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Two Poems by Amelia Rosselli

Translated by Lucia Re and Diana Thow

Amelia Rosselli (1930–1996) was one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. These poems are taken from the volume *Documento 1966–1973* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976), Rosselli's third and effectively last collection of poetry. In *Documento 1966–1973*, Rosselli changes her style and approach dramatically, striving for a clearer, more communicative and less cryptic diction. In this collection she also uses shorter lines, unconstrained by the rigorous geometric structure of her previous poetry. While the poetry in this volume is in many ways intensely personal, it is also a "document" of the political and sexual turmoil and euphoria of 1968 and its aftermath. Rosselli, who became a member of the Italian Communist party in 1958, working assiduously in the Rome precinct of the PCI near her house in Trastevere, declared in an interview "In *Documento* ... I tried to express problems and articulate possible solutions that are collective... I lived through 1968 staying close to the party and the party's local precinct but also in close contact with various groups in order, among other things, to keep up to date and to develop a political culture for myself ... Stylistically, however, I dislike those who go from politics to literature, trying to use literature to express their political commitment." (Interview with Renato Minore, *Il Messaggero*, February 2, 1984). The use of titles in Rosselli's poetry is very unusual. "Sciopero generale 1969" ("General Strike 1969") refers to the events of the "Hot Autumn" of 1969. A huge wave of strikes, factory and university occupations and demonstrations swept through Italy. In December 1969, the massacre caused by a bomb explosion in a bank at Piazza Fontana, in Milan, led to a roundup of left-wing activists across Italy and marked the beginning of the "strategy of tension" and of a decade of violent confrontations and terror. "Ho venti giorni" ("I have twenty days") conveys a sense of optimism and an urgency that are exceptional in Rosselli's overall production. The poem captures the connection between the personal and the political that was at the heart of the movement of 1968, as well as Rosselli's own intense investment in the power of poetry. In the same interview, Rosselli explains that she wrote the first part of *Documento* until 1970 in a "scoppio d'ispirazione" ("an explosion of inspiration"), but subsequently felt increasingly drained and wordless.

(LR)

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'infischiarvene.

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.)

General Strike 1969

lamps lit to burn and the howl
of a calm daring crowd
find you suddenly involved
in something serious: that is
taking a risk! May this seeming
childishness also kill off my
incapacity to care.

A God hidden within could have been enough
my egoism was not enough for me

it was not enough for these people
to taste the richness of revenge

so soon smothered. We had
to express what was best: give in

to a rhetoric that was a howl
of protest against destruction

fearless in our fearful
houses. (I lost that vertical
love for a solitary god,
revolutionizing myself
in the people, removing
myself from heaven).

Ho venti giorni
per fare una rivoluzione: ho
altri venti giorni dopo la rivoluzione
per conoscermi
mio piccolo diario sentenzioso

Tana per
le fresche menti
le parole,
un pugno
chiuso che le garantisce
la mia più imbattibile ragione d'essere.

Il nemico le strappa le vesti
la felicità è un micro-organismo nell'interno
dell'infelicità

nel cimitero
non sa smettere di essere felice.

I have twenty days
to start a revolution: another
twenty days after the revolution
to get to know myself
my little sententious diary.

Words a
den for
fresh minds,
a raised fist
that guarantees her
my most invincible *raison d'être*.

The enemy tears off her clothes
happiness is a micro-organism inside
unhappiness

in the cemetery
she can't stop being happy.