* (Florence: Cadmo, 1998); see also S. Lucamante, Sharon Wood, *Under Arturo's star: the cultural legacies of Elsa Morante* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006). The more recent work by Porciani continues the research started by Lucamante and expanded the analysis of Morante's meta-literary laboratory through an analysis of her manuscripts: see Elena Porciani, *Nel laboratorio della finzione. Modi narrativi e memoria poetica in Elsa Morante* (Rome: Sapienza University Press, 2019).

163 *Alibi* was firstly published by Longanesi in 1958. The third edition published by Einaudi in 2004 also contains the series of poems *Quaderno di Narciso*. E. Morante, *Alibi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004).

164 E. Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini e altri poemi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968).

165 In the introduction to *Alibi*, Morante highlights how 'essendo […] scrittrice di storie in prosa, i suoi radi versi sono, in parte, nient'altro che un'eco, o, se si voglia, un coro, dei suoi romanzi'. E. Morante, 'Premessa', *Alibi*, p. 3.

166 As significantly recognised by Carmello, the two poetic collections by Morante function as a sort of thresholds which divide her *oeuvre* into two main phases: the first one comprehends the first two novels *Menzogna e sortilegio* (1948) and *L'isola di Arturo* (1957) and concludes with the first poetic collection *Alibi* (1958); the second starts from *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (1968) and finishes with *Aracoeli* (1982). Cfr. Marco Carmello, *La poesia di Elsa Morante* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 18-19. Mengaldo recognises an ungrasped linguistic bond between *Il mondo salvato dai*

describes her two poetic collections as the 'chorus' for her novels.[167] As pointed out by Marco Carmello, Morante's poetic works function as a linguistic and thematic collector for her novels. As far as the second poetry collection is concerned, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* can be easily defined as a generational book, representing that generation who was reaching its maturity during the seventies.

3.3.4. PATRIZIA CAVALLI

Younger poets tend to recognise their model in other poets. There is, in this sense, a set of inclinations which produced stylistic tendencies also within 'minor literatures'. A new generation of 'minor' poets tends to get inspiration from other 'minor' poets, who belong to the previous generation. During the seventies, Rome was an unprecedented melting point for different generations of poets.[168] At that time, poets such as Rosselli and Morante were already charismatic figures, being able to exert an attractive influence over younger poets who were going to publish their first collection of poetry. This ended up creating a sort of genealogic structure even within what we have defined 'minor poetry'.

Moving from Todi to Rome in the late sixties to major in philosophy, Cavalli knew no one in Rome, except for a group of young American artists.[169] As a matter of fact, Rome, the city of her rebirth, would become one of the main characters acting in her poetry. In this context, she got to know Elsa Morante who went on to act as a sort of

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ragazzini and *La Storia*: P.V. Mengaldo, *La tradizione del Novecento*. *Quarta serie* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), pp. 147-48.

[167] Morante is not diminishing the role of her poetic production by subordinating the role of poetry to a sort of commentary. Indeed, Morante is profoundly aware of the function of the chorus in sustaining the overall structure of classical tragedies. See M. Carmello, *La poesia di Elsa Morante*, p. 7.

[168] Enrico Testa, 'Introduzione', *Dopo la lirica*, pp. XVI-XVII; see also B. Frabotta, "La seconda persona plurale", *Quartetto per masse e voce sola* (Rome: Donzelli, 2009), pp. 35-67.

[169] Gini Alhadeff, 'Afterword', Patrizia Cavalli, *My Poems Won't Change the World*, trans. by G. Alhadeff (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 135.

tutelary deity. As reported by Cavalli, she was convinced by Morante to show the poems she was secretly working on in the early seventies:

> Ma la verità è che non c'era quasi niente da ricopiare, perché le poesie che avevo mi sembravano inservibili: letterarie, *imitative*, inesistenti. Io, per me, avrei persino imbrogliato, ma pensare di imbrogliare Elsa era un'idea ridicola. [...] Mi sono messa a scrivere nuove poesie, intanto cercavo di capire quali di quelle già scritte fossero o non fossero poesie, cosa era mio e cosa non lo era, dove era il vero e dove il falso. Fu il mio primo esercizio di consapevolezza.[170] [emphasis mine]

Two things in particular stand out from this passage. At first, Cavalli puts a lot of stress on the difficulty of writing something original as such: the difficulty of coping with the anxiety of influence – she says 'le poesie che avevo mi sembravano inservibili: letterarie, imitative, inesistenti' – elicited an exercise in originality which is undoubtedly inspired by this dialogue with Morante; an exercise that already is an act of 'de-territorialization' towards the 'minoritarian' model. Secondly, this process is also connected by Cavalli to a movement towards self-consciousness and individuality. As a matter of fact, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, the first collection published by Cavalli in 1974, is not only dedicated to Morante, but it aims at becoming a very precise answer to the questions raised by *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. On a thematic level, the two collections have many points in common: from the centrality of gesture and performance to a shared depiction of distortion of temporality.[171]

Cavalli's affiliation with Morante is not limited to the consonances of meaning and aim but should be extended to a consistent series of textual evidence. Even her metrical system consists of a response to the long hyambic free-verse of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*: if Morante's model is possibly the prosody of Walt Whitman filtered

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[170] Lisa Ginzburg, 'Le parole che suonano. Intervista a Patrizia Cavalli', *L'Unità*, 3 June 2002.

[171] Andrea Cortellessa, 'Io è un corpo', *Parola Plurale. Sessantaquattro poeti italiani fra due secoli*, ed. by G. Alfano, A. Baldacci, C. Bello Minciacchi, A. Cortellessa, M. Manganelli, R. Scarpa, F. Zinelli, P. Zublena (Rome: Luca Sossella, 2005), pp. 40-42.

through the experience of Cesare Pavese's *Lavorare stanca*, in Cavalli's poetry, one must recognise the evident debt with the epigrammatic tradition, which keeps under the same system classical and modern authors such as Catullus and Martial, William Shakespeare,[172] Wystan Hugh Auden, and also Sandro Penna.[173] As noted by Concetta D'angeli, Cavalli's poetry exhibits a craft-like attention towards the structure of the phrase and its rhythm that echoes and rephrases many of Morante's techniques – especially Cavalli's use of hendecasyllables, rhyming elegiac couplets, and epigrammatic structures.[174] Analysing the relationship between *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* is thus vital to contextually understand Cavalli's poetry.

3.3.5. BIANCAMARIA FRABOTTA

The early poetry of Frabotta is characterised by a similar bond with the poetry of Rosselli. Also in this case, the type of relationship is not a mimetic one. While addressing similar themes already introduced by Rosselli, *Il rumore bianco* aims at developing her own poetic voice: as Cavalli, Frabotta also describes this process as an attempt to channel her own voice, freeing herself from the 'controcanto ai bassi tellurici' of Amelia Rosselli's poetry.[175] Frabotta reconstructs this complex relationship and never-ending fascination with Rosselli's poetry in the lyric diary *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*:

> [Amelia] ci comunicava i suoi incubi, i mali che la torturavano e insieme, i suoi paradisi, la gioia del tempo, la passione politica che l'ha sempre agitata, e tutto, il male come il bene supremo acquistava un tono, il suo. […] In tanti avremmo voluto *imitarla*, la sua poesia, anche solo per un omaggio, un affannoso tributo

[172] P. Cavalli, *Shakespeare in scena* (Florence: nottetempo, 2016).
[173] While Morante's main reference from is tragedy, Cavalli overturns this reference to a different genre: the epigram. In this sense, Cavalli responds with the *levitas* of her references to the *gravitas* intrinsic to Morante's *Il mondo*. Cfr. Giancarlo Alfano, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Parola Plurale*, p. 157.
[174] Concetta D'angeli, 'A difficult legacy. Morante's presence in Contemporary Italian Literature', *Under Arturo's Star. The Cultural Legacies of Elsa Morante*, ed. by Stefania Lucamante, Sharon Wood (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), p. 198.
[175] B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse*, p. 12.

> d'amore. Ma era come voler ricalcare il percorso nell'aria delle lingue di fuoco.[176] [emphasis mine]

The rich system of intertextual references between the two must be connected to the creation of a new 'de-territorialised' poetic language of lyric poetry. This aim emerges in the first series published by Frabotta in 1976 with the title *affemminata,* but also in the whole *Il rumore bianco*: the references span from Rosselli, who is playfully quoted, to Rosa Luxembourg, also encompassing Arthur Rimbaud and the French symbolists, Eugenio Montale, Marianne Moore and the 'zoo-morphist poets', as well as the letters of Abelard and Heloise.

In open dialogue with the international feminist movements, the author asks her texts to function as an emancipatory act and as a display of a different kind of subjectivity, freed from the burden of tradition and literary masters. Frabotta strives for a poetic style which 'non mi si chiuda addosso come una tenaglia', which would damage her own voice.[177] In some of the denser sections of *Il rumore bianco*, Frabotta seems to inherit from Rosselli the same innovative approach towards semantics: words are mixed, dismantled, and displaced through a series of tropes such as paronomasia and oxymoron. When Frabotta analysed *Documento*, she effectively stresses the centrality of these tropes in Rosselli's poetry, also creating a bond with the delivery of the political message of her poetry:

> [*Documento*] è una scabrosa proliferazione di messaggi da cui sprigiona la scintilla di un ossimoro, non statico, non montalianamente sommesso e dimesso, ma ardente di urgenze pubbliche e private, acuite dal tema dell'«insurrezionale» di quegli anni […].[178]

This urgency has a great impact on Frabotta who replicates a similar mechanism in *Il rumore bianco*; in particular, Frabotta is spellbound by Rosselli's attempt at merging

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[176] B. Frabotta, 'Elogio del fuoco', *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, pp. 65-66.
[177] B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 20.
[178] B. Frabotta, 'Le buone «intenzioni» di Amelia Rosselli: qualche riflessione su Documento', E. Tandello, G. Devoto, *Trasparenze 17-19*, p. 336.

the lyric dimension of the private and that of the public. This element remains central to her poetics also after the publication of *Il rumore bianco*.

2.4. A POLITICAL POETRY

> La lingua dovrebbe essere trattata come una concezione del mondo, come l'espressione di una concezione del mondo […].
>
> (Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 5, IX, 131)

One more feature completes the definition of 'minor literature'. As highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari, one should recognise a connection between the individual and her political immediacy, namely between the fictional subject of 'minor literature' and the historical and social foreground. For this reason, they affirm that 'everything is political' in the context of 'minor literatures'.

> In 'great' literatures, on the contrary, the question of the individual (familial, conjugal, etc.) tends to be connected to other, no fewer individual questions, and the social milieu serves as environment and background. None of these Oedipal matters is particularly indispensable, absolutely necessary, but all 'form a unit' in a wide space. Minor literature is completely different: because it exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political.[179]

The Oedipal triangle is dismissed, and its importance is strongly diminished. Originally treated as a collector of themes related to the subject, family becomes only one of the centres of 'minoritarian literatures'. If we think about the role of women in Italian society up until the sixties, we can easily appreciate how the responsibilities accessible to women in the public sphere were highly limited, as they were often relegated to the dimension

[179] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 30.

of domesticity, sentenced to play the part either of the mother or of the wife. The seventies brought into public display this domestic and private contrast, making the case for a societal revolution that saw women as protagonists and independent subjects. Following the vector connecting the dimension of the private to that of the public and, thus, of the political, we can identify a deeper connection between the subject and the others. This dimension of the others is to be considered as a multitude included in a real and historical context. The 'political aim' of 'minor poetry' written by women can be identified in this non-fictional representation of the self and its attempt to channel other plural selves.

By representing the lyric subject from a different perspective – that of women –, these authors developed techniques that have found stylistic expressions in their text. In pursuing this aim, an author as such accomplished an expansion of the self through a collective utterance. While the 'political aim' entails a relationship between 'minor literature' and its meaning – a relationship that is centred on the signified –, the second characteristic concerns the way through which a minor literature is expressed. This is a characteristic of the signifier which is intrinsic to the lyric subject.

> The third characteristic is that everything has a collective value. In effect, precisely because talents do not abound in a minor literature, the conditions are not given for an individuated utterance which would be that of some 'master' and could be separated from collective utterance.[180]

When we extend this discourse to poetry, the movement from a singular enunciation to a 'collective utterance' is identifiable in a transformation of the lyric subject. We now have to identify the ways in which our poets fulfil these extra-literary conditions through their own writing. This 'minorising' force in poetry is developed in two ways: the relation to the contemporary debate on the women's condition and the connection to the dimensions of others performed by the subject of poetry.

[180] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 31.

2.4.1. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: BECOMING-EVERYTHING/WOMAN

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta reveal a difficult relationship with the Italian canon: an unquestionable ghettoization affected the reception and collocation of their poetry in the history of Italian literature. Nevertheless, this collocation – which is only apparently unlucky, as I am to demonstrate – gave these authors an unprecedented chance to make a political statement about their position within literary history. By being confined outside the major streams of literature, these authors had the unique possibility to affirm the centrality and vitality of their poetry through new and unbeaten tracks. The newness of their poetry functions as a form of 'political' statement against the canon and the authorities hiding behind it.

Poetry is often viewed – and critically read – as a means of introspection or, at best, as an instrument of self-representation.[181] The noun 'poetry' – especially when paired with the adjective 'lyric' – tends to be considered a synonym with lyric as an expression of a detached subjectivity; lyric, to that extent, has been frequently considered just as a hyponym of poetry.[182] It is a common place that lyric poetry has less to deal with historical and political themes, or, to a broader extent, to what is not directly involved in the experience of the subject.[183] This widespread perception is rooted in critical works that analyse the case of women's poetry. As highlighted in Chapter 1, according to many literary critics, the preferred themes in women's poetry are limited to

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[181] Federica Santini, Giovanna Summerfield, 'Introduction', *The Politics of Poetics. Activism in Early Modern through Contemporary Italy* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. VII-XIII.

[182] On the nuanced definition of the term 'lyric' in relation to 'poetry' see Virginia Jackson's entry on 'Lyric' in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene and others, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 826-34, which indicates that the modern understanding of 'lyric' is only one instantiation of what lyric could mean

[183] Jonathan Culler, 'Lyric and Society', *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 296-97.

a certain selection of motives such as the hidden, the private, and the subconscious.[184] These thematic preferences appear to be concerned with the problematic representation of the subject of poetry and, to this extent, may also be considered more related to the lyric genre. This contributed to a rendering of the self as marginalised from history because of its thematic preferences. Furthermore, history has been shaped and written by men for centuries, while women were simply relegated to an ancillary role. This situation had been reversed during the seventies, when feminist movements were able to give women new possibilities of self-expression and of self-collocation within history.[185] However, women's poetry has not received a fair treatment capable of recognising this relevant aspect of their work.

Women's poetry – and, more broadly, poetry as a genre – has the capacity to show the incongruities of society through the use it makes of language, which allows meaning to emerge from a non-linear communication. The poets involved in this study were able to address historical themes with an oriented and political purpose. On the one hand, their relation to historical themes, such as that of self-representation of women, is a way to overcome the limits imposed by the lyric genre over a male-centered tradition. Since then, poetry becomes more inclusive not only at a linguistic and symbolic level, but it enriches its scope by historicising the dimension of the women's selves. Even if some of these authors were not directly engaged in the political movements of the seventies and their poetry seems apparently to stand on its celebrated disengagement, as is the case with Cavalli,[186] nor did actively take part in feminist protests, as is the case

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184 Robert S.C. Gordon, 'Women's Writing', p. 129.

185 M. Bracke, 'Woman as a Political Subject', *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: feminism in Italy 1968-83* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 19-21.

186 Even the title of Cavalli's first collection, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, sounds like a manifesto against any sort of political activism. The lyric subject finds herself compressed between the claustrophobic dimension of her apartment in Rome and the outer world. In this sense, this stifling confinement allows Cavalli to introduce historical references in a subtler way. History emerges in poetic epiphanies that lay on the foreground of Cavalli's poetic discourse. This is identifiable, for instance, in a poem in which the 'lead years' are introduced through the

with Morante,[187] they still managed to develop a political statement in their poetry. The one that poses women at the core of the lyric discourse. This entails not only a reflection on the experience of being a woman poet during those years, especially in the poetry of Frabotta[188] and Cavalli, but also an historical documentation of some fundamental events of that period, which have a role also in Rosselli's *Documento (1966-1973)*[189] or in certain passages of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. Thanks to this mechanism, the single story, the personal, and its narrative are connected to history thanks to a register overcoming the limits of the subject: that of the political.

This association, which is ground-breaking in poetry written by women, is consequently connected to a certain and non-stereotypical treatment of the lyric subject. The second relationship contributing to create 'collective utterance' consists in a relocation of the subject, displaced from the singularity of the self towards the plurality

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detached point of view of some Roman boys: 'l'ultimo suono dal gruppo di ragazzi / fermi sulla piazza: non della prossima / strage stanno parlando / ma del prossimo film che vedranno.' P. Cavalli, *Le mie poesie non salveranno il mondo*, p. 45.

187 Morante actively takes distance from any identification with the feminist protests and, especially, from any attempt to include her work under the label of 'scrittura femminile'. She strenuously defends the ungendered nature of art by claiming a different place for her poetry: 'dove io e te siamo uno solo / né uomo né donna'. E. Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, p. 45. For the same reason, she even refuses the inclusion of her poetry in an anthology such as *Donne in poesia* edited by Frabotta and Maraini.

188 The second section of *Il rumore bianco*, published separately in 1976 with the title *affemminata*, is entirely dedicated by Frabotta to the treatment of a female lyric subject. In this collection, she explicitly problematises its gendered characterisation. The narcissistic representation of the lyric subject as 'un'amica rara anch'ella d'oro impuro nel secolo buio / privò la donna di specchi laghi per ella / spicchi di inutili narcisate', is then problematised by the reference to history: 'storia al chiuso / non abbiamo, eccoci, non siamo: lo scacco della triplice. / Fu la protesta, la Guerra, lo scontro col cervello […] / Ma se di poco ancora si sposta la storia / io, ladra d'occhi, dove prenderò la luce?'. B. Frabotta, *Il rumore bianco*, p. 24.

189 As stated clearly by Rosseli in an interview published in *Fiera Letteraria*, *Documento* attempts to achieve a new relationship with history by starting a dialogue between poetry and the world, and politics. Indeed, one of the first nucleus of the collection was published on *Carte segrete* in 1972 with the title 'politiche poesie'. Giovannuzzi highlights how these new references are mirrored also by the titles of some of the poems of the collection as, for instance, 'Neve 1973', 'Campagnano Paese', 'Sciopero generale', 'Il Cristo (Pasqua 1971)', and 'Sciopero generale 1969'. Cfr. S. Giovannuzzi, 'Documento. Notizie sui testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 1370-71.

of others within a continuous process of 'becoming'. This new crowd of dialoguing subjects dismisses the old monovocal subject of lyric poetry which is now replaced by a new chorus of voices – a plurivocal subject. We are not anymore in front of a subject who speaks to herself or addresses a fictional second person object. An empathetic connection renegotiates the 'io-tu' lyric dialogue and expands it on a more inclusive enunciation 'io-voi' or 'noi-tu'.[190] This new output can be overlapped to what Deleuze and Guattari defined as 'collective assemblage of enunciation' and to the notion of 'becoming'; more than one voice is indeed echoed in this 'collective utterance'.[191] This contributed to the creation of new ways of interacting with the lyric genre by innovating it from within.

However, this innovation is not limited only to a questioning of the literary genre. The 'political aim' is performed through a new way of documenting the position of the woman subject within history which entails a transition between singularity and plurality. History – and its transcription in lyric poetry – is a matter of 'impersonality' which cannot be reduced to the individual experience of a singular speaking subject. In many poems, our poets feel the need to represent collective experiences through a new lens. This has inevitably led to the rise of first-person plural form or to the reference to a second-person plural addressee. Even if such transition to 'noi-voi' can still be perceived as a distortion of ordinary usage of language or even as a non-realistic representation,[192] this new relation functionalises the centrality of the audience of poetry.[193]

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[190] Rosselli provides a definition for this technique: 'Il dialogo oramai è fra due o tre persone / che si tengono a distanza e sognano di / non conoscersi più, scrivendosi domande / e risposte per scolpire dentro questa naturale biografica negatività', A. Rosselli, 'Documento', p. 478. Cfr. Culler's definition of 'Lyric as utterance', in J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 119-120.

[191] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka*, pp. 32-33.

[192] Brian Richardson, 'Representing the Social Minds: We and They Narratives, Natural and Unnatural', *Narrative* 23, 2 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, May 2015), pp. 200-203.

[193] During the seventies, an unprecedented break between poets and their audience occured. The audience started to retrieve its own voice in a sort of struggle for identity and representation, as happened during the poetry festival in Castelporziano in the summer of 1975. Cfr. Guido

This narrative structure is clearly expressed when Morante addresses to the crowd of 'felici pochi' in the third section of *Il mondo*. In this part, she focuses her attention on the generation of young people approaching adulthood during the seventies – a generation of fair revelations and failed revolutions: 'E allora o voi morti voi con gli altri felici guariti d'ogni lutto / la vostra presente conversazione significa / che le vostre contraddizioni non esistono finalmente / altro che nei nostri pettegolezzi provvisori'.[194] In so doing, Morante creates a new way of writing poetry that functions as a political and generational manifesto. A parallel treatment of the generation of '68 can be found also in Rosselli's *Documento* where she addresses 'i giovani, le loro rose / simili a te: i giovani / le loro rose, simili / a me: i giovani, i loro / torti, simili ai nostri'.[195] In this sense, one should recognise a need to break the boundaries between the subject and its non-fictional audience: 'Come le pietre sono con voi! – come le / pietre! – sono tutte lì, i pezzetti mancanti / e io sono qua ad attendere con loro, i / vostri bisogni […] io sono / quello che mai sapeste e poteste sapere / io sono come voi quel che non sapeste / mai'.[196]

Younger poets such as Cavalli and Frabotta, who can be considered part of the generation of 'felici pochi', find different addressees. On the one hand, Cavalli's addressees do not possess a particular identity and appear more related to a general depiction of an unnamed crowd. Nevertheless, this audience defines a mechanism of recognition and recollection which allows the subject to conquer her historical dimension. As Cavalli declares in *Il cielo*, this is the only possibility left to the lyric subject: 'Se di me non avessi memoria, / degli altri e del mondo, / potrei vedere il mio viso

Mazzoni, 'Sulla storia sociologica della poesia contemporanea in Italia', *Ticontre*, VII (Trento: University of Trento, 2017).

[194] E. Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, p. 137.

[195] A. Rosselli, *Documento*, p. 483.

[196] A. Rosselli, *Documento*, pp. 485-86.

scomparire / ingigantito o perso'.[197] If deprived from the dimension of the others, the subject is driven to silence. On the other hand, Frabotta's audience is less desultory as it is identifiable mostly with women and their political engagement in the feminist movement, especially in *affemminata*: 'è un furto di sonno, di sogni. / Non si dorme esposti all'antico ordine delle stoviglie. / Inventiamo vertenze contro il compromesso. / Auspichiamo il silenzio dei posteri.'[198]

2.5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta explore new ways of writing lyric poetry that are moved by an internal 'minorising force'. 'Minor literatures' are not to be limited to their reception but must be evaluated through an investigation of their many features. For these reasons, their poetry benefit from being analysed through such a theoretical framework. The category of 'minor literature' can provide a better lexicon to make an argument against the exclusion of these poets from the canon and literary coteries; concurrently, the Deleuzian category of 'minority' can stimulate a stylistic analysis based on innovative linguistic elements. At the same time, this category can also reveal the centrality of the 'political aim' in their writings, connecting women's poetry to the domains of history, collectivity, and its representation.

[197] P. Cavalli, *Il cielo*, p. 96.
[198] B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 20.

3. 'SONO UN PASSAGGIO DI BARBARI DIVINI'

Lightness and Gravity in Elsa Morante's *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and Patrizia Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*

> My life is light, waiting for the death wind
> Like the feather on the back of my hand.
>
> (T.S. Eliot, *A Song for Simeon*)

There are different ways of 'de-territorialising' one's poetic language, as the two following chapters will show. This chapter aims at unweaving the entangled relationship between the poetry of Elsa Morante and Patrizia Cavalli and their approaches to the 'de-territorialization' of their poetic language. Two levels are involved in this analysis. First, this chapter reconstructs the system of reciprocal influences and external references related to both authors' poetry. Second, it assesses the originality of Morante's and Cavalli's style by exploring their dialogue through two concepts derived from Simone Weil's thought: 'gravity' and 'grace'.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first two sections retrace the genealogical connection between two books: Morante's *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (1968), and Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* (1974). The second section focuses, specifically, on their titles. This will lead to the second core component of my analysis, which investigates the presence and distribution of the two concepts of lightness and gravity in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*. The analysis of the presence and distribution of the two concepts of lightness and gravity moves from the acknowledgement of a Weilian trace in Morante's and Cavalli's texts and engages mainly with the two notions of *grâce* and *pesanteur*. According to Weil, the term *pesanteur* refers to a kind of moral tendency which she defines as 'moral gravity'. Through a reference to the Newtonian formulation of 'gravity', *pesanteur* describes a

moral mechanism which causes things to fall down.[199] In her essay *Oppression and Liberty*, she explains how 'the wretchedness of our condition subjects human nature to a moral form of gravity that is constantly pulling downwards, towards evil, towards a total submission to force.'[200] Conversely, the term *grâce* identifies an opposite and inhuman force that elevates human nature. In this sense, 'grace' is described as an 'unnecessary sense of completeness'.[201] These are defined as forces that are external to the text but have an impact also on the textual level and on the writing process, as I will demonstrate. The third, fourth, and fifth sections comprise a stylistic analysis of the two collections. According to Morante's reception of Weil, the concepts of *grâce* and *pesanteur* – i.e., 'grace' and 'gravity' – are, at first, investigated as the stylistic categories of *levitas* and *gravitas* by reconstructing how these two Latin terms have been used to identify two stylistic trends in poetry. The two categories are employed to stylistically investigate Morante's and Cavalli's 'de-territorialization' of their poetic language, as a process involving the metrics, the semantics, and the structure of the two collections.

3.1. A POETIC ENCOUNTER

Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini, Elsa Morante's second collection of poetry was published in 1968. As she admitted in 1980, *Il mondo* has a central position in her *oeuvre*: 'se dovessi portarmi uno dei miei libri nell'altro mondo, non esiterei un momento, mi porterei *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*.'[202] The publication of this collection forms a watershed in her production. As noted by Marco Carmello, *Il mondo* determines a new direction in

[199] The influence of thermodynamics and Newtonian physics on Weil's thought is analysed by Ann Pirruccello in '"Gravity" in the Thought of Simone Weil', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V. 57, N. 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), pp. 73-93.
[200] Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. Arthur Wills and John Petrie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 166-67.
[201] S. Weil, 'Imagination which fills the void', *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 222.
[202] Costanzo Costantini, 'Vorrei essere un fantasma', *Il Messaggero*, 13 gennaio 1980, p. 3.

Morante's literary production: 'I testi poetici di Morante – *Alibi* e *Il Mondo* – hanno un valore di soglia'.[203] Despite her poetry being constantly overlooked by scholarship, the author reaffirms the centrality of this book. Morante always defined herself a 'poeta' and, from the sixties onwards, a 'poeta di professione',[204] highlighting the relevance of the poetic experience even in her prose writing. According to Morante, poetry is a matter of sensibility through which one may access a new viewpoint over the world.[205] However, poetry cannot be merely reduced to a question of perspectivism. At first, authoring poems is a linguistic act about an extremely specific practice. Here, the message tends not to be as straightforward as in prose. Morante envisions a more appealing way of delivering a message through poetry: that of transporting a critical reading of the world into language.[206] To this extent, poetry is experienced as a hermeneutic and moral exercise: the interpretation is only the very the first stage of this process which also has to involve a practical intervention on the world.

This is even more thought-provoking if we consider that this book was meant to celebrate a new generation of young people, while also electing the 'ragazzini' as its target

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[203] Not only is *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* tied to the novel *La Storia*, as highlighted by Mengaldo, but this last poetic collection marks also the development of new elements of discontinuity in Morante's production: P. V. Mengaldo, 'Spunti per un'analisi linguistica dei romanzi di Elsa Morante', *La tradizione del Novecento* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), pp. 147-149. From this moment on, Morante almost completely abandons the representation of childhood as a mythical and aspirational centre of her novels; soon after the publication of *Il mondo*, she leans towards a more pessimistic vision. This new posture will affect her romantic idea of childhood and its relationship with literary objects and the world. Cfr M. Carmello, '*Alibi* e *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* come soglia', *La poesia di Elsa morante. Una presentazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2019), pp. 25-27.

[204] B. Frabotta, 'I paradossi di Alibi', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, Vol. 21 (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014), pp. 131-132.

[205] For this reason, *Il mondo* could be interpreted as a Leopardian book, as suggested by Cesare Garboli: a private story, a biographical novel, and a lyric poem transported onto a universal scale. C. Garboli, 'La vera Morante in questo libro. Oppressi e felici', *Il Mondo*, 12 September 1971, p. 27. Cfr. also E. Morante, 'Sul Romanzo', *Pro o contro la bomba atomica* (Milan: Adelphi, 1987) pp. 43-73.

[206] Marcello Frixione, 'Linguaggio della poesia e linguaggio ordinario', *RIFL* (2017), V. 11, n. 2, pp. 51-64.

audience.[207] The complex architecture of *Il mondo* unfolds as a political and generational manifesto, while also working as a poetic testament.[208] Pier Paolo Pasolini, one of the very first reviewers of the book, suggested the newness of Morante's book in his newspaper column *Il caos*:

> Un manifesto politico scritto con la grazia della favola, con umorismo, con gioia (ecco perché prima dicevo che se c'è una fatalità nel destino di un libro, essa è voluta dall'autore: la Morante, infatti, non ha voluto sapere che *grazia*, umorismo, gioia sono sentimenti e *strumenti stilistici*, *oggi, incomprensibili*). Ed è dunque arduo per un lettore e un critico comprendere come, invece, il fondo di questo libro sia atrocemente funebre, e contenga tutte le ossessioni del mondo moderno: l'atomica, la morale dei consumi e il profondo desiderio di autodistruzione, non più come flatus vocis o luoghi comuni, ma come elementi assolutamente originali e vissuti personalmente, dentro un sistema linguistico così comunicativo da scandalizzare. [209] [emphasis mine]

From this moment on, poetry was no longer seen as a desultory activity practiced as a personal journal of mourning, as was the case with her first published collection *Alibi* and with the posthumous *Quaderno di Narciso*.[210] On the contrary, *Il mondo* possesses a dialogical and almost philosophical catch on reality. The poet pursues the moral imperative to let the world speak through her voice while also striving to intervene on it. It is not surprising that this book served as a sentimental education especially for younger generations of writers, whose first collections appeared in the seventies.[211]

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[207] As will be observed, the audience's centrality is strongly reaffirmed by the poets included in our case study. On this theme, cfr. A. Berardinelli, F. Cordelli, *Il pubblico della poesia* (RoME: Castelvecchi, 1975), T. Kemeny, C. Viviani*, Il movimento della poesia negli anni Settanta* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1979), and Guido Mazzoni, 'Sulla storia sociale della poesia contemporanea in Italia', *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, n. 8, 2017, p. 1-26.

[208] G. Fofi, 'Introduzione', E. Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), pp. VII-VIII.

[209] P.P. Pasolini, 'Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini, 27 agosto 1968', *Il Caos* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1979), pp. 51-52. Pasolini wants to highlight the uniqueness of Morante's poetic diction and its diversity from the Gruppo 63's linguistic choices; Morante's *Il mondo* is provided as an example of poetic experimentalism that does not embrace forms of linguistic nihilism imposed by the New-Avantgarde.

[210] C. Costantini, 'Vorrei essere un fantasma', p. 3.

[211] Gabriella Sica describes how Morante acted also as a sort of motherly figure over her poetry. She highlights the nature of this linguistic influence by describing it as an illness: 'Noi figlie, noi che siamo state contagiate dalla fascinosa, affettiva, famosa lingua di Elsa, ci accorgiamo che

Being just twenty-one years old when the book came out, Patrizia Cavalli was to be considered one of those young poets. *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* was published six years later, in 1974. Not only Cavalli dedicated her first book of poetry to Morante, who acted as a sort of patroness for her poetry, but this book also showed an attempt to supply different answers to the questions raised by Morante's poetry. This relationship needs to be considered as a form of triple dialogue: 1. between the younger and the older poet; 2. between the younger poet and the literary canon; 3. between the younger poet and contemporary history. The modes and postures[212] of this dialogue allow us to identify an inner 'minorising force'[213] in Morante's and Cavalli's poetry. At the time, poets such as Elsa Morante were already charismatic intellectuals, who exerted a strong influence over younger poets. After the publication of *Il mondo*, Morante herself claimed her allegiance to this 'minorising force': 'sono rimasta muta, sono la minoranza muta'.[214] *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* initiated a genealogical structure, triggering, to put it in Deleuzian terms, a counter-imitative process, in which also Cavalli is involved.[215]

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mentre ci porge il suo straordinario dono con la stessa forza ce ne priva […]. Noi figlie, ci accorgiamo anche di essere comunque in un altro luogo, un altro distante porto', G. Sica, 'Elsa Morante, grande madre del Novecento', *Studi Novecenteschi 47-48*, ed. by C. D'Angeli, G. Magrini (Pisa: Giardini, 1994), p. 184. In the same years, Dario Bellezza writes a book – which ended up being both a pamphlet, a private journal, and a book of poetry, dedicated to his almost oedipal relationship with Morante's poetry: D. Bellezza, 'Congedo', *Donna di paradiso* (Calcata: Edizioni del Giano, 1992), pp. 57-62.

212 My discussion is informed by the notion of 'authorial posture', as theorised by Jérôme Meizoz. According to Meizoz, writers, and poets, in particular, have always tried to conjugate their public image to its literary representations. The poet tends to act as a public figure but also as a fictional persona in his writing. In doing so, the poet impersonates a character based on his artistic production. This leads to a range of representations and staging of the lyric subject's engagement with reality and the world. See J. Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mise en scène modernes de l'auteur* (Geneva: Editions Slaktine, 2007).

213For a complete definition of the internal 'minorising force' acting among several authors of 'minor literatures', Cfr. Paragraph '2.3.1. De-territorializing the Anxiety of Influence'.

214 Cesare De Michelis, 'Premessa', *Studi Novecenteschi,* 47-48, p. 7.

215 Cesare Garboli recognises Cavalli's uniqueness in his introduction to the publication of her first poems in *Paragone,* in 1973: 'Non un caso interessante ma un autore da ammirare. A chi somiglia? Solo a lei, naturalmente. Ma nessuna vocazione nasce da sola, e nessun linguaggio si forma da sé. Non si spiegherebbe lo stile oscuro e lucente della Cavalli, e quella ricchezza, appariscente, anche da pochi versi […] se non esistessero, vicino a lei, due poeti che le sono,

Cavalli arrived in Rome between 1968 and 1969 to start her degree in philosophy at La Sapienza, University of Rome. In several interviews, she describes this period as the beginning of a new life, an artistic and social rebirth. Moving from the 'minor' and provincial city of Todi, it took time to her to enjoy the life in the capital. In Rome, Cavalli experienced the feeling of being out of time, pretending to wait for someone every morning, while missing classes. Frequently, she finished the stipend given by her family halfway through the month and she subsequently had to return to Todi with a constant feeling of missing out, of waiting for someone, for an encounter that could turn her life upside down.[216]

When a close friend from Todi introduced her to a group of American Fulbright scholars, young historians, and writers, her desire finally came true. Cavalli rapidly became close with this group of young American intellectuals; she started to have dinner with them every night, without being able to speak a word of English at first.[217] In 1972, an encounter changed her life: Cavalli was introduced to Morante by the group of American scholars, probably during one of those numerous dinners.[218] In that period, Morante was very close to several American cultural circles in Rome, thanks also to her relationship with painter Bill Morrow. Cavalli had encountered not only poets of the beat generation, but also a group of artists close to the avant-gardist *Living Theatre* in

almeno indirettamente, maestri: Elsa Morante e Sandro Penna.' P. Cavalli, 'Sei Poesie', with an introduction by C. Garboli, *Paragone*, n. 282, pp. 73-75.

[216] Annalena Benini, 'Le mie poesie sono respiri e io respiro per trovare le parole', *Il Foglio*, 21 August 2017.

[217] Ibid.

[218] As reported by David Rivard in a review of the English translation of Cavalli's Poems, 'she came to Rome in the late 60's to study philosophy, started writing poems and fell in love with some American ex-pats who introduced her to the Italian novelist Elsa Morante.' David Rivard, 'Foreign Body: Gottfried Benn, Patrizia Cavalli, and the Situation of Translation', *Numéro Cinq*, Vol. VI, N.1, January 2015 (http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2015/01/07/foreign-bodies-gottfried-benn-patrizia-cavalli-and-the-situation-of-translation-david-rivard/: accessed on 8 May 2021). See also Pasqualina Deriu, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Racconti di poesia* (Milan: CUEM, 1998), p. 22.

Rome, thanks to the mediation of Pasolini:[219] the director Peter Hartman (who probably also introduced the actor Carlo Cecchi to Morante's circle), as well as the actors such as Rufus Collins, and poets such as Gerard Malanga.

Cavalli rapidly managed to join this circle of artists and elicit Morante's curiosity. She effortlessly became one of the centres of those dinners by conquering a solid place in Morante's pantheon of friendships.[220] The episode enters Cavalli's last collection of poetry, *Vita meravigliosa.* In the poem titled *Con Elsa in Paradiso*, Cavalli brings back to life one of the conversations had with Elsa and the other attendees of those banquets. To the question about whom Morante was willing to bring with her in paradise, she used to refuse everyone, except for one person: Patrizia.

> Elsa ogni tanto ci portava in Paradiso.
> E a chi chiedeva: «A me mi porti?» «No»,
> lei subito, decisa, «Non c'entri niente tu.
> Tu non ci puoi venire in Paradiso».
> «E allora chi ci porti?» insistevano i delusi,
> «Patrizia ce la porti?» E Elsa: «Sí,
> Patrizia può venire in Paradiso».
> […]
> Ma io – a parte i gatti, che stavano già lí
> ad aspettarci – ero la prima, sempre,

---

[219] *The Living Theatre* is an American theatre company funded in 1947. The history of The Living Theatre begins when Judith Malina and Julian Beck meet each other in 1943. Their first plays were in the living room of their apartment at 789 West End Ave., across the street from Julian's parents' apartment. Irving Beck, Julian's father, paid the rent. They produced *Childish Jokes* by Paul Goodman, *Ladies Voices* by Gertrude Stein, *He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No* by Brecht, and *The Dialogue of The Manikin and The Young Man* by Garcia Lorca. In 1961, *The Living Theatre* came to Italy from the very first time, presenting Gelber's *The Connection* at the Teatro Parioli in Rome. Between 1964 and 1970, the company began its wandering across Europe, with several plays presented in Rome. This is the time when Pier Paolo Pasolini met the company, in 1964. Gian Maria Annovi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini-Performing Authorship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). Cfr. also, John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York, Grove Press, 1995).

[220] Carlo Cecchi and Ginevra Bompiani both mention the names that entered Morante's circles in those years: 'erano Pasolini, Penna, Guttuso, l'attore Paolo Graziosi, Grazia Cherchi, Patrizia Cavalli. Si incontravano a casa di Elsa Morante, poi pranzavano fuori a Roma o in campagna, a Trevignano'; 'una frequentazione intensa in compagnia di Patrizia Cavalli, Carlo Cecchi, Cesare Garboli e pochi altri.' Pico Floridi, 'Sceglieva per me gli autori da portare sul palcoscenico. Intervista a Carlo Cecchi', *la Repubblica*, 26 March 2002; Paolo Di Stefano, 'Letteratura stupefacente. Intervista a Ginevra Bompiani', *Corriere della Sera*, 2 October 2015.

la prescelta. Non mi chiedevo il motivo
di questa preferenza: da un lato
mi pareva naturale, dall'altro
pensavo fosse meglio
non mettersi a indagare. Del resto,
io a quei a quei tempi venivo ammessa ovunque:
ai pranzi, al cinema, a teatro, andavo
sempre bene con chiunque. Neanche
di questo mi chiedevo la ragione,
forse per questo avevo l'ammissione. […][221]

In his recent intellectual self-portrait, Giorgio Agamben remembers how 'nel circolo di Elsa si entrava immediatamente o si veniva respinti'.[222] The 'elective affinity' between Morante – who, at that stage of her life, was famous for being awfully selective with her friendships – and Cavalli seems natural but not based on common literary interests. As declared by Cavalli herself, she would disclose her artistic calling only once Morante would force her to do so. As a matter of fact, poetry was still a private exercise for Cavalli at this stage. Morante had already foreseen in Cavalli what had not been exhibited yet: her natural disposition for the poetic language functioned, according to Morante, as a sublimated form of reality. Between the end of 1972 and 1973, Morante eventually took the lead and forced Cavalli to show her the poems she had been writing.

As described on several occasions, Cavalli kept pushing the deadline forward, while rewriting everything in the hope not to make a bad impression on Morante and to lose access to her private paradise. Cavalli stresses here the 'anxiety of influence' she felt during that period, defining her early work 'literary, imitative, and non-existent'.[223] A statement such as this one testifies to a genealogical connection between Morante's and

[221] P. Cavalli, *Vita meravigliosa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2020), pp. 15-17.
[222] Giorgio Agamben, *Autoritratto nello studio* (Milan: nottetempo, 2017), p. 162.
[223] G. Alhadeff, 'Afterword', P. Cavalli, *My Poems Won't Change the World* (London: Penguin, 2018), pp. 135-36.

her own poetry.[224] Elicited by the dialogue with Morante, Cavalli even compares the first encounter with her inner voice to an almost mystical exercise of attention:[225]

> Mi misi in ascolto, come in preghiera, sì, fu un esercizio, in un certo senso, morale. Riuscii alla fine a consegnarle un gruppetto di poesie brevi (nella brevità c'erano meno rischi, davo il minimo di informazioni). Mi chiamò dopo neanche un'ora dicendomi: 'Sono felice, Patrizia, sei una poeta'.[226]

This moment prompted not only the beginning of a poetic exchange between the two poets but also Cavalli's attempt to overcome Morante as a poetic model to imitate. An important moment in this dialogue is Morante's introduction for Cavalli, which was to be attached to the very first Einaudi edition, in 1974.[227] In the end, Einaudi preferred not to include Morante's introduction, considering it a too direct and an appropriation of Cavalli's poetry. The tone and the semantics used reveal the true nature of this draft. Morante describes Cavalli's poetry through a series of adjectives that could be easily adapted to her own poetry. In this text, we find the word 'poeta' instead of 'poetessa', used to render the poet's role absolute by avoiding any gendered traits. Secondly, the poet is described as the one offering her voice to the world ('il poeta è chi

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[224] As Lucamante highlighted, it is even possible to identify a Morantian posture in contemporary poetry: 'Patrizia Cavalli in poesia, ed altri, seguono un filone morantiano che talvolta si esplicita in un omaggio intertestuale all'arte della grande Elsa'. S. Lucamante, *Elsa Morante e l'eredità proustiana* (Fiesole: Edizioni Cadmo, 1998), p. 21.

[225] Morante and Cavalli share a pervasive use of the word 'attention'. The word is often linked both to poetry writing and the representation of reality. This specific use explicitly echoes Simone Weil's thought whose writings are eagerly read by Morante and seem also to reach Cavalli's own vocabulary, as testified by words such as 'esercizio di consapevolezza', 'mi misi in ascolto, in preghiera', and 'esercizio morale'.

[226] G. Alhadeff, 'Afterword', p. 136.

[227] The text is part of the Fondo Morante and preserved at the National Library of Rome in two drafts (ARC 52 II 1.15). In the first draft, Morante wanted to write an introduction, an essay of 'critica militante', but also an attempt at self-philology in a text that could also be considered a self-commentary. As highlighted by Giuliana Zagra, this is the kind of text in which one could expect to find a discussion of Morante's poetics: 'L'autrice non ha lasciato una trattazione sistematica della sua poetica; la sua visione si è espresso piuttosto nelle pieghe di scritture quasi sempre brevi e apparentemente marginali, come prefazioni, rubriche, conferenze, lettere ai giornali.'The second draft of the document testifies an attempt at setting the tone of the overall introduction on a lower level. G. Zagra, *La tela favolosa. Carte e libri sulla scrivania di Elsa Morante* (Rome: Carocci, 2019), pp. 10-11.

parla al mondo trascrivendo il linguaggio dell'universo'): the act of writing is just a matter of transcription filtered through the poet's subjective posture. Morante reads Cavalli's title as an oxymoron hovering between mockery and self-diminishment: the impossibility of intervening on the world through poetry would be 'una falsità perché ogni parola di poesia rappresenta il mondo'.

3.2. WORD/WORLD: THE TITLE AS A SEMIOTIC THRESHOLD

The titles reveal the interconnection of these two works. The shared reference to 'il mondo' suggests the same relationship between writing and reality. A title does not only suggest the content and tone of the poetry collection[228] but, as is the case here, may connect the three corners of the 'triangle of reference', to put it in Richards and Ogden's words.[229] These three elements are: the referent – also known as 'world'–, the symbol – which stands for the 'word', the textual dimension –, and the reference – or the 'writer's thought'. In both titles, the poets make a similar word-choice by pairing two phrases that concern the referent – 'il mondo', addressed in both titles – and the symbol.

On the symbolic side, a first difference between the two collections needs to be observed: in Morante's title, the symbolic point of reference is represented by 'i ragazzini', the 'kids', while in Cavalli's title the symbolic referent is substituted by 'le

[228] The title and the core text constitute a pair which is deeply intertwined. Besides cases of surrealist parody or word-pun, their relationship is usually characterised by similar word-choices. In this case, both titles are formed by a long and articulated sentence, which is passive in the case of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and active in *Le mie poesie non salveranno il mondo*. Nevertheless, these titles are unusual for books of poetry published in the same period in which authors usually prefer to include no more than two nominal elements and avoid using any verbs (i.e. *Gli strumenti umani*, *Variazioni Belliche*, *Nel magma*, *Canzonette mortali*). P. V. Mengaldo, 'Titoli poetici novecenteschi', *La tradizione del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), pp. 3-27.

[229] The original structure of the triangle of reference was theorised by Ogden and Richards in a book entitled *The Meaning of Meaning* in 1923. This sets forth the really beginning of semiotics as the branch of linguistics meant study of the relationship between the signifier, the signified, and real objects.

poesie', 'the poems'. This is only the first discontinuity. Morante's title excludes, for instance, the reference – at least from this liminal threshold. In this very case, a first-person subject is not even grammatically mentioned: the use of the past participle 'salvato', 'saved', allows the author to disappear by putting 'the kids' as 'complemento d'agente' and, thus, favouring the symbolic element of the sentence. This syntactical structure also implies ideas of plurality and of choral intervention on the 'world'. These ideas are absent in Cavalli's title which is centred on the lyric subject instead. In Cavalli's case, everything is connected to the subjective dimension of the adjective 'mie': the poems written by the reference-author will not be able to intervene on the referent-world. The use of the future, along with the negation 'non', makes a clear statement regarding the poet's task and the collection's aim: poetry aims to represent the outer dimension of the world without any sort of direct intervention. Even if the authorial approaches towards the extratextual are characterised by a certain degree of complementarity, this relationship must be read through a system of internal antitheses. What is the meaning behind the use of the word 'world'? How did these poets, for instance, approach reality through their poetic word?

For Morante, the world coincides with the new generation, the 'felici pochi' – 'the happy few'. According to Morante, this tag should not be limited to the newest generation but should also apply to those who are able to preserve the lightness and purity of creative thinking at a later stage of their life.[230] Morante provides a description of her own definition of 'felici pochi' in the introductory section of the song:

[230] The reference to the 'happy few' deals also with a systematisation of the category of 'minority' within *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. Indeed, Morante initiates a dialogue with a 'minority' defined through a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one. In one of the first addresses toward the 'Infelici Molti', Morante asks them why this category of people is not even touched by a 'minorising force': 'E voi, poveri Molti, / figli infelici e stolti / di padri infelici e stolti, / perché non vi lasciate voi minorare?' E. Morante, *Il mondo salvato dai* ragazzini (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), p. 153. Subsequently, she foretells a future time in which the condition of 'minority' experienced by the 'Felici Pochi' will be reversed: 'Non è detta / che prima ancora del giorno del Giudizio / quei pazzi F.P. non vi mettano in minoranza. […] Sarebbe una magnifica stravaganza / di

? Che significa F.P.? Si tratta di un'abbreviazione
per Felici Pochi
? E chi sono i Felici Pochi? Spiegarlo non è facile,
perché i Felici Pochi sono indescrivibili.
Benché pochi,
ne esistono di ogni razza sesso e nazione
epoca età società condizione
e religione.
Di poveri e di ricchi
(però, se nascono poveri, loro, in generale,
tali rimangono, e se nascono ricchi, presto si fanno poveri)
di giovani e di vecchi (però
difficilmente loro arrivano in tempo per farsi vecchi)
di belli e di brutti (a vero dire, loro
pure quando siano volgarmente intesi brutti,
in REALTA' sono belli; ma la REALTA'
è di rado visibile alla gente… […] (MSR, 132)

As Morante explains, happiness is a way of questioning the subjective experience of the world – which is rendered through the word 'la REALTA', written in capital letters – by acknowledging its complexity without remaining corrupted. Morante's conceptualisation of reality, which is influenced by her reading of Simone Weil, especially Weil's *Cahiers* (a book she read so often the pages are in tatters), is based on the imaginary and on how fables, fantasies, mystery, games, and magic serve to illuminate the real world. 'Realtà' and 'mondo', therefore, collide in most cases: the former could be read as a personal, subjective, and even hallucinatory interpretation of the latter. Poetry implements this hermeneutical task. For Morante, reality is the world transformed by imagination. As such, it is invisible. Happiness and the Weilian concept of grace, as intellectual virtues, are bestowed on very few people, who can nurture and further continue this dialogue with the world even at later stages of their lives. Youth cannot be considered enough. In the second text of the cycle, which holds a prominent position and is to gain a theoretical value within the overall volume, *La canzone dei felici pochi*, Morante provides a list of names

scavalcare tutti insieme i tempi brutti / in un allegro finale: FELICI TUTTI!'; E. Morante, *Il mondo*, p. 154. Morante's definition shows evident similarities with the notion of 'becoming', as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille Plateux*.

of people considered to be part of the 'happy few': Baruch Spinoza, Simone Weil, Arthur Rimbaud, Giordano Bruno, Giambattista Bellini, Giovanna D'Arco.[231] These are but a few examples. Morante adds almost anonymous characters in the last section of *Il mondo.*[232] Being an 'intellectual virtue', happiness can lead to a state of *grace* through which the 'happy few' can embrace and understand the problematic vastness of the world: 'La vostra benedizione è conoscere / che pure il desiderio del paradiso è servile. / Il gioco è divino perché non c'è nessuna promessa / o speranza di guadagno.'

In the poet's description, the world is dominated by irritational fears, complacent hypocrisy, and conflicts. Several poems, for instance, describe historical events connected to the Second World War and the Holocaust. Morante discusses the concept of 'gravity' by sketching the world's constitutive depth, historical contradictions, and tragedies. These events are often mirrored by the verbal violence used in their delivery. Only poetry could contrast these outcomes. From this gnoseological standpoint, poetry provides an answer to the intricacies of the world by mirroring them linguistically. *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* represents Morante's attempt at an almost infernal descent into the abyss of poetic language.[233] This elicits the adoption of a plurivocal viewpoint, which also models the multi-centric structure of the *Il mondo.* For instance, the author is just

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[231] Morante lists the name of those included among the 'happy few' by attaching a chart to the section *Canzoni popolari.* E. Morante, 'Introduzione Esplicativa', *Il mondo*, p. 135.

[232] The list provided in the introductory song to the cycle of the 'happy few' is expanded by the poet with other names of fictional, mythical, or even real characters. Bill Morrow, the protagonist of the cycle of elegies at the very beginning of the book, is described with similar adjectives as the ones attributed to the 'happy few'. 'La Carlottina', the protagonist of the last song, is defined as one of the 'happy few'. The song is a fable-like transfiguration of Nazism: the young protagonist manages to sabotage the Nazi plan by wearing a yellow star dwstined to the members of the Jewish community. This act of resistance is perpetrated through a childish game and a contagious burst of joy: 'Certi attacchi d'allegria sono uguali alle note musicali. / Che non possono restare sole: d'istinto una nota s'attacca a un'altra nota / Per l'accordo; e un accordo ne vuole un altro e un altro e un altro, e vanno al tema; / e allo sviluppo; e al ritornello.' E. Morante, 'Addio', *Il mondo*, pp. 5-21; 'Canzone finale della stella gialla, detta pure La Carlottina', pp. 237-243.

[233] 'Lo so / che l'incarnazione del figlio dell'uomo […] / si contorce come un pupazzo / nelle illustrazioni sabbatiche dell'inferno.' E. Morante, Il *mondo*, p. 140.

one of the many voices participating in what can be interpreted as a tragic chorus: not only the already mentioned 'happy few', but also Oedipus, the beloved Bill Morrow, and various other characters, both fictional and real. Morante, while still speaking from a prominent position, aims to become one of 'felici pochi' by addressing these characters in various sections of the book and letting them speak through their own voices. The unity of the book stems from the thematic and stylistic coherence of Morante's voice, the very centrepiece for the overall poetic collection. Even if the lyric subject imitates the voice of different characters – Oedipus, Antigone, La Mutria, Bill Morrow, La Carlottina –, Morante's voice remains the very centre of the whole collection.

Cavalli takes a different approach to the relationship between 'world' and 'word'. *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* opposes the impossibility of intervening on the world through poetry. In the title, the negation states an impossibility which also represents a theoretical starting point. Despite being separated from the world, the lyric subject can still speak through the text. This produces a private revolution which sets the tone for the overall collection. In *Le mie poesie*, there are several descriptions of indoor landscapes, stifling corridors, and empty rooms. The house is an outpost whereby Cavalli can propel her vision of the world. As a result, an inner movement of reduction shapes Cavalli's work. However, this subjective burden – 'mi dicono che le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo' (LMP 5) – is constitutive of Cavalli's noetic approach. The use of reported speech in that very first poem does not result in a negation of the poetic discourse, or even in a critique of its value. Cavalli still considers poetry an important instrument for investigating reality.

If we compare Cavalli's aim to Morante's one, Cavalli tackles the same questions but reached different results. While Morante's investigation is stimulated by the world itself – by replacing the lyric subject's voice with the voice of other characters –, in Cavalli's collection, we must notice that the world acts on the lyric subject through a

series of stimuli. If the authorial voice cannot intervene on the world, it can still offer a reflection on the present and the collocation of the subject within the world. With this aim, Cavalli responded to Morante's tension towards wholeness by describing scattered 'moments of being'.

We can identify two main reasons behind this different approach. First, Cavalli does not trust the centrality of 'happiness' as a key-concept. In a poem included in a later collection, *L'io singolare proprio mio*, Cavalli writes: 'Quasi sempre chi è contento è anche volgare; / c'è nella contentezza un pensiero / che ha fretta e non ha tempo per guardare / ma passa via compatto e maniacale / e reca oltraggio volgendosi a chi muore […]'.[234] Not only is happiness vulgar, but it also entails the idea of lack of attention and misinterpretation of reality. In the following lines, she further develops this metaphor: '[...] Chi è fermo nel dolore non frequenti / gli allegri e disinvolti corridoi / ma solo i passi lenti dei suoi uguali.'[235] Empathy might occur, but the poet claimed the uniqueness of her feelings. The singularity of each experience of the world is opposed to the state of grace shared by the 'happy few'.

Second, Morante's attempt to outline a sense of gravity offsets Cavalli's linguistic and formal lightness. For Morante, the tension towards 'happiness' – and thus 'grace' – must be an immersive experience, a katabasis within the gravity of language. Cavalli, again, pursues a different path. In *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, she outlines the harshness of the world using a lighter poetic style, characterised by a dissimulated levity and musicality. Often, the actual nature of the world emerges as epiphanic and inconstant 'moments of being':[236]

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[234] P. Cavalli, 'L'io singolare proprio mio', *Poesie 1974-1992* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 237.

[235] Ibid. p. 237.

[236] According to Morante's description, grace is an unpredictable force. Cavalli's poetry seems to perfectly fit into one of the first definitions of grace given by Morante in her short story *Un frivolo anedotto sulla Grazia*. In Morante's own words, one cannot willingly seek for grace. Conversely, one has to welcome its inconstant manifestations: 'Questa è la legge: alcuni sudano e si insanguinano i piedi per toccare la Grazia, e diventano rochi per chiamarla, ma inutilmente,

Quando ricerco il suono
dell'anello contro la ringhiera,
mi risponde una vertigine.

(… allora senza più anelli
le mie mani tornate al primo grido
della nascita, fasciate
della sola ebrezza di potersi
posare sul bracciolo di una sedia,
sulle ginocchia incrociate). (LMP 28)

Even if the dialogue with the world takes different directions, both authors constantly allude to the opposition of lightness and heaviness. On the one hand, Morante depicts a world in which lightness, grace, and happiness function as noetic engines. The language used in this description is characterised by a veil of gravity, determining the linguistic nuances of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. On the other hand, Cavalli conveys the gravity of her depiction of the world through light stylistic choices.[237] As will be shown in the next two paragraphs, this linguistic overtone – which results in a clear opposition between gravity and lightness in style – affects the metre chosen, the semantics, as well as the overall structure of both books.

3.3. THE SEMANTICS OF GRAVITY AND GRACE

Gravity and lightness are deeply rooted in Morante's and Cavalli's poetic works. Morante's reception of Weil's thought played a fundamental role in shaping *Il mondo*. Morante started approaching Weil's books in the fifties. Weil wrote a series of journals

perché la Grazia li rifiuta. Altri invece che vivono dimentichi e vaghi come foglie sull'acqua, e non si curano della Grazia e magari la respingono, in ogni momento sono vegliati e baciati da lei, e se la ritrovano al capezzale al giorno della morte.' E. Morante, 'Il gioco segreto', *Opere* ed. by C. Garboli and C. Cecchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), V. 1, p. 1671.

[237] Cesare Garboli firstly recognises the Manichean nature of Cavalli's poetic style. He describes this antithesis as 'stile oscuro e lucente' in the introduction to her first six poems published on *Paragone*. C. Garboli, 'Nota introduttiva' in P. Cavalli, 'Sei poesie', *Paragone*, n. 282, 1973, pp. 73-75.

in which the two concepts of 'gravity' and 'grace' appeared as the core element of her philosophy.[238] Although Weil's preoccupations are primarily ethical, moral, and mystical, the *Cahiers* also possess aesthetic implications that are echoed in Morante's work: 'Creation is made of the downward movement of gravity, of upward movement of grace and downward movement of grace doubled in its intensity'.[239] In the previous paragraphs, we identified a genealogical connection between *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*. In this section, we will appreciate how this connection allows us to retrace these concepts in Morante's *Il mondo* and to verify how they have transited into Cavalli's *Le mie poesie.* From this standpoint, it will be possible to employ the two stylistic categories of *gravitas* and *levitas* to analyse and assess Morante's and Cavalli's 'minoritarian' use of a new poetic language.

A question has still to be answered. What do the categories of *gravitas* and *levitas* entail? Outside the literary field, many writers employed these concepts to define a peculiar subjective posture of a sentient being characterised by 'gravity', on the one hand, and by 'lightness' or even 'grace', on the other. The pair of 'gravity' and 'grace' suggests a certain degree of complementarity, with the first item functioning as a complement for the second, while the two are in opposition.

Gravitas and *levitas* were first theorised in the context of classical literature. In the Republican period, *gravitas* was listed as one of the Roman virtues along with *pietas*, *severitas*, *dignitas* and *virtus*.[240] But the meaning of *gravitas* is not to be limited to morality only. In fact, both philosophical and grammatical treatises illustrate this concept. When it comes to turn these concepts into stylistic categories, the scholarship formed by

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[238] Simone Weil's books owned by Morante are heavily annotated. This reveals Morante's intensive reading of Weil's journals and essays before she had started writing *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini.* Cfr. also G. Zagra, 'Nella libreria', *La tela favolosa* (Rome: Carocci, 2019), p. 110

[239] S. Weil, 'Imagination which fills the void', *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 18.

[240] Brian Harding, *Augustine, and Roman Virtue* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 94.

classical authors may help. According to Cicero, *gravitas* defines 'the solemnity, majesty characterising a speaker or a writer and his language'. Several definitions of a 'grave style' can be found in Cicero's *Orator*[241] – pertaining to oratory – and in Horace's *Ars poetica*[242] – pertaining to poetry. It is interesting to notice that *levitas*, a less institutionalised concept, is never applied to poetry. However, we may find a description of this concept again in Cicero's *Orator*[243] and in the treatises of several *grammatici* such as Varro[244] and Quintilian.[245] *Levitas* stands, here, for 'the smoothness of sound and the absence of harshness in expression'.[246]

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241 Cicero introduces the concept of *gravitas* while discussing the stylistic peculiarities of some Greek philosophers and orators, defining Plato as 'the first writers and speakers in dignity and grace' in the *Orator* (CIC. Orat 62-64). Yet, the Sophists' style cannot be compared to the gravity of Plato's speeches; indeed, the former lacks in the 'equipment of words or phrases that catch the popular fancy', 'it is not arranged in rhythmical periods, but is loose in its structure', 'there is no anger in it, no hatred, no ferocity, no pathos, no shrewdness'. Cicero, *Orator*, trans. by H. M Hubbel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 351-53.

242 Horace introduces the concept of *gravitas* while discussing certain archaic tendencies in contemporary Latin poetry in the second book of *Epistles* (Hor. Ep. 2.I.50-59): a marked preference for what is old pervades, in Horace's opinion, the Roman literary world and some archaic poets are imitated also by his contemporaries. Among them, Horace lists Terence and Caecilius by pointing out their opposition in terms of style: Caecilius' *gravitas* and Terence's *ars*. The two nouns are oddly juxtaposed, as *gravitas* looks as if it calls for the contrast with something like *lenitas*, 'lightness', which is not actually *ars*, 'skill/craft'. However, Horace does not give any further context. F. Skutsch identifies the context with that of a fragment of Varro in which Caecilius is praised for the shaping of his dramatic action, designed to arouse emotions in contrast with the character-study of Terence. Horace, *On Poetry. Epistels Book II: The Letters to Augustus and Florus. Text and Commentary*, ed. by C.O. Brink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 110-11.

243 Cicero, *Orator*, pp. 353-54.

244 *Levitas* is discussed by Varro in his treatise *De Lingua Latina* (L. 5.133): the concept of *levitas* is listed within is description of 'smooth sounds' produced by the elimination of liquid consonant (/r/ and /l/) within the diachronic evolution of certain Latin words. Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, ed. by G.P. Goold, trans. by R.G. Kent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), vol. I, pp. 126-27.

245 In Quintilian's *Institutiones* (Inst. 8.3.6), *levitas* is discussed by referencing the already mentioned passage of Cicero's *Orator*. In this context, *levitas* has a negative connotation when applied to oratory. When an orator organises his speech, his words shall not be perceived as 'light': 'however (let me say this again) this ornament must be manly, strong, and chaste. It must not favour effeminate smoothness or the false colouring of cosmetics.' Quintilian, *Institutiones*, ed. and trans. by D.A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 342-43.

246 'Levitas' in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. by H. Cancik, H. Schneider (Leiden: Brill, 2005), V. 4, p. 323.

In narrowing down these stylistic definitions to the field of Italian literature, we are left in much more uncertainty. While the stylistic category of *gravitas* enjoyed a large fortune during the 16th century, mainly thanks to the Petrarchist tradition,[247] that of *levitas* is still significantly unexplored. The definitions given by Calvino in *Lezioni Americane* are not, in this sense, of much help. A recent article by Pietro Benzoni[248] tries to adapt the category of *levitas* to contemporary literature, failing to offer a phenomenology of the concept.

3.3.1. THE SEMANTICS OF LIGHTNESS AND GRAVITY

Before evaluating the stylistic function of these concepts, we must verify their presence within Morante's and Cavalli's texts. *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* represents a fundamental watershed in Morante's life and career. *Il mondo* was written in the early years of the second half of the sixties and then published in 1968. In the sixties, Morante had already left Moravia and started a new life in Rome. For her, this is also a period of mourning due to the deaths of her lover, the American painter Bill Morrow, in 1962, and of her mother Irma, in 1963. In 1962, she turned fifty. From this moment on, Morante underwent a new metamorphosis: 'Elsa cominciò a cambiare – in Cesare Garboli's words –, subendo una metamorfosi anche fisica... Diventò un'altra persona; e smarrì, o uccise in sé, la gioia della sua grazia'.[249] As Morante herself confessed, 'Vuoi sapere qual è il mio vero difetto? Proprio quello a cui nessuno pensa. Ma io so benissimo qual è... È la *pesanteur*'.[250] The term *pesanteur,* here, gains a precise connotation: not only does it overlap with the concept of *gravitas,* but it is also a precise reference to Simone Weil's thought.

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247 Petrarchist *gravitas* is thoroughly studied by Andrea Afribo, *Teoria e prassi della gravitas nel Cinquecento* (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 2002).

248 Pietro Benzoni, *Levitas versus gravitas. Forme della leggerezza a confronto* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2012).

249 C. Garboli, 'Prefazione', E. Morante, *Opere* (Milano: Mondadori, 1987), p. XXII.

250 Ib. p. XXII.

In those years, Morante approached the reading of Weil's *Cahiers* as well as the book *La pesanteur e la grâce,*[251] a volume consisting of a selection of some of the material included in the *Cahiers* edited and published by Gustave Thibon in 1948.[252]

According to Weil, 'gravity' is the force that drags us down and produces 'bassesse'. This downward drive is not negative. 'Bassesse' is a fundamental component of both the forces of gravity and lightness. While being characterised by an 'ascending movement',[253] 'grace' can elicit 'a descending without gravity'.[254] Even when these two forces are experienced independently, the subject is influenced by both gravity and grace. As will be shown by a close reading of Morante's and Cavalli's texts, the two authors tend to fluctuate between the two poles of gravity and grace. To put it in Deleuzian terms, gravity and grace do not produce a state but a movement. This movement produces what we have defined as a 'becoming' – one of the notions primarily structuring women's writing.[255]

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[251] The title *La pesanteur e la grâce* is decided by Gustave Thibon who edited and published this selection of Weil's notebooks. In doing so, Thibon tried to organise systematically the encyclopaedical structure of Weil's *Cahiers*. The book was published after Weil's death and followed by an introduction written by Thibon himself: S. Weil, *La pesanteur e la grâce, avec une introduction par Gustave Thibon* (Paris: Plon, 1948).

[252] Morante owned the series of *Cahiers* and the essay *La pesanteur e la grâce* and are now preserved at Morante's fund in the National Library of Rome. Published by the French editor Plon, the volumes were purchased by Morante between the end of the forties and the very beginning of the fifties: S. Weil, *La pesanteur e la grâce, avec une introduction par Gustave Thibon* (Paris: Plon, 1948), *Cahiers*, V. 1, 2, 3 (Paris: Plon, 1951, 1953, 1956). The presence of the French edition of the texts in Morante's library is also particularly interesting, considering that the *Cahiers* would have been translated and published by Adelphi only in the eighties: S. Weil, *Quaderni*, ed. by G. Gaeta (Milan: Adelphi, 1982, vol. 1; 1985, vol. 2; 1988, vol. 3). This witnesses an early circulation of Weil's texts in Italy – other important poetz who worked on Weil's texts directly on the original French were, for instance, Cristina Campo and Franco Fortini. Morante's volumes are heavily annotated; this can testify Morante's intensive reading of Weil's journals and essays in the same period she started working on *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini.* Cfr. also G. Zagra, 'Nella libreria', *La tela favolosa* (Rome: Carocci, 2019), p. 110.

[253] S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 13.

[254] Ibid. p. 13.

[255] G. Deleuze, *Mille Plateux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 133-34. Cfr. Paragraph 2.3.1. 'Writing on Difference: Becoming-woman'.

These notions had a profound influence on Morante's following works.[256] *Il mondo* inaugurates a new phase. As Gabriella Sica noticed, Morante was completely exposed to the fragility of the state of grace characterising her first books:

> Si era provata in tutti i modi per risanare la ferita originaria da cui si sentiva attraversata, e a spostare le parole verso una forza vitale ascendente invece che verso la gravità, ma alla fine era arrivata alla convinzione che l'anima è fatta di materiale pesante.[257]

In truth, the concepts of *pesanteur* and *gravitas* are not only pervasive in *Il mondo,* but they also structure the whole book. Morante's experience of the world through writing was central to an open-ended dialogue between life and poetry. This connects to the language's inadequacy in rendering faithfully the nature of the world as a place dominated by violence and silence. In Weil's words:

> The fundamental analogy between the world and thought is the relationship between the high and the low depending on gravity. Gravity is the outstanding example of force — and is there, strictly speaking, any other kind? Everything suggesting an upward_movement suggests an increase in value.[258]

The poet must deal with a sense of separateness from grace and lightness – which is typical of poetry and youth. Morante tackles this foundational problem through the creation of a new poetic language. In this sense, the poet is offered a linguistic solution: she must openly engage with this *gravitas*, as if it were an object of writing itself. This can be done by introducing elements of disequilibrium within language, while also testing its mimetic abilities. In one word, this operation can be carried out through a 'de-territorialization' of the language of lyric poetry. To this extent, *Il mondo* stands for a sort

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[256] In the collection of short stories *Lo scialle andaluso* and the novel *L'isola di Arturo,* the lightness of youth is still considered an answer to *pesanteur*. *Lo scialle andaluso* and *L'isola di Arturo* were respectively published in 1963 and 1957. The short stories collected in *Lo scialle andaluso* covers a period that comprised between 1935 – the year in which 'Il ladro di lumi' was written – and 1951 – 'Lo scialle andaluso'. E. Morante, *Lo scialle andaluso* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963); E. Morante, *L'isola di Arturo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957).

[257] G. Sica, ' Elsa Morante, grande madre del Novecento', p. 180.

[258] S, Weil, *The Notebooks*, p. 71.

of *descensio ad inferos* of the poet in a territory where poetry, grace, and *levitas* are denied and absent. Even after this inevitable katabasis, the poet can still experience an upward movement towards grace and lightness. The references to the impossibility of overcoming the current *impasse* are frequent and scattered across the whole book. In the following two excerpts taken from the sections *La sera domenicale* and *Addio*, for instance, the semantics of *levitas* is constantly opposed to the semantics of *gravitas*.

> […] O preghiera trafitta dall'elevazione,
> io rivendico per me la colpa dell'offesa
> nel corpo vile.
> Stàmpami nella mente malcresciuta
> la tua grazia. Io ti ricevo. (MSR 71)

> Forse attraverso una perdizione? o una grazia?
> o in quale veleno? in quale droga?
> forse nella ragione? forse nel sonno?
> La tua morte è una voce di sirena. […] (MSR 6-7)

In the first text, the prayer is wounded by the process of elevation and forced to be imprisoned in a bodily matter ('nel corpo vile'), while, in the second text, grace is mistaken with several other heavy objects: a poison, some drugs, reason, and eventually sleep. The closing line condenses this opposition in a powerful oxymoron: 'La tua morte è una voce di sirena.'

Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo is located at the other extreme of this dialectic but it is, nevertheless, influenced by the same opposition between gravity and grace. The two collections move from the same theoretical assumption: Morante's reading of Weil passes directly into Cavalli's poetry. Nevertheless, Cavalli interprets this opposition differently. Grace and lightness are the result of the process and not a starting point or a lost condition, as is the case with Morante. In *Le mie poesie* too, lightness consists of a tension and of a forward movement which is often prevented or even negated by the poet even in her later works. Cavalli's tension towards lightness elicits a very peculiar tone, characterised only by minor fluctuations towards gravity in this very first collection

and even beyond.[259] In the opening poem, Cavalli herself reports a fictional conversation with Morante, setting the tone of the overall collection:

> Qualcuno mi ha detto
> che certo le mie poesie
> non cambieranno il mondo.
> Io rispondo che certo le mie poesie
> non cambieranno il mondo. (LMP 2)

Whilst acknowledging the existence of a poetic tension towards the representation of the world, Cavalli subsequently steps back: for her, poetry is a matter of representation, but not of direct intervention on the world. This approach leaves room for lightness and grace:

> Ma per favore con leggerezza
> raccontami ogni cosa
> anche la tua tristezza. (LMP 10)

The concept of 'leggerezza' corresponds also to a movement of elevation that can be both oriented upwards and downwards. This is symbolised through different images and metaphors that echo *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. In the following poem, this progress is sketched through two objective correlatives: the rose and the eagle.

> Da scalfittura diventare abisso
> da fragile membrana diventare
> la corda tesa delle vibrazioni incostanti.
>
> Comincia la stagione delle grandi cacce
> da Aquila Reale, e la rosa
> guarderà i suoi petali cadere
> ad uno ad uno. (LMP 14)

The 'abisso' represents an obsessive metaphor in the collection, virtually a symbol of the concepts of *levitas* and *gravitas*. Concurrently, the world is the place where miracles and

[259] As suggested by Giancarlo Alfano, Cavalli invented a stylistic formulation of lightness through her use of light metres, rhymes, and the creation of solid and coherent metrical and phonic system. This formulation characterises her poetry as a whole. To this extent, Alfano also highlights how Cavalli's 'toni e tematiche sono nel complesso rimaste invariate'; G. Alfano, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Parola Plurale* (Rome: Luca Sossella Editore, 2005), p. 157.

trivial epiphanies occur. The poetic text offers a 'light' sublimation in the trivial routine of everyday life:

> […] come potrò
> sciogliere i miei piedi, come
> discendere – regina delle rupi e
> degli abissi – al passo involontario,
> alla mano che apre una porta, alla voce
> che chiede dove andrò a mangiare? (LMP 53)

Moreover, *levitas* has a twofold connotation in Patrizia Cavalli's poetry. In *Le mie poesie*, one can recognise a 'momentous' *levitas*, as is addressed by the poet in several metaliterary texts, but also a 'trivial' *levitas,* employed in a substantial number of texts.

Cavalli addresses the 'momentous' *levitas* through well-selected, metaphorical, and evocative semantic choices. In this context, the poet's question pertains to the nature of *levitas* and its implications. When the word *levitas* is used with this meaning, the poet tackles the slipperiness of this concept, providing a 'theoretical' and poetic definition instead. In a selected number of poems, Patrizia Cavalli focuses on the definition of *levitas* by providing only an aphoristic definition of this concept: 'Ma per favore con leggerezza / raccontami ogni cosa /anche la tua tristezza' (LMP, 10). In this metaliterary poem, the imperative refers to the lyric subject. This results both in a soliloquy and an interrogation about the nature of lightness and its subtle relationship with sadness. Lightness and *levitas* are central concepts in *Le mie poesie*; therefore, Cavalli seeks to reach a comprehensive definition of them. However, the poetic subject often gets distracted by the expression of lightness and cannot focus on a single definition: '[…] Così dimentico sempre / l'idea principale, mi perdo / per strada, mi scompongo / giorno per giorno ed è vano / tentare qualsiasi ritorno' (LMP, 49).

The nature of this distraction allows us to understand a different manifestation of *levitas* in Cavalli's poetry. Indeed, a 'trivial' – and therefore 'practical' – reading of *levitas*

is also possible.[260] Cavalli approaches this second nuance of the term by adopting a low register. Here, the question is no longer related to what *levitas* entails. Rather, Cavalli aims at providing a series of 'practical' examples that could better illustrate the nature of lightness. If a 'theoretical' definition is not possible, what are the objects that could empirically communicate lightness? While trying to answer this question in several texts, the poet embraces a tendency to dysphemism. In doing so, Cavalli interpolates questions regarding the nature of lightness with elements borrowed from the most 'trivial' epigrammatic tradition: word-choices become progressively more inclusive, and the reader can find seemingly unpoetic words, such as 'supplì', 'culo', 'cesso' and 'pisciatoi', 'la biancheria sporca' and 'le mutande giallo portorico', or even a celebration of 'la sbornia'. Cavalli creates a catalogue of objects, situations, and characters that actively contribute to the definition of 'lightness' through their 'trivial' expressions. Both the 'momentous' and 'trivial' lightness shape Cavalli's vocabulary while also setting the tone of her poetic diction.

3.4. LIGHT METRES AND MOMENTOUS RHYTHMS

In metrics too, the two poets' approaches are complementary. While Morante's way of composing lines relies on the rhythmical flow and coherence, Cavalli models her lines employing the exactitude of meter. By rhythm, I intend the overall *tempo*, or pace, at which the poem unfolds. In Morante, the distribution of the stresses does not usually follow regular patterns[261] but, when it does, this tendency bears resemblance to classical

[260] A. Afribo, *Poesia italiana postrema. Dal 1970 a oggi* (Rome: Carocci, 2018) pp. 47-48.

[261] Beltrami describes rhythm as 'il disporsi nel tempo di elementi riconoscibili e significativi: nella versificazione italiana, alternanze (regolari o irregolari) di sillabe toniche e sillabe atone, ritorno a una certa distanza di suoni uguali (rima, assonanza, allitterazione), rapporti di uguaglianza o disuguaglianza fra misure sillabiche (numero di sillabe dei versi), o configurazioni di tutti questi elementi'. In his study, Beltrami adapts its definitions of rhythm to include tropes

poetry. Indeed, one can describe rhythm in *Il mondo* in terms of feet. In classical poetry, a foot is a predetermined set of syllables.[262] I here intend to find recurrent patterns that will allow the reader to identify continuities and even variations in feet through which the inner pace of the verse unravels.[263]

Meter, on the other hand, refers to a measured sequence of syllables whose patterns, as distributed within the poetic discourse, determine the name of the verse (hendecasyllable, decasyllable, novenary and so forth). Meter consists of the norm within which the rhythm unfolds in fixed and over-determined structures (for instance, a sonnet is formed by fourteen rhyming hendecasyllables, a song is formed by several stanzas in which septenaries and hendecasyllables alternate but the number of lines and rhyme of each stanza is set, and so on and so forth). Contemporary poets who write in free verse[264] tend to de-emphasize or ignore meter and focus instead on refining and tuning their natural speech rhythms to suit the poem's content. This prosodic antithesis results also in an opposition of tones. A poet who favours the fast-paced rhythm of her verse, as Morante does, ends up creating an overall sense of gravity in her poetry. Conversely,

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such as rhyme, assonance, and alliteration and even the syllabic quantity. P. Beltrami, *La metrica italiana* (Rome: Il mulino, 2011), pp. 17-18.

[262] Italian poetry differs from classical poetry because the former does not rely on a system of quantitative opposition of vowels, as the latter does. Italian poetry usually employs the distribution of accents to define its metres, with the only exceptions of Gabriello Chiabrera, Vincenzo Monti, Giosué Carducci and Giovanni Pascoli.

[263] Classical poetry uses feet to characterise a rhythm, or to describe an isolated short run of syllables. Firstly, feet are useful to describe over-determined patterns; secondly, they are invaluable diagnostic and analytical tools. As pointed out by Don Paterson, feet are 'a wholly abstract concept, and do not exist in the real world'. These ends up being opposed to metres and metrical patterns that, when converted to a template, are characterised by a predictive and organising force (if I am reading a line of eleven syllable, I can predict, for instance, a distributional pattern of accents, with the main stress on the fourth or sixth syllable and a descriptive and indispensable accent on the tenth; therefore, Italian metrics is based both on a number of syllables and on the primary accent in the line). Feet, on the other hand, do not have such fixed and predictable patterns. D. Paterson, 'Metre: The Rhythm of a Poem', *The Poem. Lyric, Sign, Metre* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), pp. 361-62. Cfr. also P. Beltrami, 'L'endecasillabo', *La metrica italiana*, pp. 182-88.

[264] Edoardo Esposito, *Metrica e poesia del Novecento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1992).

Cavalli prefers to rely on over-determined metrical structures, resulting in a lighter and regular musicality.[265]

3.4.1. MOMENTOUS RHYTHMS IN IL MONDO SALVATO

In *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini,* the use of free verse prioritises a rhythm based more on syntactical pauses and the collocation of the *enjambements* than on the distribution of stresses.[266] *Enjambement* is, indeed, far more significant in the context of free verse because it is the only discrimination offered to the reader by the poet to discern a poetic text. This way of shaping the line, which is characteristic of Morante, ends up producing a rhythm that is more instinctive and less foreseeable. The tendency is to create almost prose-like lines, especially in the closing section of *Il mondo*, which includes the *Canzoni popolari*, the most experimental section in the whole book. In other sections, such as the first one, *Addio*, the structure is more traditional, characterised by well-defined stanzas and defined by an elegiac mode of discourse in which the lyric subject dialogues with an absent other.

Relying on a range of options such as this, Morante creates a variety of results. From hyper-meters stretching from twelve to eighteen syllables to short lines of just three, four syllables at most:

> Realmente
> la felicità che avevo io
> era un tale splendore sincero e smisurato
> che tutti i sì detti nei secoli dei secoli per tutti i paesi
> avrebbero potuto senz'altro testimoniarla
> in un coro mondiale.

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[265] This opposition between the levity of the metre and the heaviness of the rhythm in lyric poetry is theorised, among others, by Franco Fortini in his essay *Metrica e biografia*. F. Fortini, 'Metrica e biografia', *I confini della poesia* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2015).

[266] Avoiding any etiological discussion on the history of free verse and the debate on its Laforgueian or Rimbaudian origins, I use here the label of 'free verse' with the meaning of 'unrhymed verse which demonstrates no adherence to a metrical pattern'. See D. Paterson, *The Poem*, p. 498.

Ma la felicità
più che è felice
e più che, un poco, strazia il cuore. (MSR 173)

Taken from 'La Canzone di Giuda o dello sposalizio',[267] this example is representative of Morante's versification. The incipit is made of a short line of only four syllables followed by a nine-syllable line and then by a fourteen-syllable line. Metrics is, in this case, subordinate to syntax. A hierarchical predominance of the latter over the former can be observed. Nevertheless, the sense of unity is not simply conveyed by the syntactical distribution of the sentence's elements, rearranged, and broken into the small line units. To this purpose, the use of the *enjambements* is fundamental to determine the peculiar rhythm and pace of Morante's poetic discourse. The rhythmical structure of the poems is based on the alternation of iambs and anapaests. These feet can sometimes be substituted with dactyls and trochees.[268] Despite the evident fluctuation between different feet, Morante's preference for iambic rhythms followed by anapaests is evident. We can find several examples of this also in other sections of *Il mondo*.

In the first text, the iambic rhythm develops into an anapaestic rhythm, with a further insertion of dactyls in the fourth line (¯ ˘ ˘). In the following three examples, the anapaestic rhythm is turned into iambic rhythm.

[iambic rhythm turned into anapaestic rhythm]

Lei r**i**de lei r**i**de	˘ ¯ ˘ ¯
perch**é**, stacc**a**ndos**i** da una cr**o**ce	˘ ¯ ˘ ¯
le v**i**ene inc**o**ntro,	˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯
fr**e**sco assol**a**to rid**e**nte	¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ *[dactylic rhythm]*
il rag**a**zzo Ad**a**mo. (MSR 125)	˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯

[267] E. Morante, 'La Canzone di Giuda o dello sposalizio', *Il mondo*, pp. 167-235.

[268] A iamb is a quantitative foot characterised by the use of a short syllable followed by a long syllable (˘ ¯). Opposed to the iamb, the trochee is a foot whereby a long syllable is followed by a short one (¯ ˘). The anapaest consists in two short syllables followed by a long syllable.

Però stavolta una voce materna, gelata e ansante ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘
–

è accorsa, eco d'un eco (MSR 120) – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – *[trochaic rhythm]*

[alternation of iambic and anapestic rhythm]

Memoria memoria, casa di pena (MSR 33) ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ –

Avevo il passaporto, col visto ufficiale dell'Accademia mondiale di Chimica Superiore (MSR 27)

˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ –

Iambs and trochees are characteristic of classical tragedy, while anapaests occur in classical comedy. One must recognise that Morante is recasting the *gravitas* of classical theatre into the rhythm of modern poetry. It is not accidental that a theatrical piece inspired by Sophocles, *La serata a Colono*, occupies a core position in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and, more significantly, in a section entitled *La commedia chimica.* The main character, Oedipus, expresses himself following similar stress patterns, alternating anapests to a prevailing iambic rhythm:

Non c'è un inizio né una chiusa né una chiusa né un ordine di periodi
˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –

com'è uso nelle scritture
˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ →

della logica sintattica.
→ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ –

E MORTE E NASCITA E MORTE E NASCITA E MORTE E NASCITA (MSR 65)
˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – ˘ –

Morante's approach to prosody mirrors Weil's statement on the relationship between *gravitas* and ancient poetry: 'The force of gravity in epic poetry, tragedy (Sophocles, *Phèdre,* Shakespeare), is the triumph of genius.'[269] Weil goes on to say: 'all very great art

[269] S. Weil, *The Notebooks*, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 120.

is supernatural. Part played by form, rhythm, ceremony?'[270] Morante combines these classical references with a more modern tradition in the attempt to 'de-territorialise' her poetic language while moving away from New-Avant-gardist prose-verse.[271] Her use of long free-verse is also inspired by American poets belonging to the *beatnik* generation, such as Allen Ginsberg.[272] However, her most prominent source of inspiration is doubtlessly Walt Whitman's free verse in *Leaves of Grass* filtered through Cesare Pavese's *Lavorare Stanca.*[273] Other than Pascoli's experiments with the 'metrica barbara', the verse of *Lavorare stanca* does not have any forerunner in the Italian tradition.[274] Nevertheless, Pavese introduced original elements in his metrics that make his musicality different from either Pascoli's or Whitman's.[275] In contrast with Pascoli, Pavese did not follow

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[270] S. Weil, *The Notebooks*, p. 155.

[271] Contrastingly, Morante's free verses cannot be compared to the prose-verses used during the same years by authors of the New-Avantgarde such as Sanguineti in *Laborintus*; Edoardo Sanguineti, *Laborintus* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965). Morante, for instance, still uses syntactical pauses as commas and periods and does not tend towards a-syntactical structure.

[272] *The Howl* by Allen Gisberg was traslated for the first time in Italy by Fernanda Pivano in 1965. Her translation *Jukebox all'idrogeno*, published by Mondadori, is part of Morante's library. The book is highly annotated and numerous comments testify Morante's engaged reading of Pivano's translation of Ginsberg's collection. M. Carmello, 'Carattere di una poesia. Morante fra ritmo e contenuto', *La poesia di Elsa Morante*, pp. 92-94.

[273] Pavese occupies an eccentric position within the Italian poetic canon like Morante does. Both can be considered part of the aforementioned 'minorising force' within the Italian tradition. As pointed out by Calvino in the introduction to the second edition of *Lavorare stanca* published in 1943, Pavese is 'una delle voci più isolate della poesia contemporanea'. In consonance with Morante's case, Pavese's poetry ends up being 'minor' not only for its refusal of the hermetic diction but also for its problematic relationship with contemporary history, as *Lavorare stanca* was firstly censored by the fascist regime in 1936. I. Calvino, 'Introduzione', C. Pavese, *Lavorare stanca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1943), p. VII.

[274] P. Beltrami, 'Il verso libero', *La metrica italiana*, p. 237.

[275] As suggested by Nicola Gardini, Pavese's versification is not completely eccentric to the Italian poetic tradition: 'E, a ben guardare, il verso nuovo di Pavese è meno lontano dalla tradizione italiana di quanto sembri dalla sua ipermetria: ogni linea è divisibile, con cesura più o meno marcata, in due segmenti, di cui il primo è sempre un settenario. Il ritmo anapestico - molto regolare - avviato dal settenario si esaurisce su una coda di lunghezza variabile, ma compresa tra le sei e le nove sillabe. Le combinazioni possibili sono: 7 + 6; 7 + 7; 7+ 8; 7 + 9. Molto frequente quella di doppio settenario, niente più che un richiamo alla norma (per altro già attuata da Pavese in poesie giovanili come "O colli dove nacqui, sempre v'avrò nel cuore"). Negli altri casi si ricade nell'andamento esametrico (Pascoli) o in misure già montaliane, con quel tanto di barbaro che una metrica simile suggerisce.' N. Gardini, *Sangue e terra, Le poesie di Cesare Pavese*, 'Poesia' 116 (Milan: Crocetti, 1998), pp. 40-42

regular schemes of lines and stanzas and preferred to introduce elements of dissonance into the poem's structure. Pavese highlights how his voice is inadequate at receiving the rhetorical component of Whitman's versification.[276] However, Pavese's posture could be interpreted also as a *topos modestiae*. Pavese's statement might also be interpreted in light of the different rhythm developed by the two poets: anapaestic in Pavese, dactylic in Whitman. Pavese's versification is based on the distribution of similar accentual patterns rather than on isosyllabic stanzas. For Pavese too, rhythm is opposed to metre. Pavese isolates rhythmic cells – consisting of shorter lines of six, seven, or eight syllables – and combined them to obtain a verse of more than eleven syllables. On that basis, he introduced elements of disturbance by inserting rhythmic cells characterised by a different stress-pattern – in the same poem, two lines with the same number of syllables can be characterised by a different distribution of stresses. In this case too, rhythm opposes, and is preferred to, meter. Morante's versification therefore seems closer to Pavese's than to that of other Italian and English-speaking poets, the main difference being the more frequent alternation of long and noticeably short lines in Morante's poetry.

3.4.2. LIGHT METRES IN LE MIE POESIE

Cavalli shares with Morante similar references to theatre and classical poetry, while intermingling them with modern allusions. Musicality regulates her intertextual practice. As Cavalli highlights, poetry is 'una cosa molto misteriosa. Credo provenga da una certa area del cervello che sta a metà tra quella della musica e quella della parola. Perché suona. È una parola che suona.'[277]

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[276] 'Il *free verse* di Whitman, infine, si rivela piuttosto un fantasma dei critici (attirati anche dagli esperimenti di Bacchelli) che uno stato di fatto. Lo stesso Pavese, d'altronde, dichiara la sua voce inadeguata alla capienza di un verso così ammirevole eppure così oratorio.' N. Gardini, *Sangue e terra,* pp. 40-42.

[277] Liza Ginzburg, *Le parole che suonano. Intervista a Patrizia Cavalli*, 'L'Unità', 3 June 2002.

Her main source of inspiration is the Latin epigrammatic tradition, Catullus and Martial. These authors are significant to Cavalli not only for their polished style but also for the peculiar musicality of their metre, the elegiac couplet. On the modern side, other important sources are Sandro Penna – who, with Umberto Saba, is also one of Morante's favourite poets[278] and ascribable to that poetic posture that Pasolini defined 'anti-novecentismo' –, as well as English poets such as Wystan Hugh Auden and Oscar Wilde, because of the nursery rhymes' and cradle songs' rhythm of many of their short poems.[279] Shakespeare is also a model, as the theatrical dimension of Cavalli's poetry shows. Shakespeare serves as the main reference for Cavalli's use of the rhyme, as we are to demonstrate.

Overall, the recasting of the elegiac couplet is a case in point. Rather than replicating Carducci's barbarian metrics by transferring a hexameter followed by a pentameter,[280] Cavalli tries to recreate her own version of the elegiac couplet. In most cases, she did so by keeping the same accent-pattern but with a shorter and thus lighter metre. However, in the case of longer poems, when the couplet is isolated and not part of it, Cavalli employs the hendecasyllable:

Andr**ò** dai miei am**i**ci andr**ò** a c**e**na HEND
consoler**ò** cos**ì** la mia p**e**na. (LMP 6) HEND

In longer poems, the hendecasyllables tend to be broken into two shorter lines. This leads to the creation of 'endecasillabi a gradino'[281] by adding a quinary to a senary and

[278] E. Morante, 'Il poeta di tutta una vita', *Pro o contro la bomba atomica*, pp. 31-39.
[279] G. Alfano, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Parola plurale*, p. 159.
[280] In his 'metrica barbara', Carducci recreated the elegiac couplet by pairing of two long verses, namely a novenary plus a septenary followed by a septenary plus a quinary.
[281] This is, for instance, a common trait of the poetry of Sandro Penna, deeply admired by Cavalli. Cfr. Fabio Magro, ' Di alcune forme della ripetizione in Penna', *Forme della ripetizione*, ed. by G. Peron, A. Andreose (Padova: Esedra, 2006), pp. 305-321.

vice versa, or a quaternary to a septenary. The 'endecasillabo a gradino' offers the poet new possibilities to create a 'lighter' versification while keeping the couplet's structure.

Se di m**e** non p**a**rlo	SEN	**HEND**
e non mi asc**o**lto	QUIN	
mi succ**e**de p**o**i	SEN	**HEND**
che mi conf**o**ndo.	QUIN	

(LMP 12)

again again again	SEN	**HEND**
fallo di nuovo.	QUIN	

(LMP 39)

Tardi verrà	QUA	**HEND**
a mostrarmi più densi	SEPT	

(LMP 37)

[…] sottrasse a me	QUA	**HEND**
la rara prigioniera.	SEPT	

(LMP 25)

[…] le referenze	QUIN	**HEND**
le darò domani.	SEN	

(LMP 22)

Overall, the decasyllable is the most frequent line. If we investigate the Italian lyric tradition, this key metric aspect of her poetry entails two key features. On the one hand, the decasyllable had not been used by many poets: again, this verse was introduced by Carducci and Pascoli to recreate the metre used by the classical authors of epigrams. On the other hand, this feature witnesses Cavalli's attempt to distance her poetry from the most common verse used by Italian poets – the hendecasyllable – to build innovative and lighter metrical structures. Some poems, for instance, reinterpreting the Alcaic stanza,[282] with different variations consisting of the use of three decasyllables introduced by a hendecasyllable (in this case 'tronco', with the last accent on the tenth and last syllable):

Né morte né pazzia mi prenderà	HEND
un tremore delle vene forse	DEC
un'acuta risata, un ingorgo	DEC
del sangue, un'ebbrezza limitata.	DEC

As is obvious from these examples, rhyme has a fundamental role in Cavalli's metrics, mainly serving musical and semantic purposes. Cavalli finds an important model in the Shakespearean theatre. The introductory note to her translation of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* provides an interesting insight into this feature of her own poetry:

> Gli innamorati entrano ed escono dalla rima come se entrassero e uscissero da una parte. La rima li tiene nel teatrino d'amore […]. La presenza della rima, quando più grande è l'esaltazione o la disperazione, rafforza l'artificio, anzi lo ratifica, producendo in chi ascolta la certezza della commedia: indica l'eccesso e allo stesso tempo lo contiene. Con la rima baciata questa sensazione è anche più forte, perché il discorso, con le sue eventuali complessità, viene

[282] The Alcaic stanza is a Greek lyrical metre, an Aeolic verse form traditionally believed to have been invented by Alcaeus. The Alcaic stanza consists of two Alcaic hendecasyllables, followed by an Alcaic enneasyllable and an Alcaic decasyllable. John Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 18.

> regolarmente e a breve termine riacciuffato e messo al sicuro dalla comune desinenza sonora di parole di significato diverso. Queste rassicuranti stazioni, proprio quando il cuore dovrebbe smarrirsi, permettono al pensiero, anche al più tortuoso e terribile di non perdersi mai.[283]

Rhyme strengthens the literary depiction of feelings as it exhibits their artificial nature. Rhyming couplets are even more representative of this tendency, as Cavalli underlines. Indeed, they are more than frequent in her poetry. Rhyming couplets are usually used in short poems or in the last two lines of longer poems to simultaneously do homage to the classical epigrams and the Shakespearean sonnets, both characterized by a final *pointe*:[284] 'Andrò dai miei amici, andrò a c**ena** /consolerò così la mia p**ena**' (LMP, 6), 'Ma d'amore non voglio parl**are**, / l'amore lo voglio solamente f**are**' (LMP, 5).

In most cases, rhyme does not serve a structural aim and is used for euphonic purposes, creating a refrain effect: 'un'acuta risata, un ingorgo / del sangue, un'ebbrezza limitata' (LMP, 3), '[...] mi scompongo / gi**orno** per gi**orno** ed è vano / tentare qualsiasi rit**orno**' (LMP, 49), 'I marocchini con i tappeti / sembrano s**anti** e invece / sono merc**anti**' (LMP, 46).

Rhyme is employed not only with the aim of enhancing this light musicality but also to strengthen the system of opposition in which Cavalli's poetry is grounded. As already discussed, the lightness of the metre and tone hides more profound considerations on the experience of the heaviness of the world. As a result, rhyme often produces in Cavalli strong polarities that stretch out into syntactical parallelisms. As a result, musicality does not merely concern the metre, but also the syntax as the internal rhyme coincides with syntactical pauses:

> Qualche volta un silenzio può essere
> apparenza di più vasti pensieri
> che non possono aprirsi
> alla cadenza di una voce giornaliera.

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[283] P. Cavalli, 'Nota', W. Shakespeare, *Sogno di una notte di mezz'estate* (Rome: nottetempo, 2015), p. 253.

[284] Jessica Rosenberg, 'The Point of the Couplet', *ELH* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), V. 83, pp. 1-41.

Ma questo non è il tuo caso
cara m**ia**: il tuo caso è soltanto
totale mancanza di allegr**ia**. (LMP, 21)

The text is developed into two different periods – vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-7 –. In the final two lines, the internal rhyme separates the concluding statement from the previous descriptive section more abruptly than the syntactical pause. The internal rhyme, here, functions as a discriminating syntactical factor by inserting a pause in the middle of the line. Furthermore, the anaphora of the syntagms 'il tuo caso' reinforces this break in the middle of the line. This pattern highlights the contrast between the subject and her interlocutor.[285]

3.5. 'IL LIBRO DI POESIA' AS MACROSTRUCTURE

The stylistic categories of gravity and lightness do not involve the semantics or metrical structure of the two poetic collections only. These categories are much more pervasive, well beyond prosody and semantics. The opposition between gravity and lightness concerns the very structure of these poets' books.

Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini is divided into three main sections arranged in a circular structure and into sub-sections. Several voices and genres range from elegy to popular songs – the *Canzoni popolari* –, including a theatrical piece, *La serata a Colono.*[286]

[285] Sheltered behind a seemingly easy musicality, this system of opposition is vividly described also by Alfonso Berardinelli: '[…] Ma l'apparente leggerezza o frivolezza non devono ingannare. La Cavalli è dotata in realtà di un intelletto altamente percettivo e raziocinante. Dietro ai suoi versi […] che sfumano in ritmi aerei e appena cadenzati, agisce una cosmologia della perfezione e dell'imperfezione, della presenza e dell'assenza, della luce e del suo offuscarsi.' A. Berardinelli, 'La poesia', *Il Novecento*: *Scenari di fine secolo*, ed. by N. Borsellino, L. Felici (Milan: Garzanti, 2001), pp. 161-62.

[286] Morante highlights the multi-faceted nature of her poetic and literary production in different contexts. In her theoretical texts, she always tries to counterargument against the classical definition and separation of literary genres. This has been pointed out in her theorical text dedicated to the novel with outstanding accuracy. E. Morante, 'Sul romanzo', *Pro o contro la bomba atomica* (Milan: Adelphi, 1987).

The book's opening section, *Addio*, is characterised by a meta-literary function: the two elegies are deeply indebted to her previous collection, *Alibi*.[287]

I. ADDIO
- First elegy
- Second elegy

The second section, *La commedia chimica*, is divided into four sub-sections. *La commedia chimica* is centred on the Rimbaldian theme of 'derangement of all the senses'.[288] *La commedia chimica* is a parody of some myths on the sources of poetic inspiration.

II. LA COMMEDIA CHIMICA[289]

i. La mia bella cartolina dal paradiso
ii. La sera domenicale
iii. La serata a Colono
iv. La smania dello scandalo

[287] *Alibi* was published in 1958 within the poetry series created by Domenico Naldini for the editor Longanesi. For decades, this book has been overlooked by scholarship also because of Morante's attempt at public detachment from her own creation: 'L'Autrice prega i lettori di perdonarle l'esiguo valore e peso di queste pagine. […] autrice di storie in prosa, I suoi radi versi sono, in parte, nient'altro che un'eco, o, se si voglia, un coro dei suoi romanzi.' Morante would modifiy her opinion on this matter after the publication of *Il mondo*. E. Morante, 'Premessa', *Alibi*, p. 4.

[288] The expression 'derangement of all the senses' comes from a letter that Arthur Rimbaud sent to one of his professors, George Izambard. The letter, also known as *Lettre du Voyant*, represents a centerpiece within the creation of Rimbaud's own poetics but also, to a broader extent, in a consequent poetic tradition inspired by this text. A. Rimbaud, 'Lettre du Voyant', *Ouevres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), pp. 354-58.

[289] In *La commedia chimica,* Morante reaches the highest point of density and experimentalism. Inspired by a series of themes of Rimbaud's poetics, *La commedia chimica* is divided into four different sub-sections: 'La mia bella cartolina dal paradiso' and 'La sera domenicale' both describe the experience of psychedelics. Morante, in this section, explores the mythical foundation of poetry as a state of alteration. The ecstasy produced by the artistic inspiration represents the entrance to a different world of creativity. However, this alteration does not elicit a new awareness in the lyric subject: 'Nessuna rivelazione […] / Nessun peccato […] / E nessuna grazia speciale'. The access to a state of grace is therefore obstructed: this results in a parody of the myth of poetic inspiration. The third sub-section of 'La commedia chimica', 'La serata a Colono', develops further this parodic setting through a theatrical piece that recasts the myth of Oedipus, a myth that is central to twentieth-century literature. In the fourth sub-section, 'La smania dello scandalo', Morante continues her description of *ivresse* as an ecstatic inebriation produced by poetry. This text functions also as the lyric core of the whole book of poetry.

A third and last section, *Le canzoni popolari*, envisions a new poetic theory of language. According to Morante, language should be able to investigate, explore, and represent the world.

III. CANZONI POPOLARI[290]

1. La canzone degli F.P. e degli I.M. in tre parti
   i. Introduzione esplicativa
   ii. Parentesi. Agli F.P.
   iii. Agli I.M.

2. Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini
   i. La canzone della forca
   ii. La canzone di Giuda e dello sposalizio
   iii. Canzone finale della stella gialla detta pure La Carlottina
   Congedo

The structure of the overall collection moves from a poetic experience centred on *gravitas* and personal loss towards an all-encompassing discourse on the abysmal dimensions of collectivity.

In contrast with Morante, Cavalli develops a plainer structure in *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*. The book displays a monovocal linearity which is frequently interrupted by desultory and plurivocal revelations. The two books obviously differ even in the typographic arrangement of the writing. While in Morante's book we find longer texts and several sub-genres, Cavalli uses shorter poems without titles. Nevertheless, there are many striking similarities. As far as disposition is concerned, the two books

[290] The last section hosts the *Canzoni popolari*, formed by a suite of three longer texts: 'La canzone dei F.P. e degli I.M.' In this series of etiological songs, Morante defines and then address the young generation of 'happy few' by identifying them as the only group of people able to access a poetic knowledge through the world. *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, divided in other three subsections, completes the list of the 'happy few', providing new names such as the protagonist of the first two songs, 'La Mutria'. The third 'Canzone', 'La Canzone della Carlottina o della stella gialla', shows Morante's attempt to re-write history through poetry. This song focuses on a poetic fable regarding an uprising of children against the Nazis during the Second World War.

show a similar circular structure which connects the collections' opening and ending sections.

In my discussion of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, I will be analysing the two macro-structures of the collections.[291] One can observe two pairs of elements in the macro-structure of a poetry collection: on the one hand, meaning and semantics; on the other, disposition and syntax.[292] In the semantical structure, coherence emerges from the repetition or arrangement of single elements, where each element gains a diverse meaning within the macro-structure. The macro-structure of the 'libro di poesia' relies both on the recursiveness and difference between the repeated elements.

Petrarch's *Canzoniere* could be considered as a paradigm of the 'libro di poesia'. The structure of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* witnessed a large fortune within and beyond the western literary canon, being a stylistic model for many twentieth-century Italian poets still.[293] Nevertheless, *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* cannot be fully understood within the notion of 'canzoniere'. Both books do rely on an internal structural coherence. However, their internal continuity relies more on the idea of 'performance' than on that of the representation of a subjective experience and teleological journey, as is the case with Petrarch.[294] Despite their macro-structural

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[291] My definition of macro-structure is informed by Testa's work on poetic macro-structures as well as by Niccolò Scaffai's study of Eugenio Montale's poetic collections. E. Testa, *Il libro di poesia, Tipologie e analisi macrotestuali* (Genoa: il melangolo, 1982); Niccolò Scaffai, *Montale e il libro di poesia* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2002). More recent articles on this theme have been published by Stefano Ghidinelli: S. Ghidinelli, 'Alle origini del libro di poesia moderno', *Versants*, 57:2, 2010, pp. 455-57; 'Formato antologia e formato libro. Sui modi di presentazione della poesia del Novecento', *Enthymema*, XVII, 2017, pp. 23-25.

[292] Syntax, in this context, stands for the disposition and processes that govern the arrangement of poetic texts within the macro-structure of the book of poetry. E. Testa, *Il libro di poesia*, pp. 19-20.

[293] On this theme, see the volume edited by Andrea Cortellessa, *Un'altra storia. Petrarca nel Novecento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004).

[294] It is worth highlighting how the (sub)genre of the 'canzoniere in morte' – a poetic collection written by the poetic subject for their dead beloved, a genre at the core of the Western lyric tradition, the presence of fragments is always kept together with the intention of crafting a unity

coherence, both Morante's and Cavalli's books show a preference for a non-teleological structure. This element would be incompatible with a Petrachan *canzoniere*. The two forces operating in Morante's and Cavalli's collections, gravity and grace, are not seen as an aim but rather as a process that the lyric subject must undergo. As will be demonstrated, 'performativity' and 'repetition' work together in an uninterrupted process of 'becoming' in *Il mondo* and *Le mie poesie*.

My analysis will be based on the identification of those semantic and syntactic elements that help developing the structural coherence of the two poetry collections. While identifying the structural and thematic elements that characterise *Il mondo* and *Le mie poesie*, I will be focusing on two main aspects. On the one hand, I will be looking at the structures of the collections, focusing on the beginning and concluding texts; as is often the case, such texts have a meta-literary value. On the other hand, I will investigate some of the semantic structures that determine the book's thematic coherence. I will

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out of these fragments. A unity that enacts a strong teleological gesture of finitude, completeness, closure, and thus also of narrative-oriented internal structure. One of the most celebrated tragic mythical couples of all time, Orpheus and Eurydice, at the centre of most *canzonieri* leads the reader along a path that starts with Dante and Petrarch, passes through Leopardi, and eventually reaches Montale. In Petrarch's 'canzoniere' as well as Montale's *Xenia* – although the same cannot be said about the poets at the centre of this study – one finds a poetic subject, in a state of mourning and trying to re-articulate their loss, attempts to order his scattered memory fragments by arranging them in a highly organized and structured work. One can still not reach a resolution without, however, reaching an internal, structural 'resolution' in putting together fragments the way Petrarch does in his *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. In this sense, I contend that Petrarch enacts a teleological journey within the *Canzoniere*, one that directly points towards the concluding 'Canzone to the Virgin'. As highlighted by Teodolinda Barolini in her essay 'Forging Anti-narrative in the Vita nuova', the narratological structure connecting the two temporal dimensions of 'then' and 'now' will be picked up in later lyric sequences in Europe and, as pointed out by Roland Greene in his *Post-Petrarchism*, in Western modern poetry: see Teodolinda Barolini, 'Forging Anti-narrative in the Vita nuova' and 'The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's Rerum Vulgarium Fragments', *Dante and the Origins of Italian Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 189-192; pp. 193-223, Roland Greene, 'Founding Fiction: The Temporality of Petrarch's Canzoniere', *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Inoovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 22-62. Cfr. also, Thomas E. Peterson, 'Temporality and Desire' and 'Songs of Consecration', *Petrarch's Fragmenta: The Narrative and Theological Unity of Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 47-83; 166-189.

reconstruct two chains of themes: the first one concerning poetry and the perception of time's circularity; the second relying on performativity, gesture, and space.

3.5.1. POETRY, REPETITION, TIME

The beginning of *Il mondo* is a farewell to the poet's lover, the American painter Bill Morrow.[295] This section of *Il mondo* contradicts her previous collection of poetry, *Alibi*, published in 1958. The first section, entitled *Addio*, is a sequence of two long elegies in memory of her lover. *Addio* functions as an introduction and a summary of her previous collection, presenting most of book's meta-literary considerations. *Alibi* focuses on the celebration of love, loss, and lyric poetry. With the second collection, this is no longer possible. Morante dismisses this subjective posture by turning it into a mythical parody based on one of Ovid's metamorphoses: that of Echo and Narcissus.[296]

In *Alibi*, the figure of the lover recalls the mythical character of Narcissus, the young boy who fell in love with himself: 'O Riflesso, o amante caro e infido! / In te conosco il viso fraterno / del cangiante mio desiderio' (A, 75). The poet / Narcissus ends up falling in love with herself and her poetic diction. According to Morante, narcissism is one of the main risks that a poet must face in approaching reality. In *Alibi*'s closing section, Narcissus is turned into Echo, the nymph who has fallen in love with

[295] In 1959, on her first visit to New York City, Elsa Morante fell in love with Bill Morrow, a twenty-three-year-old painter from Madisonville, Kentucky. Bill was introduced to Elsa by a mutual friend. In April 1962, while Bill Morrow was in New York for a brief visit – he was planning to return to Italy and live there permanently with Elsa – he was killed. It was presumed that, hallucinating on LSD, he had thought he could fly, and he jumped off a Manhattan skyscraper. C. Garboli, 'Cronologia', in E. Morante, *Opere* (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), V. II, pp. LXVI-LVII.

[296] The theme of farewell is developed by Morante also in the essay dedicated to Umberto Saba's *Canzoniere*: 'Tutto il corso di questo avventuroso *Canzoniere* è accompagnato da una voce, che sembra ripetere una specie di ringraziamento, o di addio: poiché nel tempo stesso che vanta, o lamenta, o accusa, i beni e i mali della vita, questa poesia straordinaria non dimentica mai, nella sua pietà quasi materna, la qualità vulnerabile di tutto ciò che vive.' E. Morante, 'Il poeta di tutta una vita, *Opere*, V. II, p. 1489.

him. Unfortunately, she is still not able to communicate with him. The nymph is forced to stare at Narcissus while he falls in love with himself over and over again. Within this process, the lyric dialogue ends up being a soliloquy. The object of love and desire is mirrored by the lyric subject, an alter-ego of the poet, revealing the narcissistic nature of the lyric genre – 'Né conversare mi piace / se non con Eco […]' (A. 75), 'La tua grazia tramuta / in un vanto lo scandalo che ti cinge' (A. 49).

In *Addio*, Morante wants to overcome the narcissistic posture of the lyric genre.[297] Elegy is the starting point of a new poetic diction. The mirrored image of the poetic subject, Echo, is reduced to an echo, a reverberation of the poet's voice: 'Dal luogo illune del tuo silenzio / mi riscuote ogni giorno l'urlo del mattino. / […] Io premo l'orecchio sulla terra /a un'eco assurda dei battiti sepolti' (MSR, 5). In the first elegy, the separation between the narcissistic subject and the object of love/desire is portrayed through a traditional – and almost Leopardian – series of antitheses, opposing the first-person pronoun to the absent second person pronoun. 'La tua morte è una luce accecante nella notte / […] Io sono condannata al tempo e ai luoghi / finché lo scandalo si consumi su di me' (MSR, 7). In *Alibi*, this 'scandal' is the enduring possibility to oppose poetry to mourning. The lyric subject strives to receive the grace of the poetic diction by filling the gap left behind by death and the consequent period of mourning. Nonetheless, the lyric subject has been confined in a worldly, embodied, and separate dimension: 'Amputati dai corpi, si disperdono separate / senza rimedio, eterne mutilazioni. /

[297] As theorised by Deleuze, this narcissistic subject is originated from a profound wound that is constantly reopened in lyric poetry: 'L'io narcisistico è inseparabile non soltanto da una ferita costitutiva, ma dai mascheramenti e spostamenti che intessendosi da un'estremità all'altra costituiscono il suo modificarsi. Maschera per altre maschere, travestimento sotto altri travestimenti, l'io non si distingue dai propri buffoni, e cammina zoppicando su una gamba verde e una gamba rossa.' G. Deleuze, *Differenza e ripetizione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1971), p. 181. Interestingly, we can find a similar portraiture of the poetic subject as a Shaskesperean fool in *Il mondo*: 'Ma tu rintanato nel tuo freddo nascondiglio / disprezzi la mia commedia miserabile. / Buffone inutile io deliro per le vie / dove ogni fiato vivente ti rinnega.' E. Morante, 'Addio', *Il mondo,* p. 6.

Nessun miraggio può incontrare un altro miraggio. / Non ci sono che solitudini, dopo il furto dei corpi' (MSR, 10). The factual separation of the dead lover from the poet triggers a reflection over life and death. Moreover, this insurmountable distance produces a metaliterary reflection on the possibility of poetry and grace. Is *grâce* still reachable in a world condemned to *pesanteur* and pain? Does poetry offer an effective medium even when banished in posterity?

In the second elegy, the alteration between states of grace and gravity is further described through an accumulation of deictic syntagms: 'here' is opposed to 'there'. On the one hand, 'il ragazzo' found himself in the hereafter – 'Là non esistono indirizzi, né nomi, né ore. / Nessun segno per conoscersi' (MSR, 10); on the other hand, the poet, portrayed as 'la ladra delle notti', finds herself stuck in a different dimension: 'Quaggiù i difficili ragazzetti […]', 'Qua un giorno di primo autunno […]', 'Qua, una notte di troppe bevute […]', 'Qua ci si può raccontare le storie della propria vita […]', 'Si può bisbigliare ad un orecchio una frase tremenda', 'Si può protestare indignati […]' (MSR, 10,11). The anaphoric accumulation enhances the separation between the time dimensions pertaining to the dead lover and the living – and loving – poet. Time is suspended and the encounter between the two happens in a dreamlike atmosphere, which is the only one left to the poet. Morante ends up dialoguing with an unreal dimension outside time: that of lyric poetry.[298] Memory functions as a hallucination of reality that has still to be overcome by the subject.

[298] This temporal dimension possesses a striking similarity to the one experienced in the encounter between *Aracoeli*'s protagonist, Manuel, and his dead mother, Aracoeli. Normal temporality is abolished and replaced by new nexus that are not those of logical consequentiality. In *Addio* and *Aracoeli*, the subject has to confront with the abyss of unreality as a dimension that has to be gone through: 'E stanotte io dubito dell'esistenza reale di totetaco, così come quella di El Almendral. Forse la mia prima Aracoeli dello specchio e di Totetaco non è mai esistita. […] E denuncio così (non per la prima volta) la mia natura scissa, che spesso invalida la mia testimonianza perfino al giudizio mio proprio.' E. Morante, *Aracoeli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 112-13. Cfr. also Giuseppe Stellardi, 'La fabbrica del tempo: strutture della temporalità in Aracoeli', *Cuadernos de Filologìa Italiana*, 2014, V. 21, pp. 187-88.

Even if partially grounded on true biographical events, lyric based on love themes only cannot provide an answer different from the myth of Narcissus.[299] In an introductory note attached to the second edition of *Il mondo*, published in 1971, Morante clarifies her movement towards a new poetic diction:

> […] il viaggio di una coscienza di poeta, [che] partendo da un'esperienza individuale (*Addio* della prima parte), attraverso un'esperienza totale che si riconosce anche nel passato millenario e nel futuro confuso (poesie della seconda parte, e in particolare il poema, in forma di dramma, *La serata a Colono*), tenta la sua proposta di realtà comune e unica (poesie della terza parte). Si capisce allora perché Elsa Morante definisca il suo libro, fra l'altro, *romanzo e autobiografia*: non intendendo questi come un seguito di fatti particolari o personali, ma come l'avventura disperata di una coscienza che tende nel suo processo a identificarsi con tutti gli altri viventi della terra.[300]

That poetic language cannot provide any further solutions. Love, as she experiences it in her life, is somehow not sufficient to approach grace:[301]

La ladra delle notti è una demente maniaca
che nasconde ogni suo furto sempre in un'altra buca. […]

Alla distanza fantastica che li divide
non c'è misura. Nessun messaggio è possibile.
Senza usci le stanze: né finestre, né bocche di lupo.
Niente posta né alfabeti né telefoni né cifrari. […]

Ma quando la memoria è masticata dalle sabbie
anche la pulsazione del dolore è troncata.

Così sia. (MSR, 21)

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[299] In *Il mondo*, the distance between the poetic Subject and the author is more evident especially if compared to *Alibi*. Jonathan Culler discusses the different degrees of separation between the author and the lyric 'I' and defines it through the word 'indeterminacy'. In her second poetry collection, Morante wants to reach this point of 'indeterminacy' by inventing new characters and poetic events in order to challenge this overlapping between fictional and biographical subject. Cfr. J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 105-109. n

[300] The introductory note is reproduced in the chronology in the Mondadori edition of Morante's works. C. Garboli, 'Cronologia', E. Morante, *Opere*, V. 1, pp. XVIII- XCIV: LXXX.

[301] This completely differs from the solution listed in the poem *Alibi*, which was part of the previous collection: 'Solo chi ama conosce. Povero chi non ama!'. E Morante, 'Alibi', *Alibi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), p. 49. See also B. Frabotta, 'I paradossi di Alibi', pp. 131-142.

Morante's journal after Bill Morrow's death helps to understand this movement of separation in *Il mondo*. Written while she was working on *Il mondo*, these pages offer a deep insight into some of the figures of the new book:

> Sono passati due anni dal 30 aprile [the date of Bill Morrow's death]. E continuo a vivere come se ancora fosse vivo. In certi momenti dimentico l'orrore e si presentano istanti di consolazione come se ti avessi riconosciuto in qualcosa d'altro. Ma poi il dolore ritorna inaspettato. Ora anche le altre morti sono diventate per me la morte stessa. Prima non era così.
> Quanti anni ancora mi restano da vivere sopravvivendo: venti, forse trenta? L'unico modo umano per arrivare alla fine è non essere me stessa, ma un tutt'uno con gli altri, con quelli che rimangono. Non esserne separata. Essere tutti quelli che sono passato, presente e futuro. I morti, i vivi. In quel modo posso anche essere con te… l'unica felicità rimasta: non essere una ma essere tutti…
> Una sorta di parodia dei gesti che producevo quando ero ancora in vita.[302]

Morante touches here on various elements that will be pivotal for the structuring of *Il Mondo*. Firstly, she describes the fluctuation between emotional states, a constant presence of pain, and the indistinctiveness caused by death. Some flashes of lightness interrupt this state sporadically. Secondly, this alternation is rooted in the state of physical separateness she is experiencing at that stage of her life – 'alla distanza fantastica che li divide / non c'è misura' (MSR, 21), as she points out in *Addio*. The only solution for Morante is to embrace otherness and become indistinctively everyone; in other words, to de-subjectify herself. Thirdly, parody emerges in these pages too. Parody might lead one to reach a lighter way of thinking about reality and describing it through poetry. However, in Morante's diary, life itself has been turned into a parody. The consequent repetition of gestures without a meaning has staged Morante's own *pesanteur*. In disclosing her own traumas, the subject's ability to love is, in the end, obstructed and negated. In the attempt to provide a different interpretation of the lyric genre, Morante turns the love phenomenology into something else, that is less dialogic and more choral

[302] L. Tuck, *A Woman in Rome*, pp. 236-37.

– 'essere tutti quelli che sono passato, presente e futuro'. Accompanied by the burden of the *pesanteur*, her inability is, in the end, perceived as a guilty act.

This leads us to the core of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*: the dramatic piece *La Serata a Colono*. The text is labelled as a 'parody' by Morante, a metamorphosis of Oedipus into an alter-ego of the poet.[303] The scene takes place within a psychiatric hospital where Oedipus, accompanied by his daughter Antigone, is waiting for a therapeutical treatment. Oedipus' blindness prevents him from distinguishing the voice of the doctor, three guards, and of the other characters including Antigone. His blindness, to a certain extent, corresponds to the lack of sensitivity that also characterises Narcissus in *Alibi*. We can draw this parallel because Oedipus embodies the only lyric voice in Morante's dramatization. Indeed, not only Oedipus is the protagonist, but he is also the only character who is able to sing and speak poetry. Oedipus' language is parodied especially when he enters the dialogue with Antigone (who speaks a Roman dialect), the chorus, the nun, the doctor, and the guardians (who employ trivial idioms, characterised by slang expressions and, sometimes, even by verbal violence). As in the dialogue with Bill Morrow, Oedipus' speech is centred around the theme of loss and echoes the circular structure of the poetic farewell of *Addio*:

> Non c'è un inizio né una chiusa né una chiusa né un ordine di periodi
> com'è uso nelle scritture
> della logica sintattica.
> E MORTE E NASCITA E MORTE E NASCITA E MORTE E NASCITA
> questo motto così ripetuto a caratteri uguali senza virgole né punti
> è stampato lungo il cerchio d'una ruota.
> Ma la mente, stretta nella sua frammentaria misura lineare,
> si fabbrica le sue geografie e le sue storie
> come un folle coatto che nel percorrere avanti e indietro la sua corsia,
> crede di viaggiare alla scoperta di regioni inesplorate. (MSR, 65)

[303] Claudia Messina, 'Al centro del *Mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. Una lettura della *Serata a Colono*', *Bollettino di Italianistica* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), Vol. 1, pp. 105-122.

In this case too, the alternation between life and death structures the lyric subject's perception of time. The logical disposition of facts in poetry is no longer possible. For Oedipus, the human mind is not able to catch and accept the cyclical alternation of life and death, as well as the concurrent states of 'gravity' and 'grace'. Whereas gravity was, in Morante's words, a constant undertone to her existence, grace is accessible through a series of unstable and fickle encounters. At this stage of Morante's theorisation of a new poetic language, any linguistic revolution faces a systematic barrier. 'Grace', on the other hand, lies in the place of absence:

> Però il dolore è certo.
> È la mia presenza. È mio.
> Io non sono uno che assiste al dolore
> di un tale Edipo. Sono io
> questo dolore… (MSR, 67)
>
> Dolore e beatitudine – gli altri e me stesso
> tutti questi nomi sono differenze fittizie
> ch'io posso invertire e mutare quando voglio. […]
>
> Mischiare le voci di tutti i vocabolari
> a un corale o di bestemmia o d'implorazione,
> o meditare su un solo nome, riducendo gli altri al silenzio.
> Posso straniarmi da ogni significato verbale.
> Vociferare in una lingua dei misteri come gli ossessi e le sibille.
> O emettere sillabe senza senso. […]
>
> … Ma sono tutte rivoluzioni di un ceto
> di cui nei gradi della corte irraggiungibile
> non si ha notizia
>
> Il luogo della grazia è assenza di ogni notizia
> e ogni presenza è luogo inferiore.
> La memoria
> è peccato come la veggenza. (MSR. 68,69)

According to what Morante states in *La serata a Colono*, I argue that the poetic subject/Oedipus must accept the dislocation of the lyric subject, experiencing a dimension far away from the hereafter and 'grace'. Condemned to eternity and repetition, poetry embraces lyric as a form of an interrupted and everlasting farewell,

escaping from a linear temporal dimension.[304] In one of Oedipus' speeches, for instance, there is a further reference to *Addio*. This reference allows us to draw a parallel with the concluding poem of *Il mondo*:

Addio ADDIO è la sola scritta leggibile su questo muro sgorbiato che è l'ultima mia casa, - eternità carceraria dove non si dà più fuoco domestico, né stanza d'incontri/ o di ritorni. (MSR, 70)	Congedo E adesso, o voi che avete ascoltato queste canzoni, perdonatemi se sospiro ripensando a quanto era stata semplice la mia vita. (MSR, 245)

Characterised by this thematic continuity, the book's structure appears even clearer after reading the closing poem, *Congedo*. Here, the poet speaks directly with her own voice. The poet addresses her speech to those who will be reading the book and will, hopefully, identify with the 'felici pochi' celebrated in the last section of the book. Morante asks for forgiveness, for her 'ripensare', getting back to a state of 'grace' she had experienced before.

The large variety of genres in *Il mondo* prevents any easy classification of this book. Morante fosters a generic confusion, defining her own book as a novel, an autobiography, a secret diary, a newspaper article, an elegy, a theatrical piece, a love poem, an epitaph. Lyric poetry, no doubt, gains a central stage also on a thematic level, resulting in the only way to get access to 'grace'. This composite definition of the lyric genre displays, to a certain extent, an all-encompassing idea of poetry. If one looks closer at the alternation between sections and sub-sections, the consistency of *Il mondo* relies on the circularity of its structure. In other words, the circularity of this uninterrupted

[304] Also in this case, Morante's discussion of temporality is echoed in Aracoeli: 'E in quel punto il tempo si è fermato, rendendomi a un senso indicibile, unico e totale, al quale oggi potrei dare un nome: ETERNITÀ. (È strano come l'ETERNITÀ si lasci captare piuttosto in un segmento effimero che in una continuità estesa. Ma il corpo non sostiene la prova, e torna al disordine). E. Morante, *Aracoeli*, p. 202.

'addio' shapes *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, also providing some of the fundamental meta-literary theorisations in the collection.

Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo appears as a continuum of fifty-four poems. In the overall structure, one can recognise shorter chains of poems that show a thematic continuity. *Le mie poesie* develops a more linear structure compared to Morante's book. In the first place, the book is not divided into sections and sub-sections.[305] However, if we look closely at the very beginning and at the very end, we may discover that *Le mie poesie* shares more than one similarity with *Il mondo salvato*. As revealed by Cavalli in an interview with Lily Tuck, not only did Morante suggest the title of Cavalli's first book, but she also helped the poet in arranging the poems, contributing also to the final draft.[306] The two works, as a result, disclose the same structural pattern. As in *Il mondo*, meta-literary texts are located at the beginning and at the very end of the book. These texts address the same chain of themes: poetry, time, eternity, and repetition. In *Le mie poesie*, we can even find a similar discussion of the nature of poetry and its foundations. For both the poets, poetry originates from absence. Nevertheless, the methods to address this absence are different.

The first poem of *Le mie poesie* is a proper poetic statement. As already highlighted, the poem rephrases the title of the collection:

> Qualcuno mi ha detto
> che certo le mie poesie
> non cambieranno il mondo.
>
> Io rispondo che certo sì
> le mie poesie
> non cambieranno il mondo. (LMP, 1)

[305] E. Testa, 'Patrizia Cavalli', *Dopo la lirica*, p. 298.
[306] Lily Tuck, *Woman of Rome. A Life of Elsa Morante* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 247.

The metaliterary nature of the epigrammatic opening is underlined using a reported speech ('Qualcuno mi ha detto'), showing us nothing more than a tautology.[307] The very beginning of Cavalli's poetry contains an auto-biographical reference to Morante as the person hidden behind that 'qualcuno'. The lyric subject is opposed to the other voice in the second stanza. The first-person pronoun at the very beginning of the new stanza highlights this opposition. This immediately differentiates the two collections. In Cavalli's text, 'qualcuno' leaves the place to the poetic subject of the second stanza, endorsing an uninterrupted dialectic between the self and alterity.

The first poem is followed by two texts that are also in open dialogue with Morante's *Addio* (LMP, 2 and 3). For Cavalli, eternity and death still enable the poetic discourse but, unlike in *Addio*, the lyric subject rejects the approachability of those dimensions. In fact, the subject must stay away from such threatening dimensions. Humour and lightness offer an escape:

Eternità e morte insieme mi minacciano:
nessuna delle due conosco,
nessuna delle due conoscerò. (LMP, 2)

Né morte né pazzia mi
prenderà:
un tremore nelle vene forse
un'acuta risata, un ingorgo
del sangue, un'ebbrezza
limitata. (LMP, 3)

If we compare these three poems with the suite of three texts at the end of the volume (LMP, 52, 53, and 54), we also discover that *Le mie poesie* discloses a circular structure, centred on a progressive absence of the subject.

Sono malata sono malnata
e poi tanto dico sempre
le stesse cose. (LMP, 52)

All'ombra di una metafora
datemi una margherita
perché io possa tenerla in mano
la margherita. (LMP, 53)

Poco di me ricordo
io che a me sempre ho pensato.
Mi scompaio come l'oggetto
troppo a lungo guardato.
Ritornerò a dire
la mia luminosa scomparsa. (LMP, 54)

[307] Gian Maria Annovi, 'An Endless End', *Ends of Poetry*, ed. by G.M. Annovi, T. Harrison, *California Italian Studies*, 8, Issue 1, 2018, p. 7.

The first poem of the suite is dedicated to a self-portrait: the phrase 'poi dico' echoes the reported speech of the opening poem ('qualcuno mi ha detto'). The stress here is on the repetition of an action, the one allowing the reiteration of the poetic discourse. This is made explicit in the last poem in which the poet's destiny is to vanish in front of the reiteration of her own poetic creation: 'Ritornerò a dire / la mia luminosa scomparsa'. The use of the verb 'ritornerò' not only replicates the motif of repetition but it also strengthens the circularity of the book.

In contrast with Morante's inclination to otherness, *Le mie poesie* celebrates the centrality of the lyric subject. In the 'teatro d'amore', the subject must dialogue with two emerging instances: the unremarkable objects of poetry and the performativity of the poetic discourse. Objects participate in Cavalli's light tone and contribute to shaping its performative nature.[308] As in an actual theatrical set, the subject interacts with different inanimate objects while performing her own monologue. As emerges from the penultimate poem, these objects are fundamental in structuring the way the subject expresses herself. Even metaphor is rejected in place of the intrinsic perfection of reality and its manifestations ('All'ombra di una metafora / datemi una margherita / perché io possa tenerla in mano / la margherita'). Moreover, a similar structure can be found in one of her longest texts that Cavalli places at the centre of the collection:

> E chi potrà più dire
> che non ho coraggio, che non vado
> fra gli altri e che non mi appassiono?

[308] To this extent, Cavalli's discourse echoes Agamben's category of 'inoperosità', as theorised in *Homo Sacer*. Agamben defines 'inoperosità' as a potential act which is not actually carried out to completion. Originated from the agency of the subject, this is a device used to shelter life from any power's dynamics. The category of 'inoperosità' unfolds through a collective sequence of acts and objects that are deprived of their value of use. This potentiality which is not fulfilled in the factual experience of life produces a sort of suspension of time, an ἐποχή, that we can easily recognize also in the poems written by Cavalli. Not only poetry can be interpreted as an exercise of this 'inoperosità' but, in the case of Cavalli, this is also exhibited as the core of her poetics and would become the main theme of a later collection, *Pigre divinità e pigra sorte* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006). Cfr G. Agamben, *Il regno e la Gloria. Per una genealogia teleologica dell'economia e del governo* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2007), pp 11-13; 69-80; *L'uso dei corpi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2014), pp. 477-483.

Ho fatto una fila di quasi
mezz'ora oggi alla posta;
ho percorso tutta la fila passetto
per passetto, ho annusato
gli odori atroci di maschi
di vecchi e anche di donne, ho sentito
mani toccarmi il culo spingermi
il fianco. Ho riconosciuto
la nausea e l'ho lasciata là
dov'era, il mio corpo
si è riempito di sudore, ho sfiorato
una polmonite. Non d'amor di me
si tratta, ma orrore degli altri
dove io mi riconosco. (LMP, 26)

The text begins with a rhetorical question the subject is asking herself. In this case too, Cavalli recurs to the verb 'dire'. After that question, she starts a description of a trivial experience: queuing up at a post office. This experience is wittily turned into an encounter with otherness. People become an excuse for poetic involvement with reality and, concurrently, a way to experience the world. The discourse's centre is no longer the lyric subject but the eerie encounters with the others: '[…] Non d'amor di me / si tratta, ma orrore degli altri / dove io mi riconosco.'

3.5.2. PERFORMATIVITY, GESTURE, SPACE

Figures of repetition are not limited to the books' liminal spaces. There are other recurrent themes in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and *Le mie poesie*. Performativity has a significant role in both collections. The centrality of gesture contributes to the coherence of the books.[309]

[309] The relationship between lyric poetry and gestures is discussed by Francesco Giusti, 'Temporalità liriche. Ripetizione e incompiutezza tra Dante e Caproni, Montale e Sanguineti', *The Ends of Poetry*, *California Italian Studies*, ed. by G.M. Annovi, T. Harrison, *California Italian Studies*, 8, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 1-16.

As already mentioned, Cavalli celebrates the subjective experience of reality. In doing so, she uses humour as a powerful poetic source.[310] Through humour, Cavalli turns the 'lightness' of poetry into an actual gnoseological tool. Gesture, in Cavalli's texts, always originates from an attempt to dissimulate the actions performed by the lyric subject. Each action must appear as if it were done casually and without any constraint. This is the main product of Cavalli's attempt to preserve a 'light' diction in poetry. The author's subjective posture reveals a tendency to 'sprezzatura'.[311] In Cavalli's own words, each poetic gesture seems performed effortlessly. This attempt contrasts with the rich system of cultural and literary references hidden behind her well-thought spontaneity. During the performance of those acts, 'sprezzatura' leaves a thematic trace as well:

> Devo fingere volgarità e tradimento
> per accomodarmi sul divano
> per ricambiare sguardi; spiegando
> le tredici pieghe di un pensiero
> decifro l'accorta sentenza che scende
> sulle mie sentimentali parole che dico
> che dico fingendo anche l'amore
> e nella finzione riconosco il punto perfetto
> l'unico possibile della certezza. (LMP, 7)

A single gesture becomes part of a broader scene that does not simply define Cavalli's performance but also gains a stylistic value. This idea is developed through several

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[310] A. Bertoni, 'Nel Novecento e oltre', *Poesia italiana dal Novecento a oggi* (Bologna: Marietti, 2019), p. 117; Cfr. also A. Berardinelli, *Il Novecento*, p. 161: 'Crudeltà e spavalderia, arguzia formale e naturalezza espressiva: le caratteristiche della poesia di Patrizia Cavalli si rivelano e si impongono immediatamente ad aperture di pagina.'

[311] 'Sprezzatura' is a theme central to Cavalli's *oeuvre* developed in several texts in *Le mie poesie*. Here, 'sprezzatura' is substituted with other nouns such as, for instance, 'educazione': 'L'educazione permette di mangiare / con educazione e permette / altre cose; ma se vuoi volare / le ali si hanno o non si hanno' (LMP, 20). In the collection published in 2013, *Datura*, 'sprezzatura' becomes one of the main themes. In the poem titled 'La maestà barbarica', Cavalli uses the word 'sprezzo' in order to describe this systemic dissimulation as the main characteristic of her poetry: 'Alle invettive maggiori fanno seguito /varie esercitazioni: prove di voce, / di gesto, di posture, riscaldamenti / dei quali non avrebbe alcun bisogno, / non fossero un di più, quel lusso divertito / di chi per troppa arte si abbandona / all'accademia o indulge nello sprezzo […]' P. Cavalli, *Datura* (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), p. 13.

syntactical elements: the performative phrase 'per accomodarmi sul divano' is connected to the fictional imperative in the opening line, 'Devo fingere volgarità e tradimento'. Cavalli's posture hides the baroque complexity of the thought that produced the gesture: lines such as 'le tredici pieghe di un pensiero' and 'le mie sentimentali parole' reveal the actual complexity behind this performance. This overall movement allows the subject to gain a new awareness of reality: 'nella finzione riconosco il punto perfetto'.

Within this never-ending performance, the lyric subject conquers the stage; from this central position, the subject can investigate the world.[312] For Cavalli, gesture is a pure signifier that gains a new meaning through repetition and staging. While even the most trivial object becomes part of the dramatization, the subject obtains the centre of the stage and disappears afterwards at the end of each scene, as an actor performing in an actual theatrical piece:

> Quante tentazioni attraverso
> nel percorso tra la camera
> e la cucina, tra la cucina
> e il cesso. Una macchia
> sul muro, un pezzo di carta
> caduto in terra, un bicchiere d'acqua,
> un guardar dalla finestra,
> ciao alla vicina,
> una carezza alla gattina.
> Così dimentico sempre
> l'idea principale, mi perdo
> per strada, mi scompongo
> giorno per giorno ed è vano
> tentare qualsiasi ritorno. (LMP, 49)

The subject's disappearance is described in the last five lines by two indirect object pronouns – 'mi perdo', 'mi scompongo'. The accumulation of these gestures creates a

[312] This operation would become central not only to *Le mie poesie* but also to the following books published by Cavalli. For instance, one of these poetic collections is entitled *Sempre aperto teatro* whereby this tension is openly revealed; P. Cavalli, *Sempre aperto teatro* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999). Not to mention Cavalli's translation of several Shakespeare's plays. The first play translated by Cavalli was *The Tempest* that would have been staged in 1984 at the Teatro Niccolini in Florence. P. Cavalli, *Shakespeare in scena* (Rome: nottetempo, 2016), p. 14.

private theatre. On this stage, the single movement becomes part of a performative staging. The lyric subject aims to fulfil her pleasure principle. In other poems, this tension towards repetition and performativity becomes even clearer: 'again again again / fallo di nuovo' (LMP, 39).[313] Supported by a narcissistic drive towards the satisfaction of the pleasure principle, the healing nature of this performance is, in the end, diminished – '[…] ed è vano / tentare qualsiasi ritorno'.

In several poems, the subject's fantasy focuses on the unnamed and anonymous characters that are staged in Cavalli's books and participate chorally in her drama.

In un punto del loro acuto svolgersi
s'empivano di verde gli occhi del gatto,
specchio brevissimo e attento
degli alberi e dell'erba. E ripeteva il gesto
senza saperne lo splendore. (LMP, 4)

Perché avevi un foglio di carta
e una matita, credevi che
l'immagine ti sarebbe riuscita.
Ma il gesto tuo più grande
fu cancellarmi, riportami
nel limbo da cui ero uscita.

Invece io, dopo le vene
della mano e come
dalla camicia il braccio
si scopriva, aggiunsi
le sopracciglia al mio disegno
nel piccolo volo
che ti confonde il viso. (LMP, 43)

In the first poem, a cat performs a gesture with no understanding of its aesthetic implications. Also in this case, the repetition of a gesture without meaning is central to Cavalli's private theatre. The second poem sketches a different scene: here, the protagonist is a lover, a painter. The poem is divided into two sections. On the one hand, the first stanza describes the lover while she is portraying the poet. The conjunction 'ma' opposes the act of portraying the lover to the gesture of erasing a portrait. On the other hand, the second stanza is focused on the lyric subject who intervenes and engages with

[313] S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: Penguin, 2003).

this portrait. This results in a mirror image of the self who contributes to another poetic self-portrait.

All these scenes are added to a 'light' phenomenology of love developed through a sequence of actions and daily performances. Filtered through a constant reference to classical authors of epigrams such as Catullus and Martial, Cavalli described the love relationship employing the *topoi* of the 'militia amoris'.[314]

[…] Ma lei sa
che l'omaggio è regale
la cavalieria impunita. (LMP, 8)

[…] Hai intarsiato la mia scrivania
scolpito il mio scaffale; ma ora non più
arcieri in costume da guerra, soltanto
segni distratti. […] (LMP, 15)

Vado in guerra lasciando una città
senza lasciarla; simulo l'eternità
portando assieme alle valige
due cappotti. (LMP, 19)

The classical reference is altered and then adjusted to a different description. In the first two poems, for instance, the warrior should not be mistaken for the poet, as is common in classical epigrammatic and elegiac poetry. However, the lover is here the one in charge of the scene. While the lover is sketched as a brave and unpunished soldier, her drawings are metaphorically described as archers ready to sting the lyric subject with their love arrows. The target of the third poem is, once again, the subject; now, the subject is portrayed while going to war. Cavalli describes this war as a trivial and daily struggle whereby the subject can simulate and communicate a separate and eternal time dimension – 'simulo l'eternità', as Cavalli states. One can recognise the recurrent opposition between the temporal dimension of the present, the one in which daily performances and actions occur, and an external dimension, which is suspended and out of space. This second dimension can be only simulated by a poetic exercise. Indeed, the act of writing is a crucial exercise, enabling the lyric subject to overcome the transiency of life:

Anche quando sembra che la giornata
sia passata come un'ala di rondine,

[314] Paul Chrystal, *Women at War in the Classical World* (Barsnley: Pen & Sword Military, 2017).

come una manciata di polvere
gettata e che non è possibile
raccogliere e la descrizione
il racconto non trovano necessità
né ascolto, c'è sempre una parola
una paroletta da dire
magari per dire che non c'è niente da dire. (LMP, 9)

While Cavalli's gesture and performance are introduced through the filters of lightness and 'sprezzatura', Morante's has a far more complex approach to these themes. In *Il mondo*, gesture is not limited to the textual space. Indeed, *Il mondo* is profoundly tied to the experience of the dramatic monologue *Pro o contro la bomba atomica*. Held in several Italian theatres in 1965, *Pro o contro la bomba atomica* consists of a reflection over some of the questions which Morante would later discuss in *Il mondo*. Among others, this text stages Morante's own poetic voice to tackle the relationship between poetry and reality.

> Ultima e più allegra ipotesi: lo scrittore si ritroverà ancora una qualche fiducia nella liberazione comune, insieme con la certezza di essere lui stesso, ancora, salvo dal disastro, e capace di resistergli. […] Naturalmente, povera poesia, dovrà penare per meritare attenzione attraverso i funebri mercati della, cosiddetta quaggiù, alienazione, nel furibondo fracasso dei traffici ufficiali, sacro alla noia dei miseri alienati. Fra tante prove più dure di resistenza, il rumore della noia è logorante. E talvolta lo scrittore avrà voglia di mandare tutti quanti all'inferno, coi loro giornaletti, i loro cantautori e il loro ciclotrone. E lui imbarcarsi definitivamente come Rimbaud, o magari andarsene a stare nel deserto delle colonne, vicino ai suoi compagni stiliti. Ma poi, o non lo farà, o dopo ogni fuga, ritornerà indietro: perché lui, per sua natura, ha bisogno degli altri, specie dei diversi da lui. Senza gli altri è un uomo disgraziato. E così, rimarrà sul campo. […][315]

In this passage, Morante depicts a series of scenarios where the poet is the protagonist and director of her own actions. These gestures must gain a collective meaning, or art will remain a sheer matter of self-representation. According to Morante, literature is a matter of involvement and dialogue with reality. Poetry – and literature at large –

[315] E. Morante, 'Pro o contro la bomba atomica', *Pro o contro la bomba atomica e altri scritti* (Milan: Adelphi, 1985), p. 78.

challenges and confronts unreality, which is not only dangerous but also poisonous to humankind. Intrinsic to Il *mondo*, this theatrical component unfolds through a series of literary references.

On the theme of performativity, Shakespeare functions as an important model for *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. The Shakespearean theatre represents another important similarity with Cavalli's case. Nonetheless, while Cavalli tends to take inspiration from the lightest plays, namely comedies such as *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *The Tempest*, Elsa Morante opts for the tragedies. There are several allusions to *Macbeth* in *Il mondo*. In the closing section of *La Commedia chimica*, *La smania dello scandalo*, Morante inserts a considerable number of innuendos from the most famous lines of the 'Scottish play': Macbeth's monologue after he discovers the death of his wife:

> She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.
>
> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.[316]

Several sections of *La commedia chimica* echo this passage through direct quotes from the Shakesperean lines. In addition to the key theme of loss of meaning in the line 'full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing', the reference to Macbeth's soliloquy is made explicit in the sub-section *La smania dello scandalo* whereby 'SPEGNITI SPEGNITI CANDELINA' (MSR, 125) is a translation of Shakespeare's 'Out, out, brief candle!'. In

[316] W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 228-29.

the preceding text of *La smania dello scandalo*, Morante writes her own version of the monologue:

> Per divertire la noia della loro morte
> dovrà innocente recitare una commedia pervertita
> dove il segreto ultimo che confida
> sembri infine a lui stesso una favola e un tradimento.
> Dovrà riconoscere la sua diversità come una smorfia
> e rendersi, come alla grazia,
> al loro vizio comune
> invocando la cecità come un perdono.
> Domani
> e domani e domani e domani e domani e (MSR, 119)

Through a series of nods to Shakespeare's texts, such as the translation of the line 'tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow', Morante creates a personal transposition of the text preserving almost identical semantic choices. The lyric subject/Shakesperean fool must carry on her role in a 'commedia pervertita' in which the actual meaning will be discovered at the end of her performance. Performed by the subject on the stage, the series of gestures has to be interpreted – and solved by the reader/audience – as a sort of riddle to be narrated over and over again. This procedure could eventually lead to grace. Morante's aim is to reconstitute the meaning the loss of meaning occurred in this never-ending 'commedia'. Yet, the body represents a key tool to access reality.

However, a type of knowledge centred on the bodily experience only was not enough for Morante. Therefore, the body cannot be the only protagonist of a revolution such as the one outlined by the author: 'La vostra sostanza è conoscere / che questa macchina lacerante da noi chiamata il corpo /non era se non un rifugio sepolcrale / della paura sepolcrale' (MSR, 144). The body is still a burden and relegates the lyric subject to her *pesanteur*. The 'Felici Pochi' are the ones in charge of developing a possible solution through their own way of experiencing reality. The body must be expressed through gesture, and this must be done, specifically, by disconnecting one's mind from any utilitarian interpretation of agency. Gesture, then, can conquer its own meaning.

We can recognise the development of this approach in the *Canzoni popolari*. Rufo, also called La Mutria, a child from the Roman 'borgate', decides to hold the cross in place of Christ during his martyrdom. Narrated first in the *Canzone della forca* and then in the *Canzone di Giuda o dello sposalizio*, the event stages a sort of 'acte gratuit' which allows the protagonist to access the revelation of a so called 'game'. Morante describes this revelation as a game by using a recurrent refrain: this is pronounced by Christ in his way to Golgotha and keeps being repeated in each 'canzone': 'TUTTO QUESTO / IN SOSTANZA E VERITA' / NON E' NIENT'ALTRO / CHE UN GIOCO'. The refrain is repeated at three different stages in the two opening 'canzoni' (MSR,169,175,217).

In the last 'canzone', the *Canzone della Carlottina o della stella gialla*, Morante introduces a variant by modifying the refrain for the first time. The protagonist of this song, 'Carlottina', invents a stratagem to sabotage the Jews' deportation. During the Second World War, she convinces the whole population to wear a yellow star of cloth originally destined to Jewish people. Here, the refrain keeps the same reference to 'il gioco' but it is then expanded in a reflection over the nonsensical nature of war:

> […] la vostra Guerra
> pure quella
> comunque vi andasse, vittoriosa o persa, e per quanto lugubre, oscena e feroce vi riuscisse
> ALLA FINE
> IN SOSTANZA E VERITA'
> NON POTEVA CHE ESSERE STATA MAI, PURE QUELLA,
> NIENT'ALTRO CHE UN GIOCO. (MSR, 243)

The accumulation of non-utilitarian gestures is eventually turned into a game, and the game culminates in a spontaneous revolution. Nevertheless, this game does not consist of a loss of meaning. Morante's game gains a different meaning instead. The game is a procedure used by the 'happy few' to tackle *pesanteur* and win their own 'de-territorialised'

space within the world. In the last section of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini,* Morante aims specifically at this ultimate revolution that, according to her, must start as a poetic one.

3.6. CONCLUSION

Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini and *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* are profoundly interconnected. Both Morante and Cavalli follow a path of cross-fertilisation of their style, themes, and language. Therefore, the analysis of their genealogic relationship has been fundamental. Thanks to the study on the reception of the Weilian concepts of 'gravity' and 'grace', a reason for Morante's and Cavalli's poetic 'illocality' has been provided. As revealed after a close reading of these texts, the two books reveal a common ground of mutual interconnections, intermingled with references to various literary and extraliterary traditions, a similar interest in a new metrical system, and structural similarities in the composition of their poetry collections. The comparison between the two has allowed us to better understand and situate Morante's and Cavalli's stylistic originality. In both *Il mondo salvato* and *Le mie poesie*, there is an attempt to 'de-territorialize' the poetic language. This results in a 'de-territorialized' collocation of both the authors within the Italian poetic canon.

4. 'NON V'ERA PUBBLICO PIÙ DISATTENTO'. Clarity and Obscurity in Amelia Rosselli's *Documento (1966-1973)* and Biancamaria Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*

Within the process of de-territorialization of the poetic language, the discussion of form and style does not rely on the oppositive coupling of lightness and gravity only, as is the case with Morante and Cavalli. Form is the main outpost to any attempt at de-territorialising the language of poetry; being the very core of the poet's intervention on reality, form works as the degree of reality which is rebuilt *within* the poetic language. As previously analysed while discussing Morante's and Cavalli's poetry, not only de-territorialization is anchored in language, but passes also through a systemic innovation of the different structures of the signifier thanks to a novel approach to literary tradition. Tradition itself, to this extent, is seen as something mobile, which must be challenged, hybridised, and innovated within these poets' lyric discourse. This act is specifically carried out by contaminating the Italian poetic tradition through a transnational dialogue with several other traditions, while also producing radical changes in the many ways the textuality is unfolded by these poets. Amelia Rosselli and Biancamaria Frabotta are no exception to this dynamic of de-territorialization.

This chapter focuses on the stylistic processes through which Rosselli and then Frabotta develop the de-territorialization of their language at three distinct levels: the semantics, the metrics, and the structure of their books. The system of linguistic and stylistic innovations introduced by the two poets passes through another oppositive pair of concepts: the one that opposes clarity to obscurity. Before getting started with a close reading of their poetic collections published in the seventies, it is important to reconstruct the historical framework whereby the encounter between the two poets occurred.

4.1. A BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS: THE AUDIENCE OF POETRY

4.1.1. IN SEARCH OF LOST ADOLESCENCE

The 'long seventies' represent a crucial decade for both Amelia Rosselli and Biancamaria Frabotta. In 1966, Amelia Rosselli started writing her third poetry collection, titled *Documento (1966-1973)*, a book that the poet loved to define 'libro della maturità raggiunta'.[317] This collection happens to be the third one fully written in Italian. However, *Documento* would have occupied the fifth position within the authorial publication plan, which not only comprised the first two Italian collections, *Variazioni Belliche* and *Serie Ospedaliera* – respectively published in 1964 and 1969 –, but also two other books: *Primi Scritti*, which includes the early texts of various nature written in Italian, French, and English, and *Sleep*,[318] a collection of poems written in English using a reinvented Elizabethan poetic grammar and spelling. In the Rosselli's intentions, *Documento* should have occupied the fifth place within her whole production, a book that one could define – preserving the same Shakespearean reference suggested by the author – as a manifestation of a finally achieved 'ripeness'.[319] To this extent, the trajectory described by the triad formed by the collections written in Italian – *Variazioni Belliche*, *Serie Ospedaliera*, and *Documento* – would be grounded in the other two multi-lingual

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317 A. Rosselli, 'Alla ricerca dell'adolescenza', *Fiera Letteraria*, 25 July 1968, now in A. Rosselli, 'Documento', *Una scrittura plurale,* ed. by F. Caputo (Novara: Interlinea, 2004), p. 285.

318 Rosselli published the collections in this chronological order: *Variazioni Belliche* (Milan: Garzanti, 1964), *Serie Ospedaliera* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1969), *Primi Scritti* (Milan: Guanda, 1980), and *Sonno – Sleep* (1953-1966) bilingual edition translated by Antonio Porta (Rome: Rossi & Spera, 1989). *Sleep* was reprinted by Garzanti in 1992 together with the Italian translations by Emanuela Tandello.

319 The frequent use of the word 'maturità' in *Documento* not only seems to resonate within a reference to William Shakespeare's *King Lear* – a text which Rosselli was carefully studying while she was writing *Sleep* – but it also refers back to the dedicatory epigraphy of *Lavorare Stanca* by Cesare Pavese, strengthening the idea of a strong connection between *Documento* and Pavese's poems. See E. Tandello, 'Sleep: Notizie sui testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 1498; 1502.

books, *Primi Scritti* and *Sleep* – two works that are able to illustrate the stratigraphic nature of Rosselli's literary system.

According to Pasolini, Rosselli's stylistic heritage was 'apolide' and informed by a forced 'cosmopolitismo'.[320] A style that was going to become a 'caso isolato' within the Italian poetic tradition, as Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo claimed in his anthology.[321] This style would find a different justification in the narrative that the author herself, Amelia Rosselli, was trying to put together during the seventies: *Primi Scritti* and *Sleep* would be able to illustrate a system of references external to the Italian canon while also expanding the borders of the many traditions she dialogues with in her poetry, with a particular focus on the European Avant-Garde, on the one hand, and on the English Renaissance, on the other.[322] In Rosselli's will, *Primi scritti* and *Sleep* are to be interpreted as a fundamental premise to fully understand her poetry. Guided by a firm rational plan, far from Pasolini's definitions of 'inconscio' and 'nevrosi',[323] the design of Rosselli's narrative should guide the reader and the literary critic into the still uncharted territory of her poetic production. Rosselli's publication plan had to be adapted and postponed due to a prolonged and difficult dialogue with several publishing houses: *Primi Scritti* published in 1980 by Guanda and *Sleep*, published by Rossi e Spera only in 1989 and

320 P.P. Pasolini, 'Notizia su Amelia Rosselli', *Il Menabò* 6, 1963, p. 66.

321 P.V. Mengaldo, 'Amelia Rosselli', *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), p. 993.

322 Carpita stresses how 'La raccolta [*Primi Scritti*] condivide con le composizioni degli anni Sessanta scelte retorico-stilistiche e fonti letterarie con le quali si confronta, come accade con il modernismo anglo-americano o la lezione di Baudelaire e Campana.' C. Carpita, 'Primi Scritti. Notizie sui testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, pp. 1395-96.

323 P.P. Pasolini, "Notizia su Amelia Rosselli", pp. 68-69. On this topic, Rosselli elaborates in a late interview released in 1988: 'I miei coetanei rifiutano questa sistematicità, rifiutano la scienza. La poesia è considerata espressione dell'irrazionale […]. Che la scienza sia in tutte le discipline anche artistiche è un mio parere, ma se lo dico a un poeta si spaventa.' With 'science', Rosselli is referring to the notion of a rational system – that one, for instance, that guided her 'grammatica dei poveri' in the first collections or her metrical system explained in *Spazi Metrici*. See A. Dolce, 'Amelia Rosselli: poesia non necessariamente ascientifica', *Idea*, XLIV, 1-2, January-February 1988, p. 42.

then reprinted by Garzanti in 1992 with the new translations into Italian by Emanuela Tandello.

At the same time, the 'mature' season of *Documento* follows an abundant period of writing which covers the years between 1966 and 1973. This is accompanied by a painful process of selection of texts that would be included in the final draft of the manuscript published with Garzanti in 1976. [324] What emerges from this period is a combined attempt by Rosselli to give order and shape to a coherent literary project guided by a rational control and, at the same time, a marked pedagogical drive: poetry has to be explained to the reader, especially when grounded in difficult theoretical bases – as is the case with Rosselli's first collection, *Variazioni Belliche* and the essay *Spazi Metrici.* Amelia Rosselli's pedagogical posture had been there since the very beginning of her literary career, both inspired and initiated at Pasolini's request[325] to publish *Spazi Metrici,* which would eventually accompany her first collection, *Variazioni Belliche*.[326] Identifying the reasons of her poetics while also trying to make her poetry accessible to the reader, not only is something intrinsic to Rosselli's ethics since her very first steps into literature but it is also an approach that she would develop systematically for the whole duration of the seventies.[327]

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[324] In a letter sent to her brother John on the 24th February 1968, Rosselli describes the process of this 'scrittura fiume' and the subsequent process of strict selection: 'Ho finalmente terminato di scegliere le poesie da un mucchio di quasi 600 pagine […] scritte in questi ultimi due anni. Non credo ne terrò più di 60-70 circa'. The number of the kept poems would have reduced even more in later years. See S. Carbognin, 'Cronologia', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, p. CII.

[325] A. Rosselli, *Lettere a Pasolini, 1962-69*, ed. by S. Giovannuzzi (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2008), pp. 36-37.

[326] Rosselli explains the process that led to the publication of the treatise in the text I*ntroduzione a Spazi Metrici*, a text which was originally meant to be presented at the conference *La parola ritrovata*, organised by Gabriella Sica at La Sapienza University of Rome in 1992: M.I. Greta, G. Sica, *La parola ritrovata. Ultime tendenze della poesia* italiana (Venice: Marsilio, 1995). The text has been later included in G. Devoto, E. Tandello, *Trasparenze 17-19* (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 11-14.

[327] Referring to *Variazioni Belliche*, Rosselli admits how 'il libro aveva nella sua prima stesura intenzioni quasi chiare, ma essendo un libro tipicamente giovanile, questa chiarezza si imbrogliò strada facendo'; A. Rosselli, *Una scrittura plurale*, p. 343.

In Rosselli's life, the seventies are characterised by the contrast between two opposite events. On the one hand, this is the period in which Rosselli's neurosis intensifies. As she painfully reports in the text 'Storia di una malattia' published on *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1978,[328] she is deeply convinced to be spied upon by the American secret service, conspiring with Italian neo-fascist organizations. The persecution 'crises' keep happening with increased strength and frequency, and this forces her to move to London and live there between 1976 and 1977.[329] On the other hand, Rosselli's fame begins to settle: she is included in several fundamental anthologies published in the seventies, such as Mengaldo's *Poeti Italiani del Novecento*, Porta's *Poesia degli anni settanta*, and Frabotta's *Donne in poesia*. As a result, Amelia Rosselli rapidly becomes one of the most appreciated poets of the so called 'Roman school' and one of the elected 'madri culturali' for Italian poets. In this period, Amelia Rosselli also starts being involved in a series of public poetry readings. The encounter with the audience – an addressee who is almost grasped as a reader in presence – is a fundamental element, which both innovates and complicates the lyricism of *Documento*. The centrality of the addressee – and, at a later stage, of the readership – was going to be clarified in the opening poem:[330]

> proprio prima di dover partire scrissi
> perciò voltando il dorso alla promessa
> cose molto belle che solo tu con la
> tua faccia infantile da ragazzo costretto
> ad esser fiero puoi indicarmi.
>
> Si, scrissi finalmente cose belle, tutte
> per te – non v'era pubblico più disattento. (DOC, 5)

[328] A. Rosselli, 'Storia d'una malattia', *Nuovi Argomenti* 56 (Milan: Mondadori, 1977), pp. 185-196.
[329] As reported by the poet Elio Pecora, Rosselli was convinced to get back to Rome thanks to the creation of a poetry prize – in collaboration with Alfonso Berardinelli, Biancamaria Frabotta, Renzo Paris – that would be given to *Documento*. A. Rosselli, 'Lettere da Londra a Elio Pecora', *Trasparenze* 17 (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 91-101.
[330] From now on, I will be using the distinction between addressee and audience – or reader –, as described by Culler. See J. Culler. 'The Lyric Address', *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2015), pp. 186-187.

The collection begins with an apostrophe to a second person which is turned into a collective audience in the final *pointe*. At the very beginning of *Documento*, someone is going to begin the journey or, more pedestrianly, hit the road. There is also someone else, accompanying the lyric subject, someone so inattentive to allow the poet to directly compose sonnets on his skin, as beautifully written by Laura Pugno.[331] The use of an infinitive verb so undetermined such as 'partire' probably alludes to an actual person, the painter Renato Guttuso, who is one of the phantasmatic presences in the whole book, but it could also be interpreted as a farewell to poetry writing, which Rosselli had in mind since the early seventies.[332] The second person pronoun functions as a sort of Benjaminian 'allegoria vuota', a protracted metaphor which contains different images leading nowhere, without the restitution of a finalised meaning;[333] in this case, leading to everybody and therefore nobody. Indeed, *Documento* begins as a series of love poems written by a now mature 'fanciulla dal cuore devastato'[334] but suddenly becomes

331 L. Pugno, 'Lettura di parte A.R.', D. Attanasio, E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli, Galleria Special Issue*, 48 (Caltanisetta: S. Sciascia, 1997), pp. 113-115.

332 In the interview with Sandra Petrignani, Rosselli describes herself as a 'poeta della ricerca' while also outlining the reasons why such a poet decides to stop writing poetry at a certain stage of her career: 'Della ricerca. E quando non c'è nulla di assolutamente nuovo da dire, il poeta della ricerca non scrive.' A. Rosselli, 'Non mi chiedete troppo, mi sono perduta in un bosco', *Una scrittura plurale*, p. 290. Cfr. also S. Carbognin, 'Cronologia', p. XCIX.

333 'Allegory goes away empty-handed. The absolute evil that it fostered as enduring profundity exists only in allegory, is purely and simply allegory, signifies something other than what it is. And to be sure, it signifies precisely the nonbeing of that which it represents.' W. Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. by H. Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), p. 255. Benjamin says 'Leer ausgeht die Allegorie', consciously using a colloquialism in German, which is lost both in the English and in the Italian translations. This image is been used by Romano Luperini in his essay *L'allegoria del moderno*, where he translates Benjamin's concept with the synthetic expression 'allegoria vuota'; see R. Luperini, *L'allegoria del moderno: saggi sull'allegorismo come forma artistica del modern e come metodo di conoscenza* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1990).

334 According to Tandello, it is possible to identify an adolescent posture of Rosselli's lyric subject up until *Serie ospedaliera*. To this extent, *Documento* represents a turning point that sees Rosselli's subject evolving into something different: the maiden is still there but no longer as a mythological residue. The 'visione adolescenziale del mondo' becomes an allegory representing a condition that must be recovered from the past but with a new mature awareness. On this topic, see E. Tandello, *La fanciulla e l'infinito* (Rome: Donzelli, 2011), pp. 4-5; see also A. Rosselli, *Variazioni Belliche*, p. 48.

something different within the process of writing; something that could concurrently function as a mirror for the addressees whereby the constant shifting of the pronouns creates an echo-chamber to host both the readers and the author. The stress put on the necessity of receiving attention within the delivery of the poetic message is something that is not limited to the text included in this collection, but rapidly becomes a common thread in Rosselli's programmatic practice of poetry.[335]

Soon after the publication of the first nineteen texts from *Documento* in *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1967,[336] Rosselli is invited to give a series of public readings. The first one occurs at the Teatro del Porcospino in the same year. In an interview with Aurelio Andreoli, she would later describe the experience of having to face an audience enthusiastically 'molto attento'.[337] Once again, Rosselli stresses the attention of the audience as a fundamental element. This first public reading would be followed by several events in the seventies such as the reading organised by Dacia Maraini at the Teatro Femminista della Maddalena in 1971, culminating in the reading at Castelporziano in 1979.[338] Rosselli highlights the centrality of a dialogue with the audience in her poetry, describing these series of readings as fundamental in producing an awareness of the audience – on her part – and, therefore, of the real:

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335 As in Morante's poetics, we can distinguish also in Rosselli's discourse in *Documento* the equation that keeps together the two extremes of 'attention' and 'poetry': Cfr. S. Weil, 'Attention and Will', *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 116-122. See also E. Rasy, 'Elsa, non sarai mai di moda', *Il Sole 24ore*, 25 May 2012; and also E. Tandello, 'La poesia e la purezza: Amelia Rosselli', *L'opera poetica* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. XXXIX-XL.

336 A. Rosselli, '19 poesie da Documento', *Nuovi Argomenti*, 6, April-June 1967.

337 A. Andreoli, 'È possibile fare poesia al femminile?', *Paese Sera*, 28 August 1980, p. 3. Now included in A. Rosselli, 'L'esperienza del reale collettivo', interview with A. Andreoli, A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vista che ho perso* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010), p. 39.

338 'Ho letto in cantine, in centri culturali. Ma le sensazioni più forti le ho avute al teatro Porcospino. Un pubblico molto attento. Leggevamo Porta, Pasolini, la Maraini, ed io. A Castelporziano era molto faticoso, con un pubblico divertito, critico, strano…' Ibid. p. 39. Maraini herself recalls how: 'Amelia era bravissima a insegnare. Quando si trovava davanti a un pubblico di donne, perdeva la sua ombrosità, diventava lucida, generosa e pronta a ogni confronto.' In S. Carbognin, 'Cronologia', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, p. CX.

> La presenza fisica dei poeti non è, nelle letture pubbliche, una circostanza, ma un fatto costitutivo, senza il quale, come senza il gruppo del pubblico, non c'è comunicazione. Quindi il pubblico è il destinatario diretto e indiretto, necessariamente collettivo.[339]

We see Rosselli hovering between these two opposite states in the seventies. On the one hand, the decision of putting an end to her poetic career by programming her farewell to poetry creates *Documento*. On the other hand, the second and more joyful state is characterised by an overwhelming attempt to become communicable; Rosselli describes it in the two different drafts of her curriculum vitae as a 'tentativo di uscire da una situazione di isolamento sociale da parte dei poeti'.[340] The encounter with the plural non-fictional addressees of poetry functions for Rosselli as a fundamental stimulus, able to become itself one of the elected themes of her poetic discourse.

This seemingly unresolved contradiction makes her poetic *persona* even more appealing to a whole generation of younger readers. As a matter of fact, despite her psychological struggles and the desire to spend her life almost as a recluse, she was rapidly elected as the model for a crowd of younger poets that gravitate around her during those years, as reported by many of those who were close to that circle.[341] Rosselli accompanies one of the first selection of poems from *Documento* – to be published on *La Fiera Letteraria* in 1968 – with a short introductory essay titled, unsurprisingly, 'Alla ricerca dell'adolescenza': the word 'adolescence' must here be read both as a reference to a pristine form of artistic inspiration and, concurrently, as an allusion to the generation of '68.[342] In that short introduction, she states 'ho voluto ritrovare […] la follia, il coraggio e forse anche il misticismo di quegli anni adolescenziali: razionalizzandoli sino

339 Ibid. pp. 39-40.

340 A. Rosselli, 'Curriculum I', *Una scrittura plurale*, p. 279.

341 These poets are Biancamaria Frabotta, Renzo Paris, Dacia Maraini, Dario Bellezza, Elio Pecora, Gabriella Sica. See R. Paris, 'Oh, le poètes!', *Miss Rosselli* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2020), pp. 266-274; see also B. Frabotta, 'Soufflé d'anime', *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, pp. 25-42.

342 A. Rosselli, 'Alla ricerca dell'adolescenza', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 25 July 1968.

alle estreme conseguenze'.[343] Later on in the decade, Amelia Rosselli reinforces this idea by highlighting the rupture between a lost poetic childhood and a newly-reached 'senility'. In a famous interview with Sandra Petrignani, she says:

> Non pensavo di vivere a lungo e credevo romanticamente di bruciarmi entro i quarant'anni al fuoco di un rischio troppo grosso, quale è stato la scelta della mia vita. La scelta della poesia, come l'ho vissuta, voluta, io. Quasi spaccavo la macchina a volte per l'intensità con cui scrivevo. Ora mi trovo ad affrontare una seconda metà dell'esistenza cui sono completamente impreparata e che mi interessa fino a un certo punto. La poesia non si addice alla vita normale, quella di tutti i giorni... Tanti poeti muoiono giovani o suicidi. È come se lo scrivere dovesse essere legato a *una visione adolescenziale del mondo* e quando si raggiunge la cosiddetta maturità il desiderio di scrivere viene meno.[344] [emphasis mine]

Rosselli's statement would seem to trace the origins of her poetry back to the post-Romantic motif of the brevity of the poet's life. In the second half of the text, the stress is put on the poet's adolescent sensibility; the poet must preserve the same view on the world even at latter stages of their life which is closer to a Leopardian and, Rimbaldian interpretation of the relationship between life and poetry. As we will see, the poet's vision must remain anchored to a condition which is lost but need to be replicated within the poetic discourse.[345] It is no surprise that *Documento* embodies this dialectic. *Documento* was, indeed, published in a decade that sees Rosselli trying to retrieve that 'adolescent' lyric posture, but from the new perspective of 'ripeness' and readability.

4.1.2. A QUARTET FOR CROWDS AND VOICE ONLY

This idea of 'mature adolescence' exerted a charismatic power and attracted younger poets. Biancamaria Frabotta's poetic début too is tied to the centrality of adolescence

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[343] Ibid.

[344] S. Petrignani, 'Non mi chiedete troppo, mi sono perduta in un bosco', *Il Messaggero*, 23 June 1978, p. 3. Now in A. Rosselli, *Una scrittura plurale*, pp. 289-92.

[345] On this topic, see M. Perloff, 'Trouver une langue: The Anti-paysage of Rimbaud', *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: From Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 45-66.

and youth – showing thus a significant debt to Rosselli's *Documento*. Concurrently, her poetry is also grounded in an interrogation of the poetic medium and its 'readability'. This 'adolescent' posture not only can be characterised as biographical – Frabotta being twenty-five years old when she published her first poems on *Nuovi Argomenti* – but it is also born under Amelia Rosselli's sign. In the seventies, Frabotta was part of that audience of young writers that were elected by Rosselli as her non-fictional audience and, mutually, elected Rosselli as a literary model able to synthesise many of the conflicts between life, literature, and history in her own poetry. The two poets met in 1968 thanks to Dario Bellezza, who brought Rosselli to the Libreria Ferro di Cavallo, a gathering place in Via Ripetta where different generations of Roman writers had been known to meet since the early sixties.[346] Here, Rosselli not only encountered Frabotta but also the young generation of intellectuals and poets that will soon be the core of the theatre centre 'Beat 72': the poets Giorgio Manacorda, Gregorio Scalise, Renzo Paris, coordinated by young literary critics such as Giulio Ferroni, Alfonso Berardinelli, and Franco Cordelli.[347] Indeed, one of the main aims of this group of poets was the investigation of the fast-changing dialogue between the lyric subject and the plurality of the audience. In the seventies, we witness a huge change in the role attributed to the audience of poetry. The new audience of poetry demands to be heard and, eventually, to take the floor; this happened many times within the experience of the group 'Beat 72', which culminated in the poetry festival of Castelporziano.[348] The crowd of silenced addressees of poetry transits from the experience of the unachieved revolution of '68

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346 Agnese De Donato, 'Introduzione', *Via Ripetta 67. Al 'ferro di cavallo': pittori, scrittori e poeti nella libreria più bizzarra degli anni '60 a Roma* (Bari: Dedalo Edizioni, 2005), pp. 15-16.

347 Berardinelli and Cordelli are the editors of the anthology *Il pubblico della poesia* in 1975 – the anthology which aspired to celebrate the new literary generations of poets who started publishing after the '68, while also stressing the connection between the poets, the audience of poetry, and collective history. A. Berardinelli, F. Cordelli, *Il pubblico della poesia* (Cosenza: Lerici, 1975).

348 Alessandro Clericuzio, 'La poesia beat in Italia: uno studio translocal', *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale*, V. 52, September 2018, pp. 135-137; see also F. Cordelli, *Il poeta postumo. Manie, pettegolezzi, rancori* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2008).

straight into the imaginative core of the seventies. Frabotta, unarguably one of the most militant voice of the group, is one of the leading organisers of the poetic *soirées* at the basement of Via Gioacchino Belli. The aim of the events was to combine the language of theatre with the language of poetry within a performative act in which the physical presence of the poet would finally work as a medium between the lyric subject and the audience. Motivated by an attempt to innovate the literary genres through a process of hybridisation, these ecounters are characterised by an ongoing phenomenon of 'teatralizzazione' of poetry.[349]

For all these reasons, Frabotta's poetic debut is located at the very centre of a momentous melting pot. In 1971, she publishes a first selection of poems, titled *Versi*, in *Nuovi Argomenti*.[350] Five years later, in 1976, Frabotta expands that very first selection of poems into a *plaquette* to which she gives the title *affemminata*.[351] *affemminata* would be later included in her first book, which Frabotta would publish with Feltrinelli with the title *Il rumore bianco* in 1982.[352] This is important for at least three reasons: firstly, *Il rumore bianco*'s season embraces the whole duration of the decade from the very beginning of the seventies until the beginning of the eighties, the end of what has been described by historiography as a 'long decade' in Italian history. Secondly, it is possible to recognise a sort of *continuum* between Frabotta's experimentalism with different genres – a hybridisation of genres which was born under the star of 'Beat 72'. Indeed, her activity is multi-faceted and not limited to poetic writing only. Thirdly, *Il rumore bianco* covers the same years of Rosselli's *Documento*, becoming a document of those years too. Indeed, *Il rumore bianco* connects the more lyrical dimension of the private – the story of the end of the relationship with the poet Renzo Paris – with the public and the political – the history

[349] Tomaso Kemeny, Cesare Viviani, *Il movimento della poesia italiana degli anni Settanta* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1979).
[350] B. Frabotta, 'Versi', *Nuovi Argomenti*, n. 22 (Milan: Mondadori, April-June 1971), pp. 95-102.
[351] B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, with an introductory essay by Antonio Porta (Rivalba: Geiger, 1976).
[352] B. Frabotta, *Il rumore bianco*, with an introduction by A. Porta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982).

of Frabotta's political engagement with feminism. However, one must acknowledge that *Il rumore bianco* is a different kind of 'documento', written, at least, from a distinct perspective: the one belonging to a representative of a new generation. In Frabotta's own words:

> *Il rumore bianco* fu la cronaca non sempre candida di quell'amore di gioventù, scritta in sventata libertà, tra barlumi concettuali, ritratti, versi d'occasione scarabocchiati sulle tovaglie di carta delle pizzerie, o sui taccuini delle autocoscienze, mentre intanto passavano gli amori, le risse, due mariti, nessun figlio e infine l'inevitabile crisi. Alla partitura di quel quartetto per masse e voce sola ('il quartetto si bacia / si slabbrano a corona / dove comincia finisce / chi viene intera e se ne va divisa') si aggiunse la dissonanza di una volontaria reclusione nella volontaria pratica della guarigione.[353]

The poet not only uses the word 'cronaca' – which we could interpret as a synonym of 'documento' – but also draws a parallel between the account of the end of the relationship with her husband and the narrative of various events involving Frabotta at a public level. The quartet symbolises poetry, to be interpreted as a practice able to contain both the plurality of the addressees ('per masse') and the singularity of the lyric subject ('per voce sola').

With specific regard to the book's aim, the two collections, *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco*, are characterised by evident consonances. As Rosselli states in a later interview: 'in *Documento*, il terzo libro, mi ponevo il problema di come uscire dal rapporto io-tu: non è che è sempre possibile ma è un problema molto difficile che ci viene anche dalla poesia in genere, specie dall'ermetismo.'[354] Rosselli's attempt to innovate the lyric genre – in relation to the central problem of apostrophe – is something that Frabotta, as a literary critic, identifies as particularly significant, as she points out in the essay "Le buone 'intenzioni' di Amelia Rosselli: qualche riflessione su *Documento*":[355] something that

[353] B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, p. 13.
[354] A. Rosselli, 'Intervista', *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 203.
[355] B. Frabotta, 'Le buone intenzioni di Amelia Rosselli: qualche riflessione su *Documento'*, G. Devoto, E. Tandello, *Trasparenze*, n. 17 (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 333-42.

had been started by Rosselli but that had not ultimately carried out. With this aim, Frabotta aspires to return to and complete with her own collection, *Il rumore bianco*.

4.1.3. A TEXTUAL ENCOUNTER

The poetic dialogue between Rosselli and Frabotta is not limited to the similarities in their rendering of the lyric subject. Rosselli's poetic language is widely referenced in *Il rumore bianco* and in some of the early texts of *Versi* and *affemminata*.

In a poem dedicated to Rosa Luxemburg, Frabotta inserts a series of allusions to Rosselli, using quotes taken from *Variazioni belliche* and *Documento*. Elected as a symbol of a revolution in politics, on the one hand, and in poetry, on the other, the two figures overlap in a perfect encounter between lyricism and references to historical events. Moreover, the two characters are both actors and victims within collective history:

> Le hanno detto: non è tempo di morire, rosa bianca di südende
> essendo ormai l'utopia una maestra un poco inacidita.
>
> Rinchiusa nella fortezza di Wronke riabituò all'esercizio del moto con
> severa lezione di classicità le zampine di una vesta in licenza di gelo.
>
> Apro una parentesi in tuo omaggio: non è da tutte saper di botanica
> balbettare correttamente nell'incivile dérèglement della guerra civile.
>
> A far calare il capo della rosa a perdere la spina
> cadde infatti la esse e morte divenne la tua sorte. (RB, 28)

Though later included in the section *affemminata* of *Il rumore bianco*, the text was originally not part of the *plaquette* published by Adriano Spatola and Giulia Niccolai. Indeed, with the publication of *Il rumore bianco*, Frabotta expands her first selection and adds other texts in the second half of the section. In most cases, these are 'testi d'occasione' dedicated to several women who are connected both to private and historical events. The epigrammatic nature of the poem dedicated to Rosa Luxembourg is reinforced by the division into couplets, which are typical of the epigrammatic form – a form, which

is traditionally destined to the celebration of friends, relatives, but also political figures.[356] In the third couplet, Rosselli is present through an allusion to her as the author of *Variazioni Belliche*: 'Apro una parentesi in tuo omaggio: non è da tutte sapere di botanica / balbettare correntemente nell'incivile dérèglement della guerra civile.' Frabotta models her line on Rosselli's own 'invidio i maestri di botanica', which is part of a poem included in *Documento*:

> Il portanome di questa lettera bizzarra
> sembra scappare all'aprire dell'aurora
> invidio i maestri di botanica,
> la letteratura paragonata ad un batticuore.
>
> Stringenti alibi, la moltitudine
> delle facce zittisce l'inferiore
> o infernale faccia del mondo […] (DOC, 148)

In Rosselli's poem, 'i maestri di botanica' probably alludes to the zoomoralist poets who represent a point of reference for both Rosselli's and Frabotta's poetry, with specific regard to Montale who is widely quoted but also challenged in their poetry.[357] Frabotta also refers to the stuttering that Rosselli defines 'babelare commosso' in 'Roberto, chiama la mamma, trastullantesi nel canapè', the opening poem of *Variazioni belliche*.[358] Furthermore, the word 'dérèglement' is a reference to the technique of 'automatic writing',[359] which Mengaldo mistakenly ascribed to Rosselli's poetic practice, used by Rimbaud first, employed then by Lautreamont, and, eventually, by Surrealist writers.

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356 A.B. Coiro, 'Epigram', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by R. Greene, S. Cushman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 449-450.

357 Cfr. B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse*, p. 11: 'Mi misi sulla pista di altri modelli che tanto piacevano a Calvino: Marianne Moore, Francis Ponge, di nuovo Montale e tutti quelli che pendolano dalla vita all'animale e dall'animale alla vita'.

358 'oh, / posponi la tua convinta orazione per / un babelare commosso […]' in Rosselli, A., 'Variazioni Belliche', *L'opera poetica*, ed. by Tandello, Emanuela, Giovannuzzi, Stefano, (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), p. 7.

359 The expression 'derangement of all the senses' is also taken from the letter that Arthur Rimbaud sent to one of his professors, George Izambard. A. Rimbaud, 'Lettres dites du Voyant', *Poésie, Une Saison en enfer, Illuminations (*Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 199-200.

Rosselli's presence in *Il rumore bianco* affects more than the textual level, influencing also Frabotta's poetic grammar. This is made clear in the first selection of *Versi* and in *affemminata,* to be later included in the collection published in 1982. In Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*, textual traces of Rosselli's semantics, syntax, and metaphors can be find in high numbers. In her poetic diary, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, Frabotta herself admits suffering from a sort of 'anxiety of influence' with regard to Rosselli at this stage of her poetic career:

> Eravamo nel 1971 e scrivevo epigrammi convulsi e un po' sinistri, stanze di suoni implosivi, immaginosi, surreali, dettati da una voce non pienamente mia, quasi un flebile controcanto ai bassi tellurici di Amelia Rosselli, che aveva appena pubblicato *Serie ospedaliera* e avevamo già eletto incontrastata regina di dismisure.[360]

Frabotta recognises how Rosselli's influence had an impact on her early poetry and describes this experience as an act of dictation or even ventriloquism: Rosselli's poetic grammar speaks through Frabotta's own voice. This reinforces the idea of a genealogic connection between the poetry of Rosselli and Frabotta, especially at the stage of Frabotta's debut; on the other hand, *Il rumore bianco* consists of Frabotta's attempt to free her poetic diction from Rosselli's linguistic phantasm: a process involving the 'assimilazione di una madre culturale', as Frabotta points out.[361]

It is interesting to note how, between *Versi* and *affemminata*, Frabotta's focus is put on Rosselli's early poetic production. As analysed by La Penna[362] and Bisanti,[363],

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[360] B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse*, p. 12. A similar statement can be found in an interview with Luigia Sorrentino: 'L'eredità che mi ha lasciato? Urticante e dunque indimenticabile. Le prime poesie che pubblicai su *Nuovi Argomenti* ne portano il segno. Ma capii presto che bisognava liberarsi dell'inevitabile epigonismo cui ci dannava. E contemplarne la straordinaria intelligenza "altra" un po' da lontano, assorbendola a piccole dosi. Un'isola ignota è meglio desiderarla e non violarla nella realtà.'

[361] B. Frabotta, *Letteratura al femminile. Itinerari di lettura: a proposito di donne, storia, poesia, romanzo* (Bari: De Donato, 1980), p. 5.

[362] Daniela La Penna, *"La promessa d'un semplice linguaggio": Lingua e stile nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 84-85.

[363] Tatiana Bisanti, 'Sintassi della preposizione e del periodo', *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli. Un distorto, inesperto, espertissimo linguaggio* (Pisa: ETS, 2007), pp. 139-40.

syntactic anastrophe is one of the most frequently employed tropes: a preposition is put at the very beginning of a sentence, or even at the very beginning of the poem, to introduce a secondary clause which is placed before the main clause. As a result, the subject is dislocated to a second position. Frabotta models the opening of the sixth poem of *affemminata*, 'Per la libidine del corpus domini / di giovedì acconcio l'alcova',[364] on several examples taken from *Variazioni*: 'Per le cantate che si svolgevano nell'aria io rimavo',[365] or 'Per la tua pelle olivastra per la tua mascella cadente'.[366]

Rosselli's technique of 'variation' is another syntactical structure adopted by Frabotta. Inspired by Rosselli's musical education, the technique of 'variation' reproduces a hammering repetition of syntagms that are constantly varied and modified within the flow of poetic discourse. Epanodus, epistrophe, anadiplosis, and paronomasia are figures of speech employed also by Frabotta to strengthen the rhythmical patterns of her poetry. Even if figures of speech such as these are consistently used in contemporary Italian poetry, Frabotta and Rosselli stand out for the high frequency in which they employ them. This technique is something very peculiar to Rosselli's rhythmical structures that passes also into Frabotta's poetry. The continuity between the two approaches can be seen easily when we compare these two poems taken from *Variazioni Belliche*[367] and *affemminata* respectively:

L'alba si presentò sbracciata e impudica; io
la cinsi di alloro da poeta: ella si risvegliò
lattante, latitante.

L'amore era un gioco instabile; un gioco di
fonosillabe.

[…] Se tu sei ancora sveglio,
scrivimi ti prego una poesia
che vinca la vita che si ostina
che mi affretti l'alba di
un inizio di non vita.

Una poesia che non mi si chiuda addosso come una

[364] B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 14
[365] A. Rosselli, 'Variazioni Belliche', *L'opera poetica*, p. 48.
[366] A. Rosselli, 'Variazioni Belliche', *L'opera poetica*, p. 79.
[367] A. Rosselli, 'Variazioni Belliche', *L'opera poetica*, p. 74.

tenaglia. (AFF, 12)

The two poems connect the image of the dawn is connected to the theme of poetic inspiration, following a famous Provençal[368] and then Rimbaldian theme. In the first poem, Rosselli is closer to Rimbaud's text taken from *Illuminations*; not only she creates a personification of the dawn but she also describes it as a half-naked maiden.[369] Similar is also the final *pointe*, the last lines of the poems, whereby the two poets condense a statement of poetics: on the one hand, Rosselli pursues 'un gioco di fonosillabe' in her poetry, on the other, Frabotta aims at 'una poesia che non mi si chiuda addosso come una tenaglia'. The proximity of these two poems is reinforced by the use of epanodus – which in Rosselli's case is an almost perfect anadiplosis -: 'un gioco instabile; un gioco di fonosillabe'. Besides examples such as 'che vinca la vita che si ostina /[…] un inizio di non vita' or ' 'scrivimi ti prego una poesia /[…] Una poesia che […]', Frabotta refers to Rosselli's model also in the 'complementizer deletion'[370] carried out through the anaphora of 'che' – 'una poesia / che vinca la vita / che si ostina'. A second similarity can also be recognised in the use of paronomasia: 'lattante, latitante', on the one hand, and 'vinca la vita', on the other. With the expression 'gioco di fonosillabe', Rosselli specifically alludes to the use of linguistic puns: in a paronomasia, a word changes thanks to the substitution of a syllable. At the same time, this technique enhances the rhythmical repetition of syntagmatic elements in Rosselli's and Frabotta's poems.

368 Furio Brugnolo, Roberta Cappelli, 'L'eccezione narrativa e i generi non lirici in lingua d'oc', *Profilo delle letterature romanze medievali* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 234-235.

369 'J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été. […] Alors je levai un à un les voiles. Dans l'allée, en agitant les bras. Par la plaine, où je l'ai dénoncée au coq. À la grand ville elle fuyait parmi les clochers et les dômes, et courant comme un mendiant sur les quais de marbre, je la chassais.' Rimbaud, 'Aube', *Illuminations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 178.

370 According to Bisanti, 'complementizer deletion' is another trademark of Rosselli's poetry: the 'che', in this case, has not to be referred to 'vita' but to the main subject 'poetry'. Cfr. T. Bisanti, *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli,* pp. 100-102.

These are but a few examples of complementary techniques and devices employed by Frabotta in her early poetry in light of Rosselli's revolutionary experiments with language in *Variazioni Belliche*. As we already demonstrated, the dialogue between *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco*, as a whole, is strong and affects more than one aspect of the authors' poetics of de-territorialization. These aspects will be discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

4.2. CLARITY AND OBSCURITY AS FORMS OF DETERRITORIALIZATION

De-territorialization stands for an attempt to intervene on poetic language and modify its patterns thanks to systematic innovation in metrics, semantics, and syntax. This is carried out through two approaches that modify the mainstream of the poetic grammar of a specific time. The first one involves an attempt at simplifying while also innovating the poetic grammar; the second consists in the creation of a new system of references which is usually not internal to the Italian canon and, when it is, poets try challenge and rework it. These series of innovations are detectable both in Morante's and Cavalli's poetry, as well as in Rosselli's and Frabotta's. Even if the aims and premises are similar, Rosselli and Frabotta develop a different framework to the one which has seen lightness and gravity as opposed but complementary forces in Morante's and Cavalli's poetry. Rosselli and Frabotta approach de-territorialization through the dyad formed by clarity and obscurity. While the couple lightness/gravity is based on a series of qualities intrinsic to the form adopted by the poetic discourse, clarity and obscurity stem from an intrinsic quality of poetry and externalise it in the delivery of a message: the poetic language itself tends to lean towards the obscurity of message. This is part of the pact between the poet and the reader within the specificity of this communication act. This awareness functions as a premise to re-establishing a communication between the author and the reader, and, in Rosselli's and Frabotta's case, between the lyric subject and their addressees. The

overall dynamics describes an attempt to restore a lost line of communication in which obscurity is the very starting point: clarity is the final goal of poetry.

In Amelia Rosselli's *Documento 1966-1973* and Biancamaria Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*, the opposition between obscurity and clarity is more than a cultural metaphor. This pair is interpreted by Rosselli and Frabotta not only as a physical obstacle, but also as a dialectical barrier to overcome. To this extent, this relationship expresses the phenomenological experience of reality through the language of poetry; in doing so, this operation is remarkably similar to the one developed by Morante and Cavalli. While the latter starts a reasoning over the poetic language based on the physical perception of weight, mass, and lightness, Rosselli and Frabotta move from a similar apperception of the law of physics by investigating the presence and absence of light.[371]

It is thus interesting to note how these poets started their intervention on language from an experiment conducted on the visible manifestation of reality and the physical forces that animate it. Subsequently, they develop this intuition following different paths. Within Rosselli's and Frabotta's de-territorialization of the poetic discourse, two levels are involved in their questioning of these opposed qualities. At a first stage, obscurity and clarity are figures internal to the text which are used by the two poets to question their perception of reality: in this case, obscurity and clarity are almost interpreted as physical forces that determine the lyric subject's ability to distinguish the real. At a second stage, obscurity and clarity are to be read as figures external to the text – characteristics that imply a referent and a delivery of the message within the poetic dialogue.

[371] *La pesanteur e la grâce* by Simone Weil was translated by Franco Fortini into Italian as *L'ombra e la grazia*, highlighting the existence of a fade line between the two semantic fields: the one that deals with weight and the one that deals with light. See S. Weil, *L'ombra e la grazia*, translated into Italian by F. Fortini (Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1951).

4.2.1. CLARITY AND OBSCURITY AS PHYSICAL FORCES

Rosselli and Frabotta develop this opposition through metaphors based on light and its absence. The presence or absence of this physical force is something that allows the lyric subject to perceive reality, discern objects, and, eventually, understand the relationship that keeps them together or apart. As explained by Jonathan Culler, lyric poetry is characterised by a convention that we might call expectation of totality or coherence: speech acts do not need to be autonomous wholes because they are but parts of complex situations to which they contribute and from which they derive meaning.[372] Meaning, as a product of different linguistic patterns, is what gives structure to reality and makes it readable through the chain of signifiers unfolded in a speech act. To this extent, clarity and obscurity can be figures internal to the text because they deal with intrinsic quality of the lyric subject and its reading of the components constituting reality; the lyric subject functions as the filter traversed by reality within the poetic discourse. This is, for instance, the type of obscurity – and therefore clarity – that Russian Formalism and Viktor Šklovskij tried to define in relation to art as a text:

> the device of the so-called 'obscure form' […] increases the difficulty and the duration of perception, since the device of perception is intrinsic [and thus internal] to art and must be prolonged.[373]

Everything is clear only if it is made perceivable; the tension between these two physical forces, the presence and absence of light, is the condition that can make reality accessible and questionable. Eventually, this is elicited by a perceptual stimulus. As readers, in this context, we are put in front of an investigation of meaning – through its clarity and obscurity – which is re-enacted within the body of the lyric text. Obscurity and clarity are therefore elements internal to the text. Rosselli was interested in this theory of textual

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[372] J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 199.

[373] Viktor Šklovskij, 'Art as Device', *Theory of Prose*, trans. by B. Sher (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 82.

perception as she knew – and was also a passionate reader – of Šklovkij's *Theory of Prose* in the seventies.

Rosselli addresses obscurity – as limitation of sight, blindness – since her very first collection, *Variazioni Belliche*.[374] There, the absence of light was condensed in metaphors dealing with the limitation of sight: 'I miei occhi obliqui'.[375] The poet's awry gaze is the direct cause of that impossibility of approaching light, also causing a limitation of the ways through which the poet could investigate reality. In her third collection, *Documento*, light and obscurity suddenly become external forces and they are not self-determined: they produce an effect on the lyric subject as they impact on her ability to explore reality. This change in the lyric subject's perception of reality is represented in a poem from *Documento*:

> Senza di te
> trafitto, io non so disgiungere la conoscenza
> dall'aborto ferraceo
> (come d'un candido lettino infantile
> separato).
>
> Poi ho ritrovato una luce
> intatta, che era una sorta di paradiso mal digerito.
>
> Un paio d'occhi celesti incerti,
> un sogno o due,
> giù per la pineta maleodorante:
> non seppi più
> credere alla realtà con certezza guidandola

[374] Rosselli had also in mind to write an article about Šklovskij's *Theory of Prose*, as testified by a note left in his *Suggerimenti per eventuali articoli critici*: 'Libro di critica letteraria *Una teoria della prosa* di Viktor Šklovskij, De Donato Editore 1966. Scuola formalista russa del 1920. Testo fondamentale ripreso dalla scuola strutturalista d'oggi ma comunque amalgamabile a un più vasto atteggiamento critico.' A. Rosselli, 'Curriculum I', *Una scrittura plurale*, p. 279.

[375] The quote is taken from the last poem from *Variazioni Belliche*, 'Tutto il mondo è vedovo': sight and blindness are central themes in Rosselli's early production. A. Rosselli, 'Variazioni Belliche', p. 179. Cfr. also 'tu non sai quale oscuro precipizio / affumicò miei occhi a tua / vista: tu non odi le rosse mie indagini / squadrarti [...]', 'I miei occhi che non s'aprono, dal / sonno o dalla tortura [...] I miei occhi sembrano pieni di sabbia [...]', 'I tuoi occhi di ceramica', A. Rosselli, 'Variazioni Belliche', pp. 25; 312; 164. On this topic, see also R. Binetti, 'La Funzione Rosselli. Genealogia poetica di una letteratura minore', *Studi Novecenteschi,* 95,pp. 161-165.

per meno amorosi boschi. (DOC, 138)

The absence of light is linked back to the absence of the addressee – which can be overlapped with the unnamed figure of a distant lover, or even of her father, Carlo Rosselli. But the second stanza describes a change in this dynamic: 'poi ho ritrovato una luce / intatta che era una sorta di paradiso mal digerito'. Due to this change in circumstances, the eyes are no longer 'obliqui' but are now clear, even if still 'incerti'. What did cause this modification of the lyric subject's ability to perceive reality? Rosselli explains this in the introduction to *Documento,* where she refers to a 'canone realistico dove l'io è il pubblico, dove l'io è le cose, dove l'io è le cose che succedono'.[376] The elegiac and dark tone dominating the first collections is tamed to let things speak within the new collection. Light, in this frame, is the physical force that make reality clear, readable, and intelligible: 'il dialogo si fa a quattro / […] (Le cose stesse /seminano il mio cuore di luce)' (DOC, 173), as Rosselli acknowledges in another text from *Documento.* The lyric subject is traversed by light, this produces clarity, and thus the subject is able to let the things speak: 'colle di limone: solitudine / impeccabile! pregno di luce / sono io stasera non buia […]' (DOC, 200). Rosselli makes clear the parallel between the surrounding environment and the new state of lyric subject in other poems from *Documento*:

> Ho visto il cielo gongolarsi: era purpureo
> poi mano a mano si schiariva ed io
> mi schiarivo con esso: non riuscivo ad
> essere esso!
>
> Quando fu grigio a chiaro non fu più
> cielo: ah un attimo sfuggente che perfino
> io distrussi!
>
> Quando il cielo tornò ad essere quella
> macchina sguaiata dei nostri inverni
> cittadini dimenticai quasi che potesse

[376] A. Rosselli, *Documento (1966-1973)*, p. 2.

essere all'alba un fulgore.

A tradimento il blu si fece incolore
la profondità dell'alba e della notte
sfumò in agonia di primo mattino. (DOC, 28)

The lyric subject describes the colours and the light of the rapidly changing sky and then focuses on the effect produced by this environmental modification: 'poi a mano a mano si schiariva ed io / mi schiarivo con esso' until this produces a difficult identification between the cloudless sky and the subject ('non riuscivo ad essere esso!'). The overall process is painful and does not provide a Panic identification of the subject with the sky. In fact, the text reworks the post-romantic *topos* of 'wandering', a sort of 'passeggiata surrealista', in order to probably describe one of the psychotic episodes that Rosselli was experiencing in this period. However, it is interesting to note how the change in lighting elicits an epiphanic moment which does not occur in the end.

With a similar attitude, Frabotta describes a lyric subject touched by light:

Ad essere l'amico più caro di me stessa
costa la seconda nascita, il risorgimento di narcisa.
Un'amica rara anch'ella d'oro impuro nel secolo buio
privò la donna di specchi laghi per ella
spicchi di inutili narcisate, storia al chiuso
non abbiamo, eccoci, non siamo: lo scacco della triplice.
Fu la protesta, la guerra, lo scontro del cuore col cervello.
Ella, mia fata, madrepora, madre del vino, aceto
sono la luce degli occhi tuoi, ripeteva.
Ma se di poco si sposta ancora la storia
io, ladra d'occhi, dove prenderò la luce? (RB, 23-24)

As in Morante, the mythical reference to the lyric subject as Narcissus appears also in Frabotta's text. Narcyssus, in *Alibi*[377] and then in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*,[378] embodies a condition that the poet has to overcome: Narcissus is a fundamental stage intrinsic to

[377] E. Morante, 'Narciso', *Alibi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), pp. 75-77.
[378] E. Morante, 'Addio', *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), pp. 5-21.

the expression of lyric subjectivities as well as a result of the poet's drive towards writing and self-representation, but it must evolve into something more.[379] Frabotta describes this movement as a war conducted against an inner self, 'Fu la protesta, la guerra, lo scontro del cuore con il cervello' (RB 23-24), resulting in a sort of lyric psychomachia. This inner self is made to speak as she identifies herself through the use of light: 'sono la luce dei tuoi occhi, ripeteva'. Poetry is a process of traversing this obscurity; at a later stage, Frabotta would define it through the act of 'wandering', a 'viandanza'.[380] Light, to this extent, is the physical force meant to steer the lyric subject towards the right direction – the one that points towards reality. As Frabotta herself admits while answering to the questionnaire of *Il pubblico della poesia*, 'per me oggi è importante cercare di vivere i rapporti politici e letterari […] nel modo più unitario possibile. […] Per conoscenza pratica. Che nel caso della scrittura di poesia potrebbe essere anche conoscenza pratica (nel senso di *trasformazione della realtà) di me fra gli altri*' [emphasis mine].[381] The anti-narcissistic self opposes a divergent interpretation of lyric poetry which is actually grounded in an encounter with reality and, concurrently, with the fast pace of collective history, what Frabotta describes as 'trasformazione della realtà' or 'conoscenza pratica' obtained through a merging of the lyric subject with the others. This new reading of lyric poetry is presented again through a metaphorical reference to light: 'Ma se di poco si sposta ancora la storia /io, ladra d'occhi, dove prenderò la luce?' (RB, 57). The lyric subject is described as a 'ladra d'occhi' who is seeking any source of light to be able to distinguish and then represent reality. Light is thus the source of the subject's discernment and ability to question the world.

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379 As Frabotta explains in *Anniversario*, 'I versi non bastano più. Cessa dunque lo strepito. / Qualsiasi cosa, ma non questa angusta poesia da camera.' B. Frabotta, 'Il rumore bianco', p. 46.
380 Cinzia Sartini Blum, 'Biancamaria Frabotta's Lead: From fuga to viandanza', *Rewriting the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature: Figures of Subjectivity in Progress* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 93-94. See Also M. Corsi, 'L'allegoria in viaggio', *Biancamaria Frabotta. I nodi violati del verso* (Bologna: Archetipo, 2010), pp. 63-76.
381 B. Frabotta, 'Intervento', in A. Berardinelli, F. Cordelli, *Il pubblico della poesia*, p. 52.

4.2.2. CLARITY AND OBSCURITY AS STRUCTURES OF MEANING

In Rosselli and Frabotta, clarity is not simply the presence of light; obscurity, on the other hand, cannot be reduced only to the absence of it. This dualism works also as a dialectic burden at the very basis of most of modern lyric poetry. It is therefore necessary to introduce a further discriminating factor within our analysis. Clarity and obscurity can also be figures external to the lyric text, involving not only the dimension of the lyric subject but also of the external addressees – the non-fictional reader or audience of poetry.

This interpretation of the figure of obscurity is based on a critical essay by Franco Fortini in which the author outlines the differences between two different phenomena: obscurity and difficulty. On the one hand, *obscurity* is a fundamental characteristic of modern lyric poetry which 'non può né deve essere vinta o superata perché la sua ragione è di essere, in definitiva, una particolare categoria di figura'.[382] On the other hand, *difficulty* is an element external to the text, being 'un tratto di oscurità che non si pone come costitutivo ma solo come momentaneo e che può essere risolto da un dato grado di competenza del lettore'. By relying on the reader's ability to interpret a text, difficulty 'accetta anzi esige l'interpretazione e la parafrasi' and stands out as an 'enigma provvisorio risolvibile con determinati strumenti e quindi mediante esegesi critica o ermeneusi'.[383] In Fortini's interpretation, obscurity has to be read as difficulty when the text does not provide the reader with all the package of information needed to understand its meaning. The text is difficult – and therefore obscure – when it is not self-sufficient.

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[382] F. Fortini, 'Oscurità e difficoltà', *L'asino d'oro*, II, n.3, 1991, p. 87. The definition introduced by Fortini has been recently employed by Guido Mazzoni. Cfr G. Mazzoni*, Sulla poesia moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), cit., pp. 167-171.

[383] F. Fortini, 'Oscurità e difficoltà', p. 87.

The attempt to overcome obscurity as difficulty in the text, the act of 'diffidare delle cose oscure', in Frabotta's own words, stands out as a differentiation, a revolution within language, which can partially be defined perceptual and pertinent to the senses; this dichotomy is, eventually, something more. It consists of the acknowledgement of the ontological difference of the language of lyric poetry. Clarity stands also for clarity of expression, certainty, and readability: concepts that are firmly grounded in the poets' attempt to establish a dialogue with the addressees of the lyric text. Obscurity, on the other hand, consists of ambiguity, uncertainty, and 'hermeticism' regarding the language of poetry, something that has been always acting within modern lyric and, in the Italian context, has been embraced by certain trends, such as Hermeticism and the Avantgarde during the first half of the twentieth century. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and, again, also from the sixties onwards, the so called *novecentismo* and the Avant-garde are two of the main poetic tendencies that still operate within the notion of difficulty and self-referentiality of the poetic language. Hermeticism/*novecentismo* and Avant-Garde are still active in the seventies in two forms: the 'Neo-orfismo' and experimentalism or neo-metricism. The revolution started by Rosselli and Frabotta, as well as by Morante and Cavalli, moves specifically from a questioning of those premises related to obscurity, on the one hand, and gravity, on the other. They create a tangential mode of writing within the frame of a de-territorializing act that they carry out within their practice of poetry.[384] Obscurity and difficulty are fundamental parts of the lyric language, but they must be overcome.

While the common trend in twentieth-century Italian poetry is not to provide too much information to the reader, as is the case with Montale's famous *mottetto* of the

[384] A. Afribo, 'Gli anni Settanta', *Poesia italiana Postrema. Dal 1970 a oggi* (Rome: Carocci, 2018), pp. 23-24.

two jackals and the subsequent commentary given in the essay *Sulla poesia*,[385] Rosselli and Frabotta still trust in the possibilities of interpretation and try to guide the reader within this process. According to Montale, the poet must reveal only the objects of poetry and hide the context and the keys for interpreting a poem, as the poet openly admits in *Satura*: 'Con orrore / la poesia rifiuta / le glosse degli scoliasti'.[386] As shown by Luca Zuliani, this posture proved popular and productive within the Italian lyric context, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, and was taken up by several poets, such as Giovanni Raboni, Vittorio Sereni, and Giorgio Caproni.[387] Montale acts as one of the main points of reference also in the poetry of Rosselli and Frabotta. However, on this aspect of lyric theory, Rosselli and Frabotta take a different direction, as they both trust in the necessity of a dialogue with the reader: a pedagogical attitude guides their ethics of writing and orient it towards clarity. The equation that keeps together form and ideology, according to a well-known Pasolinian posture, is still active and well pursued in *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco*.[388] This also reinforces the idea of the creation of a poetic language that has some points of contact with the Pasolinian definition of *antinovecentismo*.[389] Unsurprisingly, Cesare Pavese and Sandro Penna are the recurring

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385 The commentary was published on *Corriere della Sera* of the 16th of February 1950 and is now included in E. Montale, *Sulla poesia*, ed. by G. Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1976).

386 E. Montale, 'Satura', *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), p. 333. See also U. Fiori, 'Gli "sciacalli" di Montale. Riflessioni su oscurità e chiarezza in poesia', *La poesia è un fischio. Saggi 1986-2006* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 2007), pp. 71-86.

387 L. Zuliani, 'Sull'oscurità della poesia italiana del Novecento', *La lirica moderna. Momenti, protagonisti, interpretazioni*, ed. by F. Brugnolo, R. Fassanelli (Padua: Esedra, 2012), pp. 413-428.

388 Cfr. Rosselli's reading of two texts from *Documento* 'La notte era una splendida canna di giunco' and 'Conversazioni molto sfaticate' provided during an interview with the poet Milo De Angelis and Isabella Vicentini: A. Rosselli, 'Intervista su Roma', *Una scrittura plurale*, pp. 311-313.

389 The term *antinovecentismo* is coined by Pier Paolo Pasolini. It was firstly employed in his essay *La posizione*. Pasolini describes here the 'linea antinovecentista' as opposed to the idea of 'poesia pura' celebrated by Italian Hermetic poets such as Ungaretti, Luzi, and Gatto. According to Pasolini, this 'linea antinovecentista' pursues 'una ricercar di varianti più originarie e impegnanti.' These variants would be manifested by a poetic diction that should dialogue with prose, while also being open to trivial themes. P. P. Pasolini, 'La posizione', *Officina*, ed. by Francesco Leonetti, P. P. Pasolini, Roberto Roversi (Bologna: Pendragon, 2004), pp. 254-256.

names referenced by Rosselli and Frabotta in this very period when asked to comment on their readings. On the one hand, this is something that often emerges in Rosselli's statements of poetics and that we can even find in several of her book reviews or articles she writes in the seventies.[390] On the other hand, Frabotta declares: 'posso considerare le mie letture formative Montale e Pavese per l'Italia […]. Ringraziando il cielo arriva l'avanguardia russa, gli americani attivi negli anni Sessanta e Settanta e ultimi in ordine di tempo e non di importanza, i francesi'.[391]

From this standpoint, the 'coppia minima' of obscurity and clarity is turned into a statement of poetics in more than one occasion by both Rosselli and Frabotta. Frabotta tackles this dialectic by recreating a fictional dialogue with her second husband, a physicist. Making poetry accessible to someone who is not completely familiar with its thinly concealed obscurity functions as an exercise in self-awareness for the poet, who must take on the delivery of the message. It is a matter of responsibility and, at the same time, a foundational act for an ethics of writing:

> Mio marito ha un cuore generoso
> come quel dio che dona il primo verso.
> La notte a sé non tira le coperte
> sul petto non mi pungono i suoi peli
> e al risveglio vorrebbe unirsi al coro
> anonimo che sole e fame assillano.
> Mio marito diffida delle ore scure
> e al suo cospetto io mio vergogno.
> Mio marito diffida delle cose oscure.
> Così, per amor suo, io cambierò stile
> e per lui terrò in serbo cose chiare. (RB, 65)

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[390] Rosselli never made secret of her interest in Pavese's poetry, especially in the seventies, when Pavese is frequently quoted in several of her interviews and he is even compared to Sandro Penna in one of Rosselli's critical essays: ' […] in certe poesie più ragionate e lunghe, v'è come un esplorare non del tutto risolto, di certi temi saggistici, raccontati, prosastici, non illuminabili che strano a dirsi ricordano i temi e i versi di Pavese. In ambedue gli scrittori un suicidio sociale, in ambedue una infelicità amorosa fondamentale, ma diversamente risolta.' A. Rosselli, 'Per Sandro Penna', *L'Unità*, 1 July 1970.

[391] B. Frabotta, 'Intervento', *Il pubblico della poesia*, p. 51.

Poetry writing is, eventually, an act of love meant to intercept – and to be translated into – the lover's language and, on a broader level, the audience's language. The structure of the poem itself suggests this simplicity. Indeed, its first half consists of what we can easily define as a narrative framework. From the line 'Mio marito diffida delle cose scure', Frabotta starts introducing the actual theme of the poem, but she still preserves a simple style and a well-exposed referentiality that easily allow the reader to access the meaning of the text.

Contrasting poetry's natural propensity for hermeticism is a task that both Rosselli and Frabotta share during the seventies. Rosselli adopts a similar attitude too, the main difference being that, in this case, the addressee of the poetic discourse is undetermined and can be rightly identified with a general audience, even from the very beginning of *Documento*.

> […] poesia difficile queste semplicissime parole
> un difficilissimo riscatto
> la mente tardiva non esplora altro. (DOC, 196)

The difficulty of poetry, as a communication act, is a problem that Rosselli addresses in more than one poem of *Documento* and is here described as as a sort of 'riscatto'. To this extent, the enucleation of meaning, together with the extra-textual referent needed to understand the context in which a text was written, is something that must be conquered back both by the reader and the author: 'parole pacifiche / sono incastrate nel nulla / ho reminescenza del tutto / e non so tutto' (DOC, 202), 'è vero il tuo linguaggio: vero il / nostro? Vero questo parto indolore?' (DOC, 25). Clarity has to be conquered back and this process is never described as easy or either straightforward: 'peaceful words' of poetry are stuck into the realms of nothingness, while any linguistic act ends up being a labour. For these reasons, in *Documento*, one can find a lot of references to prose as a less problematic writing process.

Rosselli considers a deviation in her writing career, which would have implied to devote herself to prose writing completely. In more than one poem in *Documento*, she describes herself as tempted by the lightness of prose: 'Oh potessi avere la leggerezza della prosa' (DOC, 17). This would have offered a medium eventually freed from the obscurity and difficulty related to the interpretation that lyric poetry requires. However, prose is an answer that the poet does not consider satisfactory, as lyric too is a medium able to extract and condense an objective reality: 'Hai avvelenato la tua esistenza cercando / il conforto della prosa mentre poesia / ricercava la tua gloria' (DOC, 33). This line must be read in parallel with *Diario Ottuso*, a collection of prose writings that covers a period from 1954 to 1968 that intersects the first season of *Documento*. In the last section, titled *Esperimenti Narrativi*, Rosselli had already in mind the risks related to poetry writing, its intrinsic formal difficulty: 'Dei tre testi [the texts included in *Diario Ottuso*] è evidente che lo sperimentare in prosa è ciò che mi attira: ugualmente vero e probabile è che si dica di più in prosa che non in poesia, spesso manieristica o decorativa.'[392] According to Rosselli, poetry can be close to reality, nurturing a sense of 'realism', a 'reality effect', but it has also to cultivate a kind of clarity which has to be different from prose's. Rosselli has been highlighting this since *Variazioni Belliche*, '*Spazi Metrici* finisce con il concetto che la prosa è la più reale delle forme ideali'.[393] The adjective 'ideale' allows Rosselli to locate prose on a level which is less practical than the one that poetry – regardless to its difficulty – can offer the reader. Therefore, prose writing remains part of a 'larger experiment' to be conducted over the possibilities offered by

[392] A. Rosselli, 'Diario Ottuso', *L'opera poetica*, p. 852.

[393] A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 185. Rosselli says here something very similar to what Vittorio Sereni describes in his text, *La tentazione della prosa*: 'Un poeta invidierà sempre a un narratore, sia questi o no di stampo tradizionale, quella specie di sortilegio evocativo con cui l'altro dà corpo, illusorio finché si vuole, a figure, situazioni vicende, ben oltre la voce, l'accento, la formulazione lirica immediata.' V. Sereni, *La tentazione della prosa* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), p. 69.

the language of lyric. Prose is a threshold that Rosselli must undergo to overcome the different layers of difficulty intrinsic to the lyric genre.

To the common place which sees 20th century poetry stemming from hermeticism, Rosselli and Frabotta oppose their 'counter-poetics', in a constant attempt to reach out to the audience and draw in their addressees within the poetic discourse. The virtual discussion on the clarity of poetry becomes a way of questioning poetic language's simplicity, readability, and intelligibility. As a result, we can distinguish here a firm movement branching out towards the actual reader of poetry. There is a pedagogical drive acting both in *Documento* and in *Il rumore bianco*. The centrality of a formal problem pairs with a question on the clarity of poetic language.

4.3. METRICAL STRUCTURES AND THE SHADES OF TRADITION

Metre is one of the main textual levels affected by the interplay between clarity and obscurity. At the same time, metrics is also one of the layers of textuality wherein the poet can perform an act of de-territorialization. Metrical structures – especially in the case of closed, and well-established structures – are to be considered a place of renegotiation of the poet's relationship with language and tradition. The intervention on these implies also a problematisation of the very core of lyric poetry.

4.3.1. TOWARDS A SPATIALISATION OF METRE

Rosselli's poetry offers us an exemplary case. Metrics is central to her attempt to innovate the lyric language; at the same time, metrics is systematically at the core of Rosselli's poetic practice. Her project to create a new metrical system lays at the intersection between rhythm and metre, that Rosselli plays as two separate instruments: on the one hand, metre is determined by a spatialisation of the length of the first line of a poem; on

the other hand, rhythm is the vital element that animates the super-structure imposed by the metre. In musical terms, one could argue that rhythm is the true 'colour' of the lyric discourse. The two layers work independently, and rhythm, for instance, is not strictly determined by the metre, as in most of the Italian lyric tradition. This tension traverses her whole literary career. Indeed, Rosselli is constantly motivated by the necessity to explain the very roots of her metrical alphabet. Each element needs to be carefully addressed, analysed, and then explained to the audience in a constant push towards clarity and systematization.[394] This process is testified by the three texts on metrics written by Rosselli: the essay inspired by the dialogue with Pasolini and attached to *Variazioni Belliche*, *Spazi Metrici*,[395] the short text *Introduzione a Spazi Metrici,* and the letters on the metrical system of *Documento* sent by Rosselli to Franco Fortini.

Many pages have been written on Amelia Rosselli's metrical essay, with the aim of weighing its scientific legitimacy, while also assessing its premises and cultural legacy (from her studies in dodecaphony to the affinity between Charles Olson's 'projective verse'[396] and Rosselli's own 'spazio metrico').[397] Several scholars criticised the legitimacy

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394 B. Frabotta, 'Le buone intenzioni di Amelia Rosselli', *Trasparenze 17-19*, p. 336.

395 The function of *Spazi Metrici* is made clear in a letter sent by Rosselli to Pasolini on 19 April 1962; A. Rosselli, *Lettere a Pasolini 1962-1969*, ed. by S. Giovannuzzi (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2008), pp. 9-12.

396 Charles Olson's influential manifesto, *Projective Verse*, was first published in 1950, and then was inserted in William Carlos Williams' *Autobiography*, published in 1951. The essay introduces his ideas of 'composition by field' through 'projective or open verse'. 'Composition by field' opposes the traditional method of poetic composition based on received form and measure – as it occurs in established metrical forms such as the iambic pentameter or the hendecasyllable. Conversely, Olson sees the challenge of the transference of acoustic energy from source to poem to reader. Rosselli picked up these ideas and inserted similar definitions in the essay *Spazi metrici* which was attached to the first edition of *Variazioni Belliche*. Charles Olson, *Projective Verse* (New York: Totem Press, 1959), pp. 2-6.

397 On the relationship between Rosselli's studies of dodecaphony and *Spazi Metrici* see: L. Re, 'Amelia Rosselli and the Aesthetics of Experimental Music', D. Attanasio, E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli, Galleria Special Issue*, 48 (Caltanisetta: S. Sciascia, 1997), pp. 35-46. On the same topic, see also Viviana Ponta, *"e risuona come idea nella mente". Musica, fisica del suono e forme universali: L'acustica silenziosa nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli*, PhD diss., (University of Pavia, 2014). On the relationship between *Spazi Metrici* and linguistics, see F. Fusco, 'Amelia Rosselli: oltre il verso', C. Verbaro, *'Scrivere è chiedersi come è fatto il mondo'. Per Amelia Rosselli* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2008), pp.

of the 'spazio metrico' by trying to prove Rosselli's frequent contradictions, hidden behind her willingness to make her metrical system clear to the reader.[398] Distant from those approaches, this study will not try to draw any counterargument to any previous analysis of the exactitude of the 'spazio metrico'. Conversely, the stress will be put on Rosselli's own discussion of the development of this system which aims at clarity and readability. I therefore argue that the 'spazio metrico' is a system which, in Rosselli's view, must be open, fluid, and variable within an interminable desire of paradigm-shifting in metrics.

Any theoretical discussion on metrics is for Rosselli a chance to approach the degree zero of her metrical structures – an ideal form that, in the practice of poetry she constantly challenged, rediscussed, and re-adapted. Thus, for her, a given metrical structure functions as a Platonic idea, something that can only be appreciated through its pale projections and physical manifestations. On the path towards Rosselli's idea of 'spazio metrico' we find several – and often clashing – achievements; in some cases, these are divergent from her original theorisation of the concept. Within this procedure, the notion of rhythm has its own independency and centrality, even when the metrical structure varies and moves away from its ideal representation.

With the publication of *Variazioni Belliche*, Amelia Rosselli reaches a very first theorisation of her metrical system, what she calls 'spazio metrico'. The 'spazio metrico' defines all the metrical structures employed by Rosselli from the second half of *Variazioni Belliche*, the section titled *Variazioni (1960-1961)*, up to her second book, *Serie Ospedaliera*. Under the same category, we can also include almost the totality of the poems comprised in *Sleep,* poems that covers the same period of *Variazioni (1960-61)* and *Serie*

77-86. On Olson's 'projective verse' influnce see: D. La Penna, 'Il compositional field e lo spazio metrico', *'La promessa d'un semplice linguaggio'. Lingua e stile nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 61-68.

[398] See S. Giovannuzzi, 'Quali Spazi Metrici?', *Amelia Rosselli: Biografia e Poesia* (Novara: Interlinea, 2016), pp. 45-77.

Ospedaliera, between 1953 and 1966.[399] According to Rosselli, the 'spazio metrico' has four main characteristics:

- the word, which is defined by Rosselli as an 'idea', is elected as the minimum segment that has to be combined in order to determine metre: 'Generalmente la parola viene considerata sì come definizione di una realtà data, ma la si vede piuttosto come un "oggetto" da sotto-classificare, e non come idea. Io invece […] avevo proprio altre idee in proposito, e consideravo perfino "il" e "la" e "come" come "idee", e non meramente congiunzioni e precisazioni di un discorso esprimente un'idea'.[400]
- the first line of the poem determines the length of the following lines by imposing a fixed time and space in which the rhythm unfolds: 'Nello stendere il primo rigo del poema fissavo definitivamente la larghezza del quadro insieme spaziale e temporale; i versi susseguenti dovevano adattarsi a egual misura, a identica formulazione.' [401]
- the 'spazio metrico' describes a spatialisation of the rhythm that must be contained within an ideal square that constitutes a monostrophic metrical structure: 'In realtà ad aiutarmi a misurare o terminare il mio rigo v'era sempre quel punto nascosto del limite destro del mio quadro, e su di esso poteva cadere, perciò chiudendo il rigo, o la parola intera, o un qualsiasi nesso ortografico, anch'esso significante […].'[402]
- the combination of words and their variation within a syntactical pattern produce different rhythms within each metrical square: 'Trasponendo la complessità ritmica della lingua parlata e pensata ma non scandita [which is not divided into

[399] E. Tandello, 'Sleep: Note ai testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, pp. 1472-73.
[400] A. Rosselli, 'Spazi Metrici', *L'opera poetica*, pp. 184-185.
[401] A. Rosselli, 'Spazi Metrici', pp. 187.
[402] A. Rosselli, 'Spazi Metrici, p. 187.

> stressed and unstressed syllables] […], la mia metrica se non regolare era almeno totale: tutti i ritmi possibili immaginabili riempivano il mio quadrato a profondità timbrica."[403]

4.3.2. THE SONNET-ARCHETYPE IN DOCUMENTO

From the beginning of her third book, *Documento*, Rosselli introduces new variants to this solid, yet at the same time porous metrical system. The metre of *Documento* is dominated by a novel approach that overcomes both the use of the 'quadrato metrico', and the monostrophic structure. Indeed, the poems of *Documento* are usually longer than her earlier collections' ones, and often divided into more than two stanzas. However, in *Documento,* one can still find some of the elements introduced in *Spazi Metrici*: for instance, the length of the very first line is employed as a 'standard measure' determining the length of the following lines.

In 'Alla ricerca dell'adolescenza' and other subsequent interviews, Rosselli states that one of the aims of *Documento* is to recreate the clarity of a fourteenth-century Italian sonnet.[404] The closed form, mediated by an approach to tradition that combines a neoclassical tension and a post-structuralist sensibility, is a further expression of the drive towards clarity that guides Rosselli's intentions at this stage. Sonnets represent a point of reference that made tradition approachable. At the same time, the text is made more readable and recognisable. Closed poetic forms are turned into a ghost-like presence in Rosselli's multi-layered metrical system. As a matter of fact, Rosselli's sonnet is no longer a sonnet, as one would find, for instance, in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. It is rather turned into a more mobile and fluid metrical structure: a sort of new ideal and 'graphic' sonnet –

[403] A. Rosselli, 'Spazi Metrici', p. 186.

[404] Rosselli declares a fascination with Italian medieval sonnets is declared also in *Spazi Metrici*: 'Per caso volli rileggere i sonetti delle prime scuole italiane; affascinata dalla regolarità volli tentare l'impossibile.' A. Rosselli, 'Spazi Metrici', *L'opera poetica*, p. 186.

something that Rosselli, in consonance with Andrea Zanzotto's *Postilla* to his *Ipersonetto* in *Il Galateo in bosco*, used to define a 'mandala'. The parallel with the geometrical and regular design of the 'mandala' is important as it suggests Rosselli's emphasis on creating a spatialisation of metre and, consequently, of rhythm.[405]

As for the previous ideal definition of the 'spazio metrico', one can find several variants of Rosselli's 'sonnets' in *Documento*: some of them were actually closer to the ideal archetype of the 'sonnet' that Rosselli describes, while a consistent portion of them is detached from this model. As Rosselli states:

> Pensavo in proposito ad una parodia non umoristica del sonetto. È semplicemente rifare il sonetto tramite una metrica del tutto non-neoclassica, ma avanzatamente formalista. Nel primo terzo del libro riesco ad ottenere questo risultato. Quei sette anni furono molto duri, passavano per il '68 e il '69.[406]

Rosselli explains the relevance attributed to the metrical system of *Documento* in a letter sent to Franco Fortini on the 17th of April 1979:

> Delle 206 poesie, circa un terzo volontariamente evitano il 'verso chiuso' tipico di Variazioni e di La Libellula [sic]; circa 38 poesie possono essere considerate di specie 'libera' (ma secondo me derivano dal verso chiuso misurato ad inizio e poi in un certo senso sfracellato) e 32 di specie libero-chiuse, essendo predominante il verso detto infatti 'chiuso'. Dunque 136 poesie sono, benché a volte ricordanti il sonetto classico metricamente *sistematicamente organizzate*,

[405] The sonnet remains an ideal archetype which expresses a tension towards order, clarity, and systematization. While analysing John Berryman's and Robert Lowell's sonnets, Rosselli declares: 'poi in ambedue i poeti v'è un singolare ritorno alla forma del sonetto, sfruttata come simbolo, o esempio del perfetto mandala, o come deferente dimostrazione rispetto ai classici.' A. Rosselli, 'Poesia d'élite nell'America di oggi', *Una scrittura plurale*, p. 143. It is interesting to note that Rosselli uses here the term 'mandala' to define the closed metrical structure of the sonnet – a definition that she share with Andrea Zanzotto and his *Ipersonetto*. For Zanzotto the traditional sonnet forms a 'mandala', a series of concentric circles in which the poet goes begging for sustenance. Similarly, Rosselli's structure of the sonnet has the precise function of protecting and rectiveting the lyric discourse. See Zanzotto's 'Sonetto infamia e mandala' dedicated to Franco Fortini: A. Zanzotto, 'Il Galateo in bosco', *Le poesie e le prose scelte*, ed. by S. Dal Bianco (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), p. 608; on this topic, see also J. Welle, 'Il Galateo in bosco and the Petrarchism of Andrea Zanzotto', *Italica*, Spring 1985, Vol. 62, N. 1, pp. 44-53.

[406] M. Camboni, 'È molto difficile essere semplici', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita*, p. 51.

anche se dall'aspetto grafico ciò non è perfettamente chiaro o analizzabile.[407] [emphasis mine]

This letter is interesting for at least three reasons. Firstly, Rosselli uses the adverb 'sistematicamente' to define the new metrical system. According to Rosselli, a rational system still operates within the new collection. By employing the word 'system', she intentionally refers to something that was governed by a certain degree of rationality, order, while also showing an inner tension towards clarity. Secondly, she also admits that this system evolved from the original line constituting the 'spazio metrico', 'il verso chiuso tipico di Variazioni e La Libellula'. [408] Rosselli tries to preserve the line as the fundamental element from the original system, but then she breaks the original monostrophic structure into two or more stanzas, suggesting a new sonnet-like structure. Thirdly, Rosselli names different typologies of metrical structures that the reader can find in *Documento*: free verse, a compromise between Rosselli's sonnet-archetype and blank verse, and the actual sonnet-archetype. Rosselli does not include in this list the monostrophic structure, typical of *Variazioni*, that we can still find in few occurrences in *Documento*.[409]

Figure 3. The sonnet-archetype in Documento



[407] The letter sent by Rosselli in 1979 is now part of the Fortini Fund, held at the University of Siena's library: Bibl. Umanistica Siena Fondo Fortini F 1 Rosselli Am. 1979.04.17.

[408] Rosselli extends the system of 'spazi metrici' also to the texts from *Documento*, while admitting the use of the free verse in the new collection: 'Quello era il mio metro. Non sono mai riuscita a scapparne. Anche in *Documento* ho dato una esemplificazione di come, entro questo sistema, si possa dare una situazione di verso libero.' G. Salviati, 'Il linguaggio della realtà', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p.129.

[409] As a matter of fact, we can still find one text following the scheme set by the 'quadrato metrico' in *Documento*: 'La notte era una splendida canna di giunco' (DOC, 17).

The figure above shows the different metrical forms approaching the ideal metrical archetype of the 'sonetto trecentesco' that, according to Rosselli, must function as an ideal form and a graphic 'mandala'. One can see Rosselli trying to assemble a taxonomy meant to communicate a certain degree of clarity to the reader. However, what are the characteristics of this ideal metrical structure? If we look at the several variants introduced in *Documento*, we can identify at least four main defining features:

- Pluristrophism: the 'sonnets' are divided in at least three stanzas;
- Incipitary line:[410] it fixes the length of the following lines determining the overall tempo of pace in which the rhythm unfolds. In the case of hybrid sonnets composed using also blank verses, the last line of each stanza could be shorter forming a sort of *cauda,* which is probably modelled on Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'curtal sonnets';[411]
- Stanza length: the number of lines included in each stanza is determined by mathematical functions. To the first stanza, some lines are added or subtracted following a fixed pattern;
- Overall length: in *Documento*, Rosselli breaks the standardised measure of the 'metrical cube' as the poems now tends to be longer and pluristrophic.

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[410] On this topic, see La Penna's analysis of the 'spazio metrico' in *Variazioni belliche*: D. La Penna, 'Spazio metrico, tempi verbali e moduli sintattici in *Variazioni belliche*', *"La promessa d'un semplice linguaggio". Lingua e stile nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli,* pp. 61-83.

[411] Rosselli takes inspiration for this structure from the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, an author that she read thoroughly, and greatly admired. Rosselli takes inspiration from Hopkins' 'curtal sonnets' which consist of a shrunken version of the Petrarchan sonnet. The 'curtal sonnet' consists of 10½-line form in which the closing line is reduced to a half of its usual length, forming a sort of shorter *cauda* – what Hopkins defines as 'half-line tailpiece' in the *Introduction* to his collection of poems. In *Documento*, Rossell frequently employs this *cauda* at the end of each stanza. L. W. Pitchford, 'The Curtal Sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 67, No. 3. (March 1952), pp. 165-169. Hopkins' caudate sonnets are 'Pied Beauty', 'Peace', and 'Ash Boughs': G.M. Hopkins, *The Major Works*, ed. By C. Phillips (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 132; 149; 177. Cfr. also L.R. Spaar, 'Curtal Sonnet', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 327-328.

To better understand Rosselli's new metrical system, it is useful to list two examples of metrical structures that one may find in *Documento*, starting from the form, which is less close to the archetype – poems written in free verse only. Rosselli expresses concern regarding the employment of this metrical structure several times within the collection: texts written in free verse are defined as 'versi bianchi' (DOC, 37) – which is a translation of 'blank verses' –, 'versi decapitati' (DOC, 43) – suggesting the absence of rhymes at the end of each line and their different length. Rosselli admits that the use of this kind of line does not lead to a fixed metrical structure, 'non volge in canto forte' (DOC, 205).

Numerous examples of poems written in free verse can be found in *Documento,* especially among those written after 1969. These are usually shorter texts characterised by a less ruminative tone, as is the case with the following poem:

> Stona la vita,
> si spegne da sé
> la speranza si spiuma
> faticosa a mettersi insieme
> non ne vuol più sapere
>
> i pensieri sono poi ovali, o opachi. (DOC, 153)

The overall length of the line is encompassed between 5 syllables of the first two lines and 13 syllables of the closing line. In this case, the 'spazio metrico' delimited by the length of the first line is not respected. Rosselli does not use any strong enjambement – for example those between article and noun or preposition and noun – that was a key-feature used to determine the spatial dimension of the 'spazio metrico'. This text is of particular interest not only for the employment of free verse but also because personal pronouns are absent: the use of impersonal verbs such as 'si spegne', 'si spiuma', 'mettersi insieme' let things speak without any subjective filter.[412] To this extent, the absence of

[412] As pointed out by Frabotta, the number of poems that avoid the employment of a first-person subject in *Documento* is highly limited: 'E allora ci accorgiamo che solo una ristretta rosa delle poesie di *Documento* eliminano realmente il soggetto e il suo interlocutore […]. L'io debole che annega in una prevalenza di verbi all'infinito, un po' alla Porta prima maniera, e di soggetti plurali,

any metrical super-structure accompanies the displacement of the lyric subject which remains hidden behind the surface of the lyric diction as the only trace and manifestation of its presence.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is important to analyse one of Rosselli's 'sonnet-archetypes'. Written in 1968, *Lettera* represents a condensed summary of the typical themes and metrical features charactering Rosselli's 'sonnets':

Lettera

Vento da galeotti stasera e tutta la
radura rade il mio cuore e l'osmosi
del bene e del male vien trattenuta

da un irresistibile bisogno di pianto,
da lucertole divine fra i semi della

rivolta: che non avviene, e nemmeno
le lucertole viaggiano per il tuo cuore!

se con la smania appariscente di apparire
vogliamo galoppare per i prati smorti
dell'intendimento di versi a noi ignoti

la luna relegata in un letto di morti
e il canto a noi noto dei morti: questi

versi che salgono scalinando per impervie
vie del tramonto, non taciono. (DOC, 125)

The poem is divided into two tercets and four couplets, making *Lettera* one of the texts that approaches more closely the model of the standard sonnet. The length of the single line is comprised between a maximum of 14 syllables and a minimum of 9. Nevertheless, these two extremes are only found in the closing couplet, while the standard length is comprised between 11 and 13 syllables. It is possible to identify a total of four

collettivi. Oppure incontriamo un io aggiunto solo in coda […].' B. Frabotta, 'Le buone intenzioni di Amelia Rosselli', *Trasparenze 17-19*, p. 339.

hendecasyllables at line two, three, six, and twelve. Within this structure, the first line of twelve syllable determines the spatial length of the following lines that have to follow a similar spatial – and thus metrical – pattern. The spatial length of the line determines the overall metrical structure. This is made self-evident by the use of the enjambement which is, in the majority of cases, very sharp, causing abrupt transitions in the text. At the same time, an enjambement of this intensity forces the reader to apply strong pauses in places in which there is no syntactical pause: 'tutta la / radura'; or even more abrupt enjambments between two different stanzas, as is the case for 'i semi della // rivolta'.

In most of Rosselli's 'sonnets', this structure produces a syncopated rhythm that reveals an attempt to innovate and de-territorialise the most common rhythmical patterns that one would find, for instance, in a Petrarchan sonnet.[413] In *Documento*, one can hardly find rhythms typical of Petrarchan hendecasyllable, that are usually characterised by a distribution of the main accent on the fourth or sixth syllable. The Italian hendecasyllable is traditionally grounded into two main stress-patterns: *a minore*, when the main stress is put on the fourth syllable,[414] and *a maiore*, when the main stress is on the sixth syllable.[415]

Figure 4. Types of hendecasyllables

a minore	in sul mio prímo gioveníle erróre (RVF, 1, 3)
a maiore	Questa ánima gentíl che si dipárte (RVF, 31, 1)

Any deviance from this model, especially within a traditional sonnet, reveals something about the author: on the one hand, a conscious act of estrangement from the Petrarchan rhythmical alphabet and, on the other, a system of references which is probably external

413 'Non mi interessa riprodurre un'impostazione metrica. Seguendo l'enjambement si riproduce invece il tono generale, la metrica generale.' M. Caporali, 'Pensare in tre lingue', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita*, p. 114.
414 F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 3.
415 F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, p. 45.

to the Italian lyric canon.[416] As Rosselli stated quite firmly in an interview with Cristiana Fisher, 'lo schema ritmico pare un istinto ma è tradizione'. [417] Specifically for this reason, intervening consistently on the rhythm would therefore have an impact also on an extended literary tradition based on the recursiveness of selected rhythmical patterns.

In *Documento*, the reader finds a rhythm which is closer to prose. Long words of four or even more syllables can often be part of the same line, producing a slowing down of the reading pace: long adverbs in '-mente' are often paired with long noun and adjectives of more than three syllables to decrease the *tempo*. This technique is evident in *Lettera* too – in particular in the lines 'se con la smania appariscente di apparire / vogliamo galoppare per i prati smorti'. To this extent, Rosselli's rhythmical patterns in *Documento* share evident similarities with the 'sprung rhythm' theorised by the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.[418] Hopkins wanted his poetry to be 'logaoedic', that is to say characterised by a rhythm that must combine the advantages of prose and verse.[419] Writing to his friend and fellow poet Robert Bridges, Hopkins explained that he used sprung rhythm

> because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining, as it seems to me, opposite and, one wd. have thought, incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm—that is rhythm's self—and naturalness of expression.[420]

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416 P.G. Beltrami, 'Note sul verso libero', *La metrica italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), pp. 231-240.

417 C. Fisher, 'La pretesa della verità', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 74.

418 On Hopkins' influence on Rosselli's *Primi Scritti* and *Sleep* see E. Tandello, 'Alle fonti del lapsus: pun, portmanteau, wordscape. Appunti sull'inglese letterario di Amelia Rosselli', *Trasparenze 17-19*, pp. 173-190.

419 J.I. Wimsatt, 'Sprung Rhythm', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 1354. Cfr. Rosselli's definition of 'ritmi microscopici' in *Spazi metrici*: Giovanni Salviati, 'Il linguaggio della realtà', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 129.

420 G.M. Hopkins, 'Letter to Robert Bridges. St Beuno's, St Asaph. Aug. 21, 1877', *Major Works* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 227-228.

As highlighted by Don Paterson, this rhythm invented by Hopkins is partly derived from a misreading of light metre folksongs.[421] In the absence of music to overdetermine the correct pace given by the position of stressed syllables, Hopkins tried to define his 'sprung rhythm' by using printed accents. It is interesting to note how Rosselli shares with Hopkins an appreciation of the contribution of folk music in the rhythm of poetry.[422] Two rhythms overlap in 'sprung rhythm': on the one hand, the marked rhythm determined by the use of strong enjambments and, on the other, the rhythm produced by the stress pattern of natural speech. Rosselli clearly picked up from Hopkins this intersection between lyric and prose-like discourse and applied it on *Documento*, following a novel 'conforto della prosa' (DOC, 33).

On a thematic level, not only does *Lettera* consist of a metaliterary reflection on the nature of poetic writing, but it also represents one of the many examples of elegiac text in *Documento*. What is also particularly remarkable is the pronoun's shifting occurring within *Lettera*: the lyric subject's presence is suggested by some syntagms such as 'bisogno di pianto', focusing on the action produced by the subject. The effect reproduces a constant movement between revealing and hiding the true nature of the subject, a sort of effect of 'presence in absence'.[423] Tellingly, the subject reappears at the end of the poem as a plural subject. The landscape dominates the first tercet and the subsequent two couplets. In front of a sort of environmental ectasis, the subject is not able to distinguish between positive and negative things – inferring that the latter

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[421] As is the case with Giovannuzzi's criticism on the exactitude of Rosselli's 'spazio metrico' and consequent adaptations, Paterson expresses doubts regarding Hopkins's 'sprung rhythm': 'As fine as some these poems are, they are broadly unscannable as Hopkins intended them, and sprung rhythm – like Robert Bridge's quantitative experiments and William Carlos Williams's "variable foot" – should be filed decisively under "lousy ideas by good poets"'. D. Paterson, 'Strong Stress Metre: Anglo-Saxon Verse, "Accentual Metre" and Rap', *The Poem. Lyric, Sign, Metre* (London: Faber&Faber, 2018), p. 507. Cfr. also S. Giovannuzzi, 'Quali Spazi Metrici', *Amelia Rosselli: Biografia e Poesia*, pp. 76-77.

[422] F. Borrelli, 'Partitura in versi', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso,* p. 146.

[423] J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 16-18.

condition prevails on the former. No chance of improvement is left to the lyric subject, who is introduced only at the end of the second couplet using the second person singular possessive adjective 'tuo'. The lizards, in this context, can be interpreted as a symbol of cyclicity, palingenesis, and desire; their absence further highlights the central lack of hope experienced by the subject.[424]

In the following tercet and couplet, the reader faces an actual *nekuya*,[425] a descent into the abyss of the hereafter. There, the dead are summoned through a chain of metaphors: the ride in a wasteland, 'vogliamo galoppare per prati smorti', the deathbed where the moon is imprisoned, 'la luna relegata in un letto di morti', and the ritual songs that accompany the descent into the abyss, 'il canto a noi noto dei morti' are signals offered to the reader to recognise the nature of this journey and the crossing of the afterlife's threshold. Undoubtedly, the text could be read in parallel with another poem from *Documento*, *Dialogo con i Morti*, in which the *nekuya* is made explicit from the title.[426] Nonetheless, in that specific case, the descent is not followed by any ascension; on the contrary, the dead are reaching the subject within the abyss: 'scendete voi, abbracciate questa vostra / figlia che annaspa'.[427] At the same time, the dead remain an entity which is external to the subject in the *Dialogo*, while in *Lettera* we witness a process of internalisation operated by the subject: this is made clear by the line 'il canto a noi noto

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[424] The lizards symbolism can be read together with the landscape of 'prati smorti' as a further reference to a *descensio ad inferos*. The fields are to be read as an equivalent of the Dantean 'selva', a de-territorialised space whereby the descent occurs. Another possible parallelism could be drawn with one of the most enigmatic sonnets by Petrarch, the sonnet XCIX: 'Questa vita terrena è quasi un prato, / che 'l serpente tra' fiori et l'erba giace'. F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, p. 132.

[425] The mythical symbolism of the *nekuya* and Orphism is employed by Rosselli to overturn the gender roles in display in the 'territorialized' structure of the lyric discourse, where the male subject is proactively in charge of the act of mourning while the female character usually coincides with the silenced object. On this topic and its relationship with Rosselli's poetry, see E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli. La fanciulla e l'infinito*, pp. 117-119. See also E. Bronfen, 'From Muse to Creatrix', *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 395-435.

[426] A. Rosselli, 'Dialogo con i Morti', *Documento*, pp. 61-63.

[427] A. Rosselli, 'Dialogo con i Morti', p. 61. See also L. Pugno, 'Lettura di parte A.R.', D. Attanasio, E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli, Galleria Special Issue*, 48, pp. 114.

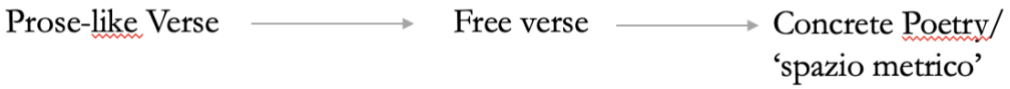
dei morti', whereby is no longer possible to distinguish the separateness of the dead and the living. The fact that the subject finally appears in the choral form of 'noi' results in an attempt at involving the reader in this dialogue with the dead.

In the last couplet, poetry is described as something that could help the lyric subject to re-emerge from the depths of the dialogue with the dead in an elegiac restitution of meaning. Eventually, the text is turned into a 'sonnet' *in morte*, easing the subject reconnection with clarity of forms and thus expression: 'versi che salgono scalinando per impervie / vie del tramonto, non taciono.' Crossing the boundaries between life and death is made possible thanks to the function of the 'canto', which reactivates the word through the closeness of the poetic form and makes it, finally, a collective chorus. To this extent, the closeness of the 'sonnet' form has made possible a temporal ectasis, as a sort of intervention on the linearity of time – once again, the lizards' symbolism is not fortuitous. Time is made circular and finite as the sonnet's structure is.

4.3.3. BETWEEN PROSE AND 'SPAZIO METRICO' IN IL RUMORE BIANCO

Biancamaria Frabotta's reflection on metrical forms is less developed than Rosselli's; in fact, there is no equivalent to an essay such as *Spazi metrici* in Frabotta's own work. Yet, it is possible to identify some metrical trends in *Il rumore bianco* that can be effectively put into dialogue with Rosselli's poetry and, more broadly, with the Italian lyric tradition. As we have already discussed, *Il rumore bianco* is profoundly influenced by Rosselli's poetic diction, and metrics is no exception to this. Within this framework, Frabotta's attempt to approach closed forms using the spatialisation of the verse and Rosselli's 'spazio metrico' can be read in parallel. As shown in the figure above, the reader is again confronted with a system that leans towards an ideal metrical structure, while also embracing a certain degree of metrical freedom:

Figure 5. Reconfiguration of the 'Spazio metrico' in Il rumore bianco



In most cases, Frabotta employs the free verse in *Il rumore bianco*. In several texts, she uses a prose-like line that stretches well beyond the hendecasyllable, as occurs in the following poem dedicated to Renzo Paris:

> Nell'orecchio di Dostoevskij Belinskij a lungo scampanò
> un'intera notte bianca pietroburghese di pietra serena.
> Ci univa, vivi, l'entusiasmo di una bella epoca.
> Morti, i minuti che abbiamo per noi, li stringo nel palmo della mano.
> Che nobile contesa, che mirabile duello fra la vita e la morte! (RB, 31)

The number of syllables in each line is comprised between a minimum of 16 and a maximum of 21. A complete overlap between syntax and metre is identifiable, as the syntactical pause is placed at the end of each line – the only exception being the period stretching between the first and the second line. Each line could be read independently while the rhythm of the discourse is, also in this case, closer to prose than to poetry, approaching Frabotta's drive towards clarity that is central in *Il rumore bianco*. In the Western lyric tradition, the use of line is unarguably one of the principal features that distinguishes poetry from prose. Frabotta is evidently playing with this concept here; prose is probably the most effective medium to reconstruct the memory of a journey – both physical, sentimental, and literary – with Paris.

Another consistent group of texts follows more closely Rosselli's work on the 'spazio metrico': the length of the first line establishes the length of the following lines. As in Rosselli's poetry, the metrical structure is grounded in a spatialisation of metrics and not on the number of syllables. The following text is a clear example of this attempt to innovate traditional metrical structures:

apri la porta e ci sei in una
girandola di azzurri ridipinti
sincronico riammagliatore dell'
ironico minuto che disperde i
giri della corsa dove sono gli
anni camminati sulle punte dell'
afflato ballerino se ti avvolgo
nell'occhio fisso di rotazione
della stanza chiusa alle vite
plurali che mai battono ai doppi
vetri serrato nella monade chia
cchierina che ti appunti all'
occhiello improbabile ragazzo
del giorno dopo voglio vederti
affacciata al davanzale imbia
ncata di sole richiamo incongruo
dei passeri marini pettinarti la
capigliatura voglio vederti
nuotare a ritroso costruire la
gaia minutaglia del castoro che
corre un passo sotto di noi. (RB, 51-52)

The text introduces the section *Le Continenze*, which consists of a sequence of texts dedicated to Frabotta's psychoanalyst Michele Risso.[428] All the texts included in this section follow the same metrical pattern and *mise-en-page*. In these twelve texts, Frabotta explores the distinct stages of the therapeutical discourse initiated with Risso, bringing together several events of her private life, love relationships, and psychic contents removed from the conscious work of everyday life: the word 'continenze' refers to the mechanisms of defence and self-restraints that the conscious creates in order to filter the subconscious' drives.[429]

[428] B. Frabotta, 'Il rumore bianco', pp. 52-58

[429] The title of the section, *Le Continenze*, echoes one of the last poems included in Rosselli's *Documento*, which opening line starts with the syntagm: 'Continenza europea'. In that text, Rosselli inserts a reference to the closed metrical structure of the sonnet, making even stronger the parallelism between 'continence' and 'literary tradition': 'Quattro stanze indivisibili / quattro angoli nascostissimi / polvere o grigiore e smemoratezza / v'hanno composto questa ballata / (angoli delle mie quattro stanze) / non disturba il vostro io trafelato // non volge in canto forte.' A. Rosselli, *Documento*, p. 205. See also B. Frabotta, 'Dialoghetti di Mezzanotte', *Tutte le poesie*, pp. 390-391.

As it appears clear at once, this poem is characterised by a completely different metrical structure from the previous text. The structure of the text dedicated to Renzo Paris falls under the category of isometry, as those lines are completely end-stopped and each line corresponds with a unit of thought – which, in that case, consists of an independent and separate sentence for each line. Conversely, with the second text, the scenario has completely changed: the poem comprises one long and uninterrupted sentence which is fragmented by an enjambement at the end of each line; the rhythm depends on the reader who is in charge of determining the syntactical pauses – always located in the middle of the line.[430] If in the previous text, Frabotta confronts the reader with an almost prose-like rhythm, here the flow of the speech leans towards poetry. The enjambements are used not only to separate syntagms – as it happens with 'una / girandola', 'rotazione / della stanza', 'la / gaia minutaglia' – but also to isolate a noun from its preposition – 'dell' / ironico', 'dell' / afflato' – or even to split arbitrarily words into two: 'chia / cchierina', 'imbian / cata'. In the essay included in the volume of collected poems published in 2018, Frabotta reports a conversation she had with Risso regarding the metrical structure characterising most of her poems:

> Rimane vero che m.r. [Michele Risso] mi chiese perché a fine verso spezzassi le parole come grissini. Gli spiegai che non era un gioco, né un esperimento cucinato in laboratorio, ma una sfida al mio cher maître, il folletto maligno che a ogni seduta la mia "guida" evocava con le sue magie, liberandomene poi con silenziosi esorcismi. Inseguendo me stessa, come una particella artificialmente elettrizzata, non distinguevo più l'originale dalla controfigura, il battito del cuore dalla sua contraffazione, la mira dal miraggio.[431]

Frabotta draws a parallel between her attempt to challenge the psychoanalyst during each session, and her act of distancing her poetry both from literary tradition and empty

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[430] As highlighted by Alessandro Baldacci in his analysis of the rhythmical pattern of *Il rumore bianco*: 'Questa poesia, riducendo al minimo e spesso eliminando quasi del tutto la punteggiatura interna al periodo, tende a fornirci un'idea di *continuum* dove il *prius* ritmico del verso informa e alimenta la geminazione e la progressione dello stesso.' A. Baldacci, 'Biancamaria Frabotta', *Parola Plurale*, ed. by G. Alfano (Bologna: Luca Sossella, 2005), p. 197.

[431] B. Frabotta, 'Dialoghetti di Mezzanotte', p. 391.

experimentalism. To this extent, metre is perceived as an actual space of renegotiation of a literary identity which, in the end, must be self-fashioned and not imposed by others.[432]

Frabotta's use of enjambement intrinsically suggests an influence of the 'spazio metrico' filtered by concrete poetry; as a matter of fact, in this text, the primacy of the spatial component overrides or subsumes poetic line in the generally regarded sense. Beyond Rosselli, Antonio Porta constitutes another strong reference for Frabotta – the poet who also wrote the introductions to both *affemminata* and *Il rumore bianco*. Concrete poets embrace the concept of inter-media works that could operate simultaneously in verbal-to-visual and acoustic modes. Frabotta seems thus closer to this model, filtered through Rosselli's practice of the 'spazio metrico' and, concurrently, distant from the New-Avantgarde nihilist experimentalism with forms. Many concrete poets distanced themselves from early twentieth century Avant-garde movements thanks to their less destructive approach to tradition. For instance, Frabotta's text still falls into the category of lyric poetry due to the centrality of the subjective discourse – a discourse that, as in the most traditional Petrarchan sonnets, addresses a distant and absent lover. At the same time, Frabotta constantly professes that tradition – even the metrical one – should not be lived as a cultural – and thus territorialised – threat.[433]

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[432] In another poem included in *Le Continenze*, Frabotta focuses on the object-relation between the lyric subject and the addressee – a dialogue that the female lyric subject wants to avoid by becoming unreachable through her linguistic and formal experiments with the lyric discourse: 'per non affrontarti di petto mi faccio / liscia come il sapone magari sfidare da / primitive il limite degli spazi balbettare / la presa di costanza di distanza la presa / rifilarsi questa smagrita coscienza senza /ciglio sbattere. Da scorporare alata.' Similarly to this, in another text Frabotta addresses more directly the problem of the lyric apostrophe, when there is a female speaking subject: '[…] ripercorro le origini accalorate del linguaggio perché il tuo possa prosperare agio e miele carota e bastoni.' . Frabotta, 'Il rumore bianco', *Tutte le poesie*, pp.55;56.

[433] To clarify this point, Frabotta draws a comparison between how American women poets and Italian women poets used to address the problem of tradition in her essay *Letteratura Femminile*: 'Antonio Porta paragonando la poesia femminile americana a quella nostrana notò per esempio che là i modelli non facevano sentire il loro peso; non c'erano i ricatti petrarcheschi in vista né alle spalle; le parole delle donne diventavano necessarie e inesorabili. […] Da noi le cose stavano molto diversamente.' B. Frabotta, *Letteratura al femminile: a proposito di donne, storia, poesia, romanzo*

The text describes the encounter between two lovers; this encounter is suggested by two chronotopes: the opened door at the very beginning of the poem to welcome the newcomer, 'apri la porta e ci sei', and the reference to the subsequent day, 'il giorno dopo'. The rhythm produced by this protracted sentence is that of a stream of consciousness produced by the inner voice of the poet: a mental – and thus internalised – lover's discourse. Two characters are identifiable within this monologue: on the one hand, the 'improbabile ragazzo' who is welcomed at the very beginning of the poem; on the other hand, the female character, the poet herself, which speaks through her inner voice, but is also included in the first-person plural pronoun in the last line of the text. Moreover, the identification between the poet and the lyric subject is also suggested by the use of the adjective 'imbiancata', that alludes, as a sort of modern *senhal*, to the name Biancamaria. The cluster of thoughts sediments together as the metrical structures enhances this continuity between the unbroken syntax and the perpetual flow of the global rhythm of the lyric discourse.

4.4. MACROSTRUCTURES AS CANZONIERI

The impulse towards clarity impacts the macrostructure of *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco* too. As discussed in the case of Morante's and Cavalli's books, one can recognise the de-territorialization of well-established and traditional structures of the 'libro di poesia'. The main references for *Documento* and *Il rumore bianco* are, on the one hand, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, on the other, Leopardi's *Canti*. However, the elected models have to be de-structured, modified, and re-written in a continuous attempt to challenge two of the foundational texts of western lyric tradition.

(Bari: De Donato, 1980), p. 117. Cfr. also A. Porta, 'Nel contatto con la realtà*, Il Giorno*, 1 December 1976.

4.4.1. THE STRUCTURE OF DOCUMENTO

As suggested by the title, *Documento (1966-1973)* covers the period between 1966 and 1973. According to the author's plan, the book was meant to be read both as a personal and political document, with the aim to narrate the numerous interactions between the lyric subject and an audience composed by both anonymous and identifiable characters; at the same time, *Documento* is also an extremely receptive seismograph, which is meant to record the movements of contemporary history. Rosselli reveals to Marina Camboni; 'voglio dire che si può documentare meglio tramite la poesia che non tramite carte bollate, o fotografie. La vita interiore qui balza fuori come documento anche se l'impostazione non è intimistica.'[434]

In the first half of the book, the authorial intentions seem closely related to the most traditional lyric posture; however, in the subsequent part, Rosselli suggests a different kind of approach to writing, which is actually far from any kind of Petrarchan legacy.[435] In the second half of *Documento*, more attention is devoted to the representation of historical events. Allusions to contemporary history are fairly limited within the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta,* and circumscribed to a series of sonnets dedicated to the moral decline of the papacy at Avignon.[436] Conversely, in *Documento* the two extremes of the private and of the public – and thus of the political – are meant to live side by side, to slide into each other, while cohabitating under the same macro-structure, that of the

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434 M. Camboni, 'È molto difficile essere semplici', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 52.
435 S. Giovannuzzi, 'Documento: Notizie sui testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, p. 1369.
436 Three texts focus on the corruption of the papacy of Avignon and the Pope Clemente VI: the sonnets CXXXVI ('Fiamma dal ciel su le tue treccie piova'), CXXXVII ('L'avara Babilonia è colmo il sacco'), and CXXXVIII ('Fontana di dolore, albergo d'ira'). The suite of three sonnets, probably written before 1348, are one of the only few occasions in which Petrarch described contemporary historical events. On this topic, see Bettarini's analysys of these sonnets: F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere. Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, ed. and commented by Rosanna Bettarini (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), pp. 664-675.

'libro di poesia'. At the beginning of *Documento*, Rosselli discusses her structural choice in the poem 'Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti':

> Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti
> poi ritrovi una «persona» che s'aggancia
> fortemente al pavimento, i bricconi
> le piccole vie pannellate, le testate
> anche i grandi riverberi della tua immaginazione.
>
> Piccoli neri su corona di fil di ferro
> fatti concordano, espongono, giustificando
> ed altri (che poi divennero te) quel
> obliterare ogni passo della tua vita
> sentimentale.
>
> Furono una corona? La portasti espellendo
> fiori mescolati all'avena? Rimanendo
> un logico bastonarsi quel correre dei
> tempi fu come una grafia utile, desiderabile
> necessaria.
>
> Rivale al cuore alle passioni (molto
> usate e celebrate) desti filo da torcere
> a quel nesso giuridico che operava nella
> tua testa che forzutamente rubando al
> ventre (ombra delle tue pupille) un
>
> rafforzarsi della ragione, salvò quel
> che potè, nell'ombra ragionando d'amore
> mentre in via di trapasso celebravi
> la quinta edizione del tuo errore. (DOC, 21)

'Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti' is a dense text, which provides a metaliterary reflection on the whole collection. The poem sets the tone of *Documento*, while also situating the new collection within Rosselli's whole production. The poem revolves around two conflicting chains of symbols: the first one draws a parallel between poems and flowers[437] that are arranged by the author in a 'corona' – an allusion to the

[437] The metaphor involving a botanical imaginary is probably informed by the ongoing dialogue with the poetry of Sylvia Plath. In the late sixties, Rosselli starts reading Sylvia Plath. This interest

'canzoniere' as a flower arrangement; the second one balances the presence of lyric poetry with prose. This is exemplified by a reference to the flowers mixed with oat but also by the 'corona di fil di ferro'.

In the first stanza, Rosselli expresses the dialectic between poetry and prose, lyric and anti-lyric diction, revealing what Frabotta defines as 'le buone intenzioni' of *Documento*: to hide the presence of a lyric subject or, at least, to limit any drift towards confessionalism.[438] As we have already seen in *Documento*, Rosselli's main attempt is to limit as much as possible the presence of an individual lyric *persona* within the delivery of the poetic message: 'Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti / poi ritrovi una «persona» che s'aggancia'. Rosselli is here trying to express a difficulty in renouncing to the centrality of the lyric subject; at the same time, the rational part of the poet's mind intends to limit her presence, while focusing on the supremacy of the account of facts.

This is summarised in the second stanza by the image of the 'corona di fil di ferro'; this image stands for the tension towards prose, which expresses the poet's attempt at containing the lyricism of *Documento*: 'quel / obliterare ogni passo della tua vita sentimentale'. However, in the third stanza, the lyric subject explicitly asks herself

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developed while she was writing some of the poems that would be part of *Documento (1966-1973*). I argue that Rosselli's work on Sylvia Plath's poetry – first as reader, and then as a translator – inspired a profound revolution within in her poetry. This experience overlaps with the editing of the second section of *Documento*, that covers the years 1966-1973. Amelia Rosselli started translating some of Plath's poems around the early seventies, and 13 of them would have been published in the number 45-46 of *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1975. Not only Rosselli mirrors some of the linguistic elements of Plath's poems, but she also uses and develops them into some metaphors and analogies that are structurally essential for *Documento* as a book of poetry and as a 'canzoniere'. Differently from Giudici's translations, the poems selected by Rosselli are specifically centred on nature. With their mature poetry, Rosselli and Plath aspire to create a cult of 'thingness' through which even the poet and other natural media end to be identified as objects. Such 'thingness' produces an identification with nature through which the lyric subject can escape from the limits of their biography. See D. La Penna, 'Authoriality in Poetic Translation: The Case of Amelia Rosselli's Practice', *Translation studies,* Vol.7 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), pp. 66-81; L. Barile, 'L'albero del tasso: Amelia Rosselli traduce Sylvia Plath', A. Rosselli, *La furia dei venti contrari*, ed. by A. Cortellessa (Pisa. Le Lettere, 2007), pp. 265-267.

[438] B. Frabotta, 'Le buone intenzioni di Amelia Rosselli in *Documento (1966-1973)*', *Trasparenze 17-19*, ed. by G. Devoto, E. Tandello (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 367.

about the newly 'intentions' of her last collection: can *Documento* be considered an actual 'canzoniere/corona'? Will the book manage to find a compromise between poetry and prose thanks to 'fiori mescolati all'avena'? The subject answers that the transition through prose is an essential step to conquer a new lyric diction. The transition from poetry to prose – and then back to poetry – is described through an allusion to the *passio Christi* by using the heart of Christ as the metaphorical reference 'rivale al cuore delle passioni'.[439] The fascination with the earthly nature of prose is to be read as a process of moving away from the metaphysical dimension of poetry towards its embodiment, exemplified by the image of the poet as Christ.[440]

In the last two stanzas, Rosselli retraces the opposition between clarity and obscurity. As we discussed, a dialectic between these two conflicting forces dominates the entire book and, concurrently, can be overlapped with the interaction between prose and poetry. The metaphysical and teleological tension that resonates within 'Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti' allow us to draw a parallel with the first poem of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Rosselli's text has, indeed, a similar function to 'Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono'; not only Rosselli's poem sets the tone of the entire book, but here she also ponders on an original metaphysical desire at the basis of poetry writing – that of overcoming the more private feelings in favour of a transcendent good. This parallelism,

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[439] On this topic, Rosselli composed another poem in 1971, titled *Il Cristo (Pasqua 1971)*: 'Perché morendo ci fai venir a festa? Semmai / era *l'altro* lato che andava premiato / e tu non rifiutasti quel cibo acerbo / *vinaigre* di festa e botte sulle spalle // pacchie e grandiose costruzioni per la / mente intorbidita: i cinque sensi hanno // dunque così poco conto o peso che tu // vaneggi su croce elegante e di legno? […]'. Rosselli strengthens in these lines the parallelism between the figure of Christ and the poet, making explicit the connection between the two figures: both are destined to a bodily and misunderstood sacrifice (DOC, 201). In this context, the 'corona di fil di ferro' can now be read as an allusion to the crown of thorns.

[440] This image also contains an intrinsic allusion to the etymology of 'pasqua' as 'passage', probably inspired by Rosselli's reading of Zanzottos' *Pasque* in 1972. In the notes to *Pasque*, Zanzotto provides an etymological analysis of the title, while also giving an interpretative key to the reader: 'Pasque: "*pasqua*, lat pascha (dal gr. Pàskha, che è dall'ebr. pesah 'passaggio') incr. con lat. pascua, pascolo.' A. Zanzotto, 'Pasque', *Le poesie e le prose scelte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), p. 455.

together with the manifest and playful manipulation of Petrarch's sonnet, is made evident in the closing line. Herein, Rosselli defines *Documento* as 'la quinta edizione del tuo errore', positioning again *Documento* in the fifth and last position within her *oeuvre*, while openly dialoguing with the Petrarchan 'giovenile errore'. As Rosselli plainly states in another poem from *Documento*: 'L'idea / di un libro mi venne in mente per sbaglio / scegliendo per amministrare questi mie / beni una scena vuota' (DOC, 150).

What differs from the *Canzoniere* is *Documento*'s internal organisation. In Rosselli's collection, there is no internal division, apart from two main *nuclei* of texts revolving around some core themes: the first one includes texts focusing on the absence of the lover, elegiac texts dedicated to her father Carlo Rosselli, and several descriptive texts such as self-portraits or landscapes. The second one deals with texts that are characterised by a programmatical abandonment of the private dimension, such as the ones addressing the workers' strikes, the students' protests, or the Italian Communist Party.[441]

Moreover, except from the poem 'Solo i fatti, reprimere i sentimenti', it is not possible to identify any teleological purpose within the structure of the collection: *Documento* is, in this sense, an open-ended 'canzoniere'.[442] In consonance with the direction given by the title, the entire book unfolds following a chronological progression, covering almost eight years of Rosselli's life; *Documento* stops as the authorial desire of documenting progressively fades away within the process of writing. Rosselli started writing this book in 1966 as a prolonged farewell both to writing and to the many

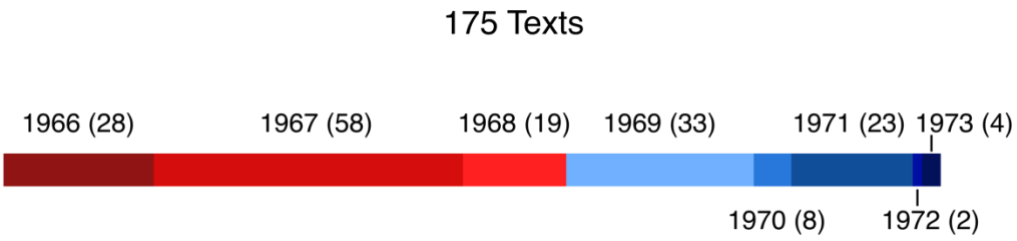
441 A. Rosselli, *Documento*, p. 150.

442 As powerfully stated by Baldacci: 'L'esemplarità di Petrarca è quella di un'anima in frantumi che finisce per fornire all'Occidente *Le Livre* (come scriverebbe Mallarmé), ovvero il *Canzoniere*, spazio emblematico, perfetto, in cui il racconto dell'anima forma un compatto monumentale, un unicum in cui si ricompongono tutti i suoi *fragmenta*. La presenza petrarchesca è disseminata lungo tutta l'opera rosselliana, ma ivi resta quasi irriconoscibile.' A. Baldacci, 'Il Petrarca di Amelia Rosselli: da Mallarmé verso Celan', *Un'altra storia. Petrarca nel Novecento italiano*, ed. by A. Cortellessa, p. 271.

lovers that bundled up with the mourned loved ones. The first poem 'proprio prima di dover partire' drags the reader into a narrative *in medias res*, as if Rosselli's discourse had started before the arrival of the audience – this effect is further reinforced by the absence of capitalisation at the beginning of the first line. As a result, the reader becomes the witness of a temporality in action that is re-enacted by the potential of the lyric discourse. A sense of motionless departure is delivered within the *suite* that this text forms with the two following poems. The focus is here put on the relocation of the lyric subject which, in the author's plan, must no longer occupy the centre of the lyric discourse.

This allows us to discuss another fundamental characteristic of *Documento:* the chronological and unequal distribution of the texts along the different years covered by this collection. In the original manuscript, Rosselli carefully annotated the date for each text included in *Documento*, as testified by the original drafts of the manuscripts held at the Fondo Manoscritti of the University of Pavia. Rosselli stated several times he desire to respect this order. When the chronology is not respected by mistake within the first drafts, Rosselli rearranges the material following the original progression of her writing process.[443]

Figure 6. Chronological distribution of texts in Documento



Between the very end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies Rosselli faces serious difficulties. Severe health crises strongly impacted on her ability to compose poems she considers worthy of publication. *Documento* contains a total of 175 poems;

[443] S. Giovannuzzi, 'Biografia, scrittura, libro', *Amelia Rosselli: Biografia e poesia*, pp. 152-156.

almost two third of them are composed between 1966 and 1969.[444] The chronology of the poems, and their unequal distribution among the years allow us to identify two separate moments within the uninterrupted season of *Documento*. Covering the period between 1966 and 1969, the first phase focuses on the relationship between the lyric subject and a collective addressee: alongside a polymorphic and unidentifiable audience of poetry, one can identify the painter Renato Guttuso (DOC 10), Carlo and Nello Rosselli (DOC 61-63), and the film director Gianfranco Donati (DOC 197-98). The dialogue between the lyric subjects and the crowd of addressees functions as a focal point whereby Rosselli can begin her quest for clarity.

Among the poems written in 1969, the reader crosses a new threshold. After that date, Rosselli starts problematising the resolutive nature of the dialogue with the audience. The new change in perspective is revealed by the recurrent use of the word 'alibi'. Rosselli employs this perspective to allude to the potential finitude of the lyric dialogue:[445] this is evident in the lines 'Stringenti alibi, la moltitudine / delle face zittisce l'inferiore / o infernale facia del mondo' (DOC, 148) and also in the lines 'Alibi a forma

[444] In the second half of 1966, Rosselli wrote 28 texts from 'proprio prima di partire' (dated 26 August 1966) to 'E veleno forzarsi' (30/12/66). A peak of 58 texts was reached in 1967, from 'La severa vita' (2/1/67) to 'Non deve cadere' (26/12/67). She then wrote 19 texts in 1968, from the text titled *Neve* (11/1/68) to 'Uccelli gradevoli sui tetti' (16/11/68). In 1969, there is still an increase in the number of texts – a total of 33 from 'Conati di libertà' (17/1/69) to 'Le tue mani bianche', which is one of the few texts left without a date. In 1970, only 8 texts saw the light, from 'Fiumi in lacrime' (9/1/1970) to 'Se hai da nutrire il tuo sangue' (3/12/70). Rosselli managed to gather other 23 poems in 1971, from 'Moristi anche tu' (17/1/71) to 'Continenza europea' (8/6/71). Only two texts were composed in 1972 – 'Non resisti a questo inverno' (21/10/72) and 'Nel nordico' (which is another undated text, probably written in December 1972) – and a total of four texts in 1973 – from 'Da sapersi molto vicini' (19/1/73) to 'Corruzione del giornale di ieri' (18/5/73). Cfr. S. Giovannuzzi, 'Documento: Note ai testi', A. Rosselli, *L'opera poetica*, p. 1361.

[445] The hammering use of word 'alibi' in *Documento* may suggest Rosselli's tribute to Morante's first collection, *Alibi*, published in 1956. We know that Rosselli owned a copy of *Alibi*, a book that she highly appreciated as is testified by the numerous notes that she took at the margins of Morante's texts. Following Morante's literary itinerary from *Alibi* to *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, Rosselli wanted to challenge the idea of lyric poetry as a confessional alibi. On this topic, see C. Carpita, 'Nella biblioteca di Amelia Rosselli: Un inedito in dialogo con *Alibi* di Elsa Morante', *Quaderni del Novecento*, XIX (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2019), pp. 75-96.

di ventaglio / una cavalleria del cuore / dormire su questi lauri / con l'arena / d'uno sgradevole pallore' (DOC, 157). The encounter with contemporary history transports the reader to the other bank of *Documento*. As Rosselli states in an interview with Renato Minore when asked to comment on the crowd of addressees in her poetry: 'immagino i miei versi diretti a una specie di massa, ad un auditorium senza poltrone. Subito dopo m'iscrissi al PCI. Ma poi si matura. E in genere a volte s'immagina una folla, a volte non s'immagina nessuno; si scrive soltanto per se stessi.'[446] The very turning-point in *Documento* occurs in a poem written in the last days of December 1969, titled *Sciopero generale 1969*:

Sciopero generale 1969

lampade accesissime e nell'urlo
d'una quieta folla rocambolesca
trovarsi lì a far sul serio: cioè
rischiare! che nell'infantilismo
apparente schianti anche il mio
potere d'infischiarmene.

Un Dio molto interno poteva bastare
non bastò a me il mio egoismo

non bastò a queste genti il sapore
d'una ricchezza nella rivincita

del resto strozzata. Dovevamo
esprimere il meglio: regalarsi

ad una retorica che era urlo
di protesta ad una distruzione

impavida nelle nostre impaurite
case. (Persi da me quell'amore
al verticale, a solitario dio
rivoluzionandomi nella gente
asportandomi dal cielo.) (DOC, 168)

[446] R. Minore, 'Il dolore in una stanza', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 66.

The title refers to the events of the autumn of 1969, when a wave of strikes and university occupations swept through Italy.[447] In December 1969, the massacre caused by a terrorist attack in Piazza Fontana, in Milan, marked the traumatic beginning of the 'long seventies' as a decade of terror in which numerous terrorist attacks piled up.[448] This is also the decade in which the historical traumas were mirrored by Rosselli's own life: her psychotics crises keep occuring one after the other and Rosselli thinks to be followed by secret agents sent by the CIA and the Italian government.[449] This crowd of voices accumulates even within Rosselli's poetry, as she is not able to distance herself anymore from those phantasmatic presences. In that very period, Rosselli is also a member of the PCI – the Italian Communist Party –, collaborating with the Rome precinct, while she is still living in Trastevere.

In the first stanza, the poet describes the crowds of people gathering in the Italian squares to fight for their rights. The following two lines bring the focus back on the poet, describing a dramatic change in her perception of poetry: the centrality of the lyric subject is no longer sufficient as she declares 'Un Dio molto interno poteva bastare / non bastò a me il mio egoismo // non bastò a queste genti il sapore / d'una ricchezza nella rivincita / del resto strozzata. […]'. The 'internal God' stands for the symbolic capital offered by lyric poetry to subjectivity. Nevertheless, through a confrontation with the alterity of the crowds, the lyric subject discovers that this dimension of writing is no longer self-sufficient. In the closing line, Rosselli makes clear this newly-reached awareness: '(Persi da me quell'amore / al verticale, a solitario dio / rivoluzionandomi nella gente / asportandomi dal cielo.)' The actual revolution consists of the discovery of

447 B. Cartosio, *I lunghi anni Settanta. Movimenti sociali e cultura politica negli Stati Uniti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012), pp. 23-25

448 M. Belpoliti, 'Nuova premessa', *Settanta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. IX-XII.

449 R. Paris, 'Non vivo nel passato', *Miss Rosselli*, pp. 37-38.

finding a balance between the personal and the political, within the constant attempt to make poetry clear and accessible.

This new achievement is not meant to last long, as it becomes more difficult for Rosselli to conjugate the two-contrasting dimensions of poetry and prose, lyric poetry, and historical document. From 1969, the act of writing becomes increasingly challenging for Rosselli; the ongoing lyric discourse started in 1966 as a 'canzoniere d'amore' began to deteriorate.[450] Under these circumstances, it is no longer possible to find a referent for her poetry. Following the almost linear development of the collection, we reach the very end of *Documento* facing the unsettling disappearance of the lyric subject within a book that – according to the initial authorial intentions – was originally meant to be also a collection of love sonnets: 'doveva essere un canzoniere d'amore in sonetti ed è diventato qualcosa d'altro'.[451] To this extent, the poetry collection is turned into an impersonal form of document which carries out the removal of the lyric subject even on a grammatical level. The last poem of *Documento* exacerbates this inner tension:

> Corruzione nel giornale di ieri
> centoventimila tiratori scelti.
>
> Senza lezione
> scemava nella tenerezza costrittiva
> l'inconscia palla del nemico divertito.
>
> Sovente nell'arte illustrata

[450] Until then, Rosselli was able to preserve a lyrical posture in *Documento*, which followed more closely the model of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. As highlighted by Tandello in her analyses of Petrarchan influences in Rosselli's poetry, 'it is in her adoption of the constitutive form of lyric discourse, the dialogue in absentia, that we can locate the most complex aspect of Rosselli's relationship with Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. As with the vision/idyll poems discussed earlier, that relationship reveals itself to be far from exclusive, as it strays and betrays, collides, and colludes with other discourses—some elective, like Leopardi's, some more distant and openly anti-Petrarchan, like Montale's.' E. Tandello, 'Between Tradition and Transgression: Amelia Rosselli's Petrarch', *Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 years*, ed by M. McLaughlin, L. Panizza, and P. Hainsworth (London: British Academy Scholarship Online, 2012), p. 8.

[451] P. Deriu, 'Ho scritto abbastanza', A. Rosselli, *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, p. 175

consigliò dono
scempio tutt'intero – (DOC, 211)

The act of reading about political corruption on a newspaper provides the subject matter for the closing poem of *Documento*. Any possibility of Petrarchan elevation towards a metaphysical dimension is denied, while the lyric subject is flattened on an impersonal annotation. If the circumstances in which the poem was written may appear clear – the act of reading a newspaper –, the meaning remains obscure. In the third stanza, 'l'arte illustrata' may refer, once again, to the friend-lover Renato Guttuso, linking this last text to the opening poem of *Documento*. At the same time, the metaphor of the 'dono' is frequent in *Documento*, consisting of an allusion to the act of writing poetry – suffice it to mention the opening line of another poem from the same collection in which Rosselli employs a metaphorical triangulation with 'flowers': 'I fiori vengono in dono e poi si dilatano' (DOC, 52-53). Nonetheless, in this closing poem, the addressees and the symbols are just sketched impressionistically. This projects a long shade on the closing section of *Documento*, wherein obscurity seems to prevail.

4.4.2. THE STRUCTURE OF IL RUMORE BIANCO

Il rumore bianco is a 'canzoniere-cluster' of different geological eras, experienced through the filter of what, at the very beginning of the writing process, was a monovocal lyric subject. The book is strongly anchored to the central voice of 'io-donna', memorably presented by Frabotta as a 'femmina culturale'. This definition is grounded in the militant and feminist background of the author, which is experienced through writing. Within the development of the lyric discourse, the theme of duplicity appears as central not only to the confrontation between a female subject and a male object but also to the practice of writing a collection of poetry: on the one hand, the dimension of the personal and the private, and, on the other, the political and the public sphere. Duplicity consists also of

the attempt to keep open the dialogue between nature and culture. Frabotta feels an impelling urgency of answering several practical questions that cannot be ignored by a poet: what is the kind of language a woman poet should be employing in the seventies? How should she shape a collection of poetry based on the original duplicity that used to exclude any female voice from the lyric discourse?[452] Frabotta is not an iconoclast and recognised the importance of literary tradition: the need for poetry corresponds to a need for roots solidly anchored to the 'humic foundation' of western literary culture, in Robert Pogue Harrison's words.[453]

In a poem originally placed at the very beginning of *affemminata*, and then moved as an incipitary poem to her whole production in the volume *Tutte le poesie (1971-2017)* published in 2018, Frabotta focuses on this specific permeation between nature and culture which is at the very core of her poetry:

> Fra le piante dimentiche dei parti prematuri
> con allegria s'ingravida il gennaio.
> I moscerini s'affollano a schernire la mia ombra.
> Sfoglio le pagine del tuo passionato materialismo
> e nel crepuscolo i colori si placano a non confermare
> le ferite impolverate da crepe sabbie duri spigoli
> maschi del paesaggio. L'azione-contemplazione
> m'imbiondisce al sole i capelli che si prosciugano
> come gli orti il loro sangue chiaro.
> Quanto bianco filamentoso desiderio dissipato
> fra i battenti schiusi della fessura
> miccia inesplosa dei femminili trasalimenti

[452] These questions were discussed in Frabotta's essay *Con la mano sinistra*, which was included in the volume *Poesia femminista italiana*, edited by Laura Di Nola: 'Quello che oggi ancora sfugge alla poesia femminile, o più modestamente sfugge a me che cerco di orientarmi fra gli opposti bisogni della comunicazione e dell'espressione, è appunto la terza via "il nuovo bisogno di concretezza e di materialità" che nella pratica delle donne qualche volta si esprime.' Similar considerastions are also expressed in a poem from *Il rumore bianco*, where the lyric subject advocates for 'una poesia che non mi si chiusa addosso come una tenaglia'; B. Frabotta, 'Il rumore bianco', p. 20; B. Frabotta, 'Con la mano sinistra', *Poesia femminista italiana*, ed. by L. Di Nola (Rome: Savelli, 1978), p. 172.

[453] The expression is taken from Robert Pogue Harrison's theory according to which it is possible to identify an earthly and natural foundation of western culture. R.P. Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 7-13.

traliccio di secoli, di pensieri inconfessabili
vi ho tenuto ancora come porcellini d'india al guinzaglio
carceriera, quintessenza, che altri insuperbisce
delibando e cantando, complice e non padroni,
da oggi dichiaro la decomposizione viva della specie
padrona e non complice
natura maligna
io cesserò di imitarti. (RB, 7)

This text is topical interest for our investigation of Frabotta's poetry. In the epitaph that introduces the text, Frabotta quotes one of the most famous passages of Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, known as 'il giardino della sofferenza': 'quella pianta ha troppo caldo, questa troppo fresco; troppa luce, troppa ombra; troppo umido, troppo secco.'[454] In those pages written in 1826, Leopardi discusses his vision of negativity in nature: everything is destined to *souffrance*, because the principle of decay is intrinsic to all things. According to Leopardi's materialistic and atomistic view of reality,[455] everything in nature is destined to suffer. This concept is expressed through a metaphorical description of a garden, called 'dolore' or 'sofferenza' – the two terms are used almost as synonyms by Leopardi. Behind the apparent beauty of the place lies a cruel reality of circular destruction and suffering among all living beings, animals, and plants.

In the first half of the poem, Frabotta poses her lyric subject in direct dialogue with this well-known passage from the *Zibaldone* by recreating a situation in which she is actually reading the book, immersed in nature. Within this newly rebuilt garden, the plants do not remember any previous sufferance, being 'dimentiche del parto prematuro', when, in January, the soil is ready to be again fecundated. The focus on labour could be also read as a reference to many passages from *Documento*, wherein

[454] G, Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by L. Felici (Milan: Newton, 1997), pp. 854-855.
[455] When this poem was originally published by Frabotta in 1974 in *Nuovi Argomenti*, the selected title was *De rerum natura*. This reinforces the idea of a triangulation between Lucretius, Leopardi, and Frabotta. B. Frabotta, 'De rerum natura', *Nuovi Argomenti*, 40-41-42 (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), p. 35

Rosselli draws a parallel between the act of giving birth and the act of writing.[456] Pictured in the act of reading probably the quoted passage from the *Zibaldone* ('sfoglio le pagine del tuo appassionato materialismo'), the lyric subject attempts to soften the outlines of Leopardi's materialistic – and therefore 'male' – portraiture of nature ('duri spigoli maschi del paesaggio') by opposing a new female awareness. At a certain stage of the development of his philosophical thought, Leopardi portrays nature as an ungenerous female subject acting against the advantage of humankind. As he states in another passage from the *Zibaldone*, 'La mia filosofia fa rea d'ogni cosa la natura, e discolpando gli uomini totalmente, rivolge l'odio, o se non il lamento, a principio più alto, all'origine vera del male dei viventi.'[457]

From its very first entries, the *Zibaldone* begins to take its shape as a fragmentary treatise on aesthetic theory, oriented primarily towards literature and then the arts; the first cornerstone of his poetic theory acknowledges that the object of art is not beauty itself but also truth because it develops from an the imitation of nature – the same nature that, later on, would be portrayed as a 'matrigna' in the *Zibaldone* and in the *Operette morali*.[458] In this poem, Frabotta introduces a new form of humanism that stems from a counterargument raised by her lyric discourse. This speech is now pronounced by a female lyric subject who does not objectify nature as the source of suffering but decides to engage in a dialogue with the natural dimension: refusing the intrinsic evil of nature

[456] The word 'parto' is employed in several occasions in *Documento*, often referring to the act of writing as a painless act: 'è sempre / una lusinga, un lungo indolore parto / per chi lo porta', 'è vero il tuo linguaggio: vero il nostro? Vero questo parto indolore?', 'Nessuna gioia nasce, può partorire'; DOC 24;25;27.

[457] G, Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, pp. 932-933.

[458] G, Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, pp. 11-14. On this topic, see also the 'Dialogo della Natura e di un islandese' from the *Operette morali*. In the opening of the *operetta*, Nature is described as a terrible and gigantic woman: 'Ma fattosi più da vicino, trovò che era una forma smisurata di donna seduta in terra, col busto ritorto, appoggiato il dosso e il gomito a una montagna; e non finta ma viva; di volto mezzo tra bello e terribile, di occhi e capelli nerissimi; la quale lo guardava fissamente.' G. Leopardi, *Operette morali*, ed. by L. Melosi (Milan: BUR, 2008), p. 276.

allows Frabotta not to put any limits on the centrality of the female body.[459] Concurrently, the encounter with a new dimension of 'becoming-woman' leads to the rediscovery of its beauty and chthonic fear.[460] This statement of poetics not only overturns a secular positioning of the male lyric subject in dialogue with a dispossessed lyric object – the 'trasalimenti femminili' and the 'pensieri inconfessabili' express this original– but unleashes also the potential for an anti-mimetic and de-territorialised lyric discourse. This anti-mimesis involves, on the one hand, the male poetic tradition and, on the other, nature as the objectified cause of the female trauma. In the closing lines, Frabotta condenses her theorisation of a new feminist humanism, which traverses and colludes with the Italian lyric tradition: 'da oggi dichiaro la decomposizione viva della specie [that of a male lyric subjects] / padrona e non complice / natura maligna / io cesserò di imitarti.' As highlighted by Antonio Porta in his introduction to *affemminata*, Frabotta's political and feminist discourse overlaps with the overturning of the aesthetic categories at the basis of the western lyric tradition:

> Biancamaria Frabotta (femminista militante) rivendica il diritto ad *appropriarsi* della poesia, di usare il linguaggio della poesia, piuttosto che esserne l'oggetto passivo, piuttosto che esserne solo la vera madre (l'utero usato dall'uomo oltre che per nascere anche per *far versi*).[461]

It is therefore fundamental to acknowledge that Frabotta decides to introduce the Oedipal paradox at the centre of the practice of poetry through a de-territorialised reference to Leopardi.[462]

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459 K.J. Jewell, 'The Ecological Tasks of Poetry: Women and Nature in Biancamaria Frabotta', *Italian Culture*, 38:1 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020), pp. 26-35.

460 B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola*, p. 23.

461 Antonio Porta, 'Maschio e Femmina', B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 27.

462 Frabotta retraces her engagement with tradition also in the volume *Letteratura al femminile*, published in 1980: 'I modelli non facevano sentire il loro peso; non c'erano ricatti petrarcheschi in vista o alle spalle; le parole delle donne diventavano necessarie e inesorabili.' B. Frabotta, *Letteratura al femminile: Itinerari di lettura a proposito di donne, storia, poesia, romanzo* (Bari: De Donato, 1980), p. 117.

The dialogue with Leopardi allows Frabotta to define the poetics of *Il rumore bianco*, moving from a de-territorialization of the lyric tradition. Leopardi becomes a point of reference for the organisation and development of Frabotta's lyric discourse within the macro-structure of the book of poetry. As we have already mentioned, *Il rumore bianco* is a multi-layered book in which various phases of Frabotta's life sedimented one on top of the other, similarly to Leopardi's *Canti*. In the volume of *Canti*, Leopardi structures a more modern 'libro di poesia' in open dialogue with – and opposition to – Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In *Canti* and *Il rumore bianco*, no teleological development is identifiable. In contrast with Petrarch, the lyric subject does not work as *exemplum*, as he does not embody any form of 'transcendent biography'.[463]

As is the case with *Documento*, also in *Il rumore bianco* the reader encounters an almost linear progression of time – the only difference being the internal division in sections. Following the model of *Canti*, Frabotta does not order her texts following any chronological or metrical parameter; she rather follows the demand to narrate the evolution of the lyric subject and her 'moti del cuore',[464] or, in Frabotta's own words, 'lo scontro del cuore col cervello' (RB, 24). As the book progresses, this narratological advancements in personal and political history are mirrored by the consistent expansion of the lyric subject beyond the boundaries imposed by her own personal history.

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[463] I refer here to Contini's essay 'Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia' in which the literary critic identifies a double function of the lyric subject in the *Commedia*: on the one hand, the reader encounters an 'io transcendentale' that has to be interpreted as a de-personalized image of humankind; on the other hand, the 'io esistenziale' represents the historical subject who undergoes an individual and subjective experience. Gianfranco Contini, 'Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia', Dante Alighieri, *Rime* (Turin: Einaudi, 1939).

[464] G. Leopardi, 'Ricordanze', *Canti*, ed. by N. Gallo and C. Garboli (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), p. 185. In a letter sent to Pietro Coletta, Leopardi detailed this fundamental characteristic of *Canti*, that of recording 'le vicende interne di un animo umano nato nobile e tenero, dal tempo delle sue ricordanze fino alla morte'; G. Leopardi, *Epistolario di Giacomo Leopardi con le Inscrizioni greche Triopee da lui tradotte e le lettere di Pietro Giordani e Pietro Colletta all'autore*, ed. by P. Viani (Florence: Le Monnier, 1849), v. II, pp. 1634-35.

Frabotta divides *Il rumore bianco* in six independent – but still interconnected – sections: *Il rumore bianco*, *affemminata*, *Il giovanile ardore*, *La mia credulità*, *Le continenze*, and *Eloisa*. Even if the book follows the linear development of a newborn female subject in a sort of uninterrupted *bildungsroman*, in contrast with *Documento*, the sections are not distributed following the chronological order of composition. For instance, some of the sections are published independently before being inserted in the collection published in 1982, and *affemminata* – which is then relocated in the second position – represents the oldest cluster of texts. Within this structure, the first five sections represent an investigation within Frabotta's biography during those years, interpreted as a preliminary phase pointing towards the final transfiguration of the lyric subject into Eloisa. In the last section, Frabotta aims to describe an itinerary begun in the closed garden of the private – that of the poem 'Fra le piante dimentiche' and of the first section, *Il rumore bianco* –, expanded into the political encounter with the dimension of the others – from *affemminata* to *Le continenze* –, and then registered on paper through an anti-mimetic metamorphosis of the female lyric subject. In the last section of the book, the lyric subject eventually manages to conjugate the dualism of the private and of the political in the long poem *Eloisa*.

The first three sections focus on the very initial encounter with the dimension of others; this occurs for the first time at the very beginning of the collection, in the eponymous section, *Il rumore bianco*. This section consists of 14 texts and functions as a philosophical and metaliterary premise to the whole book. Even is it was composed after *affemminata*, the opening section epitomizes a further discussion of themes introduced in the incipitary poem 'Fra le piante dimentiche'. Several apostrophes to the reader are placed in *Il rumore bianco*, following the already mentioned *topos* of the dialogue with a collective and anonymous audience:

> Da queste parole nascono altre parole
> onesta ve le affido

con un parto lieve ed elegante
senza anima denti e senza sangue.
Chi nasce deve poter morire.
Una volta e per tutte senza echi.
Un bambino che di parlare non ne vuol sapere. (RB, 14-15)

In this case, the apostrophe to the audience is employed by Frabotta to dialogue with the opening poem of *Documento* and, more subtly, with 'Voi ch'ascoltate' by Petrarch. Concurrently, the collective addressee offered Frabotta the possibility to formulate a new statement of poetics, as occurs in many other poems from this section. The lyric subject gives her addressees the poetic words through a painless and immaterial labour. In her description of the nature of the verses she was writing, Frabotta's word choices is of particular interest: lines are not only soulless, but also toothless and bloodless; to this extent, they are completely immaterial.[465]

Moreover, poetry must not function as an echo-chamber; at the same time, the lyric subject must find a voice of her own, which has to be detached and independent from the crowds. Once again, the stress is put on the necessity of an anti-mimetic poetry, which may finally function as a creative and independent act. In this sense, Frabotta refers back to the etymology of the word 'poetry' coming from the Greek ποίησις, which means to 'the activity to bring something into being that did not exist before':[466] the parallel between a new-born child and the act of poetry writing originates specifically from this etymology.

[465] The attributes chosen by Frabotta to describe the female 'anima' are extremely specific. It is interesting to notice how Frabotta's word choice mirrors a definition of 'anima' given by the feminist philosopher Alice Ceresa in her *Piccolo dizionario dell'ineguaglianza femminile*: 'Se ne deduce pertanto che l'anima è un organismo non soltanto invisibile, inodore, asonoro, impalpabile e insipido, ma anche razzista. […] L'anima infatti, essendo immateriale, non può parlare e neanche e tantomeno mordere.' A. Ceresa, *Piccolo dizionario dell'ineguaglianza femminile*, ed. by T. Crivelli (Milan: Nottetempo, 2020), pp. 23-24.

[466] Cfr. S. Gourgouris, 'Poiesis', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 1070-1072; see also D. Polkinghorne, *Practice and the Human Sciences: The Case for a Judgment-Based Practice of Care*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 115.

Il rumore bianco slides into *affemminata*, a second section of 19 texts. *affemminata* has been frequently defined by Frabotta as the core of the entire volume, or at least, as a turning point for the whole collection. Describing the origin of this group of texts, Frabotta wrote: 'fui investita da una grandinata di immagini che dilagarono nello spazio di un libro stipato e compresso, simile al clima storico sovraeccitato di cui in qualche modo dava un suo stravolto resoconto.'[467] 'Il clima storico' Frabotta is referring to is that of the 'hot Autumn' of 1969: *affemminata* is, to this extent, a historical document of that years of 'militanza politica' within the feminist movement and outside the university.

A section of 29 texts, entitled *Il giovanile ardore*, follows *affemminata*, completing it by adding a context to a first subjective experience of the world. The title – a clear reference to the incipitary sonnet of the *Canzoniere* – reinforces the idea of an explicit act of 'de-territorialization' targeting the lineage that connects Petrarch to Leopardi in the Italian lyric tradition: indeed, in Frabotta's title, the Petrarchan 'error' is turned into 'ardour' – a word choice that removes the 'immoral' dimension of writing, focused on love only. In this section, Frabotta inserts a series of epigrams and 'testi d'occasione' dedicated to numerous characters: Frabotta's first husband Renzo Paris (RB 31), her sister Adelaide (RB 29), the literary critic Alfonso Berardinelli (RB 36), the poet Gregorio Scalise (RB 35), and the physicist Brunello Tirozzi (RB 39). The audience has grown in number, while also gaining several new identities. The lyric subject is mirrored in this dialogue with the others in a constant quest for identity.

The next two sections represent a movement of descension and ascension, after a personal crisis and the final comeback. The fourth section, *La mia credulità*, comprises 11 texts, written in the second half of the seventies. In *La mia credulità*, Frabotta includes two longer series of texts: a *suite* of three texts, *Esordi al crocevia*, and the series *Anniversario*, which describes the end of the relationship with the poet Renzo Paris. The fifth

[467] B. Frabotta, 'Dialoghetti di mezzanotte', *Tutte le poesie 1971-2017*, p. 390.

collection, titled *Le continenze*, is dedicated to Frabotta's psychoanalyst Michele Risso and works as psychoanalytical enquiry into the poet's past and as a triumph over the personal crisis. In these two sections, the reader witnesses a return to the dimension of the private, before the last and final section.

Eloisa is the closing section. Inspired by the reading of Abelard's and Heloise's letters, the long poem operates a transfiguration of the lyric subject into *Eloisa*, the embodiment of a new lyric subject. In this sense, *Eloisa* is to be considered as the mythical transfiguration of *affemminata*: 'il Sessantotto degli entusiasmi e dei tormenti era ormai lontano. Eloisa si creava una libertà interiore, pur non negando la passione dell'obbedienza. Non andava più a caccia di se stessa.'[468] Frabotta outlines Heloise's compelling biography over the many stanzas of the *poemetto* by exploring the fragmentary thoughts and memories of a woman whose courage is inspirational. She was a renowned twelfth-century scholar of scripture and the author of collected epistles to Peter Abelard. The two fell in love and eventually married in secret. Heloise's uncle had Abelard punished in an assault that included castration; he retreated to a monastery and Heloise to a convent at his bidding.[469] Accepting obedience to her husband and the chaste purity he demanded of her at their separation, Heloise wrote her letters to a man whom she considered to be her true love. In adopting the epistolary genre, Heloise wrote in a sophisticated form handed down from classical antiquity, imitating the style of canonised male authors.[470]

Frabotta's long poem does not, however, retain the classical epistolary form used by Heloise: the choice of lyric poetry is, again, supported by an anti-mimetic aim. Her

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468 B. Frabotta, 'Dialoghetti di mezzanotte', pp. 391-392.

469 B. Radice, 'Introduction', *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. by B. Radice and T.M. Clanchy (London: Penguin, 1974), pp. XIV-XV.

470 Among others, Heloise quotes Cicero and Plato – through Cicero's texts – in the second letter, Seneca, and Lucan in the fourth, again Cicero, Ovid, St Augustine, Macrobius, Persius in the sixth letter: *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, pp. 47-55; 63-72; 93-111.

lyric subject is born out of an attempt to imagine a woman writer who composes a tale of love but is distant from the objectified addressee of the Italian lyric tradition. Frabotta's Heloise could not have appeared in Italian poetry in the style of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and not even in Leopardi's *Canti*, in which female characters have always to follow a Persephonean symbolism.[471] Frabotta's long poem makes reference to the tradition of love lyric, but here we are hearing the distinctive voice of a woman who both experienced a passionate and enduring love for a man and deplores his manner of loving her. Heloise's tragic story in the poem grew from Abelard's having turned his beloved into a 'fantastico frutto dell'occidente' (RB, 60) – a fruit that has grown out from the unbalanced discourse of the lyric tradition:

> Qui dimora l'intero e tu disperso
> ci ragioni. Che io canti, più buia
> sordidamente, ombra più pesante
> del marmo che mi riposa non conta.
> Una sola rondine non mi ti rende
> la stagione perduta.
> e io troppo tempo ho abitato in te
> come la ragnatela in un tronco morto
> limite di una terra promessa
> non cogliendomi (fu soltanto
> evocazione addestramento allo stupro
> il fantastico frutto dell'occidente)
> mi hai nominata più bianca della luce
> nido di un'idea intricata, torpida fantasia,
> pupilla cieca del tuo occhio. (RB, 59-60)

The opening stanza of *Eloisa* reveals this self-definitory movement. The two characters – the lyric subject Heloise and the silenced object Abelard – are presented through an opposition between obscurity and clarity: the function of the 'canto' is the only element that could let the lyric subject progress towards a liberation – a new condition which is defined 'più bianca della luce' in the closing lines. The whole book, *Il rumore bianco*, is

[471] See E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli. La fanciulla e l'infinito*, pp. 85-95.

thus re-configured through a last mythical metamorphosis of the lyric subject, which sets forth the process of becoming a 'femmina culturale'.[472] The lyric subject is no longer a victim of nature, but finally becomes a self-determined agent within it.

4.5. CONCLUSION

'De-territorialization' assumes the form of an anti-domesticated and multifaceted dialogue with tradition in the poetry of Rosselli and Frabotta. Tradition needs to be rediscussed following two main threads: the Italian lyric tradition, a transnational lyric canon, and that of a self-tradition created by the author herself.

For this reason, it was fundamental to reconstruct how their lyric discourse was animated by a stylistic tension between clarity and obscurity, prose, and poetry. Also in this case, the 'de-territorialization' of their style was investigated on three distinct levels, concerning the semantics, the metrics, and the structure of *Documento (1966-1973)* and *Il rumore bianco*.

[472] A. Porta, 'Maschio e Femmina', B. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 27.

5. A POLITICAL LYRIC SUBJECT

In the introduction to their seminal work *The Politics of Poetics*, Federica Santini and Giovanna Summerfield explore the relationship between poetry, politics, societal change, and *impegno*:

> Poetry is often viewed as a means of introspection or, at best, as an instrument of self-representation. This widespread conception marginalizes, when it does not completely exclude, all those work in which writing results from a desire to "undergo an experience with language," to use Heidegger's words, and from the civic engagements the poet can in no way relinquish if s/he is to be responsible member of society within which the poetic subject is operating and composing.[473]

In contrast with what Santini and Summerfield highlighted in their introduction, I contend that the mechanism of self-representation in lyric poetry does not exclude the presence of a 'political aim'. I would rather argue that, in some cases, the representation of a subject originally excluded from history, often underrepresented, or misrepresented, can actually advocate for a 'political aim' intrinsic to the lyric discourse. This is the case with Italian women's poetry in the seventies and, specifically, with the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta.

This chapter stems from a fundamental premise. As stated by Rachel Blau Duplessis, 'there are no genderless subjects within any relationship structuring literary culture.'[474] This statement extends to several layers of our experience of literature: gender has a deep impact on literary production, but also in its dissemination and reception, on literary objects, discourses practices, and, above all, on our reading experiences and hermeneutics of the texts. For centuries, in the context of Italian lyric

[473] Federica Santini, Giovanna Summerfield, 'Introduction', *The Politics of Poetics: Poetry and Social Activism in Early Modern through Contemporary Italy* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), p. VIII.

[474] Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2012), pp. 3-4.

poetry, we have witnessed the absence, removal, and dispossession of women's poetry not only from the literary discourse but, more than one could expect, from the texts themselves. For this specific reason, the relocation of a woman within the position of speaking subject reflects a self-explanatory 'political aim': that of reconquering a textual space by challenging its own vocabulary, structures, and modes of expressions by creating what Locatelli defines as new forms of 'sex(t)ualities'.[475]

This chapter is therefore devoted to the analysis of the 'political aim' intrinsic to the treatment of the lyric subject in the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta. My analysis draws a parallel between feminist and lyric discourses in the seventies by highlighting the common centrality of practices of self-representation. In the second part of the chapter, the 'political aim' of the lyric subject will be demonstrated through a comparative analysis of the authors' poetry collections published in the seventies. The *corpus* of texts includes Morante's *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*; Rosselli's *Documento (1966-1973)* and *Impromptu;* Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* and *Il cielo*; and Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*. The Deleuzian notion of 'becoming' will function as a fundamental steppingstone to analyse the 'politics of self-representation' and the consequent expansion of the boundaries of subjectivity. As a matter of fact, all these collections share a renegotiation of the core elements characterising the lyric discourse and the lyric subject. In particular, I will retrace the modifications of some of the main lyric discursive structures such as the apostrophe, the lyric present, and the dramatic monologue.[476]

[475] C. Locatelli, 'Dalla Sessualità alla Sess(t)ualità', p. 47.
[476] For the definitions of these lyric structures, see J. Culler, 'Lyric Address' and 'Lyric Structures, *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 186-243; 244-295.

5.1. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: IDENTITY AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

While it is possible to pinpoint the influence of feminism and feminist theories on the work of some women poets who openly define themselves as feminist, a considerable number of them firmly asserted their detachment from that movement. Nevertheless, even if through indirect forms of appropriation of certain themes, feminism left, doubtlessly, traces in the poetry of the poets discussed in this study. Feminism is not synonym for Italian women's poetry, but it is possible to find where the two systems overlap. For instance, they both share a drive towards self-representation.

The utopian projects of the '68 movement involved an interrogation of the existing scope of politics, as well as a desire on the part of activists but also of artists – and thus poets – both to change the world and to change themselves.[477] Activists began to draw explicit connections between subjective desires, societal changes, and cultural production. The slogan 'the personal is political',[478] which originated in the women's liberation movement that was developing in the US in the late sixties, was embraced by activists in many other countries. This inevitably left a trace also in Italian feminist movements. It opened the possibility of including domestic and sexual aspects of life within the political project of self-representation and self-determination.

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[477] Balestrini identifies '68 as the very beginning of the last modern utopia: 'A completely opposite interpretation to the one offered by Tarrow in '68; the last flare of an archaic and utopian vision, at the same time. The '68 was the last attempt to realize an unfeasible dream. Along with its insistence on community life and its social extremism, the vision inspired by the '68 was one of the latest great utopian visions, both Christian and communist.' Nanni Balestrini, Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro 1968-1977. La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005), p. 6.

[478] The sentence 'the personal is political' was firstly used as the title of an essay by feminist activist Carol Hanisch, published in 1970 in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt's *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. However, the idea has older origins and can be found in the work of sociologist C. Wright Mills, who discussed the intersection of public and personal issues in his 1950 *The Sociological Imagination*—a work that had a profound influence on New Left circles in the sixties.

The overlapping between public and private life is central not only to the feminist debate, but to women's poetry too. Often accused of 'confessionalism' and 'diarism', Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta use the material offered by their private life and experience, while also turning this material into a political statement of presence: this results in the politics of women's poetry, both as a statement of agency and as an attempt at self-representation.[479] This peculiar posture is characterised by a strong utopian drive and by the cohesion of the public and private spheres. As we already mentioned, the unification of these apparently separate dimensions have caused some hermeneutical problems in Italian literary criticism, which suggested a prevalence of the former on the latter.

The main issue in following this thread is caused by the mode of narrative adopted by these authors. This happens to differ from the techniques developed by most poets during this period. The poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta is characterised by a strong imaginative drive, the expression of the encounter – sometimes peaceful, sometimes traumatic – between the public and private spheres. In the seventies, society was changing rapidly and constantly evolving, and so the paradigms of social relationships between genders were shifting too. Due to these macro-historical circumstances, these authors recognised the need to propel a new vision of history in which the woman subject too is at the core of their lyric discourse. Italian women poets experience the necessity to be represented through their art, both individually and collectively. The intersection between these urgent calls – one external, produced by the long revolutionary decade starting from the autumn of '68, and one internal, originated by the pression exerted by feminist movements promoting women's self-consciousness

[479] We can find an example of this debate in a text sent by Amelia Rosselli in response to Rossana Rossanda's article on Sylvia Plath's poems. In this text, and in many following interviews, Rosselli refuses the label of 'confessional poetry' attached to her poetry or to women's poetry in general. Rosselli, A., 'Paesaggio con figure', *È vostra la vita che ho perso: Conversazioni e interviste 1964-1995*, ed. by Venturini, Monica, De March, Silvia (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010), pp. 280-81.

and political engagement – paved the way for a process of independent subjectification. These poets, more than other authors, embrace this very specific aspect of subjectification as a chance for self-expression and as a political statement developed through poetry.

Within the international feminist debate, it is possible to identify two main theoretical strategies related to this process. The first one deals with a description of the psychoanalytical and social dynamics behind the origin of difference. This posture poses women in the role of a self-determined Cartesian subject. Due to this repositioning in the role of speaking subject, this strategy may result, in a utopian paradox of equality: as a matter of fact, the woman subject would need to enter the patriarchal order of discourse by replacing the male subject without actually reaching an equal state. The second one develops a female entity aside the male subject; this female entity is able to subjectify herself likewise.[480] Otherness is again opposed to difference.

As Adriana Cavarero emphasised, the Italian feminist movements are fairly unique.[481] In the seventies, Italian feminism originally situated a new feminist subject at the core of a dialectical opposition between otherness and difference; it did so by laying the foundation of its theoretical discourse on a series of practices, such as the 'gruppi di autocoscienza'.[482] Self-awareness consists of the feminist political practice of questioning oneself and the context in which one lives (political, cultural, social) through authentic and dialogic relationships with other women. These groups formed by feminist activists developed a dialogical practice that conjugated the theoretical reflections of French

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480 Authors such as Julia Kristeva has theorised the existence of a female 'linguistic' essence that is completely independent from the dualism male/female and is originated in a preoedipal condition. Kristeva defined this state through the metaphor of the 'semiotic chora'; see J. Kristeva, *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique: L'avant-Garde À La Fin Du Xixe Siècle*, Lautréamont Et Mallarmé, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).

481 Adriana, Cavarero, 'Italia: centralità delle pratiche', Cavarero, A., Restaino, Franco, *Le filosofie femministe* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), pp. 97-98.

482 Barbara Crow, *Radical Feminism. A Documentary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 287-300.

feminist thought on the linguistic foundations of difference with a certain degree of performativity: the subject was at the core of this dialectic as a fertile outpost whereby the linguistic performance of the discourse could reach a definitive form of self-representation. In that context, practices such as the groups of self-consciousness and lyric poetry have the merit of relocating the woman in the symbolic space originally occupied by the male subject: the woman subject needed to be self-determined by collectively reaching new forms of self-consciousness. To this extent, both lyric poetry and the 'gruppi di autocoscienza' operate on a common ground. Within their discourse, this mechanism shifts women's discourse from the passive sphere of the lament to the active sphere of the self-representation. Working on the centrality of language and its active delivery within a process of subjectification, lyric poetry has more than one similarity with Italian feminist thought and is, therefore, an appealing and highly sensitive medium.[483]

In *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari reach a similar conclusion regarding the position of women in respect to their political agency. They contend that women advocate for a new way of existing as political subjects, what they called 'molar politics'.[484] 'Molar politics' is concerned with a female subjectivity only; nonetheless, they maintain that this female subject should not act as a self-imposed limit to the women's movement. To embrace the female subject as a foundation for action would lead to *ressentiment* – a term that stands for the slavish subordination of action to some high ideal.[485] This is where 'molecular politics' is introduced. In this double politics of the molar and the molecular, Deleuze and Guattari produce two intertwined dynamics: a 'molar' political movement as the organisation of a ground, an identity or subject that

[483] Di Nola, Laura, 'L'io sottratto', *Poesia femminista italiana*, ed. by Laura Di Nola, (Rome: Savelli, 1978), pp. 9-12.
[484] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux*, pp. 275-76.
[485] G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, (London: Athlone, 1983), p. 123.

counts on her capacity of self-representation; and a 'molecular movement' as the fluid, dynamic, and perpetual challenge of 'becoming' something different and interconnected in a plurality of forms.

We can recognise the existence of these two dynamics in the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta: on the one hand, a 'molecular' dimension of interconnectedness which unfolds through the process of 'becoming-everything/everybody'. On the other hand, it is possible to identify a 'molar' politics elicited by a pluri-vocal lyric subject.

5.2. GENRE AND GENDER: THE LYRIC SUBJECT

Lyric poetry is often anchored on a first-person speaking subject. This assumption has been deeply problematised by 20th-century poets. Nonetheless, pronouns still serve as the grammatical and imaginative core of the lyric discourse. However, the use of pronouns cannot be reduced to their grammatical function. Indeed, the lyric subject offers a grammatical outpost whereby poets can express themselves, while also delivering a personal vision of the world.[486] In many cases, the lyric subject functions as a fictional shelter for the poet's identity, a sort of alter-ego that is more than a mask used by the poet. This is precisely the place where the poets can transfer their poetics and ideologies. For this reason, lyric poetry, and literary genres more broadly, constitute a pivotal standpoint of renegotiation between ideologies related to genre, gender, and history.[487]

From the sixties onwards, numerous Italian authors have been challenging the use of the first-person subject. Their main goal was to experiment with a more

[486] J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 54-55.
[487] On this topic, see K.J. Jewell, 'Frabotta's Elegies: Theory and Practice', *MLN*, 116 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 177-192; see also Barbara Johnson, 'Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion', *The Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 529-540.

impersonal way of expressing ideas through poetry. A way that, according to several critics, aimed at removing the lyric subject from its position of power within the poetic discourse.[488] This is a turning point in the history of Italian poetry, as Enrico Testa recognised in his anthology *Dopo la lirica*. Drawing on the cultural debate around the lyric subject in the sixties and then in the seventies,[489] Testa theorises the demise of the first-person lyric subject. Testa even names a date for these reverse circumstances: it is the period in which poetic collections such as *Nel magma* (1963) by Mario Luzi, *Gli strumenti umani* by Vittorio Sereni (1965), *Variazioni Belliche* (1964) by Amelia Rosselli, *Congedo del viaggiatore cerimonioso* (1965) by Giorgio Caproni were published.[490]

Nonetheless, when it comes to literary facts, thresholds and dates tends to be blurry in most cases. Many poets, in this period, were moving forward from the notion of a mono-vocal lyric subject, also stimulated by the dialogue with – or opposition to – the New-Avantgarde movement, the *Gruppo 63*. However, even more poets managed to still employ the main feature of poetry (metre, rhythm, subjectivity) and to innovate the use of the lyric subject within its grammar. It is a matter of innovation rather than refusal when it comes to the employment of the lyric subject.

The definition of lyric subject provided by Jonathan Culler shares many points of contact with Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of 'becoming', and that of

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[488] One of the most exemplary cases, to this extent, can be found in the poetry of Andrea Zanzotto: from *Dietro il paesaggio* to *La Beltà*, it is possible to identify a progressive erosion of the lyric subject. Cfr. Beverly Allen, *The Language of Beauty's Apprentice* (London: University of California Press, 1988); see also Vivienne Hand, 'Undermining Logocentric Thought in Andrea Zanzotto's *La Beltà* (1961-1967)', *Italian Studies*, 46(1), 1991, pp. 82-101.

[489] This debate is anticipated both by the theoretical work ascribable to the New-avantgarde and Gruppo 63, but also developed by the anthologies edited by Berardinelli and Cordelli in the seventies. See Alfredo Giuliani, *I Novissimi. Poesie per gli anni '60* (Milan: Rusconi e Paolazzi, 1961); A. Berardinelli, F. Cordelli, *Il pubblico della poesia* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 1975), and F. Cordelli, *Il poeta postumo* (Milan: Lerici, 1978). On the same topic see also Michele Gulinucci, 'What Does It Matter Who Is Speaking? Dialogue with Luciano Anceschi [and Others]', Luigi Ballerini, Beppe Cavatorta, *Those Who from Afar Look Like Flies: An Anthology of Italian Poetry from Pasolini to the Present 1956-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 482-498.

[490] E. Testa, 'Introduzione', *Dopo la lirica*, pp. IX-XI. A similar periodisation can be found in Gabriele Frasca, *Posture dell'Io. Luzi, Sereni, Giudici, Caproni, Rosselli* (Pisa: Felici Editore, 2014).

'molar/molecular politics'.[491] As a matter of fact, they are situated by the authors as fundamental linguistic acts; they both deliver a message by reproducing the structure of an actual dialogue, which usually occurs *in absentia*.[492] In Deleuze's and Guattari's own words, 'becomings' progress as a series of 'linguistic acts expressed in a certain style'. Within the Italian lyric tradition, this linguistic act had been characterised by a very specific structure that shaped the entirety of the genre: this speech act mimics a dialogue in which the role of women was that of a dispossessed, absent, and, in most cases, silenced object of men's desire. This functions as a fundamental stage in the process of subjectification operated by the lyric discourse: as Lacan powerfully theorised in his sixth seminar on desire[493] and in the twentieth on female 'jouissance',[494] the subject becomes a speaking subject thanks to the symbolic recognition of his own desire.[495] The object, in this sense, is the discursive element that allows the subject access to a new form of

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491 Deleuze's and Guattari's definition of 'becoming' as a 'series of linguistic acts expressed in a certain style' allows us to draw a parallel with Jonathan Culler's transhistorical definition of lyric genre. As Culler highlighted, 'observing particular shifts in the lyric does not prevent one from maintaining a broad conception of lyric as genre. […] A broadly historical and, I would add, transnational conception of lyric enhances critical understanding.' J. Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre', *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by V. Jackson, Y. Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 68.

492 I rely, here, on the definition of 'apostrophe' given by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, and then expanded by Culler in *Theory of the Lyric*: 'the lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object. ... The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the "I-Thou" relationship. The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them and though they may repeat some of his words after him'. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 247; see also J. Culler, 'Lyric Address', *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 186-243.

493 J. Lacan, 'Ophelia, the Object', *Desire and Its Interpretation: Seminar VI* (New York: Wiley, 2019), pp. 338-342.

494 J. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Seminar XX* (New York: Norton & Company, 1999).

495 It is interesting to note how Lacan develops a dialogue between psychoanalysis and lyric poetry, with frequent references to Shakespeare and troubadours' lyric poetry. Psychoanalysis found a compelling field of analysis in lyric poetry, which is recognised as the literary genre most closely informed by a process of subjectification. This subject in action within the speech act is closely related to Deleuze's notion of 'becoming'. See J. Lacan, 'Courtly Love as Anamorphosis', *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: Seminar* VII (London: Routledge, 2007).

knowledge in the form of self-consciousness. As this structure is perpetrated by most of psychoanalytical discourses from Freud to Lacan, this produced an unbalanced dialogue whereby the male subject is the only one to access this completeness within the lover's discourse. To this extent, the roles determined by the literary genre mirror the gender roles imposed by extraliterary forces.[496] For this reason, the act of overturning the roles determined by the lyric genre also entails a reversion of gender roles.

This is the case with Italian women's poetry in the seventies. In their poetry, not only is the subject a consistent presence, but it also turns out to be a way of channelling some of the themes at the core of feminist thought, such as that of difference. Within this framework, one can identify a constant shift from a mono-vocal subject towards a pluri-vocal subject. This expansion must be interpreted both as a way of revolutionising the lyric genre, while preserving its discursive centre. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this movement not only traverses their lyric discourse, but difference is also used as a means to innovate it, to reaffirm the literary value of their writing, and to propose a new political vision of the relationship between literature and society, between the individual and the collective. Even if indirectly, ideologies – especially feminist ones – had a profound impact on how women poets decided to develop their poetics. Literary genres, thus, can easily function as a place of renegotiation of those ideologies. As highlighted by Marjorie Perloff, 'Italian poetry in the second half of the twentieth century had become a highly conscious art, even a self-conscious art, far removed from what Wordsworth called "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and even further from Allen Ginsberg's "first thought, best thought"'.[497]

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[496] This is the target of feminist and queer critiques stemming from Lacan's theorisation of the circuit of desire. On this topic see Deborah Luepnitz, 'Beyond the phallus: Lacan and feminism', and Tim Dean, 'Lacan and queer theory', *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 221-237; 238-252.

[497] M. Perloff, 'Foreword', L. Ballerini, B. Cavatorta, *Those Who from Afar*, p. XXVI.

Women poets did not aspire to be included in the canon, but they rather wanted to de-territorialize it from within by also intervening on the structures that characterise the lyric genre, such as the apostrophe, the lyric present, and the dramatic monologue. Within this framework, gaining one's own distinctive voice was seen as fundamental. In this sense, the lyric subject offers an unprecedented chance to speak about these themes, while also implementing new ways of challenging women's self-representation. Through this anti-iconoclastic drive towards innovation, women poets manage to promote a new vision of themselves as women and as historical subjects. The individual connects to a collective dimension that reveal similarities with the feminist debate in Italy. Drawing upon a critique of genre and gender, this whole dynamic leans towards concepts such as plurality, pluri-vocality, and difference. Within this dynamic of self-representation, some of the traits of the lyric subject are stretched out, expanded, and revolutionised – crafting innovative textual dimensions characterised by a strong ideological tension.

Simply put, in the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta, it is possible to recognise two stages involved in this process of rewriting: the first movement transcends the dialectic grounded in the male/female dualism. This movement towards innovation can be read in parallel with what Deleuze and Guattari described as the 'becoming everything' in relation to the 'anti-domestication' operated by 'minoritarian literatures': the lyric subject 'becomes' a queer, fluid, and metamorphic subject, neither man nor woman, but the encounter between diverse elements within nature. As a result, in these poetic collections, we witness an expansion of the boundaries of the lyric subject's identity, which is made to 'contain multitudes'[498] and 'multiple selves'.[499]

[498] This quote is taken by *Song of Myself*, a long poem included in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. In this poem, we also witness an expansion and problematization of the identity of the lyric subject. See W. Whitman, 'Song of Myself', *Leaves of Grass* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 261.
[499] Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

The second movement reveals an attempt at self-representation as independent subjects. At this stage, the process of 'becoming' is reconnected to the dimension of the 'personal', in a constant tension towards the 'becoming-self' and thus 'becoming woman'. Within this movement, we will encounter a hyper-feminisation of the lyric subject – which is frequently represented as a 'fanciulla' – and, concurrently, a drive towards juvenescence.[500]

5.3. BECOMING-EVERYTHING/EVERYBODY

The first movement of 'becoming' incorporates the unsettling dimension of totality; this new dimension is meant to turn the original dualistic system into a more fluid, open, and revolutionary 'linguistic act'. In Deleuze's and Guattari's theorisation of 'minoritarian literatures', there is an explicit reference to vitality which is expressed by a drive towards wholeness: 'minority as a universal figure or becoming-everybody/everything *(devenir tout le monde).*'[501] As highlighted in Chapter 2, the process of 'becoming' entails an overcoming of the ontological opposition between states, between male and female, and thus between subject and object within the majoritarian discourse – in this case, the lyric discourse. Within the context of 'minoritarian lyric poetry', 'becoming-everybody/everything' is the very first step to be made within the process of subjectification, a process that could eventually be liberated from the burden of a mimetic and unequal desire. The lyric subject aims to escape from the direction of the Lacanian imperative 'I desire, therefore I am',[502] and to follow that of 'I desire, therefore

[500] My discussion of the movement towards juvenescence in poetry has been informed by two capital texts on this theme: on the one hand, Emanuela Tandello's *La fanciulla e l'infinito*; on the other hand, Robert Pogue Harrison's *Juvenescence*. See E. Tandello, *Amelia Rosselli: La fanciulla e l'infinito* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), and R. P. Harrison, *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014).

[501] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 470

[502] J. Lacan, 'Desire and Jouissance'*, The Formations of the Unconscious: Seminar V* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), pp. 235-242.

I become something else'. In doing so, new forms of independent subjectification correspond to a pluri-vocal subject in lyric poetry.[503]

As already highlighted, gender and identity, undertake a fundamental role within lyric poetry and literature at large. All the four poets discussed in this study experimented with these two coordinates.[504] In their poetry, we encounter a drive towards 'everybody/everything', a dimension of totality which includes both men and women, as well as the encounter between the two identities within nature. The dialogue is no longer limited to the object relation between male and female but is also expanded in nature, through the constant interaction between genders, natural elements, and animals. The figure of apostrophe, in this sense, becomes less and less central or is often problematised due to an expansion of the addressees. As we will discover, the same treatment is reserved also to the structures of temporality. Eventually, hybridity gains the form of a queer and androgynous lyric subject, neither male nor female, but an absolute entity that encompasses multiple and interconnected dimensions.

What do we mean by queer in this context? In her definition of the scope of Queer Studies, Carla Freccero maintains that 'queer's verbally and adjectivally unsettling [functions as] force against claims for its definitional stability, so theoretically anything can queer something, and anything, given a certain odd twist, can become queer.'[505] Adopting Deleuze's perspective on a phenomenology of difference, she highlights how

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503 As introduced in Chapter 2, it is possible to identify a shift from ontology to phenomenology within the 'minoritarian' and, in this case, 'queer' discourse. On this topic, see also Sara Ahmed, 'Orientations Towards Objects', *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 25-32.

504 As Gilbert and Gubart argued, 'whatever alternative tradition the woman poet attempts at substituting for "ancient rules" is subtly devalued'. In this sense, the lyric subject enters this revolution of the prescriptive rules of gender.' S. Gilbert, S. Gubart, 'Gender, Creativity, and the Woman Poet', *The Lyric Theory Reader*, p. 527. See also J. Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre', p. 75. See also Jewell's study on the elegiac genre in Frabotta's poetry: K.J. Jewell, 'Frabotta's Elegies: Theory and Practice', *MLN*, Vol. 116, Number 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2001), pp. 177-192.

505 Carla Freccero, 'Queer Times', *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, ed. by Janet Hailey, Andrew Parker (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 17.

'queer [is a] term that do[es] the work of *différance* in relation to the identitarian inflections they carry, though each speaks to different discursive domains and targets specifically and differently inflected binaristic identitarian normativities.'[506] Within the framework of Deleuzian studies, the use of the adjective 'queer' has thus been used to challenge normalising ways of knowing, being, and writing. The Deleuzian notion of 'becoming' had a pivotal role in defining the term 'queer': 'becoming' is opposed to 'being', as 'queer' is opposed to 'normativity', 'canonicity', 'iteration, immobility, its loathing for reproduction, for repetition of sameness'.[507] In the context of literary and genre studies related to lyric poetry, the use of the adjective 'queer' brings forward a fluid, open, and multiple subject that 'de-territorializes' what was the canonical and mono-vocal centre of the lyric discourse.

As theorised by Gloria Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands*, the Deleuzian phenomenology implied in 'becoming-everybody/everything' produces a 'dynamic of interconnectedness'.[508] While theorising a queer subject grounded in Deleuze's notion of multiplicity – according to which 'each individual is an infinite multiplicity' –,[509] Anzaldúa speaks of 'bodies' interpenetration': 'the self does not stop with just you, with your body. The self penetrates other things, and they penetrate you'.[510] In Anzaldúa's discussion of 'becoming', the queer subject emerges as site of connection between several entities that were once separated but are now united in an unisonant process. Queer, in this specific condition, stands for the displacement and recovery of one's identity, in a mutual process of creation and undoing of the connections between the subject and the other. Thanks

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506 Ibid.

507 Chrysanthi Nigianni, Merl Storr, 'Introduction', *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 2-3.

508 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987). On this topic, see also Mikko Tuhkanen, 'Queer Hybridity', *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, pp. 92-109.

509 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 254.

510 G. Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, ed. by Ana Louise Keating, New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 162.

to the display of this 'interconnectedness', the 'minoritarian' discourse on lyric poetry can be overlapped with a philosophy of 'becoming' that, like Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadic subjects', 'sponsors a subject that is composed of external forces', and also 'of the non-human, inorganic or technological kind'. This is specifically what we will define as an 'expanded subjectivity'.[511]

We have seen how the reconfiguration of a literary genre passes specifically from a gradual reconfiguration of the lyric subject. However, how do Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta move towards the 'becoming-everybody/everything'? What are the techniques used to refashion the traditional dialectic 'I-Thou', 'male-female', and 'subject-object' relation? How do they implement that 'interconnectedness' that, according to Anzaldúa, is a at the core of a 'queer subject'? Which kind of temporality do they propose? We will now address these questions by looking at the many ways lyric structures such as the monologue, the apostrophic address, and lyric temporality were revolutionised by these poets.

5.3.1. A PLURI-VOCAL ANDROGYNY IN 'IL MONDO SALVATO DAI RAGAZZINI'

It is not surprising that several feminist theorists in the seventies referred to androgyny and queerness as subjective postures that could overcome some of the restrictions imposed by the binary and patriarchal systems of society. Studies such as Carolyn Heilbrun's *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*,[512] published in 1973, indicated the potential utopian power of this empowering process of subjectification. Similar consideration on the imaginative potential of androgyny were developed also by Italian feminist theorists, such as Alice Ceresa in her *Piccolo dizionario dell'inuguaglianza femminile* – in particular,

[511] Rosi Braidotti, 'Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity', *The Becoming-Deleuzoguattarian of Queer Studies*, *Rhizomes*, ed. by M. O'Rourke, n.11–12 (Fall/Spring), 8 November 2006.

[512] Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (London: Norton and Company, 1973). Cfr. also, Tracy Hagreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

regarding her definition of the concepts of *animus* and *anima*.[513] It is thus interesting to note how Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta reached similar conclusions – with a rather different medium – in the same period.

Our first encounter with this new lyric subject occurs in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. Here, Morante problematises her use of the lyric subject from the very beginning of the collection. As we have already discussed in Chapter 3, Elsa Morante creates a pluri-vocal lyric subject within *Il mondo*: this is a subject that evolves, mutates, and grows as the whole collection progresses in front of the reader.[514] Since the first section formed by the two elegies dedicated to Bill Morrow, *Addio*, we are confronted with a dialogue in which two voices – that of the poet defined as 'ladra delle notti' (MSR, 21) and that of the young dead lover –, endlessly merge within the lyric dialogue: in the first elegy, this is performed in the form of a traditional lyric monologue, while in the second elegy this is carried out through an actual dialogue. Even though still fairly traditional, this section relocates the lyric subject within a different dynamic. The separation between the subject and the mourned lover is overcome thanks to the separation of the lovers into immaterial bodies, in the form of what Morante defines as a sort of optical illusion: 'Amputati dai corpi, si disperdono separati / senza rimedio, eterne mutilazioni. / Nessun miraggio può incontrare un altro miraggio. / Non ci sono che solitudini dopo il furto dei corpi' (MSR, 10). Their separation in an unearthly dimension is the first stage for the creation of an interconnected and queer lyric subject. Within this speech act, the lyric subject aims at recovering what she lost within the elegiac re-enactment of loss: the lover, at first, then youth, and, afterwards, a space of reconciliation in which the subject and the object will not be kept separated in the following sections of *Il mondo*.

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[513] Alice Ceresa, *Piccolo dizionario dell'inuguaglianza femminile*, ed. by Tatiana Crivelli (Milan: nottetempo, 2020) pp. 23-26.

[514] Cfr. section 3.5 *'Il libro di poesia' as Macrostructure*.

At the core of *Il mondo*, in the section *La smania dello scandalo*, an androgynous subject eventually appears from the atemporal dimension of the 'lyric present'.

> E tu accorri, eco d'un'eco, dai nostri nidi vegetali
> anteriori alla prima barbarie, dove tu e io siamo uno solo
> né uomo né donna, un'allegra impubertà senza storia,
> finché ci dividono, per chiamarci alla loro strage. […]
>
> Ridomandare la risposta, e negarla in eterno,
> è la loro scelta disperata. E come gli attori zingari
> a smascherare l'infamia della reggia usurpata,
> noi siamo chiamati nel tempo a recitare il delitto.
>
> E io diviso da te, nello strappo sanguinoso
> della nascita. […] (MSR, 113)

According to Morante, this is a temporal dimension outside history, characterised by 'un'allegra impubertà senza storia', where the lyric subject and object are still united in a singular unity. This creates what Manuele Gragnolati and Francesca Southerden define as a 'complex temporality within the scope of the "lyric present": collective history is reconfigured within a history of personal loss, moving on, and, eventually, forgiveness.'[515] Yet, in *Addio*, Morante also adds that the lyric subject is lost in an earthly dimension detached from these atemporal ecstasies: 'Io sono condannata al tempo e ai luoghi / finché lo scandalo non si consumi su di me' (MSR, 7).

Separation into two gendered entities is lived as an act of violence which is defined by Morante in *La smania dello scandalo* both as a 'prima barbarie' and as a 'strage'.[516] Here, Morante develops a different form of temporality, which is to be limited to the 'atemporal present' of the lyric discourse. Indeed, this new dimension could be closely

[515] In their analysis of the sonnet RVF 90 by Petrarch, Gragnolati and Southerden discuss how Petrarch 'give us a kind of "history", which is also a history of temporal loss, in order at once to retrieve the prior event of presence and reconfigure it in the "now" of the poem.' In the first section of *Il mondo*, *Addio*, Morante re-enacts a similar kind of temporality. Manuele Gragnolati, Francesca Southerden, 'Declensions of "Now"', *Possibilities of the Lyric: Reading Petrarch in Dialogue* (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 102-104.

[516] Viola Ardeni, 'L'espressione della dicotomia tra artista e società nella Smania dello scandolo di Elsa Morante', *Carte Italiane,* 2(9) (UCLA, 2014), p. 126.

put in relation with contemporary theorisation of queer temporalities: time, in *Il mondo*, dramatically unfolds in its constant repetition without future.[517] Described as an original and yet-not-recovered condition, the golden age of youth is something that the lyric subject strives to achieve and conquer back. Memory, and poetry as well, function as tools to battle against the 'monsters of irreality' and to recover that previously owned condition of 'happiness' and indistinction.[518] Described almost as a Platonic hyper-uranium, this is a mythical dimension in which a renegotiation of identity can eventually occur: 'io e tu siamo uno solo / né uomo né donna'.[519]

Similar representations of an androgynous lyric subject are to be found in the long theatrical piece *La commedia chimica*. Described as an alter-ego of the author's voice, the character of Oedipus acts here as the lyric subject within the comedy. As already highlighted, Oedipus is the only character using the medium of lyric poetry to express his feeling and then dialogues – or at least interacts – with the other characters. Before his disappearance from the stage, Oedipus engages in a long dialogue with the chorus and, intermittently, with his daughter Antigone. On this occasion, Morante proposes one of the several ecstatic moments that constellate the whole book. Repeatedly, Morante recreates in those pages an epiphany of recognition in which a lost identity – coinciding with 'happiness' and indeterminacy – is summoned by the lyric subject:

quel mio Doppio luminoso, l'amato tuo

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[517] M. Gragnolati, 'Differently Queer: Temporality, Aesthetics, and Temporality in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Petrolio and Elsa Morante's Aracoeli', *De/Constituting Wholes: Towards Partiality Without Parts*, ed. by M. Gragnolati, C. F.E. Holzhey (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2017), pp. 85-100.

[518] The definition of 'irreality' – and its relation to writing – is given by Morante in her monologue *Pro o contro la bomba atomica*: 'È un fatto che, nel sistema organizzato della irrealtà, la presenza dello scrittore (cioè della realtà) è sempre uno scandalo, anche se viene tollerata [. . .]. La realtà, e non l'irrealtà, rimane il paradiso naturale di tutte le persone umane, almeno finché non si siano trasformate nella struttura stessa visibile dei loro corpi.' E. Morante, 'Pro o contro la bomba atomica', *Opere II*, 1549. See also Angela Di Fazio, 'La lingua della sommossa ne "Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini"', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, Vol. 21 (Madrid: 2014), pp. 113-130.

[519] A similar treatment of the lyric subject can be found also in *La commedia chimica*. See also Lucia Dell'Aia, 'Il mito dell'androgino', *La sfera del puer: Il tempo dei ragazzini di Elsa Morante* (Milan: Aracne, 2013), pp. 137-142.

il tuo simile!
Dorato come le tue ciglia
turchino come la tua stanza.
Maschio e femmina come te,
o amore ermafrodita! e padre e madre,
o unica stella! (MSR, 90)

In this passage, Oedipus explicitly refers to the hermaphrodite love as a place of encounter between the subject and object: a cohabitation of this duplicity into one peaceful and resolved entity.[520] Eventually, in *La smania dello scandalo*, the lyric 'I' is reconfigured and expanded to the point of coinciding with this oscillation of states, in a continuous process of 'becoming': 'Io sono il punto amaro delle oscillazioni / fra le lune e le maree' (MSR, 111).

5.3.2. DUPLICITY AND NATURE IN 'IL RUMORE BIANCO'

As Antonio Porta pointed out in his introduction to *affemminata*: 'il linguaggio poetico è usato anche come uno strumento per riconoscersi (l'immagine dello specchio) e per liberare i pensieri profondi, nascosti… magari scoprendo quel tanto di "femmina" che c'è nell'uomo e quel tanto di "maschio" che c'è nella donna entrambi poetanti'.[521] Poetry, to this extent, functions as an immaterial and spectral mirror used as a tool to explore the poet's own identity. This is specifically how Frabotta's poetry works in *affemminata* and *Il rumore bianco*.

Within the portrayal of a new queer subject, another mythical machinery is active in Biancamaria Frabotta's *Eloisa*, the concluding section of *Il rumore bianco*. In this case, the

[520] This treatment of the lyric subject is deeply in consonance with the representation of Manuele, the protagonist of Morante's last novel, *Aracoeli*. Manuele discovers his androgyny in Totetaco: 'Per me fra l'unità e i suoi multipli non esistevano confini precisi, così come ancora l'io non si distingueva ancora dal tu e dall'altro, né i sessi uno dall'altro. Per tutto il tempo di Totetaco, io non ebbi nozione di essere maschio, ossia uno che mai poteva diventare donna come Aracoeli.' E. Morante, 'Aracoeli', *Opere II*, pp. 1189-90.
[521] A. Porta, 'Maschio e femmina', F. Frabotta, *affemminata*, p. 26.

lyric subject, Heloise, silences the lyric object, Peter Abelard, in what seems a soliloquy. The lyric monologue opens with a reference to 'wholeness':

> Qui dimora l'intero e tu disperso
> ci ragioni. Che io canti, più buia
> sordidamente, ombra più pesante
> del marmo che mi riposa non conta.
> Una sola rondine non mi ti rende
> la stagione perduta.
> E io troppo tempo ho abitato in te
> come la ragnatela in un tronco morto
> al limite di una terra promessa. (RB 59-60)

In this case the lyric dialogue is closer to a canonical dialogue *in absentia*: the lyric subject delivers her speech to an absent addressee. What differs is the displacement of the lyric subject outside time and space in the indistinct 'intero', where the difference between subject and object is completely abolished. This the only passage of the entire section in which the lyric subject uses a feminine adjective to define herself, 'buia'. In the remaining part of text, the lyric subject is defined through attributes that are ungendered and frequently refer to natural elements: 'fantastico frutto dell'occidente' (RB, 60), 'placida onda di lago' (RB, 61) until 'l'acqua coprirà ogni traccia di nome' (RB, 61).

The natural world provides a space in which this interconnectedness and expansion of lyric subjectivity can emerge. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Frabotta draws on Leopardi's 'giardino della sofferenza' for her own theory of anti-mimetic desire – we read 'natura maligna io cesserò d'imitarti' in the closing lines of the poem – to overcome the narcissistic posture of the 'majoritarian/male' lyric discourse. In Frabotta's 'Fra le piante dimentiche', the garden functions as an expansion of the lyric self.[522] Indeed, the subject observes and reflects on the dynamics of decay and renovation that govern this natural space, her included. The garden, eventually, must be read as an echo chamber

[522] Nature, in this sense, plays a pedagogical role in revealing the interconnectedness between different and separate entities. Cfr. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 75-76.

showing the potential of interconnectedness between man and nature, human and non-human.[523]

The metaphor of the garden is expanded by Frabotta and coincides with other natural manifestations. A similar metaphor of interconnectedness involves water. In the section *Il giovanile ardore*, water stands as the ideal element to deliver this conceptualisation of fluidity, metamorphic mutations, and growth.

> Rinascerò, costola d'un lago
> e non più giuro, madre di me stessa.
> Sarò il mio beato amico, lettore
> e confidente della lingua madre
> sarò il mio squisito gentiluomo
> e come a Ungaretti Moammed Sceab
> mi verrò in sogno, due volte o tre
> e non te
> dotta, perfida, amatissima brigata. (RB, 30)

The biblical reference according to which Eve is said to be created from Adam's rib is turned into something new:[524] the poet would originate from a natural element, a 'costola d'un lago', literally a 'rib of a lake'. Identity, thus, does not deal with the biological act of giving birth but with a new poetic mother-tongue; one's native language, which is, in this case, poetry, is sufficient to determine and to expand the identity of this lyric subject. The overall dreamlike atmosphere of the text, together with the reference to Ungaretti's dream of his friend Mohammed Sceab,[525] contributes to the creation of an

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[523] On this topic, see also R. Braidotti, 'The Death of Man, The Deconstruction of Woman', *Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 26-28.

[524] Frabotta's allusion to the birth of Eve follows the events as they are narrated in the second chapter of *Genesis*: 'So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.' Gn, 2:21-22.

[525] Frabotta refers to Giuseppe Ungaretti's *In Memoria*. As a matter of fact, this is a text in which Ungaretti reflects on the change of identity of his friend and poet Mohammed Sceab: 'Amò la Francia / e mutò nome // Fu Marcel / ma non era Francese […] / E non sapeva / sciogliere / il canto / del suo abbandono'. Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'L'Allegria', *Vita d'un uomo: Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), pp. 59-60.

interconnected lyric subject – and thus of nature – whereby androgenicity plays a fundamental role. Again, we can notice how the poetic male addressee is absorbed within the plurality of an unnamed brigade. Boundaries and roles are abolished and, in so doing, a new space is conquered within the process of 'becoming-everything'.

In *Eloisa*, but also in the plaquette *affemminata*, the discussion of the notion of identity represents a key cornerstone for the recrafting of Frabotta's lyric subject. As she states in *Quartetto per masse*:

> Questa croce dell'identità cominciò ad assillarmi negli anni universitari […]. Il lavorio dell'autocoscienza mi rimandava una figura ambigua, femmina nel corpo, sicuramente. Ma nel cervello? Maschio effemminato? E il cuore? Neutro, come la parola 'poeta'?[526]

The themes of singularity and identity stimulate a reflection and discussion on the state of duplicity that this lyric subject has to undergo. In doing so, Frabotta stimulates a panic connection with the natural world, which becomes an extension of a complex and branched-out subjectivity.[527]

5.3.3. THE CELESTIAL SEX IN 'IL CIELO'

In her second poetry collection published in 1981, *Il cielo*, Patrizia Cavalli employs a similar treatment of the lyric subject. In *Il cielo*, the sky is a key protagonist. It provides a background which follows the modifications of the lyric subject's interactions with the world, while echoing them in a continuous mirror-play. Similarly to the role of the natural elements in Frabotta's collection, the sky proffers a place of hybridity to the subject whereby she can connect with the mutating weather. In Cavalli's own words, 'Il

[526] B. Frabotta, *Quartetto per masse e voce sola* (Rome: Donzelli, 2012), p. 4.

[527] This technique was already highlighted by Antonio Porta in the short text that accompanied the first publication of *affemminata*. A similar analysis is also carried out by Giovanni Raboni, in his review of *Il rumore bianco*. See A. Porta, 'Maschio e femmina', pp. 25-27; G. Raboni, 'E tutti esistono nonostante tutto', *Il Messaggero*, 30 June 1982.

cielo governa la mia vita, alla lettera. Pensieri, sentimenti, umori e salute, in me tutto dipende dal cielo'.[528] In front of each manifestation of the sky – the sun, the clouds, the rain, the breeze that traverse the whole collection –, the lyric subject is profoundly attracted by the good weather. This fascination pairs with the desire to escape from the subjective burden and to rejoin a lost and celestial dimension: 'Era proprio lassù / che doveva compiersi la mia somiglianza, lassù così in alto' (IC, 24).

In the poem below, the sky, is used to craft a newly reached androgyny:

> Mi ero tagliata i capelli, scurite le sopracciglia,
> aggiustata la piega destra della bocca, assottigliato
> il corpo, alzata la statura. Avevo anche regalato
> alle spalle un ammiccamento trionfante. Ecco ragazza
> ragazzo
> di nuovo, per le strade, il passo del lavoratore,
> niente abbellimenti superflui. Ma non avevo dimenticato
> il languore della sedia, la nuvola della vista.
> E spargevo carezze, senza accorgermene. Il mio corpo
> segreto intoccabile. Nelle reni
> si condensava l'attesa senza soddisfazione; nei giardini
> le passeggiate, la ripetizione dei consigli,
> il cielo qualche volta azzurro
> e qualche volta no. (IC, 99)

This time, the lyric subject engages more openly with her physical appearance ('mi ero tagliata i capelli, scurite le sopracciglia') to the point that she is now described as a 'ragazza / ragazzo'. On this note, it is important to recognise how the word 'ragazzo' is kept isolated in a separate line to highlight, even graphically, the duplicity of this lyric subject. On this occasion, the lyric subject seems to remember her femininity which is now sealed within an almost mystical entity: 'il mio corpo /segreto intoccabile'. The sky is also mentioned in the concluding lines of the poem: 'il cielo qualche volta azzurro / e qualche volta no.' The sky reverberates mechanisms of the body that govern the subject's own impressions, emotions, and, eventually, the subject's identity as a whole. Within a

[528] Camilla Valletti, 'Il tempo nella valigia', *Indice*, 11 November 2006.

constant process of 'becoming', the lyric subject is interconnected to the celestial vault, following its modifications, capricious shifts, and movements.

The suspended and dreamlike atmosphere is shown in several other texts through the collection, including in the following poem:

> […] E quando esco
> dal sibilo dei sogni
> che ha lasciato le mie orecchie ottuse
> intossicate dalla ripetizione e riconquisto
> lentamente i gesti
> che mi portino a un'altra posizione
> (forse metto una camicia a righe
> e i pantaloni bianchi, camminerò più in fretta,
> avrò un'andatura eretta) dove io non sia
> il recinto inerme dei territori
> l'impresario di scontri clandestini
> che alla fine si innamora dei suoi attori. […] (IC, 112)

Awakened from an earlier dream state, the lyric subject enters a subsequent alert state: 'E quando esco / dal sibilo dei sogni / […] riconquisto / lentamente i gesti / che mi portino a un'altra posizione'. The overall performance leads to the employment of new attributes (men's clothes such as the shirt or the white trousers) that allow the subject to conquer a new relational position, 'un'altra posizione', whereby the 'I' is no longer a grammatical cage ('dove io non sia / il recinto inerme dei territori'). In Cavalli's text too, we must recognise how the spatial evolution of the lyric subject is dislocated into a new hybrid condition, within a constant process of 'becoming'. It is interesting to notice how in these two poems Cavalli completely removes any reference to the addressee, in contrast with what we saw, for instance in Morante's and Frabotta's texts. The reference to the stage and the actors suggests also the performativity developed in this process of 'becoming-everything'.

5.3.4. AN AERIAL EMBRACE IN 'IMPROMPTU'

The sky and its many phenomena function as a symbolic point of reference for the lyric subject. Its constant, imperceptible, and capricious modifications mirror the process of 'becoming' that the subject has undergone. At the same time, the coexistence of several phenomena on the celestial canvas could be read as a further reference to the fluidity, openness, and queerness of the lyric subject. In *Impromptu*, the long *poemetto* written by Rosselli in 1979 after a sudden burst of inspiration, the sky is a perpetual presence throughout the whole text. The *poemetto* consists of a monologic delirium in which the lyric subject encounters several addressees, and with them rediscusses her poetics. The last section of the *poemetto* represents the pinnacle of Rosselli's lyric monologue and poetic practice:

> Soffiati 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… (IMP, 41)

As highlighted by Jennifer Scappettone, the last stanza begins with a reference to Sandro Botticelli's painting, *La Primavera*.[529] In the first stanza, Rosselli rewrites the myth of Zephyrus and Chloris, two of figures painted by Botticelli in the left section of the canvas. According to the Ovidian myth, the nymph Chloris was abducted by Zephyrus, the god governing the West Wind, who transfigured her into a goddess named Flora, the embodiment of spring.[530] Zephyrus is then summoned through an apostrophic address to a cloud. In contrast to Rosselli's most common use of the masculine word 'nuvoli', the word appears here and in the previous section of the *poemetto* in its feminine

[529] Jennifer Scappettone, 'Clori a più voci. La performance della traduzione di una "stralunante morte"', *Nuovi Argomenti*, n. 76 (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), pp. 92-102.
[530] Alexander Keith, 'Over Her Dead Body', *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), pp. 77-81. See also Amy Richlin, 'Reading Ovid's Rapes', *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. by A. Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 1992) pp. 158-162.

declination – which is grammatically correct – of 'nuvola'.[531] In this very context, this word choice is not fortuitous, especially when used to describe a mythical creature whose gender is notably known as male. In Botticelli's painting, the nymph is portrayed in the act of carrying some flowers with her lips. As noted by Jennifer Scappettone, Rosselli refers to Botticelli's iconography, alluding to the 'stelo arricciato in mia bocca'. Zephyrus merges with Chloris in a unique entity, neither man nor woman: a lyric subject that has become one through a celestial and intangible embrace.[532]

Furthermore, one can also recognise the emergence of an entangled temporal dimension, whereby present and past merge, confuse with each other and dissolve. A mixture of tenses blends within a chain of assonances: 'è', 'era', 'ora', and 'aria'. Past and present join in one intra-related temporal dimension, and so are the two mythical characters.[533] Not only this queer temporal dimension overcomes the use of the lyric present, but advocates for the existence of an a-teleological chronotope in which the dimension of futurity is completely abolished. This is something that Rosselli declares in another stanza of *Impromptu*, where she quite bluntly writes: 'Creandoselo, il futuro, in

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[531] The change in the cloud's gender occurs in the eleventh section of the *Impromptu*. Here, Rosselli writes: 'Si diradano / le nuvole ora femminili'. A. Rosselli, *Impromptu*, p. 684.

[532] As occurred also in Frabotta's and Cavalli's poetry, metamorphosis is employed as a technique to expand the boundaries of subjectivity: the natural element, the animal, and, eventually, the non-human offer the subject a non-linear possibility to evolve and to 'become-everything'. Cfr. R. Braidotti, 'Met(r)amorphoses: becoming Woman/ Animal/Insect', *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 357-366.

[533] As theorised by Carla Freccero in conjunction with Derrida's notion of 'spectrality', queer temporality points towards 'a denormativization of temporality through its relation to desire, fantasy, wish, and the impossibility of sustaining linear narratives of teleological time'. In this context, the adjective queer functions as a critique of temporal normativity and domestication, which ends up re-orientering the subject towards a philosophy of 'becoming'. C. Freccero, 'Queer Times', pp. 20-21. See also Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2004), Madhavi Menon, 'Spurning Teleology in Venus and Adonis', *GLQ*, V. 11, N. 4 (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 491-519, and Elizabeth Freeman, 'Erotohistoriography', *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 95-136. On Derrida's notion of 'spectrality', see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

maniera / congegnosa, lo ripulì dal vuoto / orrore d'un vuoto traditore' (IMP, 35).[534] Future needs to be re-created out of its removal, its emptiness, and non-existence.

Once the metamorphosis occurs, the description of this new subject is then carried on in the next lines:

> Quando vinti, ci si esercita in
> una passione, d'ingaggiarsi per
> altri versi che non questa miopìa
> non si sente l'uomo che è donna
> coi pantaloni piuttosto sul grigio
> che se non fossero al dunque lavati
>
> per quel forzato amore che è
> la detronizzazione: 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. […] (IMP, 42)

Originated from the aerial embrace and the merging of two separate entities, the subject is depicted through several allusions to its duplicity.[535] The use of the plural form of the adjective 'vinti' and the subsequent employment of the reflexive pronoun ('ci si esercita') seem to allude to a plural, multifarious, and interconnected subject. Moreover, Rosselli refers to them through a sort of myopia, a limit self-imposed to the senses. This limitation in sight does not allow to write a different kind of poetry, other than one that engages with this new entity: 'l'uomo che è donna / coi pantaloni piuttosto sul grigio'. In this line, it is interesting to note the metonymical reference to men's trousers, which

[534] A. Rosselli, *Impromptu*, p. 682.

[535] On the function of immaterial embraces, see also M. Gragnolati, 'La nostalgia del Paradiso e gli abbracci della Commedia', *Amor che move: Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2013), pp. 91-110.

is also shared with Cavalli and employed as one of the attributes pertaining to an androgenic subject.[536]

In the second half of the stanza, the cohabitation of these two realities, male and female, expands onto the discussion of the overlap of the two opposite dimensions: the personal and the political. Personal history opposed to collective history, while the lover's discourse 'di quell'ebete / femmina ingaggiata per una storia / d'amore' is put in contrast with the indifference towards 'la Storia'. Nonetheless, these two dimensions are only apparently irreconcilable. Created by the encounter between feminine and masculine components, the new lyric subject is now able to advocate for 'un'altra storia', a different story. This stands out as a diverse history which flows from the encounter between Zephyrus and Chloris, the masculine and the feminine, the private of the lyric diction and the collective dimension of history. Again, this compromise is made possible thanks to the medium of lyric poetry and its subject, as explained by Rosselli in the closing lines of the *poemetto*.

> […] 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. (IMP, 42-43)

Diversity, the refusal of normalisation, and anti-canonicity have always been at the very core of Rosselli's intervention on poetic language. The creation of what she defines as 'grammatica dei poveri' imposed as an attempt at undoing the normative grammar of

[536] Gian Maria Annovi, 'Verso un corpo universale?', *Altri corpi: Poesia e corporalità negli anni Sessanta* (Bologna: Gedit, 2008), pp. 122-132.

Italian lyric language, by hybridising it with elements of underdevelopment, together with other languages and literary traditions.[537] Overall, this movement creates an independent and self-contained linguistic system. In the closing lines, Rosselli also provides a definition of her poetic language, naming her lines 'paesani / zoppicanti'. Rosselli opens *Impromptu* with an anti-bourgeois confrontation ('Il borghese non sono io che tralappio […]') that is carried out throughout the whole *poemetto*: Pasolini, the 'fratello frassino' quoted as in the middle of the long poem, is elected as a symbol of this dialogue and implied also in the closing lines through the extension of this anti-normative drive on the poetic language. Eventually, the language of poetry reveals the interstitial existence of another rhythm, a different history, and a new poetic subject.[538]

5.4. BECOMING-WOMAN

The first movement of 'becoming-everybody/everything' overcomes the dialectics between male and female that characterised most of Italian lyric tradition. In doing so, it proposes a new lyric subject which is no longer based on an ontological opposition of states but rather inscribes difference within a phenomenology of different manifestations, encounters, hybridity, and metamorphoses. As a result, this first movement can transcend the myth of otherness of women's writing, while promoting a lyric subject which is no longer grounded in an original ontological difference. This pluri-vocal revolution allowed a repositioning of the lyric subject which moves from a relational identity to an independent self. From this viewpoint, a second movement of 'becoming' transpires – a movement that Deleuze and Guattari define as 'becoming-woman'.

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[537] Sara Sermini, '*E se paesani / zoppicanti sono questi versi': Povertà e follia nell'opera di Amelia Rosselli* (Florence: Olschki, 2019) pp. 179-183.

[538] E. Tandello, 'Il volo della Libellula', *Amelia Rosselli, Galleria*, XLVII, pp. 55-56.

In Deleuze's and Guattari's view, each process of 'becoming' that occurs within the framework of 'minoritarian literatures' points towards a 'becoming-woman'. Within a process of displacement and 'de-territorialization', the subject has always to encounter this feminine dimension. Moreover, the process of subjectification in the case of a woman writer does not oppose to man; yet it must affirm herself as an event in the process of 'becoming'. The 'becoming-everything/everybody' and, eventually, the 'becoming-woman' are part of the same movement that moves from a binary opposition towards an active philosophy of subjectification and self-representation.

As we will see in the next sections, this finds two main outputs in lyric poetry: the first movement consists of the abstraction of the apostrophic address towards a male counterpart replicating the role of a lost female object; the second entails several strategies of self-representation – such as a hyper-feminisation of the lyric subject or its depiction as a 'fanciulla'[539] – through which a woman eventually occupies the place of the lyric subject. In the lyric discourse, this is developed through an attempt at overcoming what Adriana Cavarero defined as 'teatro del maschile'[540] and Lacan theorised in his graph of desire.[541] Within this process of self-representation, women can be seen as events within a field of singularities, atoms, and particles: this is what Deleuze and Guattari define the 'molecular politics' of women's writing.[542]

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[539] My analysis of the representation of the lyric subject as a 'fanciulla' draws on Emanuela Tandello's work on Amelia Rosselli. Cfr. E. Tandello, 'Ifigenia', *Amelia Rosselli. La fanciulla e l'infinito*, pp. 17-28.

[540] As Cavarero demonstrated in her essay *Nonostante Platone*, 'il quadro simbolico costante è appunto quello che decide la rappresentazione del femminile sulla centralità del maschile […]. Per gli uomini, dunque, un teatro di figure nel quale è la loro soggettività quella che viene chiamata a riconoscersi, per le donne il medesimo teatro imposto da un soggetto maschile e nel quale esse non sono soggetto bensì oggetto del pensiero altrui.' A. Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone. Figure femminili nella filosofia occidentale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999), p. 5.

[541] Néstor A. Braunstein, 'Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan', *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 102-115.

[542] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276.

Once again, Virginia Woof's style is seen by Deleuze and Guattari as helpful to reach a definition of this process of 'becoming-woman':

> The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the *intermezzo* – that is what Virginia Woolf lived with all her energies, in all of her work, never ceasing to become. The girl is like the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult. It is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl.[543]

In this passage of *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce a further element that help them in describing the nature of women's writing and its 'political' essence. The image of the 'girl' is introduced as a new state of in-between and *intermezzo*, used by Virginia Woolf,[544] but also by the poets that are discussed in this study. As the girl will eventually become a woman, she is regarded as the 'becoming of becoming'. Man, on the other hand, is traditionally defined as 'being'. As it emerged from our discussion of 'becoming' in Chapter 2, the male ontology of 'being' is opposed to the female phenomenology of 'becoming'. Man is regarded as a self-evident ground of a politics of identity and recognition. Woman, as part of this 'minoritarian' discourse, offers the opening of becoming; and the girl thus functions as a way of thinking women, not as complementary beings, but as the instability that surrounds any being.

This sets out women's radical relation to men: not as their others or opposites but as the 'becoming' of men's other. When Deleuze and Guattari celebrate Woolf's writing style, they do not do so because she is a woman writer but because she *writes woman*. Her writings does not express an already given identity; rather, through Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique, identity is seen as the effect of a sudden alternation of thoughts in a constant process of 'becoming-woman', of 'writing woman'.[545] The inner

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[543] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 277.

[544] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276.

[545] Claire Colebrook, 'The Politics of Reading: Interpretation and Inhabitation', *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 3-4.

fluctuation of thoughts, expression of a 'molecular' and 'personal' dimension, connects to the 'molar' dimension of the 'political' through the act of writing. The same subjective posture animates the core of Italian feminist practices such as the 'gruppi di autocoscienza'[546] and, at the same time, women's lyric poetry.

The following sections will investigate how the same dynamic of self-representations of 'becoming-woman' can find several correspondences with the lyric discourse of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta. The path towards self-representation is animated by a 'becoming of becoming' and in its embodiment in the lyric subject portrayed as 'fanciulla'. On the one hand, Cavalli and Frabotta employ various young female lyric subjects who are often suffering the coming-of-age process. On the other hand, in the poetry of Morante and Rosselli, it is possible to recognise a palingenetic drive towards 'juvenescence'.

5.4.1. AN ANTI-MIMETIC DIALOGUE IN 'IL RUMORE BIANCO'

Frabotta's intervention on the genre starts from an analysis of the dualism female/male based on an innovation of the lyric dialogue and of the mimetic quality of the lyric discourse. These two forces are opposed in an unconcealable way. Difference lies at the origin of how Frabotta's subject interacts with the world. This difference is highlighted by the opposition of the female 'I' to the male 'you', performed through the apostrophic address.[547] In one of the most famous poems included in *Il rumore bianco*, the lyric subject states: 'È vero. Non come te poeta io sono / io sono poetessa e intera non appartengo

[546] On the reception of Virginia Woolf's writings by the feminist movement in Italy in the seventies, see Elisa Bolchi, 'Filling the Void: Virginia Woolf and the Feminism of Difference in Italy', *The Italianist* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 5-14. In the second section of the article, Bolchi highlights how Woolf's 'view led to the development of the 'feminism of difference', one of the main and most influential feminist theories emanating from Italian second-wave feminism'.

[547] J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, p. 287.

a nessuno. / Da me, come da te la pura stella dell'inizio del mondo / è lontana la menzogna primaria, maschia e nerovestita' (RB, 41). The text is developed through the constant opposition not only between the subject 'I' and the object 'you' – by adopting the most classical lyric apostrophic address – but also through syntactical choices, highlighting the separateness between the sexes ('poet' opposed to 'poetess', 'me' opposed to 'you' within the same line).

A similar pattern can be found also in another dialogic poem in which Frabotta openly introduces the term 'feminist': 'Se trovi facile la rima tra femminista e ballista / non tacermelo, ombrosa fonte di nervoso scherno / dolce-aguzzo come l'orlo di seta della montagna / vista dalla montagna gemella del giogo, ne ridi' (RB, 35). The two poems share the same dialogical structure based on opposition and hypotheses: the hypothetical periods introduced by 'anche se' and 'se' transports what could have been a real-life dialogue to a universal scale. In the second poem, the theme of difference re-emerges through the metaphor of the mountain chain: two identical peaks, one can echo a male voice by imitating it. The allegory is self-explanatory: after witnessing the metaphorical exchange between the inanimate objects, the subject confesses to be still imprisoned in a mimetic game. The rules of this game are determined by codes and norms that are the result of the male authority which has been historically imposed over poetic language. The female object can only function as an echo chamber for the voice of the male subject, without any possibility of advancing her condition: her condition, indeed, is firm as rocks. In his seminar on desire and its interpretation, Lacan theorises how desire and love function through a mimetic process that also involves the language of the love discourse.[548] Desire, according to Lacan, is always the desire of the other's desire, even at the stage of the linguistic delivery of the message.

[548] J. Lacan, 'La dialettica del desiderio', *Il desiderio e la sua interpretazione 1958-59* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016), pp. 337-339.

The same fluctuation can be found in *per Adelaide*. The poet introduces here a variant to the previous dialogic poems: the addressee is no longer a man, but the poet's sister, introduced through a series of objective correlatives. Moreover, the addressee is introduced as a 'giovinetta' in the act of diving into the sea:

> Come deve farsi esile, minuta la vita
> nel filo scabro di un rigo di poesia
> non come una giovinetta tuffarsi
> ma si assottiglia fino a sparirsi
> a tradirsi, non il collo maudit
> di Ade che ride sotto il cappello
> ma un'ode minore, minima, un soffio
> eppure una gabbia per le tue movenze
> di felino domestico, pulcino danzante, elegante
> non chiedermi più, accontentati
> la metamorfosi delle tue forme leggiadre
> mima, perdonami: è mimesis anch'io. (RB, 29)

Throughout the poem, Frabotta plays upon the notions of 'mimesis' and anxiety of influence within the lyric discourse. A first reference to Montale appears in the second to last line: 'non chiedermi più' works as a sort of echo of the Montalean 'Non chiederci la parola'. Frabotta alludes to Montale also through the image of the young girl diving in the sea – in this case, a resonance with Esterina, as she is portrayed in the poem *Falsetto*:

> […] T'alzi e t'avanzi sul ponticello
> esiguo, sopra il gorgo che stride:
> il tuo profilo s'incide
> contro uno sfondo di perla.
> Esiti a sommo del tremulo asse,
> poi ridi, e come spiccata da un vento
> t'abbatti fra le braccia
> del tuo divino amico che t'afferra.
> Ti guardiamo noi, della razza
> di chi rimane a terra.[549]

Montale, to this extent, is chosen as a symbol of the male poetic canon; the system of references and allusions forms Frabotta's attempt at challenging this language and instituting a new dynamic of power. If the female subject can easily imitate the most

[549] E. Montale, 'Ossi di seppia', *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), p. 14.

classical expression of the canonical poetic language, there is room for its disentanglement from within. This disentanglement is not limited to a mimetic game but consists of a metaliterary exploration of the limits of poetry. The modernist movement has been always characterised by a strong metaphysical tension stimulated by inconstant epiphanies: trivial objects, animals, and gestures can function as triggers able to project the subject beyond reality. In this poem, the lyric subject subtly criticises this notion and the legitimacy of this mimetic act. How can poetry replicate reality or even communicate its true nature beyond the realm of objectivity? Frabotta's subject steps back and reveals the old lie: 'è mimesis anch'io', 'I is mimesis too'. The agrammatical structure of the sentence poses the first-person subject as the direct object. Thus, the sentence is expressed using a third-person point of view, but without using an actual grammatical subject. In this context, it is possible to retrace a reference to Arthur Rimbaud's letter to Georges Izambard: 'Je est un autre', 'I am another'.[550] In Frabotta's case, the subject is indirectly employed in the sentence and relegated to the end of the line. Similarly to Rimbaud, Frabotta wants to embrace the otherness intrinsic to her poetic subject. At the same time, the lyric subject reveals the mimetic mechanism behind the lyric discourse. Filtered through this series of references and subtle variations, a witty tone characterises the lyric subject's posture. This posture aims, specifically, at deconstructing the foundational myths of modern lyric while also proposing a utopian portraiture of the subject.

Not only the male addressee disappears but the lyric subject too. Indeed, the subject is only introduced in the closing couplet: 'perdonami: è mimesis anch'io'. What seems a fairly traditional poem at first, actually displays a strong metaliterary critique of male lyric language and its tradition. Thanks to a subtle game of references and indirect quotes, the female poetic subject questions the mimetic process behind the lyric

[550] A. Rimbaud, 'Lettre du Voyant', *Ouevres Complètes*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2012) pp. 354-58.

discourse. This is carried out through the consistent employment of objective correlatives. These are characteristic of a certain *côte* of modernist poetry that spans from T.S. Eliot to Eugenio Montale: the poet's sister becomes a 'felino domestico' but also a 'pulcino danzante', two animals with opposite and yet complementary characteristics.

Apostrophe emerges as a central means for Frabotta's reinvention of the lyric subject. However, this new lyric subject needs to find more than one way to escape from the mimetic implications of the lyric discourse. One of the techniques used by Frabotta consists in the development of a collective addressee, which allows the subject's voice to stand out without employing the first-person pronoun.

> Da giovane vivevo una vita alla volta.
> Ora hanno buone maniere. Mi fanno gli auguri.
> È solo davanti a te che sei il più dotato
> e maleducato che la bussola perde il suo ago.
> Gli altri diranno che questa Storia è una meschina storia. (RB, 49)

In front of the male other, the subject loses her orientation. In addition, it is possible to identify a further reference to Montale in the allusion to *La casa dei doganieri* in which 'la bussola va impazzita all'avventura'.[551] The 'other' is therefore turned into the others, its plural form, an anonymous audience that considers the history of this female subject as completely disconnected from the trajectories of collective history. Clearly, this is not the lyric subject's opinion. Moreover, it is possible to understand Frabotta's use of the term 'storia' with and without the first letter capitalised as an evident reference to the closing lines of Rosselli's *Impromptu*: 'è l'indifferenza per tutto ciò / che riguarda la Storia, di quell'ebete / femmina ingaggiata per una storia / d'amore […]' (IMP, 42).

[551] E. Montale, 'Le occasioni', *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), p. 167.

5.4.2. WORDS AS YOUNG MISTRESSES IN 'LE MIE POESIE NON CAMBIERANNO IL MONDO' AND 'IL CIELO'

In Cavalli's poetry too, the abstraction of the mimetic male counterpart is one of the steps towards the creation of a new lyric subject. In *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*, the 'presence-in-absence' of the male subject is directly summoned only in one poem; in this text, the lyric subject describes a dynamic of self-representation with an indirect reference to the male component of this dialogue in absence:

> Non ho seme da spargere per il mondo
> non posso inondare i pisciatoi né
> i materassi. Il mio avaro seme di donna
> è troppo poco per offendere. Cosa posso
> lasciare nelle strade nelle case
> nei ventri infecondati? Le parole
> quelle moltissime
> ma già non mi assomigliano più
> hanno dimenticato la furia
> e la maledizione, sono diventate signorine
> un po' malfamate forse
> ma sempre signorine. (LMP, 35)

Introduced by the negation 'non', the opening sentence is used to assert what the lyric subject is not. Self-representation, to this extent, passes through the assertion of a constitutive difference. However, the male subject is only mentioned through one of his attributes, the 'seme da spargere'. This descriptive movement elicits a reflection on the different generative approaches carried out by two separate and diverse subjects. This poem contains a subtle metaliterary reference to Petrarch's 'scattered rhymes' in the opening sonnet of the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. As noted by Robert Rodini, the *topos* of the poet able to gather and then restitute to the world its meaning is polemically re-written by Cavalli thanks to the use of lowbrow semantical elements: 'pisciatoi', 'materassi', 'seme'.[552] Concurrently, it connects Cavalli's discourse with an anti-tradition

[552] Robert J. Rodini, 'Avaro seme di donna. Patrizia Cavalli's transgressive discourse', *The Romanic Review*, V. 89, N. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 269.

of 'poesia d'impegno': 'Non ho seme da spargere' refers back to the Italian tradition in its echoing Petrarch's incipit sonnet to his *Canzoniere* by underscoring the traditional association between masculine potency and the creative act: penis may symbolically stand for pen in this context.[553]

As a matter of fact, from the second half of the poem, Cavalli links the discussion on the possibilities of reproduction that differentiate women and men to a metaliterary reflection about poetry: words are the actual product of the lyric subject's reproduction. These words are described as 'signorine' and, even if they are defined 'malfamate', the poet focuses on their gendered representation. As a matter of fact, words are said to be young women, following themselves an autonomous process of 'becoming': 'le parole / […] già non mi assomigliano più'. It is important to stress that words are portrayed as women at a young age, thanks to a further refusal of adulthood and maturity. Described initially as a burden to the process of subjectification, the woman's body originates other immaterial but gendered beings that substitute the classical function of the addressee within the lyric discourse.

A further expansion of this discourse grounded in the self-representation of the lyric subject as a young woman can be found in several other poems from the same collection. In the following text, Cavalli openly criticises the process of becoming adult and intrinsically endorses the possibility of not ageing:

> È inutile fare sforzi
> diventare più adulti e più maturi
> interessarsi alle tante sorti
> del mondo nei giornali
> e intanto guardare con sensi approssimati
> scomparse e ricomparse
> dentro e fuori e i minuscoli regali
> della memoria inacidita
> nelle scatole e nelle scatolette. (IC, 64)

[553] Ibid.

In the opening lines, Cavalli highlights the uselessness of becoming adult due to a fixation with the past – a fixation that this condition might take forward.[554] With its condition of 'becoming of becoming', the young age, conversely, embodies the privilege of exercising lightness and detachment from the gravity of everyday life. Again, the stress is put on the employment of 'sprezzatura' in every act: this is the distinctive feature of Cavalli's 'fanciulla'.

5.4.3. THE LOVING BODY IN 'IL MONDO SALVATO DAI RAGAZZINI'

In *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, Morante crafts a complex and pluri-vocal lyric subject. In front of this multitude of voices and characters, the reader is constantly invited to identify who speaks and plays the role of lyric subject. The constant displacement of the subject's identity starts in the opening section *Addio* as a fictional dialogue between the lyric subject and a silent addressee – in this case, Bill Morrow who is imprisoned in a posthumous and unreachable dimension. Following a traditional introductory section in which the reader is confronted with a lyric monologue *in absentia*, the addressee takes the floor and replies to the previous apostrophic remarks made by the lyric subject:

> «Non sono ferito. Non ho nessun male.
> Guardami, sono sano. Guarda, il mio corpo è intatto.
> Ma tu, quanto vecchia ti sei fatta! sei perfino rimpicciolita!
> Hai tutti i capelli bianchi! Pure le ciglia bianche!
>
> Nel sorridere, la tua faccia si fa ancora più rugosa! […] » (MSR, 23)

The direct speech reports Bill Morrow's words addressing the lyric subject. Thanks to the inclusion of a direct speech, Morante provides the first and indirect self-portrait of the entire collection. The lyric subject is sketched by the eyes of her addressee as an old

[554] A similar critique moved against adulthood and 'ripeness' can be found in another self-portrait included in *Il cielo*: 'Di essere ormai adulta l'ho capito / da come la notte vado al gabinetto. / Sicura di tornare al grande caldo, prima / era un'interruzione quasi a occhi chiusi, / veloce e / trasognata. Ora è un viaggio lento / e freddo, staccato dal sonno, dove guardo / sapendo di guardare le stesse mattonelle / lo stesso muro screpolato […]'.

woman, transfigured and aged by the process of mourning. Adopting a similar pattern to the one we found in Cavalli's and Frabotta's poetry, the lyric subject can only tell what she is not. In this case, the parallel is kept open by the addressee who intrinsically compares a young and unwounded body ('guarda, il mio corpo intatto') with the aged body of the lyric subject: this physical difference is introduced using the adversative conjunction 'ma'. The lyric subject is thus described as an old, shrunken, white-haired, and wrinkled woman. The addressee, in this case, provides a representation of the subject which stems from the same dualism that governs the entire collection: that of gravity and grace.[555] While the young population of the 'felici pochi' embodies grace and lightness, the subject perceives her aged body as a burden, an endless source of weight and gravity.

In the following section of *Il mondo*, Morante develops a movement towards juvenescence. From this viewpoint, the lyric subject aims to return to a lost condition, that of youth, which overlaps with lost feelings of grace and lightness. The central section, *La sera domenicale*, focuses on this specific palingenetic return to a young age:

> E così torno ragazza. Riconosco
> la bocca protesa e il colore scontroso
> gli occhi ancora bagnati di fango celeste
> l'impossibilità di piangere
> il tenero pugno animalesco che non lascia la presa
> l'allegria del petto nudo sotto il grembiule di scuola
> la coscia incontaminata dal fuoco di luglio
> il ventre incestuoso e infantile.
> Per l'ambigua visitazione
> il corpo d'amore è pronto. […] (MSR, 113)

Departing from a suspended time in *Addio* which allows the subject to convene with the dead, the reader experiences a return to a specific time in the life of the lyric subject. The line 'e così torno ragazza' explicitly highlights a fracture in temporality and, at the same time, describes the return to a preceding temporal dimension. The following lines collect

[555] Cfr. Chapter '3.3. The Semantics of Gravity and Grace'.

a fast-paced transition from childhood to youth, passing through puberty. In this sense, the accumulation of several self-portraits revolves around the idea of a sudden intertwining of one state into the other, in a constant process of 'becoming': first, childhood is summoned through a series of details such as 'la bocca protesa' (begging for milk),[556] 'il colore scontroso', 'impossibilità di piangere', and eventually 'il tenero pugno animalesco che non lascia la presa'; second, the school age which is evoked through 'il grembiule di scuola'; third, adolescence and youth are rendered through other details such as 'la coscia incontaminata dal fuoco di luglio' and 'il ventre incestuoso e infantile'. After the description of this sudden growth, the process of self-representation ends. The female body is now ready for an almost mystical encounter with the dimension of the other: 'Per l'ambigua visitazione / il corpo d'amore è pronto.'

After this process of rejuvenation through which various temporal dimensions are made to coincide with what seems to be a new and a-temporal dimension. The next mode of self-representation involves an identification with the many voices of *Il mondo*. The whole collection unfolds as a theatrical stage whereby several characters take the floor and advocate for diverse types of subjectivity. The theatrical text *La Commedia Chimica* has, in this sense, a specific function: it is a mental *composition loci* in which the characters are shaped through their dialogue, interactions, and displacement within the act of staging the lyric discourse; eventually, they are able to find their own identity and voice on the stage. In Morante's poetics, theatre occupies a key place to construct her lyric subject. In an uninterrupted mimetic game, the poet imitates the voices of her own characters to the point that she fully becomes part of the staging of the poetic creation.

[556] As suggested by Gragnolati, the act of breastfeeding may suggest a reference to the *languelait* theorised by Hélène Cixous. Within this framework, the mother's milk becomes a signifier able to determine and shape the relational bond between the child and language. See M. Gragnolati, 'Ritrovarsi all'inverso. *Aracoeli* e la resurrezione di corpo e linguaggio', *Amor che move*, pp. 121-123.

Morante confesses the nature of this game of identity in the opening poem placed at the very beginning of her first novel, *Menzogna e sortilegio*. In the poem title 'Ai personaggi', Morante reveals something about this process: first, she highlights how the lyric subject, depicted here as 'una donna sciocca e barbara' is subordinated to her own creation: 'Lo so: io, donna sciocca e barbara, /non altro che suddita e ancella a voi sono.' (A, 15); second, in the following lines, she metaphorically undergoes a metamorphosis through which she becomes a bee, extracting the nectar of identity out of her flowers/characters: 'altro io non sono che pronuba ape / fra voi, fiori straordinari e occulti' (A, 15) This is the same mechanism of self-representation that governs Oedipus: not only he embodies one of the most lyrical voices in the whole poetry collection but also one of the symbols of the gravity of old age.

Giuliana Zagra highlights how this mechanism of representation – and thus of self-representation – plays a fundamental role in Morante's poetics:

> Il teatro è il luogo degli inganni e della menzogna e allo stesso tempo del disinganno e della trasgressione: il primo e principale strumento usato dai bambini per relazionarsi al mondo esterno, per rappresentarlo e per conoscerlo e, a loro modo, per trasformarlo. Il gioco del teatro è per Elsa l'humus in cui si genera e cresce la vocazione della scrittura e in cui nascono i personaggi che di questa scrittura sono i semi.[557]

It is even more interesting to note how Zagra makes a parallel between the 'gioco del teatro' and the world of childhood by highlighting how theatre – defined as the re-enactment of a real situation in a fictional context – is a prolific tool used by children to explore, intervene on, and represent reality. In this sense, the reference to childhood and its playful nature is not a fortuitous one. Children – the 'ragazzini' mentioned in the title of Morante's poetry collection – are seen as the only protagonists of *Il mondo* who can engage with the complexity of reality in a light and detached manner. The theatrical game consists of the exercise of this lightness.

[557] Giuliana Zagra, *La tela favolosa*, p. 25.

Morante's fascination with this intrinsic characteristic of youth appears also in the creation of one last lyric subject in the closing section of *Il mondo*, the *Canzoni popolari*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the game played by the 'felici pochi' has a vital role in this section to tackle the intricacies of reality, human suffering, and history. Among these characters, the protagonist of the last one of the *Canzoni*, Carlottina stands for the ultimate embodiment of a playful engagement with reality and a traumatic past. Carlottina invents a game that overturns Nazism, by fashioning a parallel and imaginary history: the little child convinces the whole young population of Germany to wear the yellow-cloth star, originally meant to be a sign of recognition in the concentration camp. In so doing, Carlottina rebuilds a new history, which deviates from its original path and finds a new lyric ending. As a result, this ends up producing a counter-history, re-written through the lyric medium. For Morante, the nostalgic hope inscribed in the act of re-writing history does not coincide with the past – a dimension that the lyric subject is trying to escape from since the first section of *Il mondo*. Conversely, this hope recognises its object in youth as a symbol of futurity. As explained by Antonio Prete, this lyric posture 'può avere per soggetto Itaca, l'eden, la lingua prebabelica, l'infanzia, il buon tempo antico, la frugalità dei costumi, e con un ossimoro violento, persino il futuro.'[558]

Carlottina personifies a new lyric subject: following the portrayal of the 'fanciulla', the description of her childish and feminine traits support Morante's representation of a hyper-feminised lyric subject. The stress is put on several physical characteristics of the 'fanciulla':

> […] Adesso, che quella Carlotta non c'è più, posso parlarne
> come d'altrui persona… Ero sul primo sviluppo,
> non tanto ma nemmeno piccola, coi ginocchi tondi
> e le fossette ai gomiti,
> e quando ridevo io, tutti ridevano!
> A scuola, fra i compagni, il mio soprannome era:
> *die godlottchen*, cioè *la carlottina d'oro*,

[558] Antonio Prete, *Nostalgia di un sentimento* (Milan: Cortina, 1992), p. 18.

perché avevo i riccetti color d'oro, gli occhi pure color d'oro,
e sulle braccia e sull'alto delle guance
una sémola
dorata. (MSR, 181)

In this portrait, one can recognise the same drive towards juvenescence, which characterised the section *La smania dello scandalo*. For Morante, childhood functions as a state of possibility, potentiality, and freedom. The body, in this sense, must mirror this inner drive, following a Homeric caveat of the *kaloi kai agathoi*.[559] With this aim, while acting as the lyric subject in the closing section of *Il mondo*, Carlottina provides a self-portrait that follows the pattern initiated in the 'Canzone dei felici pochi'. Caught in a ceaseless process of 'becoming' and growth, the body of this 'fanciulla' can be considered as a symbol which is destined to subvert and complicate the identity of the lyric subject.

5.4.4. THE PROMISE OF A PLAINER LANGUAGE IN 'DOCUMENTO' AND 'IMPROMPTU'

In Chapter 4, we discussed how *Documento* is defined by Rosselli as 'il libro della maturità raggiunta'. *Documento* develops a long reflection on the representation of reality through poetry; at the same time, it consists also of a test conducted over the nature of artistic inspiration and its relationship with an senescent body attacked by a consuming illness. The entire collection is traversed by a dialogue with Rosselli's previous collections and with the ideal of a lyric subject depicted as a young 'fanciulla'. The novelty of *Documento* is in the alternation between two different voices: a 'fanciulla con il cuore devastato'[560] – already present in previous collections, such as *Variazioni Belliche* and *La Libellula* – and

[559] Lucia Dell'Aia, 'La leggerezza dei ragazzini', *La sfera del puer*, p. 165.
[560] A. Rosselli, *Variazioni Belliche*, p. 48.

an elderly lyric subject. In the following poem from *Documento*, the lyric subject defines herself as a 'fanciulla senza colomba':

> Uno strepitare svelto di ali smorzate
> questo incesto non
> si ha da fare.
>
> Nel cavo della mano rimane
> solo un fluorescente pensarsi?
>
> Le scienze
> naturali e colte
> il mio grido di fanciulla senza colomba. (DOC, 15)

In the opening lines, Rosselli makes reference to another Ovidian metamorphosis centred, once again, on an episode of rape and abduction: that of Leda and the swan. According to the version of the story narrated by Ovid, Zeus takes the form of a swan and rapes Leda on the same night she slept with her husband King Tyndareus.[561] The episode is filtered by Rosselli through a further reference to a poem by William Butler Yeats; Rosselli almost translated the opening lines of Yeats' poem, which begins with the same image photographing the beating wings of the swan: 'A sudden blow: the great wings beating still'.[562] However, in Rosselli's re-writing, the rape does not happen, and the addressee is completely removed from the lyric discourse. This offers the lyric subject a new chance for self-representation. In the second stanza, self-representation finds a mental space: 'rimane / solo un fluorescente pensarsi?'. In the third stanza, the lyric subject is evoked through the 'grido' of a restless 'fanciulla'.

In other texts from *Documento*, self-representation is carried out through a dialogue with a distant and absent addressee. In most cases, this fictional dialogue is turned into a soliloquy. As can be observed in the following text, the initial description

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561 Ovid, 'Book VI', *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin, with an introduction by Bernard Knox (London: Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 496-497.
562 W. B. Yeats, 'Leda and the Swan', *The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 34.

opens up to a dialogue which eventually becomes a lyric monologue. Within this framework, the use of the second person singular pronoun must be understood as a self-apostrophic address:

> Non ho voglia di morire oggi, non ho nemmeno
> speranza di morire oggi: sono in piena
> attività cerebrale; sono come gli altri –
>
> candida, della tua morte fiorita d'oltretombe
> della tua morte offerta a premio, del
>
> tuo intimidito sorriso giovanile, della
> tua sfacciataggine sicura e spretata. Sono
>
> sicura tu cambierai registro, sono sicurissima
> che non mi amerai neppure la, dove vai
> e dove andrò io, vivente. Sei mai sicuro
>
> tu di questa stessa cosa, faccenda, delirante
> sicurezza d'invecchiare? (DOC, 197)

Following a self-elegiac opening section, the second half of the poem proposes one of the many self-portraits of *Documento*. The lyric subject stresses the stylistic change in register of her lyric discourse; this development overlaps with the preoccupation regarding the process of ageing, which entails a possible loss of the 'intimidito sorriso giovanile' and the 'sfacciataggine sicura'. These are all characteristics that the lyric subject loses in the process of 'becoming-self', while abandoning the original condition of the 'fanciulla'.

In another poem, one can find a similar preoccupation regarding the abandonment of the original belligerent and dense style typical of the first poetic collections:

> È una soneria costante; un micidiale compromettersi
> una didascalia infruttuosa, e un vento di traverso
> mentre battendo le ciglia sentenziavo una
> saggezza imbrogliata. Giocattoli sono le strade e
> infermiere sono le abitudini distrutte da
> un malessere generale.
>
> Conto di farla finita con le forme, i loro
> bisbigliamenti, i loro contenuti contenenti
> tutta la urgente scatola della mia anima la

quale indifferente al problema farebbe meglio
a contenersi.

La gola della montagna si offrì pulita al
mio desiderio di continuare la menzogna indecifrabile
come le sigarette che fumo. (DOC, 118)

In this hermetic and ironic statement of poetics, the lyric subject gives a passionate and complex farewell to her poetics of closed forms. This is completed with an initial self-portrait of her face lashed by the wind, and a final self-portrait in the act of smoking cigarettes. Three stanzas are crossed by a cross-country wind, which makes the lyric subject blink; the wind then reaches the gorge of the mountain evoked in the last line, up to the smoke of Amelia's cigarettes, which closes the metaphorical chain. The 'gola nella montagna' can be interpreted as the throat of the girl's body: this detail is described as freed – possibly thanks to the action of the wind – from the dependence on the vice of forms, which is, in the last lines, compared to the vice of smoking. The subject's longing for a more 'adult' and accessible form of poetry is said to perpetrate the 'menzogna indecifrabile' – an extraordinary metaphor for the misleading action of closed forms –, which pairs with the desire to continue smoking 'le sigarette che fumo'.

Overall, the poem offers a further reflection on the process of 'becoming-woman' and its stylistic significance within Rosselli's poetics. Echoing the subjective posture already developed in *La Libellula*, the stylistic change in tone and poetic forms in *Documento* can be interpreted as a process of 'becoming' adult and, eventually, 'becoming-woman': 'O vita breve tu ti sei sdraiata presso di me che / ero ragazzina e ti sei posta ad ascoltare su / la mia spalla.'[563]

Nonetheless, as we already highlighted in Chapter 4, this movement towards a new poetic diction in *Documento* produces an impasse leading towards silence: 'Cara vita

[563] A. Rosselli, 'La Libellula', *L'opera poetica*, p. 142.

che mi sei andata perduta / con te avrei fatto faville se solo tu / non fossi andata perduta' (DOC, 32). Conversely, the last collection, *Impromptu*, develops a backwards movement towards the previous lost and 'adolescent' poetic diction.

> Tarda tornavo alle parole che
> mi sfuggivano; bloccata la promessa
> d'un semplice linguaggio, il
>
> languire era per esteso una fiaba
> d'innocenza nella solitaria trovata
>
> d'un riposo in piena aria, fingendo
> di non essere massacrata da voi. (IMP, 16)

The reference to this drive not only imposes a new temporal dimension connected to the past but it also gives a new key to interpret Rosselli's approach to writing: a constant re-writing has to be interpreted as an almost Leopardian drive towards a lost condition. The dialogue with other 'fanciulli' could offer the possibility to approach that lost adolescence. The opposition of temporal states – a happy past and a tedious present – is solved through the encounter with the collective embodiment of youth in '68:

> sapersi molto vicini alle
> retrovie dei ragazzi «in
> panne», e pur sapendo, reagendo
> presentarsi nuda al televisore
> consumando «arte e storie»
> d'una altra età giovanile
> quella che è vostra e mostruosamente
> si evolve ad essere mia. (DOC, 208)

The 'retrovie dei ragazzi' refers to the crowd of young students and workers animating the Roman squares in 1968. Renzo Paris describes Rosselli's fascination with her own crowd of 'felici pochi':

> Ricordo che nel maggio del 1968 bastò una dimostrazione degli studenti parigini per incendiare piazza Navona. Amelia, bellissima e sensuale, ci seguiva con la bicicletta e il suo foulard rosso, ai lati del corteo. Si sentiva finalmente protetta, lontana dagli spettri.[564]

[564] R. Paris, *Miss Rosselli*, p.70.

5.5. CONCLUSION

The image of Rosselli riding her bike in Piazza Navona as she escapes from the ghosts of her past allows us to conclude at the exact point where we began. In this journey through the poetry of Rosselli, Morante, Cavalli, and Frabotta, we encountered several phantasmatic presences: those of present lovers and lost loved ones; those of personal and collective traumas; those of historical events and private narratives, intertwined within the flow of a 'de-territorialised' lyric discourse. These ghosts stood as the attempt to connect the personal and the political, the biographical and the transhistorical, and, eventually, the public and the private. These presences give back a picture that is extremely different from the one taken by most Italian literary critics: in fact, the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta is profoundly tied to the representation of a political dimension. This also involves the representation of a complex, expanded, and interconnected subjectivity in lyric poetry. Oriented towards a revolutionary 'linguistic act of becoming', these texts highlight how this movement mirror some of the premises typical of feminist theories of self-representation and anticipated other principles related to the representation of a fluid, interconnected, and queer subjectivity. To this extent, it is possible to retrace a 'political aim' which is well-rooted in these poetry collections and forms a symbolic bridge between the solipsistic dimension of the 'I' and the plural dimension of 'we/they' – the one that opposes singularity to plurality, independence to interconnectedness, and male to female.

CONCLUSION

This thesis investigated the intertwined poetics of four 20th-century Italian women poets: *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* by Elsa Morante, *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo* and *Il cielo* by Patrizia Cavalli, *Documento (1966-1973)* and *Impromptu* by Amelia Rosselli, and *Il rumore bianco* by Biancamaria Frabotta. This enquiry has revealed a complex entanglement of textual, interpersonal, and historical interactions between these authors and their texts. A complex and almost architectural shroud materialised in front of our eyes: this was loomed with threads that do not connect with the critical myth of 'spontaneismo' or even with the label of 'confessional poetry'. Instead, this investigation has sketched a different kind of landscape – a landscape characterised by unexpected interactions between the works of these four poets, a constant modification of 'de-territorialised' literary traditions, and a domestication of a 'political aim' intrinsic to the many ways Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta gave voice to their lyric subjects.

By looking at existing scholarship, one can easily recognise that there were only two types of studies dedicated to twentieth-century Italian women poets: on the one hand, the monograph focused on one author only which tends to highlight her 'illocality' while also defining her work as an 'exceptional case'. This critical posture managed to produce studies dedicated to a series of *voces clamantes in deserto*, even if the desert was a fictional landscape created by most of literary criticism on these authors. On the other hand, we have encountered studies dedicated to more than one poet but focused on the rendering of certain themes only, following that trend of literary criticism known as 'critica tematica'.[565] According to this posture, one has to read women's writing in relation to the theme of maternity, madness, the subconscious, the fantastic, and the body. Usually, this array of themes is constantly related to a predominance of the body over the mind, as a sort of coping mechanism suffered by a widespread trend in literary

[565] S. Zatti, 'Sulla critica tematica: appunti, riflessioni, esempi', *Allegoria* (Palermo: Palumbo, 2006), n. 52-53, p. 7.

criticism which identifies a causative relationship between gender and its textual expression.

Both approaches are faulty for various reasons: they have facilitated the creation of an unfair – and, sometimes, not even scientific – approach to poetic texts written by women which valued a given set of definitions, labels, and preconceptions completely disconnected from the textual object. Many examples of these critical approaches can be found in the history of Italian literary criticism: from the first critical profiles of Rosselli (Pasolini's 'Notizia su Amelia Rosselli' in *Il Menabò* and Mengaldo's introduction to the poetry of Rosselli in *Poeti italiani del Novecento*) to the recent volume by Carmello on the almost-forgotten poetry by Morante, *La poesia di Elsa Morante*, passing through other monographic studies such as Corsi's *Biancamaria Frabotta: I nodi violati del verso.*

The aim of this thesis is to reconstruct a more complex series of interactions between these four authors by focusing on their texts published in the seventies. For this reason, it was necessary to create a solid and new theoretical structure that can prepare and set out a new act of weaving. The first two chapters, in this sense, respectively function as the *pars destruens* and *pars costruens* of the theoretical approach developed and applied in the subsequent chapters. The first chapter analyses a living myth which concerns the existence of a so-called 'scrittura femminile': this critical posture postulates an equation that keeps together the biological genre of the writer and her stylistic preferences. The label 'scrittura femminile' has been used and interpreted as a shortcut towards the exclusion of Italian women poets from anthologies and the academic debate. A myth must craft its symbols to produce something digestible, durable, and replicable. Within this extremely fertile narrative, 'scrittura femminile' rapidly became a steppingstone on which it was possible to develop a branched-out semantics of exclusion. According to this critical posture and its myths, poetry written by women had two main characteristics that did not make it appealing to literary critics: the absence of

any historical narratives and an intrinsic renounciation to any traditional metrical forms. The first chapter aimed at unravelling these foundational myths related to 'scrittura femminile' by looking at notions such as voice, writing, and otherness.

Developed as the *pars costruens* of this work, the second chapter explored the categories of 'minor literature' and 'minority' as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Kafka: pour une literature mineure* and *Mille Plateux*. This category provides us with a better lexicon to prepare a textual analysis based on qualitative data, such as the system of references, metre and rhythm, and the innovation introduced with regard to some of the key aspects of the lyric genre. On the one hand, the second chapter thus focuses on the 'de-territorialization' of their poetic practice in relation to metrical structures, the structures of the collections, and the presence of textual references that were external to the Italian literary tradition at that time; on the other hand, this chapter concentrates on the recognition of a 'political aim' intrinsic to the intervention on some traditional characteristics of the lyric discourse such as the lyric monologue, the apostrophic address, and the employment of the lyric present. A Deleuzoguattarian approach to the texts has stimulated a dismissal of categories grounded in stable notions of genre and gender. In contrast, an approach such as this can investigate a textual object not only by focusing on its self-contained intricacies but also on the interactions of some of its unorthodox characteristics with other texts and literary traditions in the uncharted territory of 'becoming'. This critical approach has produced a problematisation – and partial dismissal – of the category of 'scrittura femminile'; conversely, it has introduced the notion of 'minority' as a novel way of approaching these texts contextually and in motion.

Drawing on the notion of 'de-territorialization', the third chapter develops a contextual analysis of Morante's *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini* and Cavalli's *Le mie poesie non cambieranno il mondo*. The focus has been put on the two Weilian concepts of 'gravity' and

'grace'. 'Gravity' and 'grace' are used as a filter to analyse some stylistic patterns of these two poetry collections; in so doing, this chapter demonstrates the presence of a well-developed approach to metre and rhythm and an attentive organisation of the macro-structure of *Il mondo salvato* and *Le mie poesie*. The fourth chapter develops a similar analysis of Rosselli's *Documento (1966-73)* and Frabotta's *Il rumore bianco*. On this occasion, the analysis in grounded in the two notions of 'obscurity' and 'clarity' that allow us to follow the path of a 'de-territorialised' approach to microstructure – namely the metrical structures employed by Rosselli and Frabotta – and the macrostructure of the two collections. The two chapters reveals further connections and resonances existing between the four collections: the careful and, sometimes, almost mathematical attention to form; the centrality of repetition, as a trope and as a structural element; the significance of a performative element in their poetic practices; eventually, the presence of an elegiac thread in their writings.

The stylistic analysis carried out in the previous chapters culminates in the last one. The fifth chapter is specifically devoted to the individuation of a 'political aim' in the aforementioned poetry collections, plus two other books published in the seventies: Rosselli's *Impromptu* and Cavalli's *Il cielo*. The scope of politics encompasses the total complex of relationships between people living in a society. With 'political aim', I intended to retrace the attempt to recreate a social dimension of interconnectedness and self-representation performed by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta. Their poetry is, indeed, not limited to the representation of a singular, autarchic, and solipsistic dimension of 'confessional poetry' but it explores the dimension of plurality which, I argue, is intrinsic to any 'political aim'. Within the texts written by Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta, women gain the position of the lyric subject and the possibility to expand their subjectivities towards the dimension of the others, while also holding the mirror of self-representation. Not only this interplay complicates the structures at the

core of the lyric genre, but it ends up enlarging further the boundaries of the lyric subject: the 'I' is often represented as a hyper-feminised 'fanciulla' and, in several cases, as an interconnected 'they'. In this second case, the reader is confronted with the embodiment of an expanded subjectivity, which is no longer determined by the discursive antithesis of genders but by the permeation of one into the other and their encounter with the indistinctiveness and interconnectedness with nature. Within the mechanism of self-representation, the lyric discourse expands its boundaries with the aim of overcoming the dialectical opposition in which the lovers' discourse was grounded.

Overall, this analysis allowed us to identify a movement towards a new kind of lyric subjectivity that not only characterises the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta but is also one of the most interesting traits of recent poetry written by women in Italy. The fifth chapter of this thesis not only proposes to be an aid for the revaluation of a contextual analysis of the poetry of Morante, Rosselli, Cavalli, and Frabotta, but also postulates future lines of enquiry into the work of younger poets such as Patrizia Valduga, Vivian Lamarque, Antonella Anedda, Elisa Biagini, Laura Pugno, Sara Ventroni, Laura Accerboni, Maddalena Bergamin, and Carmen Gallo. This unrecognised revolutionary act has contributed to sketch an idea of women's poetry which is no longer grounded in the notion of otherness but rather in an impulse that points towards 'becoming', difference, and 'expanded subjectivities'.

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