
ARTICLES – ITALIAN

'Pessimo me, come padre': Paternity in Sanguineti and the Novecento tradition

Eanna O'Ceallachain

University of Glasgow, GB
eanna.oceallachain@glasgow.ac.uk

This article investigates representations of paternity and the paternal self in the neo-avant-garde poetry of Edoardo Sanguineti, in the context of a poetic tradition dominated by filial perspectives. The article analyses the forms and emblematic functions of Sanguineti's paternal representations, and their cultural and ideological ramifications in the poetic context of the Italian Novecento. While existing scholarship has often discussed the recurrence of conjugal and broadly domestic themes as part of Sanguineti's representation of a social and corporeal *io*, this essay undertakes the first comprehensive analysis of how paternity specifically is constructed and used throughout his poetic works, from the 1950s to the early 2000s. After an initial survey of paternity in the works of some other Novecento poets, the article examines how Sanguineti's use of paternal motifs develops from the late 1950s onwards, both in his poetry and in the novel *Capriccio italiano* (1963), and how this reflects his ideological and aesthetic concerns, including a drive towards a demystificatory realism informed by his Marxian and Freudian perspectives. Throughout, Sanguineti writes fatherhood as primarily an embodied experience, anchored in a historicized present, lived and understood politically; while an increasing association between paternity and the death of the self culminates in the testamentary or post-mortem paternal postures of the 1980s. What emerges ultimately is a complex and contradictory construction of the paternal *io* as both a pathologically degraded self – one diminished in part by its own paternal status – and as a strong, sometimes patriarchal figure who leads and teaches the children, dispensing practical and ideological guidance: a gendered construction of a specifically masculine self whose representation brings together elements of both authority and abjection.

Introduction

In addressing the theme of sex and the body in a 2001 interview, Edoardo Sanguineti highlights the importance of paternity in his work, in contrast to a more conventional 'filial' perspective in Italian literature:

I poeti sono eterni figli. Il ripiegamento sulla memoria fa sì che domini, e questo anche nelle prospettive narrative, l'esperienza infantile e puerile che si prolunga all'infinito. La mia posizione risulta invece opposta. Non è che le figure parentali siano assenti

nella mia scrittura, ma quella che domina effettivamente è una prospettiva paterna. Non è la tematica di un eterno figlio alle prese con il classico problema edipico e dintorni, ma una prospettiva invece in cui davvero il problema della responsabilità, del farsi adulti, è portato in primo piano. (Galletta 103–4)

While acknowledging that his poetic representations of both the paternal theme and related conjugal-erotic motifs have a direct basis in his personal life, Sanguineti stresses that they function in his work primarily as 'emblem culturalmente rilevanti' (Galletta 104), in the context of a historicized conception of corporeal experience and as part of the 'costruzione di un personaggio' (106). In this article, I will investigate the forms and emblematic functions of these representations, as well their cultural and ideological ramifications in the poetic context of the Italian Novecento.

The centrality of a constructed *personaggio-io* is well attested in scholarship on Sanguineti: Pietropaoli sees an 'autorappresentazione parodica' (*Unità* 102) in the poetry of the 1970s; Lorenzini describes the soliloquizing voice of those years as that of 'un io grottesco e oggettivato' (*Il presente* 175), a self increasingly dominated in the following decades by 'la presenza allucinatoria del corpo' (*La poesia italiana* 169); while Baccarani sees his *io* as a 'persona' in the Latin sense of the term, a mask whose authenticity lies in its very 'estroversione' rather than concealing some hidden self (175–7). Existing scholarship has often referred to the recurrence of conjugal and broadly domestic themes as part of the representation of this social and corporeal *io*: Fausto Curi underlines the importance from the early 1960s of 'un filone di poesia familiare' where wife and children are 'personaggi e interlocutori' (*La poesia* 277); Lorenzini characterizes Sanguineti's long-running diaristic vein as 'poesie-resoconto di vicende visualizzate dal *coté* familiare, domestico ed erotico' (*La poesia: tecniche* 206). What is lacking, however, is a systematic analysis of Sanguineti's representations specifically of paternity and of the *io* as father. This article undertakes a comprehensive investigation of these aspects of his work. After an initial survey of how similar elements are used in the works of some other Novecento poets, we will examine Sanguineti's use of paternal motifs and perspectives from the late 1950s onwards, how this projects his ideological and aesthetic concerns, and ultimately how it contributes to the gendered construction of a specifically masculine self whose representation brings together elements of both authority and abjection.

Poetic filiality and the legacy of Pascoli

It is easy to find examples of a 'filial' perspective in the literary tradition, both in Italy and elsewhere: at the very origin of the Italian canon we see the essentially filial posture of Dante's pilgrim-narrator towards his guide and mentor Virgil; and Sanguineti himself alludes, albeit ironically, to an interpretation of Petrarch's Laura as a 'fantasma materno' (Gnoli 130). From Oedipus to Hamlet, sons in particular have long been written *against* fathers or father figures. In the early Novecento canon, we see the transparently oedipal impulses of Svevo's protagonist in *La coscienza di Zeno*, the journey to the mother in Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia*, or the filial stance adopted in Montale's allegorical dialogue with the sea-father in *Mediterraneo*, the 'antico', whose voice and 'law' inspire both submission and resentment: 'E questa che in me cresce / è forse la rancura / che ogni figliuolo, mare, ha per il padre' (Montale 55). The investigation of memory and childhood recurs throughout Montale's work, and indeed is a common motif in much of the poetry of the period, from Saba's evocations of the childhood self in relation to both maternal and paternal figures, to the memorial obsessions of the hermetic generation. The adoption of an infantile or filial stance resonates also with the figure of the *inetto*, which Sanguineti sees as a defining archetype of the modernist period, as reflected in the works of Montale, Svevo, Gozzano, and others (Sanguineti, 'Montale' 227–40).

Gozzano's filial and memorial perspective can be seen, for example, in the poem 'Cocotte', in which Sanguineti reads 'un clamoroso esempio di frustrato complesso edipico' (Sanguineti, *Guido Gozzano* 123).

Before the turn of the twentieth century, Giovanni Pascoli had played an influential role in establishing the infantile and/or filial perspectives as central components in modern Italian poetry. In Pascoli we find the poet as orphaned son, in dialogue with the ghost of his mother in poems such as 'Casa mia' or 'Mia madre', presenting his own voice as that of a child: 'Tra i pigolii dei nidi, / io vi sentii la voce / mia di fanciullo' (*Poesie* 585). He evokes the trauma of his father's violent death in 'La cavalla storna' and in 'X Agosto', where the father is above all felt as an absence in the fragile 'nest' of the family home: 'Ora là, nella casa romita, / lo aspettano, aspettano, in vano' (*Poesie* 72). Beyond his own tragic family circumstances, Pascoli's adoption of the child's perspective assumes a wider significance for his theory of poetry in the essay *Il fanciullino* (1897–1903), where an immutable essence of 'poesia' is attributed to the vision of a poet's inner child, 'il fanciullo eterno, che vede tutto con meraviglia, tutto come per la prima volta' (*Prose* 16). This childlike stance will resonate through much Italian poetry of the following decades, from its almost parodic expression in the crepuscular Sergio Corazzini ('io non sono che un piccolo fanciullo che piange'; 77) to the many iterations of filial piety in texts addressed to mothers and fathers. In this male-dominated canon, poems by sons to mothers have a special prominence, although texts addressing the father, often post-mortem, are also a recurring feature of the period.¹

In a number of critical essays spanning the 1960s, Sanguineti analyses the historical and sociological basis of the poetics set out in *Il fanciullino* and considers some of their ideological implications. In 'Attraverso i Poemetti pascoliani' (1962) he argues that Pascoli's vision is based on 'l'accettazione serena [...] dei limiti storici e sociali, come limiti naturali' (Sanguineti, 'Attraverso' 16), giving rise to a poetics whose ultimate aim is to 'fondare un sublime ad uso delle classi medie' (19). In 'La tragedia familiare nella poesia di Giovanni Pascoli' (1967), he contends that the filial viewpoint of Pascoli's *fanciullino*, especially that of the orphan-child, is part of a petit bourgeois aesthetic of pathos and tears focused on the dead parents. This is rooted in an 'etica piccolo borghese' which interiorizes an 'implacabile Super-Ego', an 'etica familiare tutta naturalmente dominata dalla figura paterna, unica figura portatrice di ogni norma morale' (Sanguineti, 'La tragedia' 16) – a figure whose untimely death in Pascoli's life and poetry produces supreme effects of poetic pathos. Sanguineti rounds off this decade of critical attention to Pascoli with his introduction to the 1971 Einaudi edition of the *Poemetti* (which he edited). Tracing the historically determined roots of the '*Homo pascolianus*' in the 'condizione psico-sociale' ('I Poemetti' 171) of the *piccola borghesia* in the late nineteenth century, Sanguineti highlights how Pascoli's vision in *Il fanciullino* produces a drive to 'censor' both erotic desire and economic realities:

Pascoli respinge donne e amori, [...] spietatamente censurando il sesso, [...] esattamente come ha intanto censurato, sopra l'altro versante, il denaro. I padri e le madri di famiglia della piccola borghesia non potevano sperare di più e di meglio, pedagogica-

¹ See, among others: Umberto Saba, 'Il torrente' (*Trieste e una donna*, 1912), *Autobiografia* (1924), 'Preghiera alla madre' (*Cuor morituro*, 1930); Camillo Sbarbaro, 'Padre anche se tu non fossi il mio' (*Pianissimo*, 1914); Ungaretti, 'La madre' (*Sentimento del tempo*, 1930); Mario Luzi, 'Alla madre' (*Un brindisi*, 1946); Alfonso Gatto, 'A mio padre' (*Il capo sulla neve*, 1947), 'A mia madre' (*La madre e la morte*, 1959); Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Lettera alla madre' (*La vita non è sogno*, 1948), 'Al padre' (*La terra impareggiabile*, 1958); Montale, 'A mia madre', 'Voce giunta con le folaghe' (*La bufera e altro*, 1956); Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Supplica a mia madre' (*Poesia in forma di rosa*, 1964); Vittorio Sereni, 'Autostrada della Cisa' (*Stella variabile*, 1981); Alda Merini, 'Il pastrano', 'Il grembiule' (*La gazza ladra*, 1985); Patrizia Valduga, *Requiem* (1994); Maria Luisa Spaziani, 'Papà, radice e luce' (*I fasti dell'ortica*, 1996).

mente parlando, di una tanto ferrea copertura dell'erotico e dell'economico, come delle più torbide e 'impoetiche' realtà del mondo. (Sanguineti, 'I Poemetti' 174)

These are precisely some of the 'unpoetic' realities that Sanguineti brings to the fore most memorably in his own poetic approach to paternity. Pascoli writes in *Il fanciullino* that poetic sentiment provides 'un soave e leggiro freno all'instancabile desiderio' (*Prose* 23). Sanguineti instead sees his own work as underpinned by 'il riconoscimento della libido come movente fondamentale della condizione umana', in reaction against a 'cultura sublimante e censoria' (Galletta 102). For him, 'il tema dell'amore coniugale e la tematica famigliare' (103) go hand in hand. They converge in his work through representations of a corporeal and historicized masculine subjectivity that challenge critically the surrounding alienation.

Some paternal tropes in the Novecento tradition

Notwithstanding Sanguineti's assertion regarding the 'filial' character of Italian literature, poems with a paternal voice and viewpoint do occur in the works of various Novecento poets, ranging from delicate representations of innocence and fatherly love to texts that dwell on a melancholy awareness of childhood's (and life's) transience, to the raw expression of grief on the death of a child. Before examining Sanguineti's paternal texts, we will briefly consider the forms and implications of some of these representations.

Saba's 'Ritratto della mia bambina' (1920) includes some elements that recur to varying degrees in paternal texts by other poets. The opening lines give a disarming portrait of childhood innocence, in simple, direct language: 'La mia bambina con la palla in mano / con gli occhi grandi colore del cielo' (Saba 190). After this, the father's voice explores in more complex lyrical terms various 'parvenze' that his child evokes in him, focusing on images of lightness such as 'schiuma marina' and the shifting 'insensibili nubi / che si fanno e disfanno in chiaro cielo'. All these 'cose leggere e vaganti', images of disembodiment, involve an almost mystical perception which, notwithstanding Saba's paternal perspective, resonates strongly with Pascoli's aesthetic of the *fanciullino*, the inner child who responds to 'cose che sfuggono ai nostri sensi e alla nostra ragione' (*Prose* 12).² Some elements of Pascoli's aesthetic of innocence are also echoed in Attilio Bertolucci's paternal poems. 'Per B.', for his young son Bernardo, from his 1935 collection *Lettera da casa*, takes up the motif of the child at play: the boy's 'piccoli aeroplani di carta' flying 'nel crepuscolo' are compared to the evanescent image of 'farfalle notturne', before both become metaphors for 'i nostri giorni', destined to disappear in a darker 'abyss' (Bertolucci, *La capanna* 73). A similar quasi-crepuscular melancholy, in counterpoint to the representation of childish innocence, runs through other texts for the sons such as 'A Giuseppe, in ottobre' or 'A Bernardo', where, in Bertolucci's world of agrarian 'immobilità' (Curi, *La poesia* 294), the boy's 'piede impaziente' (*La capanna* 113) is juxtaposed with autumnal images of passing time. Similarly in 'Bernardo a cinque anni', the child's 'ossatura fragile' is overshadowed by 'il dolore dei giorni che verranno' and fallen leaves bring an awareness of impending winter (Bertolucci, *La capanna* 131). In all these poems, a sense of impermanence and inevitable loss is associated with the representation of childhood, but this seems to constitute a lesson more for the father than for the child: 'ora corri / A rifugiarti nella nostra ansia' (131). Images of childhood fragility go hand-in-hand with the evocation of an innocence to be protected.³

² Saba's *Cose leggere e vaganti* also includes poems evoking his own childhood, even when addressing his daughter, for example in 'Favoletta alla mia bambina' (Saba 189).

³ Later, in *La camera da letto* (1988), Bertolucci thematizes the domestic-paternal experience within the wider framework of an epic-historical narrative, in a long poem described on the title page as 'Romanzo famigliare (al modo antico)' (Bertolucci, *La camera*).

Alfonso Gatto's poems for his children combine evocations of childhood with a more complex hermetic layering of landscape and subjectivity. The opening of 'Alla mia bambina' (from *Morto ai paesi*, 1933–7) seems initially to offer a language of magical serenity reminiscent of Saba's vision, but this is immediately undermined by an awareness of mortality: 'Lo sguardo delle marine / serene fino alla morte' (Gatto 56). Enigmatic landscape elements typical of Gatto's hermetic style interweave with an idea of gestation, until in the closing lines the born child fulfils the abstract potential of the opening imagery:

Tu, nata,
compivi il sereno,
la sua notte incarnata
nel rigoglio del seno. (Gatto 56)

This closing image anchors the text in a bodily awareness of child and mother, but this corporeality is inseparable here from Gatto's language of hermetic abstractions. In 'Al mio bambino Leone' (*Osteria flegrea*, 1954–61), Gatto's *io-padre* also sees his developing son in embodied terms, immersed in a narrative of community, but this is simultaneously de-historicized:

vederti nella storia
di tutti col tuo cuore
innocente che sa,
forse è chiamarti, amore,
mia breve eternità. (Gatto 432)

The emphasis on childhood 'innocence' is bound up with the timeless, ahistorical meaning of the relationship for the father. The poem ends with a picture of paternal love and guidance: 't'ama / chi ti porta con sé / parlando e rassicura / la tua lieta paura'. Despite the final oxymoron of 'lieta paura', these closing lines resolve the poem in a comforting vision of paternity.

One very specific mode of paternal poetry, the lament for a dead child, is mentioned by Sanguineti in his 1967 essay on Pascoli, where he contrasts the vision of filial pathos in the latter's 'X Agosto' with the austere tragedy of Carducci's 'Pianto antico', written on the death of his young son (Sanguineti, 'La tragedia' 10–11). In the same vein, some of the best-known paternal poems of the Novecento are those written by Giuseppe Ungaretti for his son Antonietto after the boy's sudden death in 1939 in Brazil. The trauma of death is manifested in the texts through a marked attention to bodily realities, as seen in 'Gridasti: soffoco':

Nel viso tuo scomparso già nel teschio,
Gli occhi, che erano ancora luminosi
Solo un attimo fa,
Gli occhi si dilatarono... (Ungaretti 303)

This poem was conceived as part of the longer sequence *Giorno per giorno*, but published only later, Ungaretti notes, because of its particular intimacy and rawness.⁴ However, notwithstanding the directness with which the materiality of death is represented here, equally striking is the way in which that physical reality is transcended, as seen in the rapid shift to the level of the spiritual after the stark image of the boy's coffin:

⁴ See Ungaretti 989–90 and 1069–70.

Poi nella cassa ti verranno a chiudere
 Per sempre. No, per sempre
 Sei animo della mia anima, e la liberi.
 (Ungaretti 304)

Giorno per giorno opens with a similar combination of raw pathos and bodily distress: 'E il volto già scomparso / Ma gli occhi ancora vivi' (Ungaretti 245). However, the overwhelming impulse in this poem is towards disembodiment too. The son's remembered voice becomes a 'voce d'anima', eclipsing the memory of his 'martoriato corpo', until the sequence closes with his consolatory message: 'Sono per te l'aurora e intatto giorno' (249).⁵ Similarly, in 'Tu ti spezzasti', the child's remembered presence is reduced to an evanescent 'lieve piede di danza', an abstract 'soffio e cristallo' (256). The drive in these anguished poems is towards transcending the bodily reality of the son's death through memory and lyrical sublimation in a quasi-Petrarchan dialogue with the absent *tu*.

Giorgio Orelli, a writer closer generationally to Sanguineti (though far from the experimental agenda of the *neovanguardia*), presents a different kind of paternal voice in 'A Giovanna' (from *Sinopie*, 1977), where the *io-padre* addresses his infant daughter in an engaging domestic scene:

C'era una gran calma. E poiché
 non eri riuscita a mangiare il carillon
 né il leprotto né il barboncino bianco
 né quell'altro bestiolo che neanche tua madre
 sa se sia un asinello o un cavallino
 o altro ancora che ai nostri tempi scarseggia,
 dopo l'amen del rutto ti portammo un po' fuori. (Orelli 64)

Orelli presents a miniature narrative of paternity against the background of a 'realtà trita e banale' (Bertoni, 111), involving the list-like enumeration of the baby's toys, the comic foregrounding of bodily functions in a register of informal *parlato*, and the subsequent inclusion of named characters (Giovanna herself, other friends' babies), all of which could be seen to resemble some aspects of Sanguineti's diaristic-paternal manner of these same years, as we will see below. However, this poem, with the all-enveloping fog that subsequently descends on their afternoon walk, also moves ultimately, in spite of Orelli's early association with the concrete poetics of the *linea lombarda*, towards a dream-like dimension, where time is suspended, ending on a vision of lyrical evanescence: 'la nebbia inghiottiva i palazzi / convocava timori intorno a noi'. Here parental anxiety is inscribed in a movement away from concrete reality, which is transfigured into oneiric uncertainty.⁶

In the paternal poems examined here – often occasional in character – we repeatedly find a focus on sublimation or images of abstracting disembodiment, combined at times with a melancholy-elegiac emotional charge or a consolatory stance. As we will see below, these elements are absent from Sanguineti's writing of paternity, which is corporeal, ideologically delineated, and systematically embedded throughout the thematic and representational structures of his work.

⁵ The image of the swallow in 'Giorno per giorno' ('Passa la rondine, e con essa estate'; Ungaretti 247) could also be seen to echo Pascoli's 'X Agosto', or indeed his 'Addio!' (*Poesie* 566), where departing swallows evoke a sense of loss for a paternity never experienced.

⁶ Orelli writes various other poems for his daughters, for instance 'Dal buffo buio' with its playful reworking of childish language, or 'A Lucia, poco oltre i tre anni', exploring the child's own naïve insight into mortality (Orelli 82, 83).

The emergence of paternity in Sanguineti's early works

Representations of paternity and the parental perspective can be found throughout the main periods of Sanguineti's poetry. The 'tripartitione' of his work, posited by Pietropaoli and broadly shared by other commentators, distinguishes three major phases: the first, marked by a 'stile avanguardisticamente sublime' (Pietropaoli, *Unità* 60), goes from *Laborintus* (1956) to *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* (1964); subsequently, in the 'fase di mezzo' from *Reisebilder* (1971) to *Scartabello* (1980), there emerges a 'neo-figurative' approach with a 'stile medio-realistico' (60); while in the long and varied final phase opened by *Cataletto* (1981), a 'stile comico' predominates (60).⁷ Throughout these phases, paternal tropes shift and develop in their modes and implications, in line with the writer's evolving poetic and ideological preoccupations.

If traces of a filial perspective can be glimpsed anywhere in Sanguineti, it is in his first volume *Laborintus* (1956), where fragments of language, culture, and the psyche are immersed from the outset in the 'Palus putredinis' (*Segnalibro* 13), a swamp that is 'archetipo del corpo materno' (Lorenzini, *La poesia* 138), site and origin of 'questo linguaggio che partorisce' *Laborintus* 10 (*Segnalibro* 25).⁸ Gian Maria Annovi highlights effectively the 'foetal' characteristics of the language and imagery of *Laborintus*, a 'regressus ad uterum' where 'la fantasia dell'io di ricongiungersi con il femminile' coincides ultimately with 'la dissoluzione stessa dell'io' (Annovi 158). Here in *Laborintus*, there may also be traces of the illness and death of Sanguineti's own mother in 1953, notably in the 'linguaggio malato' (Annovi 150) of sections 9 and 21.⁹ From *Erotopaegnia* (1956–9), however, the filial-foetal perspective is replaced by that of spouse and father, even as the first tentative glimpses of a more communicative mode appear amidst the ongoing fragmented avant-garde style. From *Erotopaegnia* 1 with its 'sala del parto' and sweaty conjugal 'abbracciamenti' (*Segnalibro* 51), procreation is part of a wider eroticized address by Sanguineti's *io* to the figure of his wife. The explicit eroticization of the conjugal relationship is one of the most compelling features of Sanguineti's work from *Erotopaegnia* onwards, creating what Curi calls an 'inaudito ossimoro' in representing 'un tenacissimo eros matrimoniale' (Curi, *La poesia* 280).¹⁰ The child (both before and after birth) is a central element in the direct, concrete representation of this reality, this domestic 'microstoria' (Curi, *La poesia* 276), which emerges in texts such as *Erotopaegnia* 4:

in te dormiva come un fibroma asciutto, come una magra tenia, un sogno;
ora peste la ghiaia, ora scuote la propria ombra; ora stride,
deglutisce, orina, avendo atteso da sempre il gusto
della camomilla, la temperatura della lepre, il rumore della grandine,
la forma del tetto, il colore della paglia: (*Segnalibro* 54)

Just like the conjugal-erotic experience, the representation of parenthood is from the outset stripped of sublimating possibilities, as the pathologizing comparison of the foetus to a fibroma or tapeworm ostentatiously eschews any sentimental component or rarefied representation of the child. With its highlighting of bodily functions the image of the child

⁷ Cortellessa identifies the third phase also as that of the 'Sanguineti postumo' (256–7). Weber sees the third phase as 'un'area vasta e composita' (11), still in progress as he writes (in 2004). Cortellessa and Weber both cite also Sanguineti's own description in a letter to Fausto Curi of three periods in terms of rhetorical styles: 'poesie tragiche', 'poesie elegiache', and 'poesie comiche' – the last of which involves a 'comico dominante, che sintetizza anche tragico e elegiaco' (Cortellessa 257).

⁸ In view of Sanguineti's practice of titling individual components by number only, for ease of identification poems from the main collections are cited here by volume title and poem number. All quotations are taken from the collected volumes *Segnalibro* and *Il gatto lupesco*.

⁹ See also Riso 257, and Riso 56, note 43, for Sanguineti's description of the 'swamp' as 'ventre generatore'.

¹⁰ See also O'Ceallachain, 2016.

provides a strong corporeal grounding for the broader experience of the world in time, a world of sensory-material realities and social-historical phenomena:

senza rimedio il tempo
 si è rivolto verso i suoi giorni; la terra offre immagini confuse;
 saprà riconoscere la capra, il contadino, il cannone? (*Segnalibro* 54)

As Annovi observes, the transition from 'io-feto' to 'io-padre' is expressed stylistically in a new 'facoltà di nominare stabilmente le cose e le persone' (162), an ability exercised exhaustively in the later works. This is manifested here in the first clear occurrences of the listing or cataloguing trope which will come to be associated strongly with subsequent paternal poems. Further list-forms are found in *Erotopaegnia* 3, addressed to the woman who will bring the child into bodily existence in time:

e a sei mesi egli potrà raddoppiare il suo peso, vedere l'oca,
 stringere la vestaglia, assistere alla caduta dei gravi;
 strappalo dunque alla sua vita di alghe e di globuli, di piccoli nodi,
 di indecisi lobi: (*Segnalibro* 53)

In these representations, the nameable physicality of the child's world is strongly linked to the idea of his existing within a temporal-historical perspective. The child in this poem is given an emblematic value relating to a future 'correction' of history, seen as previously nameless, undefined: 'i suoi occhi di obliquo burro correggeranno questi secoli senza nome!'. In *Erotopaegnia* 6, where the newborn is seen interacting with the confused materiality of the world, we find also the first intimation that the historicization of paternity is inseparable from considerations of the parents' mortality: 'ma nella durezza delle sue ossa lo sorprendiamo esistere, / e vediamo nelle sue unghie crescere la nostra morte'. This foreshadows the future intertwining of the parental strand with representations of the death of the poet's persona and associated testamentary declarations.

In the following collection, *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* (1960–3), still within the first broad phase of his work, Sanguineti writes the child as second-person interlocutor in some of his best-known paternal poems. Addressing explicitly his young sons (Federico, born 1955, Alessandro, 1958, and Michele, 1962), these texts introduce another key component of the paternal vein, namely the pedagogic dialogue, with the *io-padre* guiding the child through a world full of hostile, alluring, or seemingly incomprehensible objects and phenomena, as established from the opening of *Purgatorio* 1 (addressed to Federico): 'ti attende il filo spinato, la vespa, la vipera, il nichel / bianco e lucente che non si ossida all'aria / [...] e conoscerai la confindustria e la svastica' (*Segnalibro* 71).¹¹ The list-form is again a recurring feature, for example in *Purgatorio* 9:

piangi piangi, che ti compero una lunga spada blu di plastica, un frigorifero
 Bosch in miniatura, un salvadanaio di terra cotta, un quaderno
 con tredici righe, un'azione della Montecatini:
 piangi piangi, che ti compero
 una piccola maschera antigas, un flacone di sciroppo ricostituente (*Segnalibro* 82)

¹¹ At a 2015 conference in Bologna, Federico Sanguineti delivered his own commentary in verse on this poem. His creative 'lettura', which alludes to several of the poems discussed in the present article, introduces *Purgatorio* 1 with the following lines: 'ultimo no, ma postremo dei padri, / padre mio e degli altri miei miglior, / che bambino scrvesti a me bambino // negli anni di un miracolo economico, / di un'infanzia paese di cuccagna, / dell'Italia mio mondo alla rovescia' (F. Sanguineti 149).

In these poems, the *io-padre* sets out for his son the varied wonders of late capitalist reality, in a paratactic listing that excludes hierarchies of sense or value while warning the child about the alienating aspects of a world constituted in terms of violence, repression, or economic transactions.¹² Similarly, in *Purgatorio* 10, a bewildering catalogue of visual images shown to the son is underpinned by the hidden power of money ('ma se volti il foglio, Alessandro, / ci vedi il denaro'; *Segnalibro* 83); while in *Purgatorio* 11, we hear Federico's voice directly, delivering a rudimentary playback of his father's political teaching, embedded amidst minor domestic dramas and other childhood preoccupations:

se davvero scrivi per me (disse): oh devi metterci che anche il mio fratello
Alessandro piangeva, che ti aspettava, che piangeva tanto
[...] devi scrivere che a Pompei
sono tutti morti;
che i fascisti sono cattivi;
che i numeri non finiscono mai... (*Segnalibro* 84)

A fuller understanding of these father–child dialogues emerges through the surrounding poems, texts characterized often by disjointed syntactic structures, hyper-punctuation, and fragments of quotations, where Sanguineti's historical materialist standpoint and the political interpretation of the family motif are gradually made explicit, providing 'una interpretazione critica del caos, cui si contrappongono, come cellule di resistenza, il microcosmo familiare e la militanza politica' (Lorenzini, *La poesia* 139). Thus in *Purgatorio* 2, amidst cultural debates with Octavio Paz, Calvino, and others, Sanguineti's persona declares the ideological imperatives behind his roles both as writer and paternal educator:

spiegherò; una poesia (dissi) scriverò: sul
fascismo:
parlerò a mio figlio; dirò: ma di tali insistiti segni
l'ostinata, figlio, riconosci dissimulazione (...); ma spiegherò
come la borghesia (alta) italiana; come non posso amarla; come sogna
(ancora); quel fascismo (spiegherò); (questo); come il figlio deve,
adesso; (di cui ha salvato); essere la figura; (la struttura); (...);
della speranza: (*Segnalibro* 72–3)

Just as here 'il figlio deve [...] essere la figura [...] della speranza', in *Purgatorio* 3 he sets out a similar ideological meaning for the conjugal relationship: 'il costituirsi di una cellula (il matrimonio): una cellula (dissi) / di resistenza' (*Segnalibro* 74). In *Purgatorio* 6, while alluding explicitly to Engels' *The Origin of the Family*, Sanguineti's *io* declares the political function of the couple in educating their offspring: 'o tutti (a mia moglie) non preparano (dissi) i BUONI / CITTADINI? (e noi prepariamo, noi, i rivoluzionari...)' (*Segnalibro* 79).¹³ Taken as a whole, *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* occupies a pivotal position in the development of Sanguineti's poetry: it draws to a close the first, 'tragic' phase, the intense working-through of the legacy of the historic avant-garde, a process Sanguineti described in 1961 as 'gettare se stessi [...] nella Palus Putredinis, precisamente, dell'anarchismo e dell'alienazione, con la speranza [...]

¹² On Sanguineti's 'elenchi [...] vertiginosamente straniti e caotici', see Pietropaoli, 'Cose' 64.

¹³ On the ideological ramifications of these poems, see Livorni 64–6. Romano Luperini instead dismisses as 'illusory' Sanguineti's politicisation of the family here, which he sees as 'ripescata nell'armamentario ideologico del piccolo borghese' (837).

di uscirne poi veramente, attraversato il tutto, con le mani sporche, ma con il fango, anche, lasciato davvero alle spalle' (Sanguineti, 'Poesia informale?' 204). In a direct citation of that essay, in *Purgatorio* 17 the poetic speaker refocuses that aspiration onto the image of the children:

ma vedi il fango che ci sta alle spalle,
e il sole in mezzo agli alberi, e i bambini che dormono:
i bambini
che sognano (che parlano, sognando); (ma i bambini, li vedi, così inquieti) (*Segnalibro* 90)

The children thus embody future development, in a perhaps utopian perspective ('sognando') but also ('inquieti') with a sense of restless expectation. In these early works, Sanguineti uses the emerging paternal relationship in addressing a historical reality that must for him be understood ideologically and lived politically. Yet as part of his 'riappropriazione della parola soggettiva' (Curi, *Gli stati* 241), in the poems these relationships remain true to their own essence, to the materiality of experience, and to the specificity of individual biography, as reflected not least in the repeated use of the names of the poet's sons and wife Luciana. Thus, an ideological construction of paternity begins to be inscribed in the texts, as part of the representation of the *io* as 'un individuo la cui 'essenza' è essenza sociale e storica' (Baccarani 164).

The paternal motif in the poetry of these years is echoed in some of the hallucinatory dream-narrative sequences of the anti-novel *Capriccio italiano* (1963). Eschewing any explicitly ideological discourse, *Capriccio* explores a world of dreams and the unconscious, highlighting psychological anxieties associated with the impending birth of the narrator's third child, and often representing an *io* subject to forms of bodily and psychological debasement. The two young sons' appearances are repeatedly interwoven with the narrator's bizarre erotic adventures during his wife's pregnancy, amidst symbolic descents into tombs or cavernous underworlds. A recurring motif is paternal anxiety for the children's safety: there is an unexplained attack by 'teppisti' in which the younger boy's testicles are injured, after which the child seems to shrink to almost embryonic form in the father's protective hands (Sanguineti, *Capriccio* 35); the appearance of the two boys, crying and apparently ill, interrupting one of the narrator's strange sexual liaisons and causing him a sudden loss of potency (54–5); other appearances of the children crying or afraid of some threat, for example when the sinister figure of a priest appears in their room (111), later becoming a wolf who devours the boys' mother as the father watches, unable to intervene (116–17).¹⁴ The anxiety for the children extends to the unborn third son, whose foetus the father-narrator encounters with many others in an underground 'grotta', carrying its own placenta, which it drops, leaving the narrator soaked in blood (109–10). These images of paternal anxiety for the children are linked in part to anxieties over his own persona. Fears over the diminution of the *io* and his masculine status in relation to paternity emerge clearly in chapter XXXIII, in combination with a scene of paternal teaching:

Mio figlio dice: 'Ma ce l'hai grosso, tu, papà'. Allora io, che mi sto facendo un po' la doccia, mi giro un po' in là, e allora penso che si capisce che adesso gli viene un complesso molto grosso, a quello, e dico subito: 'Ma ce l'hai grosso anche tu, vedi'. Ma lui: 'No, no', dice 'che ce l'ho un po' piccolo, io'. 'Be', dico io, 'è solo perché sei un po' piccolo

¹⁴ Sanguineti later recounts that these episodes were based on an encounter with a real-life priest who came to speak to his sons in their hotel room. See Fava 191.

tu, ma che adesso che sei un po' alto come papà, poi, ti viene un po' tutto grosso anche a te.' (*Capriccio* 40)

After the father responds to further questions with a simple explanation of sexual differences between men and women, the son leaves and his wife enters, observing 'ehi, ti sta venendo un po' piccolo, guarda' – which the narrator blames on the cold shower, turning the heat up only to burn himself in a comic humiliation. There are other scenes in the novel in which the narrator's sexual potency seems threatened (albeit compensated elsewhere by episodes of fantastical super-virility), but it is telling here that the comic abasement of the *io* (in the eyes of the wife as well) is specifically linked to his role as father.¹⁵ If, on the one hand, the motif of paternity is inseparable from the affirmative corporeal realism of a self-aware conjugal libido, it is, at the same time, intertwined with presentiments of a diminished status for the *io* and his virility. Elsewhere in *Capriccio* the paternal-pedagogic motif touches directly on the theme of death. In chapter CVII, where the narrator and his companions are exploring a tomb and his wife and children emerge from inside a painting by his artist friend, the father's didactic vocation comes to the fore as he insists that his frightened children look at the skeleton of 'O' (a woman involved in a previous erotic encounter). Further imposing his will with a slap to each boy, he makes them face the grinning skeleton: 'Allora ci ho spiegato bene che cosa era una morta, ai miei figli, e quelli si tenevano come abbracciati' (*Capriccio* 114). Even in the framework of this fantastical dream-narrative, Sanguineti's *io-padre* is driven to 'explain' and demonstrate, sometimes brutally, the realities of life, sex, and death. In counterpoint to his contemporary poetic works, *Capriccio* explores the implications of paternity for the father's psyche, representing its associated fears, desires, and anxieties through the imagery of dream and the unconscious. The novel concludes, however, with the birth of the third child and his naming as 'Michele', bringing the text back from the world of 'brutti sogni' (119) to a stance of engagement – including the direct engagement of language, of naming – with the domestic reality that has been emerging in the poems.

The *io-padre* in the chronicles of daily life

The representation of the *io* as father is an essential component in Sanguineti's construction of the self in the poems of *Reisebilder* (written during the family's residency in Berlin in 1971) and *Postkarten* (1972–7), as he develops his 'modello di ritrovata praticabilità del quotidiano' (Baccarani 170), through the anecdotal micro-narratives of family life. Thus in *Reisebilder* 34, where the *io* is questioned by an East German 'funzionario doganale in minigonna', his erotic-ideological reverie of seduction by this 'beatrice / democratica in divisa' is interrupted by the concrete figures of his wife and children: 'hai fatto irruzione / tu, trascinandoti dietro anche i bambini, meravigliosi e meravigliati' (*Segnalibro* 138). In the ironic portrayal of his libidinous persona, his paternal status is an integral part of his 'confession' to the guard: 'ho detto che ho un figlio che studia il russo'. This miniature confession and consequent self-ridicule ('quarentenne sedotto da un poliziotto') are part of a wider performance of an unashamedly self-revelatory *io*. Shortly after this in *Reisebilder* 40, the portrayal of a pathologically degraded self, subject to 'collassi' and 'vertigini' (specifically in the context of conjugal sexual activity), leads to one of Sanguineti's best-known meta-poetic declarations:

perché scrivere (scrive il solito Goethe)
è sempre un Mißbrauch der Sprache: e quando uno sopravvive come sopravvivo

¹⁵ A fear of impotence seems also to underlie chapter LIV, where a medical examination reveals his diseased penis, and his loss of sexual potency is immediately linked to his identity as husband and father (*Capriccio* 60–1).

io, si fabbrica poi soltanto questi Bruchstücke einer großen Konfession: (*Segnalibro* 144)

This idea of poetry as 'fragments of a great confession', but subject to the estranging 'misuse of language' ('Mißbrauch der Sprache') in writing, underlies the ways in which paternity is inscribed into all these texts. The estranged fragments of paternal experience can sometimes seem almost incidental, as in *Reisebilder* 41, 44, or 46 (where the children are 'vere vespe vive' swarming around the parental couple), or in *Reisebilder* 36, where the boys make brief appearances as their parents entertain a journalist friend one evening. The poet here adopts a stance of patriarchal pride, whether at a 'dotta boutade del mio primogenito', the 'bellezza sensibile del mio terzogenito', or (apparently paraphrasing the guest's words) 'la salute di mia moglie' (*Segnalibro* 140). Amidst the setting of cultured intellectual chatter here, the appearance of the children is again associated with allusions to pregnancy and birth and to the erotic (the *io-padre* as 'Liebling der Frauen' ['beloved of women']). The linking of the father-child relationship to the highlighting of sex in its physical reality emerges also in the portrayal of a family visit to Bahnhof Zoo in *Reisebilder* 7, where the father-as-educator clarifies a misunderstanding about one of the apes: 'ma quella vecchia signora, seduta / tra le rocce, grave, grigia – quella vecchia signora è un maschio: guardate / là il suo sesso, bambini' (*Segnalibro* 111).

This kind of matter-of-fact realism has a clear ideological underpinning in an unsentimental framing of both marriage and paternity. *Reisebilder* 19 reiterates the interlinking of the personal and the political in the representation of couple and parenthood. Watching his wife buying Soviet-themed postcards in East Berlin, the father observes:

quando mi torni ragazza proletaria, sei piú tu – e piú mia:
(ma stasera, prima che discutiamo se fare o non fare un quarto figlio,
ti commento due passi del *Manifesto*:

quello in cui è detto che la borghesia
ha spogliato la poesia del duo Heiligenschein, trasformando il poeta in un suo dipendente
salarariato (ein bezahlter Lohnarbeiter): (e ha strappato alla famiglia il suo velo
patetico-sentimentale, demistificandola come un nudo Geldverhältnis): (*Segnalibro* 123)

Just as bourgeois society has, according to the *Communist Manifesto*, stripped poetry of its 'halo', turning the poet into a 'wage-labourer', so it has also stripped any mystificatory veil off the family, now seen as a 'money relationship'. The personal cohesion of this couple is intimately bound up with their political complicity (as seen in *Purgatorio*), and encompasses also this unsentimental vision of family and parenthood. It is notable that this is elaborated here in the kind of earnestly didactic posture associated frequently with the paternal role, which spills over more than once into texts addressing the figure of his wife, where the recurrence of verbs of telling, 'commenting', and 'explaining' can sit incongruously with the discourse of equality underlying a poem such as this.

In *Postkarten* (1972–7), poems revolving around the children and the paternal status of the *io* recur regularly as part of what Sanguineti would call his 'pseudo-autobiografismo' (Gambaro 83). Everyday family domesticity is interwoven with the construction of the poet's persona as public left-wing intellectual, as he recalls (*Postkarten* 15) his appearance at a Communist Party election rally in Salerno watched by his son: 'io rivedevo ancora Federico, sotto il palco, al comizio / di chiusura a Portanova, con il fazzoletto rosso al collo' (*Segnalibro* 175). The poem, addressed to a *tu* (presumably his wife) who is reading Gramsci, concludes with the *io* citing his own speech at the meeting where, with a flourish of regionally inflected *parlato*, he bluntly linked politics and paternity: 'io voto per il PCI perché tengo tre figli (ecc. ecc. ecc.)'.

226). The opening poems in *Stracciafoglio* introduce a similarly tense dialogue with one son, which underpins the whole collection and in which there is embedded a densely packed network of references to shared readings, ranging from Marx to the work of Lukács, Foscolo, and Rousseau. Since *Postkarten*, the model of poems as quasi-epistolary texts from *io* to conjugal *tu* is well established (Baccarani 173–5). But here the epistolary interlocutor becomes the absent son, from whom the *io-padre* now feels 'esiliato'; yet still he tries to play the role of cultural guide, promising in *Stracciafoglio* 1 to enclose photocopies (presumably of Marx's text), musing ironically in *Stracciafoglio* 2 over the efficacy of his son's education ('non dovevo educarti sopra i classici, / forse, per questo mondo di rospi'; *Segnalibro* 232), and in *Stracciafoglio* 3 avowedly 'preaching' an ideological lesson on living authentically: 'ritorno a predicarti che il precetto è: nuotare naturalmente dentro / la storia: (ossimoricamente detto, dunque)' (*Segnalibro* 233). All of this exchange in the opening poems is framed by repeated images of self-abasement or unstable identity ('doppio anche me'; 'vivo da topo [...] (mi aspetta, me lo sento, la mia trappola)'), as well as indications of the emotionally fraught experience of separation.¹⁸

In *Stracciafoglio* 7, the sense of a difficult period in personal and domestic events is reinforced, even as the *io-padre* again assumes the role of pedagogue, discussing the function of poetry in a challenging historical context:

aber, te lo dico io, figlio mio, che siamo arrivati nel momento culminante, o quasi
(per starci qui così, in questi finsteren Zeiten, come si deve): e che quello
che siamo tenuti a sopportarci, adesso, è un troppo pieno di realtà, invece:
e che se un poeta ci sta a fare un qualche cavolo di cose, per caso, di questi tempi
oscuri e vuoti, sarà un poeta spretato, in borghese: (e un borghese): (va bene, ma uno,
intanto, che ci dice che così stanno le cose come stanno): (*Segnalibro* 237)

Setting out a down-to-earth vision for his own art in these 'finsteren Zeiten' ('dark times'), the *io-padre* underlines here in suitably colloquial language the demystification of poetry and the poet. He goes on to apply this to his own persona, noting his renunciation of the 'Lustprinzip' (pleasure principle), preferring the modest self-definition of 'aspirante materialista storico'. However, the ideological and meta-literary focus is displaced in the final lines by an emotive, pragmatic paternal voice:

(ti scrivo su due piedi da uno stand, mentre tu giri impregnato,
imbottito di psicofarmaci, da un capolinea all'altro, sopra i bus): (e io ti dico:
aber, sopportati un po' la tua vita, almeno):
(e pigliatele, su, le tue pastiglie, tu)

Sanguineti's poetic *io* is always ready to lay bare his own infirmities, but here this principle of revelation is extended with unsettling frankness to the son as interlocutor: the recipient of his touching but unsentimental advice is another infirm, embodied individual.¹⁹ Furthermore, this is a two-way dialogue, as emerges in *Stracciafoglio* 12 where it is the *io* whose psyche is dulled by medication: 'i rari sogni me li spegne il tavor* (1,0), già, in testa, dentro: (e Alessandro / mi dice che mi spegne anche i miei versi, a milligrammi [...])' (*Segnalibro* 243).²⁰ This adds

¹⁸ 'Cinque risposte' in *Fuori catalogo*, subtitled 'per Federico' and written the same year as these poems (1977), echoes the themes of ideological-historical debate here (*Segnalibro* 396–7).

¹⁹ A similar moment of tender pragmatism occurs in *Scartabello* 7, where the father advises his son on simple, everyday tasks: 'è il banale, di solito, il difficile' (*Segnalibro* 289).

²⁰ 'Tavor' is a brand of sleeping tablet.

further to the sense of difficult personal experiences and relationships that pervades much of this collection, associated also with an increasing awareness of mortality (as glimpsed in the 'odore di cadavere' in this same poem).

Elsewhere in *Stracciafoglio*, the tense dialogues with the eldest son Federico lead to further representations of a degraded paternal subject. Thus in *Stracciafoglio* 32, the *io* as politically engaged intellectual frequenting 'Feste dell'Unità' is also 'un uomo / debole come tuo padre / che per me, in quanto me, non ho niente da perdere' (*Segnalibro* 263). This self-deprecation of the *io* as father is even more marked in the closing *Stracciafoglio* 47, the longest poem in the collection, containing an intense interweaving of ideological and personal travails:

il mio monologo esteriore (scriverti ancora è abominevole, dopo le stressanti precisazioni telefoniche, filologiche e filosofiche) è finito: (è una postilla, appena, questo mio espresso (...), una superfetazione d'occasione (...)) e, per il mio stracciafoglio fallimentare, e per me, terminale): parlarti è cosa superiore alle mie poche forze, troppo: e ti fu detto tutto, già, da me, quando tu sei contro-emigrato al sud: (quando ti ho regalato la *Scienza nuova*: 'gli uomini hanno essi fatto questo mondo...'): (non so aiutarli, i figli miei, depresso dentro le loro depressioni): (massimamente, poi, se depressi lontano, dentro aree depresse): pessimo me, povero me, come padre: (*Segnalibro* 278)

The recipient of this 'espresso' is again Federico, and the poem recapitulates several of the recurring concerns of this collection, including the difficult father-son relationship and tensions around mutual communication. The ellipses here are Sanguinetti's: a rarely used device, adding further tension to the fragmented formal texture of his verse. This poem also joins the extensive strand of Sanguinetti's meta-poetic commentaries, offering the incisive self-referential formula of 'monologo esteriore', along with the reductive 'stracciafoglio' (which will become the title), and flaunting an idea of self-revelation ('ti fu detto tutto'). But with the term 'superfetazione', it also suggests that the poetic discourse has become excessive, redundant – while hinting simultaneously at the metaphor of writing as procreative fertilization, poet as father of the text. In counterpoint to all of this, the declaration of his own paternal inadequacy brings a familiar note of ironic self-abasement. The rest of the text includes a disenchanting glance at the contemporary historical and cultural scene, the 'rotting' conscience of Europe, before returning to the failed father-son dialogue:

ho percorso i miei mille chilometri, a settembre,
per suggerirti questo: per raccontarmi, e per spiegarmi, a te (ma non ne ho avuto il modo,
e il tempo, piú) (*Segnalibro* 278)

Verbs associated with communication and didactic guidance abound in this poem: 'scriverti', 'parlarti', 'aiutarli', 'raccontarmi', 'spiegarmi', and even 'predicare'; but are all frustrated or negated by their context. In this impasse, Sanguinetti declares a utopian aspiration to 'lavoro vero, e amore vero' (for the son), and the hope that healthy 'cells' (metaphorically) can survive amidst 'impazzite metastasi', before closing on a further self-portrait (this time depicting his role as parliamentary 'deputato'):

ma io resisto qui a stento, adesso, credimi, in questo albergo
di via di Pietra, a due passi da Montecitorio, dentro questa specie di ombelico molle

della nazione, dentro questo suo tempo ombelicale: come te (come tanti, spero), io spero di essere 'lo stupido antifascista', non altro:

un professore, un deputato, un vetero-:

(*Segnalibro* 279)

So this collection ends on a note of uncertain survival, of the father as poetic subject clinging to his threatened identity (undermined also perhaps by an image of quasi-uterine regression in this 'ombelico molle'), even as he offers his offspring a continuing voice of paternal authority and ideological guidance.

Paternity, death, and the testamentary vein

The contemplation of mortality has been an implicit element in the familial strand in Sanguineti from the early stages (see *Erotopaegnia* 6), and it emerges more prominently in connection with paternal themes through the collections of the 1970s, culminating in the poetic text as a posthumous statement of paternal guidance, which will take explicit form in *Novissimum Testamentum* (1982).

The image of the father looking explicitly beyond his own death can be seen as early as *Reisebilder* 20, as he leads the youngest son Michele by the hand through a display of prehistoric human remains in a Berlin museum:

i due cadaveri nella bacheca interrata (che se corri e salti così,
sprofondi in una tomba: è meglio che mi dai la mano) sono assolutamente
preistorici: (se vuoi, ti leggo dove sono stati scoperti): (*Segnalibro* 124)

The familiar pedagogic posture is again apparent, though this text is not focused on any historically determined interpretation of the world but rather presents a simple, universal *memento mori* in juxtaposing the child and his vitality with the display of the 'cadaveri', which are specifically placed outside of historical time.²¹ The austere lesson for the child is one of impermanence: 'ma è molto improbabile, Michele, che anche per noi, un giorno, sopravviva tanto / interesse'. In the final lines, though, the focus shifts to a different self-portrait, where the *io* identifies himself in the more exuberantly macabre and culturally resonant image of a 'Totentanz', a medieval 'dance of death' fresco in Berlin's Marienkirche: 'cercami dove sono: nella Totentanz in sfacelo della Marienkirche, / l'ultima figura verso l'interno, nascosto per sempre sotto l'intonaco bianco'. The *io* prefers to see his own image in this painted figure whose 'sfacelo' and partial illegibility chime with his recurring representations of the culturally constructed self as degraded, debased, or defunct.

The portrayal of the *io* as husband or father is linked repeatedly to the presentation of a moribund self, for example in *Postkarten* 50, addressed to 'moglie mia, figli miei' (*Segnalibro* 210), where an exhausted *io* takes his leave ('vi lascio cinque parole, e addio: / non ho creduto in niente'); or in *Postkarten* 67: 'non essendo più vivo davvero, non ho più niente da dire, ecco' (*Segnalibro* 227). These valedictory statements can be seen to foreshadow the explicitly testamentary discourse that will soon emerge in *Novissimum Testamentum*. Indeed, as Cortellessa notes (262), there are numerous hints and sketches of the testamentary form throughout Sanguineti's works, not least in his predilection for the eclectic list, which we have already seen associated closely with the paternal vein. One such list-legacy is sketched out in *Scartabello* 6 (1980), addressed to the youngest child Giulia:

²¹ *Reisebilder* 12 could be seen almost as a companion piece to this: here the *io* 'explains' to his wife that the ancient Egyptian figures of a married couple seen in a museum are 'dentro una tomba' (*Segnalibro* 116).

ti lascio le stufe elettriche, le calze, le costellazioni, i bassotti [...]
 i nodi ai fazzoletti, i coniglietti, gli ideogrammi, gli epigrammi, la tosse,
 gli occhiali, le scale mobili, la vita: (*Segnalibro* 288)

Discussing this poem, Sanguineti underlines his fascination with the testamentary form, which can oscillate between 'l'ironico e il patetico, il grottesco e il drammatico [...] il parodico e il satirico' or can, preferably 'rimiscolare tutto quanto insieme' (*Genova* 35) – one of the hallmarks, in fact, of his mature comic style.

In *Postkarten* 64, an idea of writing as a kind of legacy again appears as part of a paternal dialogue:

a uno dei miei figli, l'altro giorno, ho detto che uno scrive specialmente
 perché un altro possa scrivere, ancora, poi dopo: (perché cerchiamo un po' di scrivere,
 ormai, le opere complete del genere umano, tutti insieme, noi, in fondo): (*Segnalibro* 224)

The implicit testamentary element here is then extended in scope through the response of another son: 'e poi, ieri, quest'altro mio figlio mi ha detto che uno vive / specialmente perché ecc.', which the father dismisses as 'troppo banale, troppo tremenda' before giving his son 'uno schiaffo d'amore, tremendo'. Again in this poem, the paternal-didactic motif is inscribed within the quasi-diaristic recording of the everyday, complete with details of location, address, and so forth, and in a texture of repetitive wordplay.²² The paternal, testamentary, and playfully meta-poetic strands are combined again in *Stracciafoglio* 19:

chi scrive, scrive, Federico caro, e riscrive, il proprio testamento, tutto il tempo:
 ricatta, ritocchandone le clausole, i suoi destinatari ereditari:

(e tu lo sai,

che perfeziono il mio dettato, soltanto, aggiungendo disposizione a disposizione,
 di norma): (e dico che una poesia si corregge con un'altra poesia, un corollario
 con un codicillo): (faticando fino all'item conclusivo, a fare fine, finalmente): (e io,
 che quel che ho scritto ho scritto, te l'affido):

il mio lascito è questo stesso rogito:

(*Segnalibro* 250)

Part of the ongoing, fraught dialogue with Federico, this 1979 poem identifies the text itself as an explicitly testamentary form. It also foregrounds the cumulative structure of Sanguineti's poetic opus, and in doing so prefigures the titles of two subsequent volumes (*Corollario* and *Codicillo*). But above all it focuses on the poem as legacy, which both addresses the heirs and is bestowed upon them, while ambivalently expressing the speaker's authority and his indecisiveness.

This idea of a *lascito-rogito* comes to full fruition in 1982 in *Novissimum Testamentum*, whose forty-three stanzas of mock *ottava rima* constitute, for Pietropaoli, 'la *summa* del lavoro poetico sanguinetiano' (*Unità* 148).²³ The text echoes on one level the apocalyptic outlook of *Laborintus*, but now in a 'serio-comic' key, with an *io-pagliaccio* delivering 'serissimi messaggi buffoneschi e sarcastici' (Curi, *La poesia* 283). The poem moves between parody, pastiche, and self-mockery as the *io*, echoing Villon's *Petit Testament* (Cortellessa 261), formally renounces life ('pubblicamente dichiaro e certifico / che per sempre rinuncio

²² The play of repetition and variation involving *scrivere/vivere*, what Testa calls 'l'endiadi [...] di vita e scrittura' (179), recurs various times in Sanguineti's later work.

²³ Testa ranks it 'tra i punti più alti della poesia di fine Novecento' (179).

all'universo'), styling himself as someone who 'poco ha da perdere' (*Il gatto lopesco* 129). It is a stylistic and comic tour de force, presenting the apotheosis of Sanguineti's degraded, moribund *io*, flaunting 'in piazza' an exhausted self, with nothing of substance to leave his wife or children:

alla vedova mia non lascio niente:
così incomincio, che ci parlo chiaro:
neanche niente ai miei poveri orfani,
tre sono i maschi, e la femmina è una: (*Il gatto lopesco* 130)

Sanguineti's stylistic 'sprezzatura' covers a wide spectrum, bringing together elements of 'sottoparlato di origine popolare' (Pietropaoli, *Unità* 151), alongside areas of high literary pastiche in a 'sintassi balorda e sghemba'.²⁴ In this rich verbal mix, the representation of the paternal and conjugal *io* is unstable in tone and style, at times almost peremptory (as seen above), elsewhere tenderly affectionate, notably towards the youngest child, imagined as a fatherless 'piccoletta derelitta' (*Il gatto lopesco* 130).²⁵ Here the *io-padre* plays the ironic patriarch, unable perhaps to bestow a conventional dowry, but reassured by his personal 'patrimonio' of 'bellezza infernale' that she bears:

la cocca mia, la tanto coccolata,
che ho generato con la mia signora,
purché continua come è incamminata,
non finirà, per me, credo, in malora:
tanto è gentile, e tanto pare onesta,
che a lei la vita le sarà una festa:
se, fresco morto, mi verrà a cullare,
tutto allegro io mi corro a addormentare: (*Il gatto lopesco* 131)

Here one of the most touching moments of paternal tenderness in Sanguineti is also suffused with textual irony, as the affectionate familiarity of 'cocca mia' collides both with the matter-of-fact 'generato con la mia signora' and a highly literary pastiche-fragment from Dante's *Vita Nuova*. The result is a stylistic and formal estrangement of the paternal *io*, who goes on to lay bare the inventory of a vigorous conjugal libido ('dopo, ancora, i succhiari e i pompari, / dopo i fellari e dopo gli irrumari') only to record its passing and the persistence, as legacy for his widow, of mere words, which are ultimately 'più niente assai che, dentro un'acqua, il buco' (*Il gatto lopesco* 132). The heirs are left with a superabundance of words, the 'catalogue' of the world as 'grande magazzino', in extended enumerative sequences which take Sanguineti's paternal list-mania to new heights:

lascio, a chi resta, aurore boreali,
e re di topi, e donne barbute:
lascio i cavalli di Frisia e di Troia,
la Juve, i virus, la Nato, le virgole:
e così lascio lotterie e locande,
rebus, rosari, apriscatole e scatole: (*Il gatto lopesco* 133)

²⁴ For a detailed reading of this poem, see also Weber 244–56.

²⁵ A particularly tender paternal voice is also reserved for the youngest child elsewhere, for example in *L'ultima passeggiata* 3, where she is 'la pulcina tenerina, l'ultima, / la bambina, quella gallina ruspante, rampicante, nostra cosa gaudiosa, strepitosa' (*Il gatto lopesco* 73).

In a process familiar since the paternal list-poems of *Purgatorio de l'Inferno*, the anarchic catalogue leads on to an overt ideological lesson for the heirs (both offspring and readers), about a world subject to economic imperatives above all else, where 'il verso giusto è il verso alla rovescia', and about the inverted 'alchemy' whereby 'gold' can become all other things, even allowing 'il falso' to become 'vero' (*Il gatto lupesco* 134–5). In this apocalyptic scenario of 'gare mondiali, guerre nucleari', the moribund *io-padre* can leave only the worthless physical legacy of his own degraded body, unsuitable even for recycling, with a mock-pathetic focus on his spent reproductive organs: 'ci fosse almeno la banca del cazzo' (*Il gatto lupesco* 135). Following further images of bodily decay, his legacy set out in the final lines is a meagre one:

altro, per oggi, né dico né scrivo:
 lascito magro avete rimediato,
 ma magro è l'uomo che l'ha rilasciato:
 congedo prendo, più morto che vivo: (*Il gatto lupesco* 138)

The overall sense is of an *io* exhausted by the creative and procreative process. This exhaustion must be read, Cortellesa argues, 'in chiave [...] metastorico-letteraria' (262), as the record of an 'esaurimento storico', amidst the ruins of modernity, the end for 'uno come Sanguineti' (263). For the figure of the poet-father-writer here, the exercise of writing the self is faced with extinction, and yet the fact of writing this extinction inscribes its own vitality: in fact the poem ends with a recurrence of the rhyme *scrivo-vivo*, even if both terms are negated here – and as Weber observes, the use of Sanguineti's trademark final colon is especially 'scandalous' (256) at the close of this text, denying the closure inherent in the testamentary form. Writing the death of the self, however, facilitates a vital form of parental instruction in this poem: the pedagogical impulse persists here, both in the explicitly ideological interpretation of an apocalyptic reality and in the unflinching, tragi-comic representation of bodily decay and death as ineluctable realities underpinning the paternal/filial relationship. In this representation, any descent into pathos is forestalled also by the stylistic and formal estrangement characterizing this public performance of the paternal self, in a poetic voice that is a *travestimento*, a 'costume clownesco' (Weber 245).

Paternity in the later works

Sanguineti's reporting of his own demise in 1982, at the age of fifty-two, is rather premature, in terms of both biographical reality and poetic writing. However, there are significant changes in his poetry from the early 1980s onwards: alongside a recurring posthumous stance in the ongoing diaristic-autobiographical vein, there is an opening-up to a more prominent stylistic diversity, with for example in *Senzatitolo* (1992), texts involving formal play, occasional pieces dedicated to other artists in homage or polemical opposition, parodic reworkings of canonical forms; creating a work that is 'composito, plurimo, scheggiato' (Pietropaoli, 'Sanguineti Angelus' 424). In this work, and in the subsequent *Corollario* and *Cose*, the paternal motif begins to fade from the repertoire, while there is an even greater level of 'dissacrazione del personaggio-autore' (Curi, *Epifanie* 142), often centred on the conjugal-erotic sphere. A slight variant on the paternal theme appears in *Rebus* 19 (1984), written on the birth of his first grandchild, whom he greets with 'esercitati effetti (e affetti) vocali, / sperimentati, ora fa un secolo, pare, sopra il suo padre' (*Il gatto lupesco* 59). However, the relatively rare occurrences of the *io-padre* from this point involve primarily the figure of the poet's youngest child Giulia, seen for example in *Codicillo* 17 (1983), where she is 'la fantolina arlecchina, fatina minutina, tutta di plastilina' (*Il gatto lupesco* 27), or in *Codicillo* 25, as she runs up high scores in the home videogame *Astrosmash*: 'mia figlia è meglio non parlarne, che spara cifre vertiginose,

siderali, / astrosmashtiche' (*Il gatto lupesco* 35). Here the father's bemused stance at his daughter's prowess with computerized 'astronavi' is combined with the portrayal of his own ineffectual attempts, couched in comically sexual imagery ('mi sborro e mi spappolo / una cannonata di orgia computerizzata') before ending with the reprise of a familiar rhyme ('chi vive vive, e scrive'). One of the 1986 *Mauritshuis* sequence based on paintings in the eponymous museum in the Hague is also addressed to 'figlia mia': in keeping with the thematic strand of teaching the children about physical realities and death, the poem describes meticulously a still life by Pieter Claesz, a *memento mori* piece whose 'repertorio trito' includes a 'morto cronometro', 'ossame molto umano', and a 'penna semiesausta, muta' (*Il gatto lupesco* 179), resonating inevitably with the repeated images of the moribund poet in this phase. After this, in *Corollario* (1992–6) we find just one passing instance of parental address in poem 19, where his gift of a jigsaw puzzle from Jerusalem for the now grown-up daughter leads to yet another 'didactic' speech, this time inveighing against religions. Subsequently, in *Cose* (1996–2001), there are no further identifiable instances of texts involving paternal concerns or dialogues (although the conjugal-erotic theme is as strongly present as ever).

There is, however, a late recurrence of the paternal theme in the posthumous collection *Varie ed eventuali* (published in 2011, a year after Sanguineti's death), in the sequence 'Tre sonetti verdi' (dated 2004). The sonnet form, which appears at intervals throughout this final volume, had typically been used by Sanguineti in previous works as part of a more playful or occasional vein, in pieces such as acrostics dedicated to artistic and literary friends.²⁶ However, a notable feature of this posthumous collection is the presence of sonnets in which the examination and representation of the self is the primary concern, involving varying degrees of stylistic irony or pastiche. In the first poem in 'Tre sonetti verdi' – a dialogue with the self, with the 'heart' – the speaker's paternal status is a defining characteristic:

cuore mi sei di padre, e così, a scatti,
e a salti, e a sbalzi, in vampe di calore
mi scappi in scoppi, e ti storci e ti sbatti,
bello bollente in bolle di vapore: (*Varie* 38)

The playfully alliterative texture within a canonical verse form recalls *Novissimum Testamentum*, as does the exaggerated display of emotion: his 'caro cuore' gives rise to 'lacrime di languido liquore', exuding an 'amaro amore'. The tension in these last words is echoed in the second sonnet (addressed to a 'figlio'), which is striking for its strong physicality (images of sleep, death, 'membra storte') and its contradictory emotions reminiscent of paternal poems from *Stracciafoglio* in the late 1970s, but resolved finally in a passage of unaccustomed paternal humility:

perdona il genitore: e con assorto
voci io ti cullerò: dolce, amoroso,

placida pace, in ninnenanne accorte,
odi, filastrocando, io, doloroso,
ecco, a te porgo: e busso alle tue porte: (*Varie* 39)

Here, as the gravitas of the sonnet form is undermined in the comparison to a lullaby or a *filastrocca*, the note of paternal tenderness recalls if anything elements of the address to the

²⁶ See, for example, in *Ecfrafi*, 'Animali elementari' (*Il gatto lupesco* 158); or in *Faneroografie*, 'Che cosa è la poesia' (213).

daughter in *Novissimum Testamentum*.²⁷ This echo is reinforced in the third sonnet where her figure again takes centre stage: 'il mio universo è in te, florida figlia' (*Varie* 39). In a further display of hyperbole, she is superimposed on a range of female figures ('madre a me sei [...] mi sei sorella [...] quasi sposa mi sei, mia meraviglia') culminating in the self-ridiculing portrayal of a lovesick *io-padre*: 'a te ti faccio l'occhiolin di triglia'. In the closing lines, the tone shifts as the self is represented in less comic terms:

tu non sai, cara, quanto ho trepidato,
quanto ho sofferto: io sono la conchiglia
in cui, volendo, ascolti, in concertato,

come si franse, in mare uraganato,
in mille pezzi la fragile chiglia
del mio arcaico naviglio navigato: (*Varie* 39)

In this, his last appearance in Sanguineti's verse, the figure of the *io* as father is reduced to an empty, resonating shell, to a broken thing, the shattered hull of a wrecked ship. In his stance of trepidation and exaggerated humility, the father is now a fragile, diminished, almost vanishing *io*, in keeping with the further generalized abasement of the self in this posthumous collection.²⁸

Paternal realism and the construction of Sanguineti's masculine self

Our analysis of the texts brings to light two salient and, in the wider literary context, distinctive aspects of Sanguineti's extensive use of the language, imagery, and postures of paternity. Firstly, there is an overarching concern with material realities, whether bodily, economic, or political, in representing and addressing the child from a paternal perspective; secondly, paternity is a key component in his construction of a contradictory, sometimes fragmented, but distinctively masculine self.

Discussing the term 'realism' in 2005, Sanguineti states that its efficacy lies in the emphasis it places 'sul rapporto concreto fra gli uomini, sulla loro storia, sulla loro esperienza' (Galletta 63); and he concludes with the avowedly 'paradoxical' claim that, in the twentieth century, 'l'unico vero atteggiamento realista, nel senso che ho cercato di indicare, sia stato quello delle avanguardie' (68). In a similar vein, Lucia Re asserts that a key element in the work of the *neoavanguardia* in general was 'the urge to "demystify" and "demythify"' (Re 137): in this sense, a realist impulse can certainly be seen to underpin the role played by paternal themes and images in Sanguineti's poetry. Describing aspects of his cultural formation in the immediate postwar years, Sanguineti stresses the importance of 'Marx e Freud come due punti di riferimento essenziali, soprattutto colti in quello che è l'atteggiamento di demistificazione e di critica' (Galletta 93). The demystification of the family, seen in the poems with reference both to the conjugal and the parent-child relationship, is rooted on the one hand in Sanguineti's Marxist position, as elaborated clearly in the 2006 essay 'Come si diventa materialisti storici?' Here he recalls how, according to the *Communist Manifesto* (a passage already cited in *Reisebilder* 19), capitalism itself destroys 'valori familiari' and ultimately exposes the naked economic mechanisms underlying family relationships ('Come si diventa' 20). In the same essay, he links his own earliest awakening of class consciousness with an acquisition of a sense of sexual awareness, recounting how, as a child in Turin, a chance encounter with a

²⁷ These lines also partly prefigure the language of 'Nove filastrocche per Luca', written for his youngest grandson in 2010 (*Varie* 147–55).

²⁸ We can perhaps also find parallels with this late, self-deprecating *io* in some of the moments of tragi-comic paternal pathos in *King Lear*, which Sanguineti would translate in 2008.

slightly older working-class boy gave him his first direct contact with an individual from what then seemed 'un altro pianeta', the world of the proletariat. It is telling that a key part of the memory involves the other boy's uninhibited attitude to sexual matters, on which Sanguineti, as a ten-year-old with a bourgeois education, held 'un'idea favolosa' (25). The essay goes on to identify a similar conjunction of sexual and socio-political discovery in Moravia's novel *Agostino*, which Sanguineti praises for its 'realist' dimension as 'un grande libro politico' in its representation of a young bourgeois boy who discovers 'in piena coincidenza, la differenza sessuale e la differenza sociale' (28). However, if Moravia's representation of that discovery embraces the filial perspective of the child, in Sanguineti it is through the *io-padre* that this same critical revelation of the political and the corporeal-sexual is given voice.

In his 1927 essay *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud declares: 'Men cannot remain children for ever; they must in the end go out into "hostile life". We may call this "education to reality"' (Freud 49). Sanguineti's *io-padre* is frequently represented in a pedagogic posture that resonates closely with this Freudian imperative. Unlike other paternal poems seen earlier where the corporeal is attenuated symbolically, sublimated, or simply avoided, Sanguineti's poems repeatedly present the *io-padre* actively promoting awareness and understanding in his offspring of the bodily nature of human experience. From early representations of the physicality of the foetus and newborn child to admonitions delivered to the young sons about a hostile material and socio-economic world, from matter-of-fact discussions of sex to the exploration of the pathologized body and contemplation of death, Sanguineti's paternal poetry is focused on stripping away illusions and idealizations. This demystification also bears directly on his politicized view of linguistic choices, for example in *Glosse 17*: 'amo così, quella grande politica / che è viva nei gesti della vita quotidiana, nelle parole quotidiane (come ciao / pane, fica, grazie mille)' (*Il gatto lupesco* 125).

Sanguineti describes historical materialism as 'l'idea che gli uomini siano delle belve umane aggregate, che partono da bisogni elementari – produzione e riproduzione della vita – e che tutto il resto è dato come possibilità di scegliere la migliore strada per riorganizzarsi e sopravvivere prima di tutto come gruppo, come classe, come specie' (Gnoli 195). The materialist and corporeal vision of the human subject, including the child, is concomitant with a concern with the individual's initiation into culture. For Sanguineti, 'l'esperienza corporea non è un'esperienza naturale' (Galletta 105): it is based rather on cultural and historical modalities, and the task of 'humanizing' the 'bestiola bambino' (Gnoli 112) is a difficult one. An essential part of this task is teaching the child about death:

Si potrebbe dire che l'unica cosa che si trasmette culturalmente o, almeno, il nodo centrale della trasmissione culturale sta nell'insegnare all'animale uomo che dovrà morire. Cosa che l'animale ignora e che l'uomo sa. Ma che non sa il fanciullino: l'infante non nasce certamente con questa idea, deve esservi educato. (Galletta 115)

Sanguineti's use of the term 'fanciullino' here brings us back to his earlier commentaries on Pascoli. While erotic and economic realities were seen to be 'censored' by Pascoli, the theme of death was nevertheless important. In Pascoli, however, death was a focus of filial and memorial pathos, whereas Sanguineti's paternal texts locate it in the framework of present and future bodily reality, where it is, he says, 'guardata molto dal basso, come morte di un corpo e non come separazione tra spirito e carne' (Galletta 117). It is ostentatiously displayed, along with the full range of corporeal experiences. One text where the contrast with Pascoli is underscored further is Sanguineti's conjugal-erotic pastiche of Pascoli's *L'ultima passeggiata* (1982), in which, Curi notes, 'a sventare il rischio del patetico

[è] principalmente il linguaggio della corporalità' (Curi, *Gli stati* 219). We can make a similar but broader claim for the treatment of the themes associated with paternity throughout Sanguineti's work. The poems of domesticity do not so much offer 'alternatives' to 'degraded scenarios' as suggested by Peterson (72), rather they embrace the realities of animal existence in all its degradation. The language and imagery of corporeality, of the quotidian and of historical materiality are what anchor the paternal poems in a demystified present perspective. Rather than looking backwards in filial nostalgia, pathos, or regret, these texts look forwards as they offer a clear-sighted personal and ideological legacy of realism to the children and the reader.

Sanguineti's texts also present a shifting, sometimes contradictory or unstable, but assertively masculine construction of the paternal self. In an essay on fatherhood in American confessional poetry of the mid-twentieth century, Brian Glaser suggests that the poetry of fatherhood (particularly poems addressing daughters) can cast a new light on the specific experience of American masculinity in that period, as writers explore 'a relationship that made their own masculinity into an occasion of loneliness', reflecting 'a tension between their identities as fathers and their identities as men' (27). In Sanguineti, in a very different socio-cultural and ideological context, the paternal self is often degraded and problematized (notably in terms of his physical or sexual vigour), but there is little sense that these problematic figurations involve a fundamental challenge to his masculine identity. Indeed, the subject that Sanguineti constructs is avowedly masculine, albeit one in which elements of gendered self-effacement or degradation coexist with manifestations of libido, authority, and pedagogic certainty.

Lucia Re argues convincingly that Sanguineti and the other members of the male-dominated *neovanguardia* were largely 'oblivious or indifferent to the ideology of gender in their own discourse' (145). Nevertheless, their challenges to linguistic and expressive norms led them to explore 'an alternative language, which in many ways meant somehow moving towards a non-masculine, "feminine" type of discourse', one that challenged 'patriarchal bourgeois culture' (Re 169). In the case of Sanguineti, especially in *Laborintus*, this sees the writing plunged into what Re calls 'the irrationality of a generically "feminised" unconscious' (171), involving an 'appropriation of the feminine' and 'the usurpation of a vast metaphoric field which includes images of giving birth, giving life, nourishing, etc.' (172). With regard to *Laborintus*, I would argue that this is in part a distorted reading: the various figures or textual presences in that poem (*io, tu, Ellie, Lazzo*) are unstable and shifting in their identities and functions (Risso 22), and the focus on the feminine is at least in part concerned with using figurations of maternity to represent the filial-foetal stance of a dissolved, multifaceted subject.²⁹ It is certainly true, as we have seen, that Sanguineti's subsequent poetry makes widespread use of a 'metaphoric field' associated with birth, parenthood, children, and nurturing, but it does so in a distinctively masculine-gendered perspective. In fact, with the gradual development of his diaristic-communicative manner from *Purgatorio* onwards, the representation of a specifically male experience of parenthood is one of the most original elements in the construction of Sanguineti's textual persona.

We have seen how the paternal poems are a vehicle for the promulgation of Sanguineti's ideological vision through the adoption of a pedagogic stance. While this is grounded in representations of practical, quotidian experience and coupled repeatedly with a tender or protective posture, it also involves the assumption of a position of authority, indeed of

²⁹ See Annovi 143–9 and Baccarani 55.

dogmatism at times, giving rise to notable ambiguities of tone and emphasis.³⁰ The political lessons delivered by the *io-padre* are peppered with verbs of telling and 'explaining' and are often peremptory in giving the children his historical-materialist analysis of family life or of everyday cultural objects. At times the paternal stance becomes overtly authoritarian, as embodied in the slaps delivered in *Postkarten 64* and *Capriccio italiano* or in the more confrontational arguments in *Stracciafoglio*. However, from an early stage the paternal discourse is also associated with representations of the *io* as weak, degraded, confronted by his own mortality specifically by virtue of his paternal status, and in turn driven by a paternal-didactic impulse to impart the knowledge of this to his offspring as explicit or implicit addressees of the poems. Some of these ambiguities are echoed in a personal testimony by Vittorio Coletti, an academic colleague in Genoa, who stresses Sanguineti's almost ostentatious emotional and physical 'pateticità', whose focus lies in his family relationships in all their contradictory aspects: 'È nella famiglia che il poeta è corpo debole e invadente, indifeso e protettivo, fastidioso e desiderato. [...] Il corpo-famiglia è scudo e ferita dell'individuo' (Coletti, 37–8).³¹ As we have observed, ambiguities such as these are central to Sanguineti's paternal poems.

Conclusion

The representation of paternity in Sanguineti is complex and original, opening perspectives previously unexplored in the modern Italian poetic tradition. In contrast with other poets' paternal representations where the language and imagery tend towards displacement of the corporeal in symbolic or abstract terms, Sanguineti writes fatherhood as an embodied experience, anchored in a historicized present, lived and understood politically. Meanwhile, his paternal poems are characterized by a shifting and contradictory construction of the poetic *io* as both a pathologically degraded, even abject self – a self diminished in part by his very paternity – and as an assertive patriarchal figure who leads and teaches the children, dispensing practical and ideological guidance and embodying an authority represented in gendered masculine terms. The image and voice of the father in dialogue with his offspring offer a unique key to the contradictions inherent in Sanguineti's broader construction of the poetic self as by turns strong, uncompromising in his opinionated certainties, and elsewhere declaredly weak, impotent, or empty. Thus, Sanguineti constructs a masculine self riven by ambiguities and tensions, between the ultimately anarchic messages of demystification associated with the avant-garde, the authoritative and at times authoritarian stance of the pedagogue delivering them, and the often vulnerable, diminished, or sometimes tenderly protective persona of the flesh and blood parent.

³⁰ Sanguineti takes the ambiguity surrounding the paternal teaching figure to extremes in his 2001 Pirandellian adaptation, *Sei personaggi.com*, as he shockingly subverts his own widespread use of the paternal-pedagogic trope by turning Pirandello's Father into a predatory monster, who essentially grooms his own daughter by viewing with her and explaining in grotesque detail a series of sexually explicit images.

³¹ In another personal testimony, the writer Tommaso Ottonieri recalls his own 'investiture' by Sanguineti as a kind of literary 'son', noting that this apparently paternal stance was marked by a degree of detachment, which Ottonieri also perceived in Sanguineti's relationship with his own children: 'Edoardo did not have a very serene rapport with his paternal role, either direct or indirect' (Ottonieri 224). Ottonieri suggests that Sanguineti expected 'a kind of distancing from parental dependencies' on the part of his offspring, leading to 'conflicting relationships', adding that 'his fleetingness and almost distance (as a "father") was also a form of ethos, a life discipline to be transmitted' (224).

References

- Annovi, Gian Maria. *Altri corpi: poesia e corporalità negli anni Sessanta*. Bologna: Gedit, 2008, pp. 133–74.
- Baccarani, Elisabetta. 'La persona migliore dello schermo: modi ed evoluzione dell'autobiografismo nella poesia di Edoardo Sanguineti.' *Autobiografie in versi: sei poeti allo specchio*, edited by Marco Bazzocchi. Bologna: Pendragon, 2002, pp. 149–80.
- Bertolucci, Attilio. *La camera da letto*. Milan: Garzanti, 1988.
- Bertolucci, Attilio. *La capanna indiana*. Florence: Sansoni, 1955.
- Bertoni, Alberto. 'Giorgio Orelli.' *Poesia del Novecento Italiano: dal secondo dopoguerra a oggi*, edited by Niva Lorenzini. Rome: Carocci, 2003, pp. 110–14.
- Caproni, Giorgio. *L'opera in versi*. Milan: Mondadori, 1998.
- Chirumbolo, Paolo and John Picchione, eds. *Edoardo Sanguineti: Literature, Ideology and the Avant-Garde*. Oxford: Legenda, 2013.
- Coletti, Vittorio. 'L'uomo magro.' *Album Sanguineti*, edited by Niva Lorenzini and Erminio Risso. Lecce: Manni, 2002, pp. 36–9.
- Corazzini, Sergio. *Liriche*. Milan: Ricciardi, 1968.
- Cortellessa, Andrea. 'Edoardo Sanguineti, la morte in vacanza.' *La fisica del senso: saggi e interventi su poeti italiani dal 1940 a oggi*. Rome: Fazi Editore, 2006, pp. 237–72.
- Curi, Fausto. *Epifanie della modernità*. Bologna: Clueb, 2000.
- Curi, Fausto. *Gli stati d'animo del corpo: studi sulla letteratura italiana dell'Otto e del Novecento*. Bologna: Pendragon, 2005.
- Curi, Fausto. *La poesia italiana nel Novecento*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999.
- Fava, Stefano. 'Intervista a Edoardo Sanguineti.' *Filologia antica e moderna*, 12(1997): 177–94.
- Freud, Sigmund. 'The Future of an Illusion'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, vol. 21. London: Hogarth Press, 1961, pp. 3–56.
- Galletta, Giuliano. *Sanguineti/Novecento: conversazioni sulla cultura del ventesimo secolo*. Genoa: Il melangolo, 2005.
- Gambaro, Fabio. *Colloquio con Edoardo Sanguineti*. Milan: Anabasi, 1993.
- Gatto, Alfonso. *Tutte le poesie*. Milan: Mondadori, 2005.
- Glaser, Brian. 'Fatherhood in Confessional Poetry: One Facet of Men's Autobiographical Writing.' *College Literature*, 36.4 (2009): 25–45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.0.0074>
- Gnoli, Antonio. *Sanguineti's song: conversazioni immorali*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006.
- Livorni, Ernesto. 'Edoardo Sanguineti's Early Poetry: Between Language and Ideology.' Chirumbolo and Picchione, pp. 56–70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351191753-6>
- Lorenzini, Niva. *Il presente della poesia: 1960–1990*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991.
- Lorenzini, Niva. *La poesia italiana del Novecento*. 2nd ed., Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.
- Lorenzini, Niva. *La poesia: tecniche di ascolto*. Lecce: Manni, 2003.
- Luperini, Romano. *Il Novecento: apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura italiana contemporanea*. Vol. 2, Turin: Loescher, 1981.
- Montale, Eugenio. *L'opera in versi*. Turin: Einaudi, 1980.
- O'Ceallachain, Eanna. 'Siamo una doppia coppia: l'eros coniugale in Sanguineti.' *2: ricerche e riflessioni sul tema della coppia*, edited by Fabrizio Bondi et al. Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2016, pp. 51–65.
- Orelli, Giorgio. *Tutte le poesie*. Milan: Mondadori, 2015.
- Ottonieri, Tommaso. 'My encounters with the *Maestro*.' Chirumbolo and Picchione 2013, pp. 221–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351191753-24>
- Pascoli, Giovanni. *Il fanciullino*. Edited by Giorgio Agamben. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982.

- Pascoli, Giovanni. *Poesie*. Milan: Mondadori, 1948.
- Pascoli, Giovanni. *Prose*. Vol. 1, Milan: Mondadori, 1956.
- Peterson, Thomas. 'The Midlife Poetry of Edoardo Sanguineti.' *Chirumbolo and Picchione* 2013, pp. 71–89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351191753-7>
- Pietropaoli, Antonio. 'Cose e parole.' *Per Edoardo Sanguineti: 'good luck (and look)'*, edited by Antonio Pietropaoli. Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2002, pp. 61–76.
- Pietropaoli, Antonio. 'Sanguineti Angelus novissimus.' *Lingua e stile*, 30(2): 415–44, 1995.
- Pietropaoli, Antonio. *Unità e trinità di Edoardo Sanguineti*. Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1991.
- Re, Lucia. 'Language, Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde.' *MLN*, 119(1): 135–73, 2004. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2004.0068>
- Risso, Erminio. *Laborintus di Edoardo Sanguineti: Testo e commento*. Lecce: Manni, 2006.
- Saba, Umberto. *Tutte le poesie*. Milan: Mondadori, 1988.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'Attraverso i Poemetti Pascoliani.' *Ideologia e linguaggio*, edited by Erminio Risso. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001, pp. 11–34.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. *Capriccio italiano*. 1963. *Smorfie: romanzi e racconti*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007, pp. 5–119.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'Come si diventa materialisti storici?' *Cultura e realtà*, edited by Erminio Risso. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2010, pp. 17–33.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. *Genova per me*. Naples: Guida Editore, 2004.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. *Il gatto lupesco: Poesie (1982–2001)*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'I Poemetti di Pascoli.' *Il chierico organico: scritture e intellettuali*, edited by Risso, Erminio. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000, pp. 166–76.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'La tragedia familiare nella poesia di Giovanni Pascoli.' *La missione del critico*. Genoa: Marietti, 1987, pp. 4–20.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'Montale e la mitologia dell'inetto.' *Il chierico organico: scritture e intellettuali*, edited by Erminio Risso. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000, pp. 227–40.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. 'Poesia informale?' *I Novissimi: poesie per gli anni '60*, edited by Alfredo Giuliani. 1961. 2nd ed., Turin: Einaudi, 2003, pp. 201–4.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. *Segnalibro: Poesie 1951–1981*. 3rd ed., Milan: Feltrinelli, 2010.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo. *Varie ed eventuali*. Edited by Niva Lorenzini. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011.
- Sanguineti, Federico. 'Una lettura di *Ti attende il filo* ossia *Le ceneri* di Sanguineti. 23 giugno del 2015.' *Edoardo Sanguineti: ritratto in pubblico. Atti del convegno internazionale di Bologna (23 giugno 2015)*, edited by Luigi Weber. Milan: Mimesis, 2016, pp. 147–51.
- Testa, Enrico. *Dopo la lirica: poeti italiani 1960–2000*. Turin: Einaudi, 2005.
- Ungaretti, Giuseppe. *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie*. Milan: Mondadori, 2009.
- Weber, Luigi. *Usando gli utensili di utopia: Traduzione, parodia e riscrittura in Edoardo Sanguineti*. Bologna: Gedit, 2004.

How to cite this article: O'Ceallachain, E 2019 'Pessimo me, come padre': Paternity in Sanguineti and the Novecento tradition. *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 1 pp. 1–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.286>

Published: 02 January 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

]u[*Modern Languages Open* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Liverpool University Press.

OPEN ACCESS 