

**ici** KULTURLABOR  
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# THE POWER OF DISTURBANCE

11-12 April 2008  
ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry

## Around Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*

*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. It includes an international conference combining scholars from different disciplines and cultural traditions, a staged interpretation of the novel and a talk by the poet Patrizia Cavalli.

Organizers:

Manuele Gagnolati (Somerville College, Oxford; ICI Berlin) and Sara Fortuna (Freie Universität Berlin; ICI Berlin)

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### Friday 11 April

- 14:00** Christoph Holzhey (ICI Berlin)  
Opening remarks
- 14:15** Moderator: Fernando Vidal (Berlin)
- Rebecca West (Chicago)  
*Seeing and Telling: Anamorphosis, Relational Identity, and Other Perspectival Perplexities in Aracoeli*
- Margarete Zimmermann (Berlin)  
*L'imaginaire du corps féminin et masculin dans Aracoeli*
- 15:45** Break
- 16:00** Moderator: Elena Lombardi (Bristol)
- Sara Fortuna (Berlin) / Manuele Gagnolati (Oxford)  
*Suckling at the Mother's Breast: Language, Body and Identity from Dante to Aracoeli*
- Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (Bochum)  
*Aracoeli alias Baubo: Morante's Queer Feminism*
- 17:30** Break
- 17:45** Moderator: Emmanuela Tandello (Oxford)
- Francesca Cadel (Yale)  
*Politics and Sexuality in Pasolini's Petrolio*
- Florian Mussgnug (London)  
*Resisting Paranoia: Poesis and Politics in Elsa Morante*
- 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

- 10:00** Moderator: Marco Formisano (Berlin)
- Pierangiolo Berrettoni (Pisa)  
*Aracoeli's Nostalgia*
- Mimma Congedo (Berlin)  
*Indian Traces: Aracoeli, Pasolini's L'odore dell'India and Moravia's Un'idea dell'India*
- 11:30** Break
- 11:45** Moderator: Robert Gordon (Cambridge)
- Claude Cazalé (Paris)  
*Morante and Simone Weil: The aporias of history and the end of the fairytale*
- Sergio Parussa (Wellesley)  
*Morante and Judaism*
- 13:15** Lunch Break
- 14:45** Moderator: Francesca Sforza (Torino)
- Elisa Martínez 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*
- 16:15** Break
- 16:30** Moderator: Manuele Gagnolati
- Vittorio Lingiardi (Roma/Milano)  
*"Scene madri": A Psycho-analytic Vision of Almodovar's Volver and Aracoeli*
- Agnese Grieco (Berlin)  
*Aracoeli's Passion*
- 17:45** Break
- 18:00** Conversazione con Patrizia Cavalli