

The Power of Disturbance: Around Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*
11-12 April 2008

NEW PROGRAMME

Aracoeli (1982) is the last novel written by Elsa Morante (1912-85), one of the most significant Italian writers of the twentieth century. From *Menzogna e sortilegio* (1948) and *L'isola di Arturo* (1957) to *La Storia* (1974), Morante became an increasingly important author, provoking animated debates in the Italian and European literary and cultural milieu. Her final novel, by contrast, was received with profound aversion and almost unanimously dismissed as a desperate writer's self-destructive attempt at a tragic parody of everything she had previously written.

If it is indeed true that *Aracoeli* returns to topics fundamental to all of Morante's texts and questions them in an often disturbing manner, our hypothesis is that the novel cannot be reduced to a deep expression of despair, but, rather, succeeds in confronting crucial philosophical and epistemological questions in an original and profound way: through its narrative inquiry into the relationship between mother and child, Morante's text creates a "hallucinatory" representation of the original mother-child dyad, questioning the classical distinction between subject and object and offering a theory for the genesis of language and meaning.

The protagonist's journey to Spain in search of his dead mother forms the poetic and theoretical nucleus for the novel's manifold perspectives and motifs that contaminate and disrupt literary, psycho-analytic and political paradigms as well as categories of identity, gender and sexuality. In particular, the novel's intricate structure allows different levels to interact with one another, producing asymmetries and contrasts that represent a form of resistance towards the hegemonic and totalizing claims of the *logos*.

The Berlin symposium seeks to re-evaluate the complexity of Morante's novel by reflecting on the manifold tensions that it stages and that are also present in contemporary philosophical discourse (from feminist to queer to political theory) and authors (such as Gadda, Pasolini, Jelinek or Almodóvar). It includes an international conference combining scholars from different disciplines and cultural traditions, a staged interpretation of the novel (written and directed by Agnese Grieco, and interpreted by Anne Tismer and Frank Arnold), and a talk by the poet Patrizia Cavalli.

Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry / ICI Kulturlabor Berlin.
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Organizers: Manuele Gagnolati (Somerville College, Oxford; ICI Berlin) and Sara Fortuna (Freie Universität Berlin; ICI Berlin); with the support of Italienisches Kulturinstitut Berlin and Institut für Romanische Philologie, Freie Universität Berlin.

FRIDAY 11 APRIL
14.00-15.30

- Christoph Holzhey (ICI Berlin): Opening Remarks and Introduction
- Sara Fortuna (Berlin) / Manuele Gagnolati (Oxford) *Suckling at the Mother's Breast: Language, Body and Identity from Dante to "Aracoeli"*

15.30-15.45 Break

15.45-17.15

Moderator: Fernando Vidal (Berlin)

- Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (Bochum) *Aracoeli alias Baubo: Morante's Queer Feminism*
- Rebecca West (Chicago) *Seeing and Telling: Anamorphosis, Relational Identity, and Other Perspectival Perplexities in "Aracoeli"*

17.15-17.30 Break

17.30-19.00

Moderator: Elena Lombardi (Bristol)

- Francesca Cadel (Yale) *Politics and Sexuality in Pasolini's "Petrolio"*
- Mimma Congedo (Berlin) *Indian Traces: "Aracoeli", Pasolini's "L'odore dell'India" and Moravia's "Un'idea dell'India"*

21.00 *Die Passion der Aracoeli*, Szenische Lesung nach *Aracoeli* von Elsa Morante mit Anne Tismer und Frank Arnold. Gesang: Anne-Lisa Nathan. Projekt: Agnese Grieco.

SATURDAY 12 APRIL

10.30-13.00

Moderator: Marco Formisano (Berlin)

- Florian Mussnug (London) *Resisting Paranoia: Poesis and Politics in Elsa Morante*
- Claude Cazalé (Paris) *Morante and Simone Weil: The aporias of history and the end of the fairytale*
- Sergio Parussa (Wellesley) *The Womb of Dreams: Judaism and Jewish Kabbalah in Elsa Morante's "Aracoeli"*

13.00-14.30 Lunch Break

14.30-16.00

Moderator: Francesca Sforza (Torino)

- Elisa Martinez Garrido (Madrid) *Fra l'Italia e la Spagna. "Aracoeli": un viaggio di frontiera*
- Giuseppe Stellardi (Oxford): *Language and Melancholia in Carlo Emilio Gadda's "La cognizione del dolore"*

16.00-16.15 Break

16.15-17.30

Moderator: Manuele Gagnolati

- Vittorio Lingiardi (Rome-Milan): *"Scene madri": A Psycho-analytic Vision of Almodovar's "Volver" and "Aracoeli"*
- Agnese Grieco (Berlin): *Aracoeli's Passion*

17.30-18.00 Break

18.00-19.00 *Conversazione con Patrizia Cavalli.*