MANUELE GRAGNOLATI

Differently Queer
Temporality, Aesthetics, and Sexuality in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Petrolio and Elsa Morante’s Aracoeli

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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of fragments from several manuscripts and put together by a fictional editor, who would have filled the gaps with historical documents like interviews, newspaper excerpts, and other documentary material.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-
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’).¹ 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.² 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*.³ 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 programmatà, irrisione della coesività, introduzione teppistica dell’ arbitrario’ (‘Asymmetry, disproportion, the law of planned irregularity, derision of cohesiveness, the thuggish introduction of the arbitrary’).⁴ In other words, *Divina Mimesis* performs failure, while *Petrolio* performs ‘dilation’.⁵

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,⁶ and I rather take it as an allegory for homosexual relations.⁷ 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’). 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 [...]. Tutto questo [...] era [...] simbolo di una profonda diversità sociale, il mondo dell’altra classe, che era quasi il mondo di un’altra vita.

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 [...]. All this [...] was [...] the symbol of a profound social difference: the world of the other class, which was almost the world of another life.

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.\textsuperscript{11}

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.\textsuperscript{12}

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 compiutezza 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.\textsuperscript{13}

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.\textsuperscript{14}

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

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sense of power and possession that Pasolini loathed so much, it also clarifies the connection between sexuality, ethics, and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{15} 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.\textsuperscript{16}

These reflections suggest that \textit{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 \textit{The Three Essays on Sexuality} and \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, is that \textit{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.\textsuperscript{17}

Both \textit{La Divina Mimesis} and \textit{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 \textit{La Divina Mimesis} and \textit{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 (\textit{La Divina Mimesis}) or by expanding temporality endlessly (\textit{Petrolio}), and in both cases contesting any teleological idea of the future or futurity. \textit{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’).\textsuperscript{18} In this respect, the novel resonates with the reformulation of queer given by Lee Edelman in \textit{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. One could advance the hypothesis that Petrolio, 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. Regardless of whether Morante drew directly from Paolini in constructing her protagonist, Manuele’s sexuality exhibits some peculiarities that resonate with those of Carlo, Petrolio’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, desierta 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 berl, si velava, nello sguardo adorante e assonnato che ha l’infante allattato dalla madre.

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.

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.
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 guardar i miei occhi, poi, s’insuperbiva, come a un segnale gaudioso del suo grande sposalizio esotico:

*los ojos azules*  
*la cara morena.*

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.*
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.26

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.27

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.28

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.29

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.30

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 lan-
guage that has not lost the ‘semiotic *chora*’ (which for Kristeva desig-
nates 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 real-
ized with the threat of castration in the Oedipal phase — and has there-
fore lost any trace of the ‘semiotic’ component.31

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 Monda32 — so it is repeated sev-
eral 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, ‘Ricascare nei soliti schemi d’obbligo sembra, qui, essere fuori
luogo. Il nostro caso non si adatta a nessuno schema prefisso.’ (‘Recur-
ring to the usual cut-and-dried patterns seems to me out of place here.
Our case does not fit into any pre-established pattern.’).33 And while
describing the unconditional love between Aracoeli and Eugenio, Man-
uele 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.34
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.

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’:


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.\textsuperscript{37}

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 exclu-
sively rational grids.

Contrary to Manuele’s previous experiences, which are symptoms
of his condition as a melancholic subject, the journey enhances a verita-
ble re-elaboration of the suffered loss and allows him to move to a fur-
ther 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 aban-
doned.

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’.\textsuperscript{38} This return to the father is very different from a return to the
(hetero)normative world of \textit{I Quartieri Alti} and takes place only after
Eugenio has deserted from the Navy and is in an abject position, sym-
bolized 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 protag-
onist but rather to the proposal of the possibility of further elaborating
and developing a corporeal and fluid non-Oedipal — but not necessar-
ily pre-linguistic — subjectivity.\textsuperscript{39}

I would like to conclude by proposing that, as for \textit{Petrolio}, so for
\textit{Aracoeli} one could imagine a kind of ‘artistic sublimation’ à la Bersani
that replicates the movement of sexuality: on the one hand, the multilingual 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’),\(^{40}\) as though the reactivation of the semiotic chora shakes the rigidity and hierarchies of the symbolic order, reinterpreting it and recreating it anew.\(^ {41}\)

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,\(^ {42}\) 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.\(^ {43}\)

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 Aracnoeli, 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


2 Petrolio, ed. by Siti and De Laude (hereafter ‘Petrolio’), p. 1275.


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.


7 See also the recent analysis by Daniele Donnarumma, ‘Metamorfosi e nascondimenti. Pasolini e l’omosessualità in Petrolio’, in Inquietudini queer: desiderio,

8 Petrolio, p. 1415 [Goldstein trans., p. 178].

9 Petrolio, p. 1435.


11 Petrolio, p. 1509.

12 Petrolio, Goldstein trans., p. 247.

13 Petrolio, pp. 1552–53.

14 Petrolio, Goldstein trans., pp. 278–79.


19 Lee Edelman, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Durham, NC:
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24 Aracoeli, pp. 1189–90.
25 Aracoeli, Weaver trans., p. 114.
26 Aracoeli, p. 1186.
27 Aracoeli, Weaver trans., p. 112.


29 Aracoeli, pp. 1070–71.


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-Lisch, 1999); and Marco Bardini, ‘Dei “fantastici Doppi” ovvero la mimesi narrativa dello spostamento psichico’, in Per Elisa: Studi su

35 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 126.


37 *Aracoeli*, Weaver trans., p. 9.


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.


42 *Aracoeli*, p. 1427 [Weaver trans., p. 291].

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