"Truly worthy to be remembered among the great Italians of this century." Sandro Pertini, President of the Italian Republic, 1983

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli was born into a patriotic Venetian family in 1870, just as the new nation-state of Italy was completing its unification by incorporating Rome as its capital. Her life and work were intimately tied to the political and cultural development of the new nation. As a writer, a woman, and a Jew, her biography offers a unique prism reflecting the often complicated intersection of these categories of existence. Rosselli's writings and life stand as a not-so-subtle critique of gender inequality both within Judaism and secular, bourgeois society. Her accomplishments force us to reevaluate the position Italian women had in the first half of the twentieth century, especially in the context of the Fascist regime (De Grazia 272-288).

Both the Rosselli and Pincherle families had been actively involved in the Risorgimento, the movement for national unification in nineteenth-century Italy. Leone Pincherle, an uncle of Amelia's, was a minister of the Venetian Republic (1848-49) under Daniele Manin. As secular Jews and members of the upper bourgeoisie, the Pincherle enjoyed the liberal outlook of the Venetian city-state and fully participated in the political, cultural, and commercial life of the city. In 1885, the family moved to Rome where the young Amelia met and fell in love with Giuseppe Rosselli, a musicologist. The Rosselli family was originally from Livorno, a major port city on the western coast of Italy, and like the Pincherle had moved to Rome in the wake of national unification. In 1841, while some members of the Rosselli family were residing in London, they met the exiled hero of the Risorgimento, Giuseppe Mazzini. Their stay in England made them Anglophiles (Giuseppe Rosselli was called "Joe" at home while the second son, Carlo, would eventually marry an English woman), and the encounter with Mazzini transformed them into active participants in the struggle for Italian independence. The Rosselli family kept--almost as a sacred relic--a note from Mazzini to Sabatino Rosselli, asking the latter to purchase "fifty sacks of the usual merchandise" (i.e., arms and weapons for the unification movement). Mazzini was to pass the last days of his life with the Rosselli family in Pisa, dying in their home on 10 March 1872.

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli was to become a fervent and jealous guardian of the Risorgimento tradition which she enthusiastically passed on to her three sons as a family legacy. As other Italian Jews, the Rosselli and Pincherle families saw their political, religious, and cultural emancipation as directly tied to the Risorgimento and the Enlightenment, liberating Italy from both the Austrians and the Papal...
authority. Amelia recalled that her parents "belonged to that period that still remained aware of the benefits of the liberation from the ghettos" (Tranfaglia 13). Accordingly, like many other Italian Jews, they supported the constitutional monarchy when it was formed in 1861. Scholars as diverse as Antonio Gramsci and Arnaldo Momigliano have noted that full assimilation of the Italian Jews proceeded apace after unification. Two Italian Jews, Luigi Luzzatti and Sidney Sonnino, became prime ministers, and Jews were promoted and decorated in all ranks of the military, in stark contrast to countries like Imperial Germany or the France of Dreyfus.

After an intense courtship of several years, Giuseppe "Joe" Rosselli and Amelia Pincherle were married on 3 April 1892 and moved to Vienna where Joe continued his studies and career as a musicologist. In July of 1895, Aldo, their first son, was born in the Austrian capital (ironically, he would be killed by the Austrians at the front in World War I). During her marriage Amelia continued writing, and on October 29, 1898 her play Anima was staged at the Gerbino Theater in Turin, garnering national acclaim and winning a literary prize (Tumiati 577). The famed novelist Alberto Moravia, who was Amelia's nephew, recalls his aunt as "severe and sentimental" while uncle Joe was an artist, "a weak man" who may have convinced Amelia that he was as good a musician as Franz Liszt. "The more I love a person," Joe once wrote to Amelia before they were married, "the more they become victims of my musical rages. Imagine what kind of victim you must be!" (Aldo Rosselli 2,19). Unlike Joe, Amelia was able to view the world with stark honesty. Her letters reveal a woman at times serious and assertive, yet sometimes insecure and uncertain, not without traces of puritanism, inflexibility, and calculating shrewdness. For his part, Joe often sought refuge from the demands of their relationship in the complexities of his favorite composers, Liszt, Beethoven and Brahms. Amelia--who did not play an instrument--reluctantly recognized that she might always be second to music in her husband's affections. Yet she still hoped that music might bring them together: Music is something divine and it must be respected as one respects God . . . you are one of the elect, you will allow me to enjoy music, and I will listen and enjoy with you, you will educate me and help me understand and uncover the beauty it encloses like a treasure. O how divine will be those hours that we will spend together in your studio. That will be our sanctuary, te sanctuary of our love (Aldo Rosselli 63). Joe seemed to revel in the role of the carefree yet tormented artist, constantly fleeing Rome or Florence but always sending Amelia flowers from wherever he might happened to be. The young couple was a study in contrasts; revealingly, while Amelia preferred reading Tolstoy, Joe favored Zola. Four years later, the small family returned to Rome where a second son, Carlo, was born in November of 1899; a year later, the third son and last child, Nello, was born in Florence. In 1901, Joe and Amelia separated, ending what had begun, by all accounts, as a great love, leaving indissoluble traces of bitterness that remained until Joe's premature death a decade later. Amelia and her sons enjoyed considerable wealth from their shares in one of Europe's largest mining concerns. And although a temporary but serious financial setback in 1903 forced Amelia and the three boys to move to more modest quarters in Florence, they still lived a privileged life. Their house in Florence conained Biedermeyer furniture, Ming vases, a Steinway piano, Bokara carpets, and a priceless sixteenth-century table. Their marital separation and Joe's early death meant that Amelia was burdened with the upbringing of her three
young sons. Her intelligence, strong-will and independence made her the dominant force in their moral and intellectual development. Sandro Pertini recalled in the last year of his office as President of the Italian Republic that Amelia was "always an exemplary wife, mother, grandmother; a very fine writer, truly worthy to be remembered among the great Italians of this century" (Aldo Rosselli vi).

Amelia's strong personality sometimes worked to the disadvantage of her children. One senses that the two younger sons--Carlo and Nello--both profited and suffered because of their mother's strong will. Writing from prison because of his antifascist activities and meditating on the relationship with his mother, Carlo wrote to her what was at once both a homage and a declaration of his independence, using an allusion to his mother's writings: In real life--like the fictional one of subjects in a novel or the theater--there is always an inevitable separation between the creator and the creation. And the more worthy, noble and pure the labor of the creator, the more will be the autonomous capacity of the creation for life and original development. The great artist is distinguished precisely by the rare privilege of being able to provide for the creation its own initiative and unmistakable life that allows it to evolve on paths other than those marked for it (Epistolario familiare 412). Apparently, the sons spent much of their lives in an intellectual and emotional tug-of-war with their indomitable mother: Aldo, the eldest son, who in Amelia’s opinion, displayed signs of social vanity, snobbery, and overweening pride, was sent to work as an apprentice in the humble shop of a local Florentine carpenter. This incident may have influenced her story "Topinino garzone dibottega" of 1909 in which a wealthy young boy embarks on a personal odyssey discovering the privations, sacrifices, and dignity of another stratum of society. The paternalistic moral of the story--that wealth and privilege impose social responsibilities--was not lost on the three brothers. Family letters reveal a continuous dialogue concerning politics, culture and society. They also demonstrate that the Rosselli brothers developed a strong social conscience at an early age. Another incident reveals how Amelia insisted on seeing the world through the lens of stark realism: Discontent with Carlo’s minimal propensity for a classical humanist education, she made the courageous decision to withdraw him from the ginnasio and enroll him in a local technical school. This was no small decision, considering the fact that traditionally the ginnasio led to higher education and eventually to a "proper" bourgeois career while the technical schools implied a certain social and intellectual inferiority.

Amelia's social demeanor greatly affected the belief-system and behavior of her three sons. A recurring motif of her work was "the social question": the seemingly-intractable problem of poverty and the conflict between different social classes trapped in the defense of their respective interests. In her 1903 collection of novellas, Gente oscura (Obscure People), the protagonists were the working and the non-working poor portrayed in a way that received a sympathetic review in the Socialist daily Avanti!; the reviewer declared that such a depiction of the laboring classes had to have been written by a socialist. However, although Amelia was close to several members of the Italian Socialist Party, she, like other Jewish members, supported the conservative-liberal parliamentary state under the House of Savoy. Yet her ideas would create an active interest in social problems and a sense of duty, obligation, and responsibility in all three sons. The ideals that she passed on to them were the imperative of moral freedom; a modern sensibility
reminiscent of Ibsen, whom she admired; the emancipation of men and women from the hypocritical dictates of convention, and a submission to the dictates of conscience--of the free will striving for, but never actually achieving, perfection (Tranfaglia 16-17). Amelia Rosselli was also active in the cultural life of Florence and familiar with the contemporary political debates. After the death of her first-born son, Aldo, at the Austrian front during the First World War, she established la Casina (the "Little House") for abandoned children and those who had lost fathers in the war. She was among the founders of the Lyceum of Florence as well as the short-lived Associazione Divulgatrice Donne Italiane. The goal of the Association was "to induce the Italian woman to take part in the scientific, social, political, and philosophical development of the nation . . ." (Politica e affetti familiare 135). Amelia counted some of the most important politicians of Italy among her acquaintances. At the Rosselli house in Florence, the family paper was not La Nazione of that city (which supported neutrality in 1914), but Il Corriere della Sera of Milan that advocated intervention in the war on the side of France and Britain. The editor of Il Corriere, Luigi Albertini, vociferously criticized the policies of Giovanni Giolitti, several times prime minister and the dominant power broker from November 1903 until March 1914. It was in this liberal, nationalist, interventionist milieu cultivated by their mother that the Rosselli brothers first became interested in politics. Amelia's nationalism would later become a point of tension with her sons. In 1927, Gioacchino Volpe, official historian of the Fascist regime, published his L'Italia in cammino, a work that Amelia praised in a letter to Carlo. Cynically, he replied: "Scratch, scratch and in mutter [German for "mother"] one always finds a bit of nationalism. . . I am not enthusiastic about [it] . . . it is not really critical nor profound in its synthesis . . ." (Epistolario familiare 355-56).

Nearly a decade later, in 1936, Amelia sent a copy for her grandson John (called "Mirtillino") and suggested to her son and daughter-in-law that they remove the last section of the book on Fascism. Yet her daughter-in-law Marion (an English woman) wrote to Carlo that she found the book without even the slightest critical spirit, written in a tone of nationalistic exaltation. "I do not want 'Mirtillino' to learn the history of Italy in this way" (Carlo Rosselli, Dall'esilio, 213-214). Amelia Rosselli was born--and remained--a secular Jew. Carlo experienced a brief yet significant religious crisis at the tender age of 12 after the death of his father. As Passover approached, he made it known to his mother that he wished to attend the religious ceremonies. Amelia accordingly brought the children to the magnificent synagogue in Florence where, from the women's gallery, she sent down her sons to stand under the talit of their uncle Pellegrino for the family blessing. (Garosci I 20, n. 1). Carlo Rosselli was never a practicing Jew, yet in his writings one can find traces of the ethical impulse of the ancient Hebrew prophets. Indeed, in the Preface to his Liberal Socialism, he explicitly claims that socialists are "the disciples of the prophets." Socialism derived from the "messianism of Israel" which demanded "terrestrial justice" and spurred a "myth of equality." So strong was this "spiritual torment" that it "forbids all indulgence" (Carlo Rosselli, Liberal Socialism 6). After a daring escape from a Fascist prison in 1929, Carlo made his way to Paris and formed the largest and most influential non-Marxist resistance movement, Justice and Liberty. The new movement attracted more than its share of Italian Jews, so many in fact that it became known as the "Jewish antifascist movement." When Sion Segre Amar informed Carlo Levi, a member and author of the classic Christ Stopped at Eboli, of his wish to join the movement,
Levi's response was, "Alas, another Jew" (Zuccotti 28). Carlo Rosselli's famous radio broadcast from Barcelona in 1936 where he was fighting in defence of the Spanish Republic, "Today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy," bears an unmistakable resemblance to the traditional Hebrew Passover Haggadah, "This year here; next year in the land of Israel" (De Felice 91).

Amelia once explained why she and most other Italian Jews supported the liberal monarchy: the new nation-state had opened the gates of the ghetto and permitted Jews to participate in the life of the country. The reactionary restrictions of the Austrians and the Papal States were replaced by tolerance that other Jews in Europe rarely enjoyed. Although this interpretation has recently been challenged by an important work (Gunzberg 1992) and there were many instances of the continuing harassment of Church authorities (Kertzer 1996), it appears that Italian Jews did in fact assimilate to a greater degree than their European counterparts. In her unpublished memoir, Memoriale, she revealed with profound psychological insight the position of her fellow Jews: [We are] Jews, but first and foremost Italians. I, too, born and raised in that profoundly Italian and liberal atmosphere, preserved only the purest essence of my religion, in my heart. There were religious elements of a solely moral character; and this was the only religious education I gave my children (Tranfaglia 13). Amelia could even be an unsparing critic of Judaism as in her letter to Carlo in early 1919 when she regretted the distinction Judaism made among men. She recognized that Judaism's "great characteristic" (monotheism) had not been superseded by any other religion, but that Christianity had added something of comparable importance: equality among humans (Epistolario familiare 91). If there was any religion in the Rosselli home, it was Mazzini's ethical conception of "The Duties of Man." Unfortunately, much research has still to be done concerning the history of Jewish women in Italy. Although there now exists a substantial body of research on Italian Jews, women are conspicuously absent from these works. The most authoritative study, Attilio Milano's Storia degli in Italia, barely mentions a handful of Jewish women as does the important study of Jews under Fascism, Renzo De Felice's Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo .

Zionism could find no place in this spiritual atmosphere. Due to the successful assimilation of Jews into Italian society, Zionism held a distinctly minority position among Italy's Jews. In London during the autumn of 1924, Carlo met Emilio and Enzo Sereni, the former a communist, the latter an ardent Zionist. Although he did not support Zionism, Carlo admired Enzo Sereni; no doubt he recognized a spiritual affinity with the young men and women who were willing to "sacrifice their intellectual and material life for the attainment of an ideal that seems unattainable to me" (Epistolario familiare 235). It was Nello who best articulated how the Rosselli brothers related to their Jewish heritage (Di Porto 499). In a speech at a Zionist conference in 1924 heartily endorsed by his older brother, Nello explained their ambiguous ties to Judaism. Confessing that he did not attend the synagogue on Saturday, that he was ignorant of Hebrew, that he did not support the Zionist cause, and that he did not observe any of the religious practices demanded by his religion, Nello asked, "How can I call myself a Jew?" I call myself a Jew . . . because . . . the monotheistic conscience is indestructible in me . . . because every form of idolatry repels me . . . because I regard with Jewish severity the duties of our lives on earth, and with Jewish serenity the mystery of
life beyond the tomb--because I love all humans as commanded in Israel . . . and I have therefore that social conception that seems to me descends from our best traditions (Zuccotti 246). Clearly their Jewish heritage remained an inseparable coponent of the Rosselli brothers' private and public personae (Formiggini 358).

Amelia Rosselli's plays distinguished her as a Jewish writer. *Anima* (1898) was written as a reply to Giuseppe Giacosa's *The Rights of the Souls* (1894) and criticized both the current fashionable vogue for Platonic love and the manner in which young men developed relationships with women. After a period of "sowing one's oats" with women of "easy virtue," young men then chose some naive girl from a reputable family who could bring a substantial dowry to the marriage. Rosselli instead insisted that a successful marriage be based on mutual respect, common interests, perfect togetherness, and a spiritual understanding of each other's "soul." (Costa-Zalessow 47). Ironically, Rosselli herself failed in the crafting of such a marriage; conscious of this fact, she nevertheless continued writing plays with strong, independent female characters. *Anima* was a daring work for its time: its protagonist, Olga, had been raped as a 15-year-old girl and was now a painter, hardly a respectable profession for a middle-class woman in turn-of-the-century Italy. Olga's counterpart, the model Marietta, was no more successful in her attempt to break the restrictions society had imposed upon women.

A comedy written in the Venetian dialect, *El rèfolo* (A Burst of Wind, 1909) contrasted the melancholic old world, centered on respect and submission to higher authorities, with the new generation, impatient with their parents' world and eager to fight for its human and civil rights. Just before and after World War I, Rosselli wrote two more patriotic plays: *San Marco* (1913) glorified the 1848 uprising in Venice against the Austrians and *Emma Liona* (1924), which cast Lady Hamilton as the persecutor of Italian patriots through her influence over Admiral Nelson at the Neapolitan court. At the dramatic finale of the play, Lady Hamilton, haunted by the figure of the revolutionary Caracciolo who points an accusatory finger at her, collapses in desperation and madness (Costa-Zalessow 47). Although cast in a negative light, it is clearly Lady Hamilton who is the protagonist of history in Rosselli's play and not Admiral Nelson. Central to all her work was a belief in the independence of the individual, including women. Marina Calloni has suggested that Amelia's contact with the Viennese avant-garde, as well as her participation in an international network of women in exile, contributed to this position. The independence of the individual led, inexorably, to the complexity of human relations, an unbridgeable gulf between individuals, and the incomprehension between social classes and generations (*Politica e affetti familiare*, 124, 133). As Monica Miniati has shown, this was one of the motifs of the Jewish press, as it reported the religious emancipation of the Jews along with the social emancipation of women in the period between the Italian unification and the First World War. (Miniati 231). Besides her playwrighting, Amelia Rosselli worked as a translator and publisher of children's tales. As director of a special collection for the prestigious Florentine publishing house, *Le Monnier*, she drafted a statement outlining her vision for children's books. The collection was intended to enlarge a child's vision of both the external and the spiritual world, reflecting life in its bewildering complexity. These books were to teach and instruct children how to love the small, everyday things in life. They were to address social and
cultural problems as well as more intimate themes of the home, childhood, and "feminine life" through the novel, novellas, and biographies. Biographies in particular were useful to study character and an "understanding of the soul." The problems of contemporary young women were especially pressing: "It is women's destiny to be called to live within and outside the home in a multi-dimensional life," and this collection of books would enable them to participate fully in the many new opportunities opening up in the new society.

With the rise of Fascism, Amelia could no longer continue to write, both for personal and political reasons. For her, literature, culture and political commitment were inexorably intertwined and the Fascist regime's vision of women was an insupportable affront to her. But the regime would extract a more terrible price from Amelia Rosselli than simply being unable to write. Carlo and Nello Rosselli were assassinated in 1937 for their role in the antifascist Resistance. Sandro Pertini wrote that Amelia emerged from the awful event "like the heroine of a Corneille tragedy." Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, who collected and edited the letters of Amelia and her sons, wrote that she was "the strong link" in the family (Epistolario familiare xxxv). The Rosselli families spent the next decade in exile. In 1940, the same year that Marshall Pétain pardoned those responsible for the assassinations in France, Carlo's and Nello's widows and seven children fled to New York. They were all shepherded by Amelia, now in her mid-seventies and still fiercely proud of her sons. After the war, Amelia returned to Italy where she died in 1954. In a bitter postscript to her life, a granddaughter, Amelia Rosselli (second child of Carlo), suffered a nervous breakdown as a young girl on the death of her mother, Marion. Although the younger Amelia also gained recognition as a writer (she was a major avant-garde poet), she suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and eventually committed suicide in 1996 by throwing herself from her apartment window in Rome. Hauntingly, her grandmother's play of 1906, L'idea fissa (The Fixed Idea) concerns a protagonist who has a dual personality and eventually commits suicide by throwing himself from a window.

Recent studies in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, and women's studies have shed new light on the role of women in twentieth-century Italy. Amelia Rosselli represents a challenge to the traditional conception of Italy as a predominantly patriarchal society; closer to the truth might be the patriarchal/matrilocal dichotomy in which the male plays the role of dominant authority outside the home in the public sphere while the mother retains power over familial relations, especially the children. Yet even this model fails to acknowledge the tremendous complexity present in the personality of Amelia Rosselli. During the Fascist regime, women were portrayed as torn between at least three competing models: the Catholic (first virgin, then saintly mother); the Fascist ("war is to man what maternity is to woman"); and the newly-emergent consumer culture ("you are what you buy"). After the war, important advances for women were accepted into the Constitution of the new Italian Republic, yet until recently, a husband in some parts of the country could be acquitted for murdering his adulterous wife in order to "protect his honor." Amelia Rosselli was an important figure in the cultural life of early twentieth-century Italy. As a Jewish writer, she created new paradigms and through her plays induced a reconsideration of the role of woman in contemporary Italian society.
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