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MANUELE GRAGNOLATI 

## Differently Queer

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## DIFFERENTLY QUEER

Temporality, Aesthetics, and Sexuality in Pier Paolo Pasolini's  
*Petrolio* and Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*

Manuele Gragnolati\*

This article explores the relationship between temporality, aesthetics, and sexuality in the final novels by two twentieth-century Italian authors who were also intimate friends: Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolio* (1972–75) and Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli* (1982). Both novels mobilize a form of temporality that resists a sense of linear and teleological development and that instead appears contorted, inverted, suspended and thereby allows for the articulation of queer desires and pleasures that cannot be inscribed in normative logics of completion, progression, or productivity. In this article I am interested to discuss how the aesthetics of both Pasolini's and Morante's novels replicate the movement of queer subjectivity but how they do so differently.

I will begin with *Petrolio*, Pasolini's unfinished *magnum opus* on which he had been working for some years when he was killed in November 1975. *Petrolio* was meant to be a 2,000-page novel in the form of a critical edition of a text composed of fragments from several manuscripts and put together by a fictional editor, who would have filled the gaps with historical documents like interviews, newspaper excerpts, and other documentary material. It would have also con-

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tained materials such as letters, songs, and even illustrations. What we have extant is a text of approximately 500 pages that was published for the first time in 1992 and has the form of a magmatic accumulation of fragments called *Appunti* ('Notes').<sup>1</sup> It intertwines the vicissitudes of the protagonist — the engineer Carlo, who from the beginning is split into two halves: Carlo di Polis and Carlo di Tetis — with, on the one hand, the political and economic history of Italy in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and, on the other, a disparate series of digressions that are often metanarrative and metaliterary. As the novel itself indicates, the course of narration is chaotic and swirly (*'a brulichio'*) rather than linear and progressive (*'a schidionata'*) and aims at inducing a feeling of disorientation in the reader.<sup>2</sup> The phrase *'a brulichio'* refers to the chaotic and irregular movement of bees, while *'a schidionata'* refers instead to the progressive logic of cause and effect represented by the *'schidione'* (the long metal skewer used for the shish kebab).

In my book *Amor che move*, I read the form of *Petrolio*, or rather the lack of it, together with *La Divina Mimesis*, Pasolini's work that is most explicitly modelled upon Dante's *Comedy*.<sup>3</sup> This reading showed that *La Divina Mimesis* and *Petrolio* destroy the modern sense of authorship that arguably began with Dante. In particular, I maintained that *La Divina Mimesis* does so by staging its own failure, while *Petrolio* does so through a type of textuality consistent with what Pasolini in the *Divina Mimesis* called *'dilatazione'* and defined in the following way: 'Asimmetria, sproporzione, legge dell'irregolarità programmata, irrisione della coesività, introduzione teppistica dell'arbitrario' ('Asymmetry, disproportion, the law of planned irregularity, derision of cohesiveness, the thuggish introduction of the arbitrary').<sup>4</sup> In other words, *Divina Mimesis* performs failure, while *Petrolio* performs 'dilation'.<sup>5</sup>

Here I will mention two episodes in which the double protagonist of *Petrolio*, Carlo, transformed into a woman, has sexual intercourse with *lumpenproletariat* boys, because these episodes offer a meditation on a particular declination of queer sexuality. I agree with Rebecca West that the protagonist's transformation into a woman, which occurs twice, does not imply any real opening towards a sexed alterity,<sup>6</sup> and I rather take it as an allegory for homosexual relations.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the protagonist is always referred to grammatically as male, and both episodes seem to remain bounded within an entirely male universe. In particular, the two long episodes insist on the details of Carlo's sexual relationships with his partners and describe a masochistic submission, which

shatters subjectivity and is experienced as a liberation from consciousness and history.

The first episode ('Il pratone della Casilina') describes in detail Carlo's numerous sexual experiences with a series of boys from the outskirts of Rome, to whom the obedient and humiliated protagonist repeatedly submits with 'the desire for depravity, for obscenity, for excess' ('voglia della bassezza, dell'oscenità, dell'eccesso').<sup>8</sup> This veritable rhetorical and sexual *tour de force* conveys an almost sacral fascination for the subproletarian boys' sexual organs and for a world radically different from the protagonist's own, as is made clear in the following excerpt from the description of the last intercourse:

Non amava Pietro solo per quel gigantesco pezzo di carne che aveva in bocca, liscio e duro [...] con quel loro calore, quel loro odore, e quel tanto di livido, quasi abietto — cioè di non innocentemente animalesco — che trasudavano. Egli amava quel ragazzo anche per quello che non gli dava e non poteva dargli [...]. [T]utto questo [...] era [...] simbolo di una profonda diversità sociale, il mondo dell'altra classe, che era quasi il mondo di un'altra vita.<sup>9</sup>

He did not love Pietro only for that gigantic piece of flesh that he had in his mouth, smooth and hard [...] with their heat, their odour, and that lividness, almost abjectness — that is, something not innocently animal — which oozed out. He loved that boy also for what he did not give him and could not give him [...]. [A]ll this [...] was [...] the symbol of a profound social difference: the world of the other class, which was almost the world of another life.<sup>10</sup>

The second of these episodes, 'Carmelo: la sua disponibilità e la sua dissoluzione', describes the protagonist's relationship with the Sicilian waiter Carmelo. A short passage gives a sense of the dimension of sacred ritual with which the protagonist undertakes his masochistic submission, experienced as a possibility to have access to the reality of the 'other' and to forget one's own history:

Se la pressione sulla mano era stata sconvolgente, quasi paralizzante — come quella di un padrone sulla bestia ammansita — la pressione sulla nuca fece quasi perdere i sensi a Carlo. Cosa voleva quella mano, larga e massiccia, posata sulla sua delicata nuca di borghese che era sempre stato debole e reso ridicolo davanti a se stesso dai suoi complessi e dai suoi doveri? Tutta la sua storia non esisteva più: la forza di un corpo

esercitata con tanta prepotente delicatezza su di lui attraverso quel palmo di una mano callosa, riduceva anche lui a un corpo.<sup>11</sup>

If the pressure on his hand had been disturbing, almost paralyzing — like that of a master on the domesticated animal — the pressure on his neck was nearly enough to make Carlo lose his sense. What did that broad, massive hand want, resting on the delicate neck of a man of the bourgeoisie who had always been weak, had always seemed absurd to himself because of his complexes and his obligations. It was as if his entire history no longer existed; the force of a body exerted on him with so much overpowering delicacy by that callused palm reduced him to a body as well.<sup>12</sup>

As explained in *Petrolio's* Appunto 65, 'Confidenze col lettore', the value of sexual experience consists in its passive form of obedience and degradation, which frees oneself from the feeling of possession and power. Indeed, the Appunto establishes a link between sexuality, economics, and ethics, distinguishing between the act of possessing, symbolised by the penis, and that of being possessed, and also identifying possession with Power and Evil and being possessed with the only possibility of Good:

Chi è posseduto perde la coscienza della forma del pene, della sua completezza limitata, e lo sente come un mezzo infinito e informe, attraverso cui Qualcosa o Qualcuno si impadronisce di lui, lo riduce a possesso, a un nulla che non ha altra volontà che quella di perdersi in quella diversa Volontà che lo annulla. [...] D'altra parte è fuori discussione che il Possesso è un Male, anzi, per definizione, è IL Male: quindi l'essere posseduti è ciò che è più lontano dal Male, o meglio, è l'unica esperienza possibile del Bene, come Grazia, vita allo stato puro, cosmico.<sup>13</sup>

The one who is possessed loses consciousness of the shape of the penis, of its limited wholeness, and feels it as an infinite and formless means by which Something or Someone takes possession of him, reduces him to a possession, to a nothing that has no will except to be lost in that different Will which /annihilates him/. [...] On the other hand, it is beyond dispute that the Possessor is an Evil, in fact is, by definition, the Evil; therefore, being possessed is what is farthest from Evil or, rather, is the only possible experience of the Good as Grace, life in its pure, cosmic state.<sup>14</sup>

While, then, *Petrolio* makes explicit the fascination with a passive sexuality of a masochistic type that allows one to be liberated from the

sense of power and possession that Pasolini loathed so much, it also clarifies the connection between sexuality, ethics, and aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> As Appunto 99 points out, the traditional construction of a novel around the function of the narrator corresponds to an organisation of reality that implies an effort to take possession of it, and this desire for possession, although it takes place on the cognitive or expressive plain, is always an act of brutality and violence, as it necessarily occurs with every possession and conquest.<sup>16</sup>

These reflections suggest that *Petrolio*'s 'openness' and anarchical opposition to traditional literary conventions are bound to a specific form of sexuality. In particular, my hypothesis, which draws on the concept of aesthetics that Leo Bersani has developed with respect to Sigmund Freud's seminal texts *The Three Essays on Sexuality* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is that *Petrolio* does not simply describe scenes of masochism but also replicates through its aesthetic choices a form of sexuality grounded in a paradoxical kind of pleasure. In this respect, I find particularly interesting Bersani's reformulation of the concept of 'artistic sublimation' as the possibility not of purifying or transcending desire but, on the contrary, of extending it to the movement of the text, thereby expressing, enacting, and making the reader experience sexuality, which for Bersani is masochistic in its ontological state and not domesticated yet according to the normative, teleological model of sexual reproduction usually considered as 'normal' and non-pathological.<sup>17</sup>

Both *La Divina Mimesis* and *Petrolio* undo the form of the traditional novel, and by undoing it, they open it up to the articulation of nonlinear and non-domesticated pleasures and replicate the longed-for shattering of a subjectivity with boundaries that are otherwise experienced as too well-defined. In both *La Divina Mimesis* and *Petrolio*, linearity and progress coincide with the monstrous form of bourgeois power and represent everything that these texts seek to resist, either by accumulating all the layers of the past without ever arriving at a synthesis (*La Divina Mimesis*) or by expanding temporality endlessly (*Petrolio*), and in both cases contesting any teleological idea of the future or futurity. *Petrolio* makes it indeed explicit that the idea itself of future has become ridiculous: 'L'idea della speranza nel futuro diventa un'idea irresistibilmente comica' ('The idea of hope for the future becomes irresistibly comic').<sup>18</sup> In this respect, the novel resonates with the reformulation of queer given by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and*

*the Death Drive* — that is, a position resisting (hetero)normative and progressive linearity in favour of repetition, negativity, and the death drive.<sup>19</sup> One could advance the hypothesis that *Petrolino*, which claims not to have a beginning, does not end either. Indeed, it refutes any form of teleology and proceeds chaotically or ‘*a brulichio*’, mobilizing a textuality that replicates the dissolution of a subjectivity based on the hegemony of the ego and reproduces its transformation into a mobile surface without memory and without history.

If this is the position expressed in Pasolini’s texts, that of Elsa Morante’s last novel *Aracoeli* is in many regards quite similar, but it also presents significant differences. It has been often acknowledged that Pasolini is an important reference in Morante’s *Aracoeli*. Some traits of Manuele, the protagonist, are modelled upon those of Pasolini himself, such as the feeling of guilt for being bourgeois or his unrequited love of young, often heterosexual, men.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of whether Morante drew directly from Pasolini in constructing her protagonist, Manuele’s sexuality exhibits some peculiarities that resonate with those of Carlo, *Petrolino*’s protagonist — but they take on a different meaning. I am referring in particular to Manuele’s masochistic fantasies of a humiliating relationship with younger boys who despise him:

Erano tutti adolescenti e, per lo più, amanti delle donne. [...] Da loro, non potevo aspettarmi amore, né l’ultima, desiata piaga. La massima grazia che potevano, essi, concedermi, era di lasciarsi succhiare da me. A pagamento. Loro, simili a statue regali. Io, come fossero santi, in ginocchio ai loro piedi. E la mia pupilla, al berli, si velava, nello sguardo adorante e assonnato che ha l’infante allattato dalla madre.<sup>21</sup>

They were all adolescent and, for the most part, lovers of women. [...] From them I could not expect love, nor the final, desired wound. The maximum grace they could grant me was to let themselves be sucked by me. For money. They, like regal statues. I keeling at their feet as if they were saints. And my eye, at their taunts, became veiled, in that adoring and sleepy gaze of an infant, nursed by its mother.<sup>22</sup>

While Carlo’s sexual experiences aims at dissolution of the self, Manuele’s fantasies point back to his relationship with his mother, and indeed, much of the novel revolves around this relationship. In a series of articles on *Aracoeli* that I have written with philosopher of language Sara Fortuna, we relate the central image of the baby suckling at the mother’s breast to a particular concept of linguistic subjectivity.<sup>23</sup> In

particular, we read the novel by focussing on the maternal and corporeal language learned at Totetaco. (This is what little Manuele calls Montesacro, the Roman neighbourhood where he spent the first four years of his life in a magical symbiosis with his mother.) In the novel, this language appears always in stark binary opposition with the disciplinary and patriarchal language of *I Quartieri Alti*, the high-bourgeois district of Parioli, where Manuele and his mother Aracoeli move in order to live with the Navy officer Eugenio, Aracoeli's husband and Manuele's father.

Totetaco represents the Edenic and fluid world of early infancy, which *Aracoeli* reconstructs with the same luminous intensity of Morante's previous novels, emphasising in particular the linguistic freedom of the joyous and enchanted relationship between mother and child:

Se un cane si affacciava col muso al nostro cancello, essa mi chiamava festante: 'Mira que bonito!' E quando passava un gregge di pecore, o un volo di storni: 'Mira! Mira! belli!' A tutte le ore, capitava sempre qualche bellezza di passaggio, da mirar. Ma le bellezze più belle, chi le teneva? Io! Dal naso gli orecchi al culillo alle dita dei piedi, non c'era luogo del mio corpo che lei non giudicasse perfetto. E tanto le piacevo, che a volte tra i suoi baci schioccanti mi dava dei morsetti innocui, dicendo che mi mangiava, e decantando i miei vari sapori. Le guance: manzane. Le cosce: pane fresco. I capelli: grappoletti de uvas. A guardare i miei occhi, poi, s'insuperbiva, come a un segnale gaudioso del suo grande sposalizio esotico:

los ojos azules  
la cara morena.<sup>24</sup>

If a dog stuck his nose inside our gate, she would call me, festively: 'Mira! Qué bonito!' And when a flock of sheep went by or a flight of starlings: 'Mira! Mira! Beautiful!' At every hour, some passing beauty always turned up for us to *mirar*. But the most beautiful beauties — who was their possessor? I was! From nose to ears to little behind to toes, there was no part of my body that she didn't consider perfect. And I so pleased her that at times, between her smacking kisses, she would give me harmless little nips, saying she was eating me, and extolling my various tastes. My cheeks: *manzanas*. My thighs: fresh bread. Hair: little bunches of *uvas*. When she looked into my eyes, then she turned proud, as if a joyous signal of her exotic marriage:

los ojos azules  
la cara morena.<sup>25</sup>



Totetaco represents a moment of corporeal fullness without divisions or rules and also manifests itself in little Manuele's androgyny:

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.<sup>26</sup>

For me, precise boundaries didn't exist between unity and its multiples, just as the form 'I' was not yet clearly distinguished from the 'you' or any other, nor were the sexes distinct. For the whole Totetaco period, I had no notion of being male, or one who could never become a woman, like Aracoeli.<sup>27</sup>

Gender categories are not yet activated at Totetaco, and Manuele has not yet been inserted within an order that forces him to assume either one in a process of normativization that acts above all on the body.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Totetaco's maternal space, which is fluid, affective, and corporeal, the paternal space of *I Quartieri Alti* is characterized by a normative order of prohibitions and hierarchies, which is introduced in the novel by the notice placed in the elevator of the new elegant building:

PORTATA: PERSONE 4

CHI SI SERVE DELL'ASCENSORE LO FA A SUO RISCHIO E PERICOLO.

L'USO DELL'ASCENSORE È VIETATO AI CANI AL PERSONALE DI SERVIZIO AI FORNITORI AI BAMBINI NON ACCOMPAGNATI E A TUTTE LE PERSONE CHE NON CONOSCONO LA MANOVRA.<sup>29</sup>

CAPACITY: 4 PERSONS

ANYONE USING THE ELEVATOR DOES SO AT HIS OWN RISK.

USE OF THE ELEVATOR IS FORBIDDEN TO DOGS, SERVANTS, DELIVERY BOYS, CHILDREN NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ADULTS AND ALL PERSONS UNFAMILIAR WITH ITS OPERATION.<sup>30</sup>

While Totetaco's unstructured mixture of Spanish and Italian, learnt by the child spontaneously and playfully through an affective and corporeal relationship with the mother, is the symbol of Totetaco's fluidity, 'pure' Italian, in particular the Italian promulgated by Fascism, which is the language that Manuele is now forced to speak (to the extent that

he will completely forget any knowledge of Spanish), is the symbol of the new order, according to which the paradigmatic subject is a male adult belonging to the dominating class and to its norm. (Carlo, the protagonist of *Petrolio*, is this kind of subject.)

Referring to Julia Kristeva's meditation on the relationship between language-learning and the development of subjectivity, Fortuna and I have argued that the language of Totetaco can be thought of as a language that has not lost the 'semiotic *chora*' (which for Kristeva designates a pre- or proto-linguistic mode of signification that takes place in the body and is connected with the experience of the child suckling at the mother's breast), while the language of *I Quartieri Alti* is presented as a fully symbolic language that has followed what Kristeva calls the 'thetic break' — which begins with the mirror stage and is fully realized with the threat of castration in the Oedipal phase — and has therefore lost any trace of the 'semiotic' component.<sup>31</sup>

Neither Aracoeli nor Manuele manage to adapt to the symbolic order of *I Quartieri Alti*, and as the mother finally (and tragically) resists the discipline that attempts to transform her into a lady — '*il tirocinio da signora*' imposed by Zia Monda<sup>32</sup> — so it is repeated several times that the son never develops a fully Oedipal subjectivity. For instance, when during the 'trial' *a più voci* the hypothesis is made that Manuele's case is part of the common Oedipal scheme, the Defense replies, 'Riscattare nei soliti schemi d'obbligo sembra, qui, essere fuori luogo. Il nostro caso non si adatta a nessuno schema prefisso.' ('Recurring to the usual cut-and-dried patterns seems to me out of place here. Our case does not fit into any pre-established pattern.').<sup>33</sup> And while describing the unconditional love between Aracoeli and Eugenio, Manuele stresses that he has never known envy for his father:

Nessuna minaccia per me, da lui [...]. Fra me e lui, corse subito — in luogo dell'affetto carnale — una silenziosa concordanza: forse anche in virtù della nostra comune passione per Aracoeli. È certo che il nostro amore grande, esclusivo per la stessa donna era fra noi due motivo di riconoscenza, piuttosto che di contesa [...]. Quanto a me, nella mia incompetenza riguardo ai titoli di padre e di sposo, a me bastava che questi titoli contassero per Aracoeli e che questo mio padre, e suo sposo, a lei portasse onori e felicità. Ripercorrendo del resto, il mio passato, io mi convinco di non aver mai conosciuto, fino in fondo, la vera tragedia della gelosia.<sup>34</sup>

No threat to me from him [...]. Between me and him there sprang up at once — instead of carnal affection — a silent accord, perhaps owing to our common passion for Aracoeli. It is certain that our great love for the same woman was a source of recognition between us rather than of rivalry [...]. As for me, in my lack of expertise regarding the categories of father and husband, I was content to know that those titles mattered to Aracoeli and that this father of mine, and husband of hers, brought her honors and happiness. For that matter, as I review my past, I am convinced I have never known, profoundly, the true tragedy of jealousy.<sup>35</sup>

In our reading of the novel, the protagonist's trip to Andalusia in search of his lost mother allows for the re-emergence of a memorial substratum, which is explicitly deemed the only practicable form of a 'carnal resurrection of the dead':

La tentazione del viaggio mi aveva invaso recentemente con la voce stessa di mia madre. Non è stata una trascrizione astratta della memoria a restituirmi le sue primissime canzoncine, già seppellite; ma proprio la voce fisica di lei, col suo sapore tenero di gola e di saliva. Ho riavuto sul palato la sensazione della sua pelle, che odorava di prugna fresca; e la notte in questo freddo milanese, ho avvertito il suo fiato ancora di bambina, come un velo di tepore ingenuo sulle mie palpebre invecchiate. Non so come gli scienziati spieghino l'esistenza, dentro la nostra materia corporale, di questi altri organi di senso occulti, senza corpo visibile, e segregati dagli oggetti; ma pur capaci di udire, di vedere e di ogni sensazione della natura, e anche di altre. Si direbbero forniti di antenne e scandagli. Agiscono in una zona esclusa dallo spazio, però di movimento illimitato. E là in quella zona si avvera (almeno finché noi viviamo) la resurrezione carnale dei morti.<sup>36</sup>

The temptation of the journey had possessed me of late with the very voice of my mother. It was not an abstract transcription of memory that brought me back her earliest little songs, formerly buried, but her real, bodily voice, with its tender savor of throat and saliva. I felt again on my palate the sensation of her skin, which smelled of fresh plum; and, at night, in this Milanese cold, I sensed her still-girlish breath, like a skim of ingenuous warmth on my aged eyelids. I don't know how scientists explain the existence, inside our corporeal matter, of these other, hidden organs of feeling, without visible body, segregated from objects, and yet capable of hearing, seeing, and every natural sensation, and others as well. You would say they are equipped with antennae and sounding-lines. They operate in a field cut off from space, but of unlimited move-

ment. And in that zone there takes place (at least as long as we live) the carnal resurrection of the dead.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the journey, the protagonist recovers bodily memory and an aggregate of sensations long since lost: the 'semiotic' dimension of subjectivity is thereby retrieved, and Manuele is granted the possibility of overcoming his obsessive tendency to interpret reality through exclusively rational grids.

Contrary to Manuele's previous experiences, which are symptoms of his condition as a melancholic subject, the journey enhances a veritable re-elaboration of the suffered loss and allows him to move to a further stage, which coincides with the recovery of the Spanish language and the fluid categories that it carries. This is how Fortuna and I read the protagonist's final encounter with the ghost of his dead mother, which represents both a retrieval of the past and a transformation of the way to relate to this past, granting him the possibility of getting rid of the inclination always to define (negatively) his own life and to see it obsessively under the aspects of not being loved and of being abandoned.

The sign that the protagonist's final encounter with the mother opens up the possibility of change is represented by what follows in the novel, that is, his retroactive discovery of the love for his father Eugenio and (arguably) for himself, which has been described as a 'queer happy end'.<sup>38</sup> This return to the father is very different from a return to the (hetero)normative world of *I Quartieri Alti* and takes place only after Eugenio has deserted from the Navy and is in an abject position, symbolized by his addiction to alcohol. Moreover, Manuele's retroactive discovery of his love for Eugenio is only possible after the re-emergence of the Spanish language, which in Manuele's specific case, means the possibility of thinking and therefore experiencing the world in a fluid manner, free from the normative violence of the symbolic order. What I find especially interesting is that the development staged in the novel does not correspond to an overcoming of the non-Oedipal position of which everybody, including himself, has constantly accused the protagonist but rather to the proposal of the possibility of further elaborating and developing a corporeal and fluid non-Oedipal — but not necessarily pre-linguistic — subjectivity.<sup>39</sup>

I would like to conclude by proposing that, as for *Petrolio*, so for *Aracoeli* one could imagine a kind of 'artistic sublimation' à la Bersani

that replicates the movement of sexuality: on the one hand, the multi-lingual texture of Morante's novel can be thought of as corresponding to a sort of Kristevan 'revolution of poetic language' that allows the semiotic component of language to re-emerge. With respect to this, Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo has aptly stated that Spanish constantly emerges on the surface in *Aracoeli*, and with the sound of its formulae and songs, it 'almost weakens the rational structures of Italian and makes it invertebrate' ('quasi fiacca le strutture razionali dell'italiano stesso, e lo rende invertebrato'),<sup>40</sup> as though the reactivation of the semiotic *chora* shakes the rigidity and hierarchies of the symbolic order, reinterpreting it and recreating it anew.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, the linguistic operation of the novel corresponds to its narrative structure, and the definition of 'forma senza forma' ('form without form'), used to describe *Aracoeli*'s final apparition,<sup>42</sup> can be taken as an appropriate definition of the novel itself. In other terms, not only language but the whole novel is 'invertebrate': a revolution of poetic language also occurs at the level of the narrative structure, which is fragmented, distorted, and destabilizing in its continual interruptions and inversions of genres, rhythms, and perspectives. The text continually repeats itself, transforms itself, turns into itself. All boundaries — generic, temporal, linguistic, subjective — are lost, and so are the norms and directions. It is a fluidifying and integrative operation that replicates the movement of a polymorphously perverse sexuality that is endorsed in its non-binary, non-teleological, and non-normative character.<sup>43</sup>

Through its qualities of repetition, retrospection, and inversion, *Aracoeli*'s textuality also mobilizes a multifarious, twisted, and suspended temporality, which interrupts any sense of linear progression and instead often inverts its course and goes backwards. However, unlike Pasolini's *La Divina Mimesis* and *Petrolio*, *Aracoeli*'s narrative holds together and even deploys a sort of conclusion, but it is — again — a queer conclusion: not only left open but also turned over and reversed. That of *Aracoeli* is a conclusion that occurs in a magmatic time, carefully suspended between present/past and past/present and in which the progress of time coexists with its suspension. If both Pasolini's texts and Morante's *Aracoeli* therefore perform acts of resistance through the nonlinear forms of their textuality and thereby propose a queer subjectivity, they do so in different ways and deploy different strategies pertaining to the genre of the novel. The fragmented move-

ment of Pasolini's textuality corresponds to a post-Oedipal and fully formed subject who wants to shatter and annihilate himself by replicating the paradoxical pleasure of non-domesticated sexuality. The position performed in *Aracoeli*, instead, is that of never adapting to the symbolic order. The poetic operation of the novel consists in the staging of an interior journey, backwards through memory and the body, towards an acceptance of the partiality and fluidity of an inter-subjectivity that is always in the process of becoming.

## NOTES

- 1 Although critics' opinion differs in this matter, I agree with Carla Benedetti and Maria Antonietta Grignani, who think that the form given to *Petrolio*'s unfinished text corresponds to the one originally planned by Pasolini: Carla Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino. Per una letteratura impura* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), p. 159; Maria Antonietta Grignani, 'Questione di stile', in *A partire da Petrolio. Pasolini interroga la letteratura*, ed. by Carla Benedetti and Maria Antonietta Grignani (Ravenna: Longo, 1995), pp. 137–38. Benedetti and Grignani refer to the first edition of *Petrolio* edited by Maria Careri, Graziella Chiarcossi, and Aurelio Roncaglia (Turin: Einaudi, 1992). On the differences between this edition and that by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, which I use and from which I quote, see Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, 'Note e notizie sui testi', in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), II, pp. 1993–96. Translations here are taken from Pasolini, *Petrolio*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Pantheon, 1997), which is also based on the edition by Careri, Chiarcossi, and Roncaglia.
- 2 *Petrolio*, ed. by Siti and De Laude (hereafter '*Petrolio*'), p. 1275.
- 3 Manuele Gagnolati, *Amor che move. Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: ilSaggiatore, 2013).
- 4 I quote the text of *La Divina Mimesis* from Pasolini, *Romanzi e racconti*, II, p. 1090. All translations from *La Divina Mimesis* are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 5 Cf. chapters 2 ('Rifare e disfare Dante. Dalla *Mortaccia* alla *Divina Mimesis*') and 3 ('Una performance queer. *Petrolio* e l'orgoglio del fallimento') of Gagnolati, *Amor che move*, pp. 35–50 and 51–67; and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini's Queer Performance: *La Divina Mimesis* between Dante and *Petrolio*', in *Corpus xxx: Pasolini, Petrolio, Salò*, ed. by Davide Messina (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 134–64.
- 6 Rebecca West, 'Da *Petrolio* a Celati', in *A partire da Petrolio*, ed. by Benedetti and Grignani, pp. 39–50.
- 7 See also the recent analysis by Daniele Donnarumma, 'Metamorfosi e nascondimenti. Pasolini e l'omosessualità in *Petrolio*', in *Inquietudini queer: desiderio*,

- performance, scrittura*, ed. by Saveria Chemotti and Davide Susanetti (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2012), pp. 293–321.
- 8 *Petrolio*, p. 1415 [Goldstein trans., p. 178].
- 9 *Petrolio*, p. 1435.
- 10 *Petrolio*, Goldstein trans., pp. 193–94.
- 11 *Petrolio*, p. 1509.
- 12 *Petrolio*, Goldstein trans., p. 247.
- 13 *Petrolio*, pp. 1552–53.
- 14 *Petrolio*, Goldstein trans., pp. 278–79.
- 15 On the connection between sexuality and writing in *Petrolio*, cf. especially Massimo Fusillo, ‘Il protagonista androgino: metamorfosi e ruoli sessuali in *Petrolio*’, in *Progetto Petrolio. Una giornata di studi sul romanzo incompiuto di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, ed. by Paolo Salerno (Bologna: CLUEB, 2006), pp. 90–95; but also Rino Genovese, ‘Manifesto per *Petrolio*’, in *A partire da Petrolio*, ed. by Benedetti and Grignani, pp. 79–92; David Ward, *A Poetic of Resistance: Narrative and the Writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), pp. 101–14; Deborah Amberson, ‘Masochism and Its Discontents: From Franciscan Orgies to Schreberian Unmannings of Putrescence in Pasolini’s *Petrolio*’, *The Italianist*, 30.3 (2010), pp. 374–94. On the relationship between homosexuality and deviation from the traditional form of the novel, see Sergio Parussa, *L’eros onnipotente. Erotismo, letteratura e impegno nell’opera di Pier Paolo Pasolini e Jean Genet* (Turin: Tirrenia, 2003), pp. 51–65. On Pasolini’s frequent assertion of his irreducible distance from power and hate for it, see Massimiliano Nicoli, ‘L’innocenza del potere. Una riflessione su *Petrolio*’, *aut aut*, 345 (2010), pp. 99–115, especially pp. 112–15. With respect to the relationship between politics and sexuality, see also Francesca Cadel, ‘Politics and Sexuality in Pasolini’s *Petrolio*’, in *The Power of Disturbance: Elsa Morante’s “Aracoeli”*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Sara Fortuna (Oxford: Legenda, 2009), pp. 107–17.
- 16 *Petrolio*, p. 1679. See Gragnolati, ‘Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Queer Performance’, p. 155.
- 17 Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 47–50.
- 18 *Petrolio*, p. 1651 [Goldstein trans., p. 343]. On the significance of the comic register and of laughter in *Petrolio*, see Cadel, ‘Politics and Sexuality’, pp. 107–17; Marco Antonio Bazzocchi, ‘Baubò: la scena comica dell’ultimo Pasolini’, in *Corpus xxx*, pp. 13–28; Gragnolati, *Amor che move*, pp. 64–65; and Christoph E.E. Holzhey, ‘Recantation without Conversion: Desire, Mimesis, and the Paradox of Engagement in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Petrolio*’, in *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), pp. 233–52.
- 19 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC:

- Duke University Press, 2004). See chapter 3 of my book *Amor che move* for a discussion of the new kind of *impegno* that such a queer position entails.
- 20 See Walter Siti, 'Elsa Morante and Pasolini', in *Under Arturo's Star: The Cultural Legacies of Elsa Morante*, ed. by Stefania Lucamante and Sharon Wood (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 268–89, especially p. 286; and Marco Antonio Bazzocchi, *Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1998), p. 129.
- 21 I quote *Aracoeli* from Elsa Morante, *Aracoeli*, in *Opere*, ed. by Carlo Cecchi and Cesare Garboli, (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), II, pp. 1039–454 (1159).
- 22 English translation of *Aracoeli* is from Elsa Morante, *Aracoeli*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 91 [hereafter Weaver trans.].
- 23 Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Attaccando al suo capezzolo le mie labbra ingorde: corpo, linguaggio e soggettività da Dante ad *Aracoeli* di Elsa Morante', *Nuova Corrente*, 55 (2008), pp. 85–123; Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gagnolati, 'Between Affection and Discipline: Exploring Linguistic Tensions from Dante to *Aracoeli*', in *The Power of Disturbance: Elsa Morante's 'Aracoeli'*, ed. by Gagnolati and Fortuna, pp. 8–19.
- 24 *Aracoeli*, pp. 1189–90.
- 25 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 114.
- 26 *Aracoeli*, p. 1186.
- 27 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 112.
- 28 On the significance of androgyny in Elsa Morante's work and *Aracoeli* in particular, see Anna Serkowska, *Uscire da una camera delle favole. I romanzi di Elsa Morante* (Krakow: Rabid, 2002), pp. 158–66; and Anna Serkowska, 'The Maternal Boy: Manuele, or The Last Portrait of Morante's Androgyny', in *Under Arturo's Star*, ed. by Lucamante, pp. 157–87.
- 29 *Aracoeli*, pp. 1070–71.
- 30 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 26.
- 31 See Fortuna and Gagnolati, 'Attaccando al suo capezzolo le mie labbra ingorde'. For Julia Kristeva's psycho-linguistic theory, see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Marguerite Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 19–106, especially pp. 46–51.
- 32 See Adalgisa Giorgio, 'Nature vs Culture: Repression, Rebellion and Madness in Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*', *Modern Language Notes*, 109 (1994), pp. 93–116.
- 33 *Aracoeli*, p. 1181 [Weaver trans., p 108].
- 34 *Aracoeli*, pp. 134–35. For an interesting analysis of the pre-oedipal condition of many of Morante's characters and of their marginal position within the symbolic order, see Lucia Re, 'Utopian Longing and the Constraints of Racial and Sexual Difference in Elsa Morante's *La Storia*', *Italica*, 70.3 (1993), pp. 361–75, especially pp. 363–67. Re has pointed out significant analogies between Morante's text and Kristeva's paradigm of the semiotic *chora*. On Freud's presence in Morante's works, see Marco Bardini, *Morante Elsa. Italiana. Di professione poeta* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1999); and Marco Bardini, 'Dei "fantastici Doppi" ovvero la mimesi narrativa dello spostamento psichico', in *Per Elisa: Studi su*



- '*Menzogna e sortilegio*', ed. by Lucio Lugnani et al. (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1990), pp. 173–299.
- 35 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 126.
- 36 *Aracoeli*, pp. 1047–48.
- 37 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 9.
- 38 Astrid Deuber Mankowsky, 'Baubo — Another, Additional Name of *Aracoeli*: Morante's Queer Feminism', in *The Power of Disturbance*, ed. by Gragnolati and Fortuna, pp. 73–83. On the significance of the rediscovery of love at the end of the novel, see in the same volume, Giuseppe Stellardi, '*Aracoeli* and Gadda's *La cognizione del dolore*: Disturbed Sons, Disturbing Mothers', pp. 96–106; and Elisa Martínez Garrido, 'Between Italy and Spain: The Tragedy of History and the Salvific Power of Love in Elsa Morante and María Zambrano', pp. 118–27.
- 39 I would add that it is here that Morante, intriguingly, differs from Kristeva's model, which implies the necessity of the thetic break for a non-psychotic development of subjectivity.
- 40 Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Spunti per un'analisi linguistica dei romanzi di Elsa Morante', in *Vent'anni dopo 'La Storia.'* *Omaggio a Elsa Morante*, ed. by Concetta D'Angeli and Giacomo Magrini, *Studi novecenteschi*, 21 (1994), pp. 11–36, pp. 29–30.
- 41 On *Aracoeli*'s language, see also the beautiful remarks in Graziella Bernabò, *La fiaba estrema. Elsa Morante tra vita e scrittura* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 271–75.
- 42 *Aracoeli*, p. 1427 [Weaver trans., p. 291].
- 43 See Christoph F.E. Holzhey, "'The Lover of a Hybrid": Memory and Fantasy in *Aracoeli*', in *The Power of Disturbance*, ed. by Gragnolati and Fortuna, pp. 42–58.

Manuele Gragnolati, 'Differently Queer: Temporality, Aesthetics, and Sexuality in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolio* and Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*', in *De/Constituting Wholes: Towards Partiality Without Parts*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Manuele Gragnolati, *Cultural Inquiry*, 11 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2017), pp. 85–100 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-11\\_05](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-11_05)>

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