



**UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI CATANIA**  
**FACOLTÀ DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE**  
Dottorato di Ricerca in Studi Inglesi ed Anglo-Americani  
Ciclo XXIV

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*Unweiling absences, or unsettling multiculturalism,*  
*in Antonio Casella's *The Sensualist**  
*and*  
*Venero Armano's *Romeo of the Underworld and**  
**The Volcano**

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TESI DI DOTTORATO

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ANNO ACCADEMICO 2010-2011



PLATE I

*Mt Etna Dreaming*  
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## Acknowledgements

In acknowledging my gratitude to all those who have intellectually, emotionally and economically supported my project, I would like to thank Professor Gemma Persico who has patiently acted as a mentor, rigorously supervised my work and offered me her knowledge of Italian-Canadian literature which has proved a valuable sphere of comparison.

I would also like to thank Professor Vittoria Maria D'Amico as coordinator of the PhD course 'Studi Inglese ed Anglo-Americani' and the Department of Filologia Moderna for being financially supportive of my attendance to conferences in Italy and abroad and my research. Fulbright professors Etta Madden and Patricia Schroeder have been very helpful in suggesting ideas and indicating bibliographical references. To them I express my gratitude.

As for my research abroad, I would like to thank the staff of the Senate House Library, the British Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies Library (London) and the National Australian Library (Canberra). Also, deep gratitude goes to both the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library (London) and the Fryer Library (Brisbane) where, thanks to their staff's professionalism and wonderful hospitality, 'research is made easier' and particularly to Senior Librarian Catherine Leutenegger for all her precious assistance. I would also like to thank Professor Gillian Whitlock, doctors Anne Gilligan, Venero Armanno, whom I met in Australia, and Antonio Casella for giving me enlightening suggestions.

My gratitude also goes to all those friends who patiently listened to my ruminations and to my university colleagues whose enthusiasm has always inspired me to make the most of this experience. *Dulcis in fundo*, my deepest 'inexpressible' gratitude goes to my family...

## Abbreviations

- TS* A. Casella, *The Sensualist*, Sydney, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991.
- R* V. Armanno, *Romeo of the Underworld*, Milsons Point (NSW), Vintage [1994] 2001.
- F* V. Armanno, *Firehead*, Milsons Point (NSW), Random House Australia, 1999.
- TV* V. Armanno, *The Volcano. A Sicilian Novel of Emotion, Passion and Fire*, Milsons Point (NSW), Knopf, 2001.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary* online

## Introduction

Apart from some scholars, very little has been written on Italian ethnic minority literature in Australia and, specifically, no investigation has been carried out about the presence of its Gothic aspects in relation to their diasporic and postcolonial meanings. As for these elements in postcolonial literature, Freud's essay "The Uncanny" has been of paramount importance in understanding the reality of the colonised subjects in social, psychological and political terms rather than in exotic ones. Mapping the clash between the *unheimlich* and *heimlich* on the reality of 'migrant' subjects means blurring hierarchical oppositions, particularly in Australia marked by a 'complicit postcolonialism'. In this light, it is significant to contextualise migrants' reality – even the cultural and social presence of those Italians 'and' Sicilians arriving in the aftermath of WWII who are in part perceived as doomed to 'invisibility' – in line with S.M. Gunew's situated multiculturalisms and in relation to colonialism. All this leading to a post-multicultural discourse, mirroring the 'post' of postcolonialism, not as something that follows multiculturalism but as its counter-discourse.

The aim of this study is, thus, to highlight the function of such Gothic elements. On the one hand, they underline the dehumanizing discourse from a narcissistic hegemonic standpoint and, on the other hand, they represent an uncanny return of the past which unsettles the present in both what it means to be an immigrant in Australia – specifically a Sicilian one – and an Anglo-Australian in a multicultural context.

In order to demonstrate the above, this research is informed by several critics and has as starting points the two authors' own words. Casella refers to *The Sensualist* as a sort of 'hit-back-at' novel and Armanno sees the world from a perspective embedded in the term 'apartness' – whose implications are evident in *The Volcano* and *Romeo of the Underworld*. Far from being associated with homesickness, their 'third space' represents an intertextual form of 'postmodern nostalgia'. This 'cultural resistance' is elucidated by drawing on postcolonial, postmodernist, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and diasporic studies. In this framework a plethora of theories will



help to unfold the cultural, social and political texture of the novels here analysed: Kristeva's semiotic, melancholia and intertextuality, Freud's *unheimlich*, comic, joke-work and dream-work, Bhabha's hybridity, Lacan's Real, Derrida's deconstruction, hospitality and *hauntology*, Said's theories, Bakhtin's intertextuality, grotesque and carnivalesque, and Burke's sublime.

Freud's *unheimlich* ontological and epistemological approach intertwines with the theories aforementioned. In brief, the semiotic elements in the novels here analysed convey the 'Real' where hybrid subjectivity has its *locus*. Such inexpressible experience is also perceivable through its 'objectification' in the form of the intertextual sublime and through uncanny Gothic elements such as memory, dreams and metaphors.

The sublime functions as a paramount manifestation of semiotic drives associated to the marginalised ethnic writer which energises mainstream culture, though only after having 'cracked' the narcissistic mirror of the 'white' subject. In this conceptual cartography, the deconstruction of concepts such as 'white', 'ethnicity', and 'identity' – the latter in favour of '*subjectivity*' – entails that the subject has to be interpreted as socially constructed and, thus, located in Lacan's 'Real' where the idea of a totalising harmonious ethnic relationship does not exist. It is at the core of this experience that absence, the unrepresentable 'encounter' in the sublime, is located. Focusing on the latter, this study tries to avoid hierarchical and discriminatory forms of essentialism.

Moreover, in approaching the uncanny from a postmodern perspective, this study discusses its functionality not only in expressing forms of displacement but also its polyvalence of recurrent concepts in diasporic studies. For example, 'diaspora' and 'nostalgia' can express both feelings of sorrow and fluidity and cultural exchange. Consequently, this disrupts the perspective of a fixed and homogenised diasporic subject in a *one-to-one relationship* supporting, also through official 'multicultural' policies, paths in line with colonial assimilation. In this post-colonial perspective, this study is informed by theories concerning ghosts, werewolves and vampires as discussed and mentioned by several critics.

As for intertextuality, and its postmodern parody, this is analysed through its aesthetic expressions such as those found in *historiographic metafiction* (*The Volcano*), in the pastiche (*The Sensualist*), and in the dialogical novel (*Romeo of the Underworld*). Their intertextuality underpins the sublime process of subjectivity shattering the ‘white’ reader’s ontological and epistemological certainties.

These theories, as far as Sicilians in Australia are concerned, have been used very little to understand the social experience and literary production of these writers whether defined as migrant, ethnic or multicultural. The latter calls into question the (in)visibility given to these literary works, their authors and their ethnic community.

This study is divided into four chapters. In **CHAPTER ONE**, ‘*The uncanny mirror of Whiteness*’, the starting point is the pedagogical value attributed by Gramsci to fairy-tales. In line with this, and adopting a post-colonial approach, the ‘mirror’ in *Snow-White* is analysed as one of the many media expressing the power of language and of the gaze in the construction of those myths narrating Anglo-Australian nation (*egalitarianism, fair-go, tolerance, mateship legend, Gallipoli, etc.*). Such universalistic values are ‘unveiled’ through the uncanny following Bhabha who underlines the psychoanalytic uncertainty which lies behind the aggressiveness metonymically displaced through excesses, stereotypes, authenticity and the comic.

The above deconstruction unhinges the concept of identity of both the ‘white’ subject and the subaltern. The former loses his/her narcissism as soon as he/she becomes aware of the Lacanian ‘lacking of the lack’ at the base of ‘Whiteness’, similarly to the death of Narcissus which, as predicted by Tiresias, overcomes him as soon as he becomes aware of his self-image. The latter is freed from the imprisoning power of the ‘white’ gaze in order to re-elaborate a new and fluid identitarian concept.

Among the many examples of *comic displacement* of the ‘white’ subject’s aggressiveness and of the risk of being ‘laughed at’ like in Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant”, the final section of this chapter, drawing on Freud’s distinction between the comic and jokes, focuses on two famous literary hoaxes. *They’re a Weird Mob* by John O’Grady/Nino Culotta and *The Hand that Signed the Paper* by Helen

Darville/Demidenko, for their uncanny relationship with the joke, are reinterpreted and identified through the neologism 'hoaks'. Besides revealing, as a crack in the mirror, the lack of 'Whiteness', they also prove the continuity between colonialism and multiculturalism in which migrants are trapped.

**CHAPTER TWO**, '*The cracked mirror or the phantom of authenticity*', contextualises ethnic literary production in what, in the wake of *postcolonial studies*, can be defined as *multicultural discourse*. Its literary framework, mapped on the sociological one, follows strategies of representation and thus of legitimisation. The reception, diffusion and interpretation of 'ethnic' works mirrors an ethnographic colonisation which elaborates arbitrarily what might be called an identikit of literary texts; or, in other words, an array of *authentic markers* that marginalise the other (subaltern/text) to a space and time 'outside' a modern, democratic and civilised Australia. After upsetting such markers, this chapter goes on to define a new concept of ethnic literature as, at the same time, one of *dislocation* and one of *recognition* or, in Derridean terms, a literature of the *arrivant*.

After the above contextualisation, this chapter discusses some Gothic topoi (bush, darkness, zombie, shadows, ghosts, vampires) which, on the one hand, are interpreted as a *discursive site* where the other is defined while, on the other hand, they are re-appropriated as uncanny and sublime elements. Through the latter, the subaltern gives voice to a social and cultural *forgetting* to which the diasporic subject is doomed as a result of the aforementioned 'authenticity' or 'ventriloquising' process.

The difficulty of expressing the hybrid identity discussed in the first chapter is connected to the death of a 'symbolic' identity that makes the subject a member accepted by the mainstream social group. For this reason such a tension remains inexpressible or, in other words, indirectly conveyed by both the grotesque 'margins' of the narrative structure of Casella's and Armanno's novels here analysed, and the uncanny intertextual elements disrupting the 'centre': the 'paratext' and the subtext (dreams, memory, metaphors).

In **CHAPTER THREE**, '*The sublime experience of living "on leased land"*', Casella's *The Sensualist* is analysed in order to highlight through the main character

the post-colonial relationship between mimicry and ‘mockery’. In this way, by unsettling the ‘representation’ of the assimilated subject, as the copy does with the original, Casella shatters that of the ‘white’ subject introjected through the gaze/mirror.

In this framework, the rituals constructing identity such as the Greek chorus and the Eucharist function as postmodern and carnivalesque parodies evoking polyphonic identities. A similar aim characterises Nick’s dreams which make uncertain, like the mist and the darkness of the novel, whatever Western epistemological certainties that oppose dreams to reality. Hence, and in line with R. Jackson’s theories, the novel can be defined as a ‘paraxial’ text.

What has been said entails Nick’s encounter with the sublime ‘lack’ or, to put it differently, the encounter with the absence of a metaphysical and transcendental ‘presence’. The latter is further complicated by its relationship with the polluting memories of Australia which take place in the bush, a discursive site of identitarian definition of what it means to be Anglo-Celtic on the margins of the Empire. It is on this site that Casella disrupts those myths, analysed in the first chapter: the ‘garden’ is, on the one hand, in opposition to the Gothic outback doomed to be physically and culturally colonised and, on the other hand, it is the place where Aborigines reclaim their rights and testify to the moral bankruptcy of modern Australia.

After having established that the Anglo-Celtic subject in Australia is a migrant as all others and that the diasporic subject has not received the societal hope of egalitarianism, there is no reason for the latter to expiate an exclusively Anglo-Celtic guiltiness.

A further point analysed in this chapter is the ‘pastiche’ of different genres that goes beyond the limits imposed on the novel by F. Jameson when discussing ‘blank parody’ as having no transgressive aim. On the contrary, it is proved that this novel by combining different genres aims at a polyphonic *jouissance* that transgresses the limits imposed by social taboos.

**CHAPTER FOUR**, ‘*Searching for home or the uncomfortable halfway*’, begins with an understanding of melancholia as an expression of social anxiety and the longing for identity. After having established its relationship with nostalgia, the chapter

moves on to analyse its intertextual implications. Hence, its manifestation through metaphors (Sicily-Australia, ghosts, vampires, werewolves) unveiling a double displacement and mis-interpellation – as well as its reasons which Armanno identifies with a cross-cultural disconnection between immigrants and locals – and the path towards a new hybrid identity, or subjectivity.

As for the first aspect, the ‘*patruni*’, ballroom and mousetrap metaphors all contribute to convey the shattering of Emilio’s hopes of an egalitarian host country in *The Volcano*. Yet, the two frames of reference do not function in a unidirectional way but serve to understand, intertextually, both Australia and Sicily. As Armanno states, by knowing migrants’ stories back in Sicily those taking place in Australia will become clearer and, vice versa, by trying to understand their attitudes in the host country one has to go back to their roots. In the same way, Gothic *topoi* convey both the displacement, hunger for one’s origins and the *liminality* of first and successive generation migrants.

As for the second aspect, an enormous importance is attached to memory and the intergenerational relationship as the only way of an ethnic survival based on the knowledge of the good and ‘stupid’ things characterising the past. Yet, like Derrida’s *pharmakon*, memory is at the same time a strategy to give presence to what is absent and a way of confirming its own absence. Located in a sort of liminal space it becomes a land of memory or *memoryscape* whose best expression, in a land where cultural heritage has little importance, seems to happen through ‘texts’. The significance of memory for what it means to be Sicilian-Australian, and consequently Anglo-Australian, is given by the ‘garden’ metaphor. In this light, memory, texts and identity seem to interrelate and find their common aspect in a ‘halfway’ *locus* – which is also spatially and psychoanalytically conveyed through dreams.

Finally, this chapter concentrates on the narrative structures of both *The Volcano* and *Romeo of the Underworld* which convey the identitarian dislocation of both characters and readers.

## *The uncanny mirror of whiteness*

One's eye takes in everything except the human beings. [...] it always misses the peasant hoeing at his patch. He is the same colour as the earth, and a great deal less interesting to look at. [...] People with brown skin are next door to invisible<sup>1</sup>.

For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white<sup>2</sup>.

The encounter between identities, determined by historical events, always entails power relations through representations and thus becomes a discursive site of visibility and invisibility. As it will be discussed in this chapter, the power of the 'gaze' both dismisses the subaltern subject and traps it in a childish position for the convenience of the 'us-them' opposition. The necessity of analysing the formation of 'discourses', both in their verbal and visual aspects, is unavoidable in order to contextualise ethnic minority writings and deconstruct the social, theoretical and political background supporting, even in a so-called multicultural period, a 'colonial' view of *the other*.

### **1.1 Almost Australian, but not quite**

In one of his letters to his sister, Teresina, Gramsci tells her that he is translating some of the Brothers Grimm's fables into Italian<sup>3</sup>. His activity of translation is far from being a minor one since it reveals the cultural and pedagogical interest that identifies his more political and social writings. Through these fabulous stories Gramsci addressed to future generations and the subaltern in order to show them a way in a world that he defined as 'terrible and vast'<sup>4</sup>. It is no fortuitous coincidence that in translating the fables he chose those which conveyed feelings of solidarity and

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<sup>1</sup> G. Orwell, "Marrakech", in S. Orwell, I. Angus (eds.), *George Orwell. An Age Like This. 1920-1940* (vol. 1), Boston, Nonpareil Books, 1968, pp. 390, 392.

<sup>2</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gramsci, Letter to Teresina, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1932 qtd in R. Corrado, *Antonio Gramsci: teorico della traduzione, scrittore per l'infanzia. Un contributo allo sviluppo della fantasia dei bambini e alla formazione dei giovani*, Roma, Aracne, 2008, p. 9.

empathy binding the marginalised groups ‘fighting’ against the oppressor. Among the fairy tales translated by Gramsci, *Snow White* will be focused on to introduce some of Gramsci’s and postcolonial concepts, such as hegemony, the subaltern, *textuality*, representation, binary oppositions, etc. In the following narcissistic scene, the queen

[...] stood in front of it, looked at herself in it, and said: “Looking-glass, looking-glass, on the wall,/Who in this land is the fairest of all?” the looking-glass answered: “Thou, O Queen, art the fairest of all!”

Then *she was satisfied, for she knew that the looking-glass spoke the truth.* [...] And once when the Queen asked her looking-glass [it] answered: “Thou art fairer than all you are here, Lady Queen./ But more beautiful still is Snow-White, as I ween”<sup>5</sup>.

While emphasis is usually given to the antagonist-protagonist dyad, the role of the enchanted mirror as not solely a plot device is noteworthy; in that it is both a controlling metaphor of the menacing *other* and a symbolic representation of the queen’s unconscious insecurity.

Confirming, at first, the queen’s unique beauty in *this* land so to satisfy her narcissism and *jouissance*, the mirror then presents Snow White as a menace to the same (“but”). *The other* is consequently perceived as a ‘bad’ double that has to be eliminated or rendered inferior as Snow-White’s *de-aesthetisation* implies – treated and dressed in rags as a slave. Be that as it may, the mirror does not reflect the ‘truth’ of reality but its ‘representation’ according to the questions posed by the queen when interrogating it. This entails that reality is created according to *positionality* so that the mirror does not speak *the* truth, as the queen believes, but *her* narcissistic truth. In this scheme, the subject is positioned in front of the mirror as already ‘given to be seen’ so as to

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<sup>4</sup> A. Gramsci qtd in *Idem*, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> J. and W. Grimm, *The Brothers Grimm. The Complete Fairy Tales*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions, 1997, pp. 249-50 (emphasis added). The present version of the folktale, cleaned up by the Brothers Grimm to be included in a collection of folktales *Children’s and Household Tales (Kinder- und Hausmärchen* – 1812), is the most well-known of all its versions and whose dialogue-lines between the queen and the magic mirror are easily recalled by heart. However, the folktale with its dark atmosphere was not meant for tender children as its first printing, addressed to scholars, suggests (cf. M. Hunt (tr.), “Preface”, *Household Tales* (voll. 2), London, George Bell, [1884] 1982 <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/authors/grimms/preface.html>).

both passively reflect in his/her eyes, as a screen, what appears in the mirror and to desire it as the lacking object which fascinates for guaranteeing unity, for overcoming differences. The gaze becomes a trap “which turns *me* into a picture”<sup>6</sup>, into a representation.

Yet, the *textuality* of the mirror suggests the shadowy representational nature of reality through language. The queen’s beauty, as the reflection for Narcissus, uncovers the danger of the mirroring as a metaphor for self-knowledge since the complete fulfilment created in the ‘deceiving’ mirror is only a shadow<sup>7</sup>. The narcissistic image she has of herself lacks embodiment and is, psychoanalytically speaking, merely an unconscious fantasy where desire can be fulfilled. As such, even with her step-daughter’s death, she would have never been the most beautiful because, just as for Narcissus, the very existence of the reflection is grounded on its impossible achievability. The awareness of the latter would be possible only in the face of death. The blind prophet Tiresias’s warning to the mother of Narcissus just confirms it: he will live a long life only if he does not know himself<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, the absence of the princess – relegated to an ‘invisible’ (social) area of the castle – is ‘repeatedly’ realised in the queen’s mind through the mirror’s visual and verbal textuality. The reiteration characterising the process of *othering* is a necessity revealing the anxious nature of the queen’s narcissism: “at the heart of the superlative lies difference”<sup>9</sup>. A difference which has to be domesticated and disavowed. In sum, *the other* is an oxymoron, ‘*desired menace*’, uncovering the ambivalence of a

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<sup>6</sup> K. Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness. A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 67. For example, in Jean Rhys’ postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* the picture portraying the Miller’s Daughter – a figure present in folk tales and the main character of Alfred Tennyson’s homonymous poem – might refer to *April Love* by the painter Arthur Hughes (1855-56). Antoinette Cosway’s veneration of the picture suggests the idea of a colonised subject reflecting, as a ‘screen’, a ‘white’ image and the consequential representation of herself as *other* (copy) adapting to the original. In her words, England is a ‘dream’ with the double ambivalent meaning of ‘wholeness’ (absence/presence).

<sup>7</sup> “*visae conreptus imagine formae/ spem sine corpora amat, corpus putat esse, quod unda est*” (P.N. Ovidio [N. Scivoletto (ed.)], *Metamorfosi*, III, ll. 416-17, Torino, UTET, 2005, p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> Tiresias’ blindness is symbolic of his insight. He knows more than others, being a prophet, though he cannot see, a telling and uncanny aspect in our culture which associates the ability to see with representation, truth, authenticity and authority. Thus wholeness, unity. When Narcissus sees his image, discovering his own shadowiness, this coincides with his death. One could argue that blindness is ‘seeing’ and seeing is ‘blindness’.

<sup>9</sup> E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester, Manchester



complex hierarchical relationship as it is inherent in Lacan's 'imaginary duality'<sup>10</sup>.

Mapping the above discourse on the *textuality* of Australian multiculturalism will be useful in critically examining the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the 'I-other' polarity and its implications with power and truth (positionality) and inclusiveness-exclusiveness: What can be known and how is it known? Who is the speaking subject? From what standpoint does he/she speak? What are its essential characteristics? Who is considered 'white' and who not? What are the characteristics of the 'non-white'? Does the 'white' subject speak for the other? Is the heard voice of the 'non-white' subject just an echo? The implications of the 'Whiteness' signifier in representing *the others* (as 'lacking' non Anglo-Celtic subjects) in an invisible way (epistemology) and as 'invisible' or 'visible but not enough' (ontology), will be stressed by analysing the relationship between *textuality*, culture, identity, political speeches, literary works, literary hoaxes and jokes – all through a psychoanalytical approach.

The representation of *the other* is not a mere consequence of the text/mirror but its main aim; a sort of subtext working in silence as the result of an unconscious attempt to hide the ontological anxiety behind representation itself. Bhabha claims that rendering visible those anxieties that lie behind hegemonic discourses is functional to the deconstruction of the latter<sup>11</sup>. The *text* – and the *book* – must be contextualised as 'acts' in the world by taking into consideration their affiliations to the world: the political, social and cultural aspects that make up their worldliness/materiality in order not to obscure the support they provide to power by creating a justifying imperial framework of cultural identities fitting binary

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University Press, 1992, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> By designating the step-daughter as the most beautiful, the superlative (a Lacanian united subject), the mirror reflects not what the evil queen is (a whole being) but what she is not, the lacking subject; an aspect that explains her desire for *the other*. Her lack fits even more with Lacan's theory of the lacking M(Other) when getting to know that in earlier versions of the folktale the antagonist was not the bad step-mother but the girl's mother herself (cf. I. Robinson, H.A. Heiner, "The Annotated Snow-White & the Seven Dwarfs", <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/sevendwarfs/index.html>). It is, thus, interesting to note that both the Queen and Snow-White compete for the approval of the absent father. Actually, the mirror represents the 'male' hegemonic gaze. Similarly, as it will be discussed in the first two chapters of this study, both the 'white' and non-white subjects are in search of a unity offered by the Father through its Law and Language which is unattainable.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 49-50.

oppositions<sup>12</sup>. *Texts* reveal a lot about the culture in which the question of ‘being’ is considered: canonical imperial texts, political speeches, even the more liberal ones, sustain ‘negative differences’ in the name of a unity which comes as a contradiction in terms in a *multi-cultural* society.

Culture, defined by language, heritage, religion, attitudes and food – to name just a few aspects – is ‘a way of life’ expressing individual and national identity<sup>13</sup>. Its *ideological* power has become central and relevant especially in an economically globalised world in which “holding a job in the nation [is no more] itself the source of an integrative force liable to increase the sense of national belonging of the workers”<sup>14</sup>. In this scheme, Hage states that while in the 70s and early-80s ‘national economy’ worked together with multiculturalism to integrate migrant workers this is nowadays no longer the case. As a result, and proof, comes a criss-crossed interest of all political parties in the definition of a ‘shared culture’ defining those who have the right to ‘belonging’. Culture determines the kind of nation imagined as existent or that should exist and the relation between concepts such as nation and nationalism. Castan raises an interesting distinction between two concepts of nation: one stressing its cultural essence as something *objective* – easily becoming embroiled in nationalism – and the other, linked to Benedict Anderson’s theory of ‘imagined community’, which understands both nation and culture as *inter-subjective*. As the latter is only achievable in the presence of negative and positive preconditions, Castan nurtures high hopes that in the future Australia might develop into a

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin Books, [1978] 2003. Such an idea of power and knowledge is closely linked to the Italian Marxist philosopher and political leader Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’ or, in other words, the ability to convince *the others* that the interest of the dominant is the interest of all. Hegemony, on the one hand, refers not merely to the ‘state’ but to the ‘integral state’ (the state as political and civil society) and, on the other hand, it was achieved by consent through different media narrations – as with Lacan’s ‘the gaze’ – and not by force, the latter differentiating ‘ideology’ from ‘hegemony’ (cf. G. Baratta, “Umanesimo della convivenza: Edward Said in dialogo con Antonio Gramsci”, in I. Chambers (ed.), *Esercizi di potere. Gramsci, Said e il postcoloniale*, Roma, Meltemi, 2006, pp. 32-34).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. C. McLeay, “Inventing Australia: a Critique of Recent Cultural Policy Rhetoric”, *Australian Geographical Studies*, 35 (1) March 1997, p. 41; cf. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Vintage, [1993] 1994, *xiii*.

<sup>14</sup> G. Hage, “Analysing Multiculturalism Today”, in T. Bennet, J. Brow (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, Los Angeles and London, Sage Publications, 2007, p. 501a.

“multicultural republic”<sup>15</sup>. Although her view is well intentioned, the absence in Howardian Australia of the negative conditions listed by Anderson as necessary for such an ‘imagined community’ – namely, the power of a certain language to give privileged access to ontological truth and the lack of a cause-effect conception of history – reinforce the idea of a multicultural Australia more in line with a form of *objective* nation, that is with the fantasy of a nation-state grounded on the invisibility of *the others*. Despite its being a fantasy, its political and cultural implications are concrete expressions of power relations. Gilroy, contextualising racism in European cultural nationalisms, defines its relation to culture claiming that:

We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognised as such because it is able to link ‘race’ with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, a racism which has taken a necessary distance from the crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified *cultural* continuity<sup>16</sup>.

However, the two major political parties’ attitude to multiculturalism cannot be based on a flimsy ‘praise-or-disapproval’ clear-cut opposition<sup>17</sup>. In fact, though the degree of anxiety of the nation’s (Lacanian) fragmentation may produce two affective investments in the nation (‘worrying’ and ‘caring’)<sup>18</sup> linked to the ability it has in

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. C. Castan, “Multiculturalism and Australia’s National Literature”, in D. Carter, M. Crotty (eds.), *Australian Studies Centre 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Collection*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2005, pp. 221-25; see also G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism. Searching For Hope in a Shrinking Society*, Annandale (NSW), Pluto Press Australia, 2003, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> P. Gilroy, “The End of Anti Racism”, in W. Ball, J. Solomos (eds.), *Race and Local Politics*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, p. 187 qtd in G. Huggan, *Australian Literature. Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> While the Labour Party is usually identified with multiculturalism and the Coalition with its critics, Jupp’s essay on immigration and multicultural policies in the 1990s shows that, on the one hand, many liberals (Coalition) in South Australia and Victoria supported multiculturalism and, on the other hand, that the demise of some institutions such as the OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs) had already begun under the Labour government (cf. J. Jupp, “Tacking into the Wind: Immigration and Multicultural Policy in the 1990s”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 53, 1997, p. 31; A. Markus, *Australian Race Relations 1788-1993*, St Leonards (NSW), Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. 219).

<sup>18</sup> Hage frames the difference between ‘worrying’ and ‘caring’ in the Lacanian child-parent relationship linking it to ‘hope’. When the parent (society), seen as the feeder, does not take care for the child the latter enters a phase of anxiety (worrying); on the contrary, when societal hopes (being fed) corresponds to effective ‘care’ this results in less anxiety. The consequentiality of this more or less anxious feeling with the presence of immigrants seen as thieves of *jouissance* goes without saying (Cf. G. Hage, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-30).

creating societal hope, the way both parties ‘narrativise’ culture in the formation of the national ‘we’ hides a common aim: achieve ‘unity’ by means of shared values such as tolerance, fair-go and mateship. This common aim of multiculturalism, namely keeping Australia a ‘cultural’ Anglo-Celtic society, will be briefly examined by linking the most heated debate of the nineties to the politically correct attitude of the eighties.

With the 1996 elections, the Labor government was defeated after thirteen years by the John Howard-led Coalition (Liberal Party and National Party). During the electoral campaign the dispute between the two major parties focused on the ability to represent the national interest through cultural and national identity<sup>19</sup>. In his 1996 speech for his proposed motion on racial tolerance, Howard conveniently self-pictured himself as a tolerant politician. First, by referring to his involvement as a member of the coalition that in the 70s admitted tens of thousands of people from war-torn Indochina. And, secondly, on the occasion of his return to the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1995, when reaffirming his commitment to politics focusing on the fact that “Australia was composed of people drawn from all parts of the world but united behind a common commitment to the values, beliefs and institutions of the Australian community”<sup>20</sup>. However, his shown-off tolerance was in sharp contradiction with the political statement made when, to the leadership of his party in the 80s, he declared that the original and desirable intent of multiculturalism was no more acceptable. Although let down by his Coalition when, politically speaking, the rather high price of his beliefs become evident, his prejudiced view on multiculturalism was deeply rooted in society. The 1996 electoral victory over a government which privileged ethnic minorities testified widespread support by many Australians to Howard’s ideas and that his focusing on symbolic values entailing the ‘forgetting’ of the nation’s past racist history, of the histories of the others and evoking a feeling defining<sup>21</sup> national unity, was a winning political strategy.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. C. McLeay, *art. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> J. Howard, “‘Racial Tolerance’. Motion By the Prime Minister on this Matter”, 30 October 1996, p. 2 [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/howard\\_1.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/howard_1.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Graeme Turner states that the debate about nationalism revolving around ‘definition’ mostly has the purpose of ‘simplification’ and ‘exclusion’ through representation (cf. G. Turner, “*Making it national*”).

At this point, the two closely connected notions of ‘values’ and of ‘community’ must be interrogated: What are the values that stand for the *essence* of being Australian? Is the community he refers to really composed of “people drawn from all parts of the world”? Critics have stressed the following as a rigid set of shared values that makes up the essence of being Australian as stated in Howard’s several speeches: tolerance, traditions of mateship and egalitarianism (fair-go)<sup>22</sup>. While, at first, the *mateship* value would appear the only traditional one descending from Anglo-Celtic colonisers and the other two as quintessentially representing *all* Australians, actually this is not the case. The long excerpt from the 1997 speech – “Address at the Launch of ‘Multicultural Australia: the Way Forward’” – quoted below proves that the above array of values is quintessentially Anglo-Celtic and expresses an implicit ‘foundation myth’ also developed in other speeches of his:

One of the things that excites me about Australia, as we move into the 21st century, is that it really does occupy a unique intersection of history, geography and cultural diversity and economic circumstances. There is no country in the world – no country in the world – which is so absolutely composed of the following things. It is very much a projection and outpost, if you like, of the best of Western civilisation in this part of the world. [...] We have brought – from our British and European heritage – we have brought the great building blocks of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, free press and the respect for civil attitudes on many issues. But we have been careful, in my view, to reject the class consciousness and the stratification of society and the disdain for people, according to where they were born or their class, that was sometimes the feature of European societies. We have been able to absorb people from all around the world because we have essentially been a group of people who have tried to deal with people on the basis of their merit and their individual qualities, and not according to preconceived notions of what a particular background produces<sup>23</sup>.

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reconsidered: The Uses of Nationalism in Contemporary Australia”, in A. Wimmer (ed.), *Australian Nationalism Reconsidered. Maintaining a Monocultural Tradition in a Multicultural Society*, Tübingen, Stauffenburg Verlag, 1999, p. 22).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. G. Hage, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-73; C. Mcleay, *art. cit.*, pp. 42-43; K. Goldsworthy, “‘Ordinary Australians’: Discourses of Race and Nation in Contemporary Australian Political Rhetoric”, in A. Wimmer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>23</sup> J. Howard, “Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward”, Melbourne Town Hall, 11 December 1997, p. 3 [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/howard\\_2.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/howard_2.pdf)

This excerpt makes clear that the ‘we’ Howard uses so many times in a process of “worlding”<sup>24</sup> refers to Anglo-Celts: democracy has been imported as the “best” aspect of Western civilisation which is synonymous with Britishness; immigrants are seen as a commodity (“absorb[ed]”) to prove the ability of the ‘we’ to be tolerant by giving everyone a fair-go; consequently and contradictorily, as absorbed ‘non-white’ subjects they are part of the absorbing ‘white’ subject though they do not share the latter’s ‘essential’ tolerant value. Yet, Australia’s egalitarianism is what distinguished it, in a postcolonial perspective, from the ‘centre’ because the dream of democracy, from Howard’s point of view, has come true in the ‘margins’; so that, accusing Australia of racism signifies marking on it the stain of a ‘complicit post-colonialism’ which, consequently, unsettles its identitarian independency. This implies that the discourse on migration is closely linked to a (post)colonial one.

What is true about Howard’s rhetorical language narcissistically emphasising ‘white’ values, is also true about multiculturalism in its heyday<sup>25</sup>. To address the increasingly paranoid reaction against a policy disadvantaging ‘white’ Australians, the government’s 1982 ‘white paper’, *Multiculturalism for all Australians: our Developing Nationhood*, aimed at ‘mirroring’ a homogeneous dominant culture whose set of values or myths about national identity were egalitarianism, tolerance and mateship<sup>26</sup>. In this way, two intertwined aims were achieved: reducing migrants, Aborigines and women to *invisibility* and assuring Anglo-Celts of their unity, in the same way assimilation did in the 50s. As it is evident, multiculturalism was *for* all Australians (read Anglo-Celts) and that set of values which identified their essence was pictured in the eyes of homogenised *others* whose unity, through sameness,

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<sup>24</sup> Spivak distinguished between three processes of *othering*: ‘worlding’ – representation of the Other as superior from which the other is determined by opposition (as with Howard’s case); ‘debasement’ – the other is described in denigrating terms and their surrender is seen as an obligation (see Pauline Hanson for this process); and ‘separation’ – between native states and colonial governments (cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 153).

<sup>25</sup> Not to use the term ‘multiculturalism’ in relation to Howard’s policies is not hazardous since he rarely uses it in his speeches while preferring terms such as ‘diversity’ and ‘enriching’ whose meaning and implications are ambivalent. However, by adopting such a distinction and proving that the term ‘multicultural’ – referred to the pre-Howard period – is not free from ambiguity the boundaries between the two, at least to a certain extent, are clearly unsettled.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. E. Vasta, “Multiculturalism and Ethnic Identity: The Relationship Between Racism and Resistance”, *ANZJS*, 29 (2) August 1993, p. 212.

could come only by recognising and desiring that picture. The analysis of the 1982 ‘white paper’ reveals the hidden racism behind multiculturalism well before the 90s, thus, pointing out its ambivalence; in that while sustaining ethnic cultures and promising the societal hope of egalitarianism, multiculturalism reiterates the belief in a hegemonic superior culture<sup>27</sup>. It is no wonder then, that the situation of the late 80s and early 90s – complicated by a (“transcendental”<sup>28</sup>) globalised capitalism, a lack of jobs and a continuous immigration flow – was characterised by anxiety and that Howard’s and Hanson’s views mirrored an Anglo-Celtic ‘mainstream’ society not so different from a supposed ‘multicultural’ one<sup>29</sup>.

As for the foundation myth, Howard clearly makes the *universal* and *narcissistic* point that Australia can be considered the ‘outpost’ of the *best* of Western civilisation. A foundation myth that, as with Aborigines, reinforces the binary opposition ‘we-them’ and sets out the criteria of belonging to the nation. Those who do not share the mythologies of the nation have no right to be considered true Australians. A striking example is his 1997 speech offered for Australia Day – on which occasion *all* people living in Australia, and their histories, are supposed to be celebrated:

When we examine our national identity, we should always remember that the symbols we hold dear as Australians and that beliefs we have about what is to be an Australian are not things that can ever be imposed from above by political thinkers [...]. Rather they are the feelings and attitudes that grow out of the spirit of the people [...]. [T]hose things that we hold dear ... have

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<sup>27</sup> Perceived as a social reform (cf. J. Jupp, *art. cit.*, p. 30), Markus was right to say that the mid-1990s policies undermined the gains of the 70s. However, on a more specific cultural level it was crystal clear that “the culture of the established society, its political/administrative institutions, [would] retain its primacy” (APIC and AEAC – Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, 1979, qtd in Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 211). Thus immigrants’ cultures, expressed through the term ‘ethnicity’, were functional to national identity as evident in what the same AEAC stated in 1977: “our goal in Australia is to create a society in which people of non-Anglo-Australian origin are given the opportunity, as individuals or groups, to choose to preserve and develop their culture, their languages, traditions and arts – so that these can become living elements in the diverse culture of the total society, while at the same time they enjoy effective and respected places within one Australian society” (qtd in A. Markus, *op. cit.*, p. 183).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Transcendental’ capitalism is linked to the aesthetic representation of the city as attractive to international investments. Besides, aesthetic criteria are closely connected with a process of inclusion-exclusion of desired-undesired subjects (cf. G. Hage, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-21).

<sup>29</sup> The connection between these two periods is important in order to contextualise both Casella’s and Armano’s novels in the Australian multicultural literary market.

come in two ways. They have come out of great traumatic events such as the events of ... Gallipoli and there are those other things that through long usage and custom ... we have come to love and hold dear [such as] our tradition of mateship<sup>30</sup>.

Drawing on Benedict Anderson, Gunew states that the homogeneity of the nation “cover[s] over the differences and disparate elements” and is “sutured by specific rhetorical structures of icons and symbols that construct notions of both borders and belonging”<sup>31</sup>. Also evoked in the 1982 ‘white paper’<sup>32</sup>, the traumatic event which took place at Gallipoli in 1915 becomes both a *symbol* working as a *traditional definition* of a national identity grounded on a ‘sacrifice’ and a process of exclusion of all people coming to the country after that date. Moments of remembering become moments of disavowal, of forgetting ones imbued with violence<sup>33</sup>. A double forgetting. Howard’s androcentric speech produces the same invisibility of the ‘white paper’ discussed above, the forgetting of other histories. And, for this, his language of a ‘we’ is already uncanny, giving life to a spooky double – as seen above for the queen. In his 1998 speech delivered to the Jewish community in Sydney, Howard underpinned the benefits Jewish people had received by coming to Australia (“the gift of a new social life”<sup>34</sup>) ‘forgetting’ about their *loss*<sup>35</sup>.

Moreover, such ‘forgetting’ entails the erasure of the racism suffered in the host country. “At the end of the day”, Australian society seems to be saying, “you have gained by coming here”. In this way, multiculturalism attempts to anxiously elide Australia’s sexist and racist history which dates back to the foundation events as will

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<sup>30</sup> J. Brett, “John Howard, Pauline Hanson and the Politics of Grievance”, unpublished paper delivered to the Conference *Is Racism Un-Australian? The Revitalisation of Australian Discourses of Race and Pain*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the History Department of the Australian National University, Canberra, 21-22 February 1997, qtd in K. Goldsworthy, *art. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> S.M. Gunew, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> E. Renan, “What is a Nation?”, in H.K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 5, 11.

<sup>34</sup> G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Sara Wills points out, in addition to the aforementioned values, the historical representations of migration as “the migrant success story” of a subject “inhabiting a nation of gain rather than loss” (S. Wills, “Un-Stitching the Lips of a Migrant Nation”, in *Challenging Histories: Reflections on Australian History*, special issue of *Australian Historical Studies*, 33 (118) 2002, p. 72).



be discussed when analysing Casella's *The Sensualist*. The suppression of traumatic founding moments grounded on antagonism and barbarity is functional, Žižek claims, to the elaboration of myths of national identity which do not "offer us a point of escape from our reality but [...] the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel"<sup>36</sup>. This uncanny silence of institutions and the texts founding them – see below – are linked to a death drive dislodging one's wholeness. The fact that any society, like any individual identity, is based on a *lack*, hides an anxiety and a paranoia produced by the impossibility of the encounter between the 'white' subject (signified) and the *object* of fantasy ('Whiteness'/signifier) since the latter is a *no-thing*<sup>37</sup>.

Žižek's notion of amnesia implies that the non-recognition of *the other* as other, as a victimised subject, is always a missed opportunity to tackle social injustice. So that, "while the occurrence of colonial violence was no longer seriously contested, [...] its significance [...] became the object of an important struggle"<sup>38</sup>. Admitting its historic reality, but no "intergenerational guilt"<sup>39</sup>, on the one hand, reveals a conception of present history as cut off from the past and consequentially, on the other hand, it is in contrast with claiming a sense of belonging that goes back to the colonial past. One has to accept the good and the bad things of one's own past, to apologise and seek a remedy for the bad things – but this would come at a high economic price<sup>40</sup> and still has its own limits since "responsibility for a shameful act is an answer to a coloniser's trauma rather than to the trauma of the colonised"<sup>41</sup>. For this reason Hage claims that, in the "postcolonial colonial" Australia<sup>42</sup>, a racist

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<sup>36</sup> S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, Verso, 1989, pp. 21, 45 qtd in S. Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 113, 114.

<sup>37</sup> Analysing nationalism in Australia, Hage stresses the intermittence between periods of relaxed and paranoid nationalism (cf. G. Hage, *art. cit.*; G. Hage, *op. cit.*). The circular, repetitive model of paranoia (*per se* repetitive) unveils the 'absence' of what the Subject longs for: unity.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> J. Howard, "Racial Tolerance", *cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> The Mabo Affair is an illuminating example (cf. G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 82). For the economics of indigenous art see C. McLeay, *art. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102. See also "complicit postcolonialism" (B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1990, xi) and "postcolonial racism" (K. Gelder, J.M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 17).

colonial attitude which continues through the commodification of *others* will finish only when the latter become interlocutors considered as subjects with a ‘will’, a memory and a history of their own – something, as will be discussed in CHAPTER TWO, that migrants are denied. Although brilliantly summarising the above point in the expression “less memory, more history”, Graham Huggan believes Hage to be “too harsh by half on postcolonialism”<sup>43</sup>. Yet, the latter is right when saying that the *other* is used only as a “postcolonial trauma therapy”<sup>44</sup> as he ironically states by comparing Howard's outrage at Australia being accused of racism and the “dehumanising concentration camps he has used to cage third-world looking asylum seekers”<sup>45</sup>. Refugees are seen as an outpouring threat hanging over the nation, as the necessary and desired transgression to the *law* (the ‘perfect’ social order) that justifies its fantasy of tolerance, fair-go and democracy. A colonial multiculturalism that many critics ascribe to Howard’s government, though traceable back to earlier periods, either as a form of nostalgia turning the clock back to the assimilation of the 50s – wrongly defined as a “transitional doctrine”<sup>46</sup> – or as an “archaeological fundamentalism”<sup>47</sup>. This highlights Howard’s belief that the quintessential Australian values are still embodied in the present as a way that “helps shield the assimilationists from the reality they need to avoid if they are to maintain their fantasy constructions: that they are the ones who have not assimilated to a changing society”<sup>48</sup>. The others are commodified to define the tolerant ‘I’ and exorcise the racist past.

In sum, a comparison between multiculturalism and Australian ‘postcolonial colonialism’ highlights the limits of the former and deprives both of their promising hopes. It is evident that multiculturalism, from the one side, renders diversity “subservient to the already constituted nationalist imaginary”<sup>49</sup>; and that, from the

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<sup>43</sup> G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>44</sup> G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*, *x*.

<sup>46</sup> G. Tavan, “‘Good Neighbours’: Community Organisations, Migrant Assimilation and Australian Society and Culture, 1950-1961”, in J. Murphy, J. Smart (eds.), *The Forgotten Fifties. Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s* (special issue of *Australian Historical Studies*), 28 (109) 1997, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, pp. 73-78.

<sup>49</sup> S. Wills, *art. cit.*, p. 72. For example, the target of multicultural policies during the Fraser Government (post 1973) was the ethnic middle class more aware of its social position and of the

other side, it avoids both facing the issue of neo-colonialism producing an amnesia “including post-war migration histories” and the *land rights* issue dear to Aboriginal activists<sup>50</sup>. The history of racism, silence and *invisibility* or *visibility but not enough* has aspects, though with different implications, common to immigrants, refugees and Aborigines.

It is in the fertile anti-immigrant ground, characterised by Howard’s attack on the political correctness of the previous period as irrelevant to the substance of the debate, that a politician such as Pauline Hanson, founder of the anti-immigration/Aboriginal/multicultural party ‘One Nation’<sup>51</sup>, went further than the Prime Minister himself. In her maiden speech delivered in 1996 as an Independent MP in the House of Representatives she gave voice, from a deeply-prejudiced standpoint not limited only to her<sup>52</sup>, to a grudge against all those whose privileges constituted a form of ‘reverse racism’<sup>53</sup> applied to mainstream Australians<sup>54</sup>. Hanson’s “mainstream” or “ordinary Australian taxpayers” are represented in opposition to “Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups”<sup>55</sup>. This reinforced binary oppositions in which all others, including post-war immigrants communities – benefitting from the funding given to minority groups for festivals,

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prejudices slowing down social mobility. By incorporating its leaders through the ethnic vote under the government influence the latter was extended to their own ethnic communities as well in order to maintain the *status quo* (cf. A. Markus, *op. cit.*, p. 196).

<sup>50</sup> S.M. Gunew, “Multicultural Multiplicities. US, Canada, Australia”, *Meanjin*, 52 (3) 1993, pp. 449, 455.

<sup>51</sup> The expression ‘One Nation’ had already been used by Paul Keating, the Labour Party Prime Minister (1991-96). Goldsworthy observes that, with Hanson, the appropriation of such a metaphor for inclusion served opposite purposes (cf. K. Goldsworthy, *art. cit.*, pp. 215-16).

<sup>52</sup> For example, the leader of the Federal Opposition, John Hewson, in his 1992 speech to the Liberal Party of Western Australia stated: “Multiculturalism – another classic example. The politics of division not the politics of one nation. Absolutely a fundamental mistake in this country. We are a multicultural society – yes. But we should never have multiculturalism” (E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 213). As Ellie Vasta points out, Hewson viewed the privileging multiculturalism in favour of ethnic groups as divisive of the nation. It goes without saying that the attack on reverse racism conceals the aim of discouraging the maintenance of their ethnic cultural background and push them towards assimilation (cf. *Ibidem*).

<sup>53</sup> Reverse racism is seen as a feeling resulting from the belief, following Žižek, that the ‘we’ has been deprived of their *jouissance* by *the others*. In Sean Homer’s words: “the other may be lazy but they still have more fun than us; they live off our hard work etc.” [...] “we work hard to build a community we can be proud of and be happy within, but this goal is denied us by lazy scrounging foreigners. We can therefore not enjoy our community because they have stolen away from us that which would most fully realize our enjoyment” (S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. P. Hanson, “Commonwealth Parliamentary Debate. Hanson’s Maiden Speech”, 10 September 1996, p. 1 [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/hanson\\_1.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/hanson_1.pdf)

literary productions, etc.<sup>56</sup>—, counted as ‘non-white’. Hanson concluded her speech by considering long-term immigrants as “first-class citizens”<sup>57</sup> but only on one condition, ‘assimilation’:

Abolishing the policy of multiculturalism will save billions of dollars and allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia<sup>58</sup>.

Until they are privileged – and one has only to think of the funds given to writers such as Armanno (see CHAPTER FOUR) – these ethnic groups will not be considered as part of mainstream Australia which Hanson identifies as ‘white’ and Anglo-Celtic. To not be considered as *others*, migrants living in Australia have to accept their ethnic *invisibility*, namely, being ‘absorbed’ into mainstream whiteness<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> However, to depict all the previous period of the fifties and sixties in a monolithic way would mean not to do justice to it. In the sixties the ‘Immigration Reform Group’ (IRG), founded by Dr Jamie Mackie in 1959, published a self-funded pamphlet, *Control or Colour Bar?: A Proposal for Change in Australia’s Immigration Policy*, against the racially based White Australia Policy of immigration. The dismantling of the latter racist policy actually and in part took place thanks to this movement (cf. G. Tavan, “Immigration: Control or Colour Bar? The Immigration Reform Movement, 1959-1966”, *Australian Historical Studies*, 32 (117) October 2001, pp. 181-200).

<sup>57</sup> P. Hanson, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*. The nineties, as Howard’s and Hanson’s political ideas testify, mirrors much of the assimilationist and conservative attitude of the fifties. Two concrete examples may be provided. First, the launching of a book defending the assimilationist policies of the fifties by the minister for Aboriginal affairs in a decade in which the children later known as the Stolen Generation were taken away from their families in order to make them assimilate (cf. J. Murphy, J. Smart (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 2). Secondly, the policies for refugees have been accused of the strain placed on ‘citizens’ (‘ordinary’ Australians) though evidence prove that more ‘white’ refugees have been accepted than ‘non-white’ ones from Africa, Asia and the Middle East (cf. G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 128). The idea of an ‘opportunity’ given to those considered as *others* identifies *the others* as something *to show off*. The more *the others* are seen as threatening the more the ‘we’ clings to the fantasy of unity and appears even more tolerant when accepting foreigners. As for the menace that comes with a policy of acceptance, it is exorcised through assimilation (cf. S. Castles, B. Cope, M. Kalantzis, M. Morrissey, *Mistaken Identity. Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Leichhardt (NSW), Pluto University Press, [1988] 1992, p. 134; see also G. Hage, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-58).

<sup>59</sup> Although Pauline Hanson might have thought her reasoning to be rational, her bias against immigrants resulted in critical inconsistencies. Were not these immigrants taxpayers like ‘ordinary’ Australians? If first-class citizens were tax-payers then they would not be ripping off the welfare state but contributing to it; on the contrary, if they were not tax-payers – which would have justified her subjective anger for what she thought a *thievery of jouissance* – then they should not have been designed as first-class citizens. In addition to that, Hanson’s blind prejudice resulted in an overlooking of the benefits – in terms of what Hage defines a ‘transcendental’ global economy – derived by immigrants keeping alive their ethnic cultures. The ‘ordinary’ on which unity is grounded is ‘extraordinary’, uncanny in that the ‘extra’ is the ‘excess’ the ordinary depends on. The ‘possible’ foreign is

On balance, the overall picture is that a multicultural agenda cannot change society overnight; and, moreover, that the adopted inclusion/exclusion criteria betray the instable construction of the notion of the ‘Whiteness’ *signifier* around arbitrary markers. Both her and Howard’s (though in more diluted measure) rhetorical language, mirror the *other* in a twisted way so that political correctness becomes bad, the black armband view of Australian history becomes partially – if not completely – false and obscuring the good aspects of Australian history – a sort of speaking absence, invisibility from the white perspective –, the “fat cats, bureaucrats and the do-gooders”<sup>60</sup> become bad and against national unity, and the *other* is not the victim of hegemonic power relations (without any recognition of *the other* as other) but the cause of reverse racism.

The *textuality* of ‘Whiteness’ works as the ‘magic mirror’: “You are Australian; it is true. But there is someone more Australian than you.” A ‘truth’ which, whether addressed to migrants or Anglo-Celts, signifies the ‘uncanny’ *otherness* of the former, in terms of menace and desire, and reveals the narcissism and consequent anxiety of the latter. The next paragraph deals with the latter in order to underline the void at the core of narcissistic *wholeness*.

## 1.2 Uncanny W(hole)ness

In his challenging essay ‘The Uncanny’ (‘Das Unheimlich’), published in 1919, Freud starts by taking issue with E. Jentsch over the definition of the uncanny that the latter understands as an “intellectual uncertainty”<sup>61</sup>. In a lengthy discussion of the different meanings traced under the headings of a German dictionary, he re-elaborates the meaning of the word *heimlich*:

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within the ‘we’, the nation: not the refugees but the first-class citizens.

<sup>60</sup> P. Hanson, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> S. Freud [1919], “The Uncanny”, in H. Cixous, “Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s Das Unheimliche (The ‘Uncanny’)”, *New Literary History*, 7 (3) Spring 1976, p. 620 (tr. J. Strachey).

“familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, belonging to the house” [and] “in a different sense, as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious ... *Heimlich* also has the meaning of that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge”<sup>62</sup>

and comes to the following conclusion: “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*”<sup>63</sup>. Thus, what is *unheimlich* was once ‘familiar’ and for that secret, intimate and not opposed to the *heimlich* as the most quoted definition of Freud’s uncanny shows: “*everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light*”<sup>64</sup>. It is an absence whose ‘unveiling’ unsettles any current familiar situation (individual and collective) provoking anxiety and ambivalence. It must be noted that to be ‘uncanny’ is never an object but the feeling it evokes in the perceiver, it is the experience itself. The uncanny is unsettling, it (un)covers a ‘gap’ as the anxious ‘presence of the absence’ does for Lacan. In his Seminar X on ‘Anxiety’, Lacan states:

“I will approach anxiety this year by the Unheimlich, it is what appears at this place. This is why I have written it for you today: it is the  $(- \Phi)$  [minus phi], the something which reminds us that what everything starts from is imaginary castration, that there is no – and for good reason – image of lack. When something appears there, it is because, if I can express myself in this way, that *the lack is lacking*. Now this may appear to be simply a joke, a conceit [?] which is well placed in my style which everyone knows is Gongoric”<sup>65</sup>.

While the relationship between the joke and the uncanny (as a process rather than a result) will be discussed in relation to literary hoaxes, here it is the anxiety produced by the lacking of the *lack* and its resulting ontological uncanniness which is noteworthy. As Nicholas Royle would put it: “the beginning is already haunted”<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> *Idem*, p. 621.

<sup>63</sup> *Idem*, p. 624.

<sup>64</sup> *Idem*, p. 623.

<sup>65</sup> J. Lacan, ‘Seminar X: L’angoisse’ (‘Seminar X: Anxiety’) 28 November 1962, qtd in K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 84 (emphasis added).

<sup>66</sup> N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 1.

Psychoanalytically explained as the masquerade of the *objet petit a* (the void, the gap in the Real) with its resulting *jouissance* in the symbolic (*wholeness*) at the same time, 'Whiteness' is beyond signification and thus inexpressible: the *Thing* is *nothing*<sup>67</sup>. To put it differently, 'Whiteness' and its derived race and ethnic system are considered as being in the Real (natural, universal values). The *Thing* is symbolised only to fulfil an emptiness at the core of identity, though it actually never existed because *the absence has always been absent*; it was not there from the very start and for this reason it remains inexpressible and unattainable, it is the unsaid *par excellence*. Thus, there was no lack for the signifier to occupy and, consequently, no universal signifier; its existence is simply a fantasmatic construction. And, if attempts to convey it may be made, its representation would only be oblique. When Lacan refers to trauma, as a *psychic* event, he argues that it is 'real' as far as it remains unsymbolisable and that it represents the very dislocation on which the subject is grounded. Any attempt at representing it, would result in its cultural construction. The common ground between the trauma, the *objet a*/the *Thing*, *jouissance*, the void, the Real and 'pure identity' (or subjectivity) can be easily established. Yet, this does not mean that identity does not exist but that it is open to changes, to its own 'migrancy' thus avoiding any essentialism.

At this stage it is necessary to elucidate how the wholeness of the signifier works, in order to support itself, in relation to the 'excess' which is paramount in this study since also ethnic literary works (texts/bodies), see CHAPTER TWO, are 'colonially' interpreted as Lacanian *remainders* ('veils').

Lacan famously stated that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'. By mapping Roman Jakobson's language processes, metaphor and metonymy, on Sigmund Freud's primary processes of dream work (the unconscious), condensation and displacement, Lacan concluded that the unconscious was structured like a language. The latter, however, was not only meant as the written and oral language (the object of linguistic) but as any signifying system based upon differential relations.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Lacan's unconscious, like language and its differential polarities, is something outside and pre-existent to the subject that the latter 'secretly' introjects from the Other, while for Freud it was individual and interiorised. In fact, Lacan distinguished between the lower case *other* and the capitalised *Other*. The former, in the mirror stage, is the illusory image that gives the subject the illusion of unity, while the latter is the symbolic, the language one needs to learn in order to satisfy his/her desire of unity. Thus desire, expressible only through a language which is pre-existent to the subject in the Other (the symbolic/the unconscious), is grounded within the discourse of the Other. By learning language, one interiorises all those symbols that structure, categorise, demarcate, classify everything into oppositions according to the system to which they pertain. Language speaks through the subject and the latter desires in language. Basically, the speaking subject speaks a 'foreign' language since 'it' is determined by the different signifiers introjected<sup>68</sup>. In accordance to what has been said in the previous section, the desire for 'Whiteness' (unity) comes with recognition of the 'discriminating' signifier. This desire does not entail a sort of de-colouring process from 'black' into 'white', but it is directed to those privileges which stand for 'Whiteness' and that turn the subject into a picture. While (unconsciously) supporting difference, 'Whiteness' simultaneously and ambivalently claims its erasure in the name of sameness. An ambivalence that Bhabha has perfectly expressed in his theory of colonial mimicry with its uncanny implications and that, as a result of the relation between colonialism and multiculturalism pictured in the previous section, can be seen as an expression of Australian multiculturalism. Bhabha states that

colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference<sup>69</sup>.

As is clear from his statement, colonial mimicry/multiculturalism is an 'ironic' compromise, it manifests an irreducible ambivalent – not contradictive – form of

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 65-79.

<sup>69</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 122.



identification; an ideological ambivalence between sameness and difference<sup>70</sup>, “almost the same, but not quite”, revealing the shaky foundations of stereotypes but indispensable both to put anxiety at bay and to sustain the discourse of power. Through “excess[es]” and “difference[s]”, which multiculturalism produces despite the promoted social and cultural equality, the anxiety of the *lack* (and aggressiveness as a result, for example through comedy) is displaced and ambivalence negated: “recognition-yet-denial”<sup>71</sup>. The confrontation with the lack is continuously differed. Drawing on Freud’s notion of the fetish as a psychological strategy of disavowal of the *lack of the penis* (castration complex) – a disavowal implicating ‘manipulation’ and not ‘repression’<sup>72</sup> – the latter lost object is reconstructed in the subject’s fantasy. Consequentially, the possibility of the illusory unity (sameness, “in Freud’s terms: All men have penises; in ours: ‘All men have the same skin/race/culture’”<sup>73</sup>). In this scheme, the lost object is just *re-placed* by the narcissistic subject on the imagined scene (fantasy) by normalising/disavowing differences (*the other* is stereotyped in a homogenised fixed dimension) and thus recreating a unity projected on an external object. In the castration complex the *lack* of the phallus is recreated outside: women need a man so to possess their own phallus (a baby). Bhabha states that “[f]etishism [...] is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration [that] by the fixation on an object [...] masks that difference and restores an original presence”<sup>74</sup>. The various shifting forms of ‘excess’ (fetish, stereotype, joke) are related to what Lacan calls the

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<sup>70</sup> Depending on the meaning given to ‘sameness’ (an inclusive connotation though with differences: in an assimilationist context it has a coercive connotation meaning that to have humanness one needs to be Anglicised – not an ‘Anglo-Celt’; in a multicultural context it ‘has’ an egalitarian implication accepting all different cultures), ‘difference’ acquires a negative or positive significance. While ‘differences’ from the authoritarian perspective are always seen negatively, even in multiculturalism, since they disrupt the fantasmic original – but never really possessed – narcissistic unity, the same term is used in postcolonial, feminist and minority studies in a positive way, implying equality in relation to Derrida’s *différance*. The term ‘difference’ reveals its ambiguity in relation to colonial and multicultural reality since it actually denotes ‘diversity’ (a lacking difference reducing to a state of inferiority): apparently embedding equality and social justice – see for example Howard’s speeches – it has an exclusionist connotation leading to what Bhabha calls “negative difference” (*Idem*, p. 108). For this reason, in this study diversity is used for its negative implications and difference for its positive ones.

<sup>71</sup> D. Hook, “Paradoxes of the Other: (Post)Colonial Racism, Racial Difference, Stereotype-as-Fetish”, *PINS*, 31 2005, p. 17

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-07.

<sup>74</sup> *Idem*, p. 107.

‘veil’, namely what hides the lack of the big Other (the rupturing of ideologies and the social order) thus keeping *the other* still a ‘desiring’ subject because, if there is a ‘veil’, there must be an object behind it. In *the other*’s racial and cultural homogeneity/authenticity (unity) the narcissist puts at bay the menacing presence of differences and sees by reflection his/her own unity. Paradoxically, differences must be disavowed in order for sameness to remain unachievable. In this way the ‘white’ subject can say: “You *see*... ‘Whiteness’ exists and I *am* ‘white’ because I possess it as the fact that you aren’t demonstrates. However, if you try you *might* achieve it”. A fact supported by Hook’s explanation that the disavowal has less to do with the difference depicting *the other* as inferior, which once understood would easily be admitted, than with the threat posed to the narcissistic illusory image of the authoritarian subject<sup>75</sup>. A ‘caricature’, a ‘comic excess’, a ‘stereotype’, the *knowable* subject is domesticated into the frame of what one already knows only as something ‘compatible’.

The work of the stereotype, the ‘racial, ethnic visibility’<sup>76</sup> deferring the lack, is evident in the *theft of jouissance*. In response to the power of taking away *jouissance* (jobs and the tranquillity of the neighbourhood) from those who have the right to possess it because of their position in society, *the other* is dehumanised. The latter stereotyping attitude, although threatening, functions as a unifying stimulus: at the same time, invisible *but not too much* and visible *but not enough*. *The others*’ inhumanness is an idea conveyed in the Howard and Hanson discourses analysed in the previous paragraph: the positive construction of the “ordinary Australian” or the “absorbed” – the latter as an uncanny form of cannibalism – casts all others in the category of the *non*-ordinary, of the faecal abject body. The language of the nation becomes the language of the house and of the body. Goldsworthy, by referring to Judith Butler, links the above political ideas to the representation of immigrants conveyed in articles and cartoons published in the *Melbourne Punch* (see PLATE 9<sup>77</sup>)

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. D. Hook, *art. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> A ‘visibility’ that Said, in the second part of his seminal work *Orientalism*, stated to be a controlling strategy at the expense of the other. To render visible means knowing the other as *other*: visibility, in the colonial and multicultural discourse, is not only the result of, but also a strategy of knowledge.

<sup>77</sup> References to the plates included in the section “Spatial and temporal representation of *the other*” do

and the *Bulletin* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the former, the Chinese people were defined as ‘The Chinese Pest’ and at best seen as what might have made Australians hold together (Us-them); in the latter, by blaming the deficiency of the immigration laws that did not solve the Chinese ‘problem’, immigrants were seen as rats invading through the cracks in the wall (the deficiencies in the immigration policy). In both cartoons, Goldsworthy underlines, “the anxiety about the transgression of boundaries”<sup>78</sup> by those considered as vermin and causing diseases, and in other cartoons as taking advantage of white women – another bodily invasion – is well represented<sup>79</sup>. Far from characterising Chinese only, it was on the contrary a prevailing attitude affecting Italians as well and, particularly, Southern Italians called ‘black wogs’ and ‘dagoes’ and ‘The Chinese of Europe’. Besides, Hanson’s affirmation that people from ethnic backgrounds – which also means that Anglo-Celts do not have one – were “first-class citizens” providing they gave the country “undivided loyalty”<sup>80</sup> meant that even they could be considered as abject bodies, for example, if they kept their ethnic backgrounds alive. Still valid today, such a discourse means that all immigrants risk becoming dangerous vermin and that a consequential racial ‘invisibility’ is a negative possibility just around the corner.

Derrida states that when one “determines the other as stranger, one is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family, nation state, and citizenship”<sup>81</sup>, to assimilate it. Clearly enough, *the gift of hospitality* becomes a process of identity formation. It is interesting to note that Derrida in his essay refers to spatial metaphors such as the ‘threshold’ to speak of hospitality and, by extension, the house/home and the verb ‘to invite’ which characterise, negatively, the above anti-immigration cartoons and Hanson’s rhetorical language: “if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my

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not appear in numerical order. Adopting this criterion has permitted following a thematic perspective in organising the central section.

<sup>78</sup> K. Goldsworthy, *art. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 218-19.

<sup>80</sup> P. Hanson, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> J. Derrida, ‘Hospitality’, in P. Goulimari (ed.), *Angelaki. Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 5 (3) 2000, pp. 7, 8. Royle puts forward the concept in the following terms: “as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster [the *othering* of the other], one begins to domesticate it” (N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 113).

country”<sup>82</sup>. However, part of the host society does not take into consideration that the caring response of loyalty is consequential to a well-given gift<sup>83</sup>.

As it is evident from the above, though the ambivalence (sameness and difference) of the multicultural discourse could be functioning unconsciously, it has material effects uncovering anxiety and dismantling narcissistic and universal discourse of egalitarianism, tolerance and democracy: Australia is not the palimpsest of the ‘best’ Western qualities, it is not were the dream of post-Enlightenment civility has come true. It is where its language of democracy has been uncannily alienated<sup>84</sup>.

### 1.3 The *migrancy* of the uncanny and the *uncanny* of migrancy

As seen above, the ‘veil’ is the racial visibility on which the signifier is grounded. But are all the remainders of visibility given from the very beginning? Seshadri-Crooks explains that in his Seminar X, besides reaffirming that the imaginary and the symbolic are not to be understood as two phases of his theory, Lacan distinguished between two imaginary identifications: the ‘specular image’ one between the other and the ‘ideal ego’ functional to the formation of the latter; and the identification with the object of desire which takes place as a reworking of Freud’s castration complex. It is in the latter that racial visibility emerges<sup>85</sup>. As the remainder of a unity-ratifying ‘encounter’, the ‘veil’ stands for a psychoanalytical process of manipulation grounded on compulsory repetition so that its protean ‘home-building’ nature (the borders of inclusion/exclusion) shifts from one aspect to another, even from different

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<sup>82</sup> P. Hanson, *art. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. G. Hage, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> For Bhabha Western knowledge is (un)homely: “The grand narratives of nineteenth century historicism on which its claims to universalism were founded [...] were also, in another textual and territorial time/space, the technologies of colonial and imperialist governance. It is the ‘rationalism’ of these ideologies of progress that increasingly comes to be eroded in the encounter with the contingency of cultural difference” (H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 195). An aspect which Hannah Arendt had anticipated in her *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* (published in 1951 and translated in English with the title *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) by analysing bureaucracy as Lord Cromer experimented it: colonial democracy was an essential contradiction (cf. K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 80). A fascinating example of the uncanniness of Western democracy and progress is given by Royle in his analyses of an article published on the *Guardian*, “Dawn of a New Millennium”, 1 January 2000 (N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., pp. 2-3).

<sup>85</sup> *Idem*, pp. 36-37.

categories – such as from ‘race’ to ‘ethnicity’. Likewise, its uncanniness is *per se* always shifting inasmuch as its success rests on its ability to ‘once again’ escape the perceiver.

In the light of this, the Manichean idea of binary oppositions must be reevaluated as sliding on a spatial axis of ‘inclusion in’ and ‘exclusion from’ a place (the symbolic) on the basis of usefulness-harmlessness and useless-harmfulness, respectively. The more subjects are classified as useful-harmless the more they are included and vice versa<sup>86</sup>. It is a matter of translocation; a positioning in the symbolic which hides ‘manipulation’. The migrant is manipulated into a multicultural politics of encompassment. Unless *the others* are *seen* as totally harmful – which is nonetheless a subjective evaluation – the manipulation along the axis permits the ‘ambivalence’ of the system. The uncanny migrates vampire-like from stereotype to jokes, to other ‘excesses’ so to find new ‘blood’ upon which to feed itself in order to guarantee the ‘successful failure’ of sameness (the non-achievability of ‘Whiteness’ and the ‘white man’s burden’).

This has to do with the difference Lacan establishes between ‘needs’ and ‘desire’<sup>87</sup>. When explaining how the mirror stage and the symbolic order interrelate he makes it clear that the desire for love goes beyond the objects satisfying one’s needs. Mapping this on ‘ambivalence’ and capitalism<sup>88</sup>, *the others* are presented with objects that apparently satisfy their needs (not basic needs such as having a job and making ends meet or social and cultural ones *per se* but as expressions of equality, acceptance and tolerance – ‘sameness’) only to discover that social, cultural, economic and political equality is a metaphor for social recognition, for being a ‘more social being’: in a word for ‘humaneness’. The latter is the true object beyond desire which is not presented as merely unachievable, since it would stop it from

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<sup>86</sup> G. Hage, *White Nation. Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Annandale (NSW), Pluto Press, 1998, pp. 78-140 (specifically pp. 90-92, 136-37).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>88</sup> Hage discusses how capitalism works in creating a synonymy between social profit and social being, so that were social profit is near to nil there one finds social death. And, of course, the relationship between social classes and *de-aestheticisation* and *de-humanisation* goes without saying. This is linked to the recognition of ‘white’ with the middle class and migrants with the working class. Moreover, as Hage explains, the racism towards those who gain social mobility is illustrative (cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, *cit.*, pp.12-21).

being desired, but only deferred and, therefore, with a shifting nature. What they need is *just* one more little sacrifice!

If the *migrancy* of the uncanny enables the above ‘successful failure’, nonetheless the crack in the mirror, constituted by anxiety itself disentangle the woven web around both *S/subjects*<sup>89</sup>. Despite the fact that the subject of the ‘ideal ego’ is constituted as ‘seeing’ while that of race as ‘seen’ through the authoritarian gaze, the latter, once the mirror is cracked, may look *back* at the capitalised Other. The ‘encounter’ is a forked-tongue issue since, besides the ‘assimilation’ of *the other* space, it employs the definition of an-other space in different terms from the one monochromatically pictured.

At this point, to understand more clearly how the unsettling ‘uncanny of migrancy’ works for immigrants, insights into the semiotic-symbolic relationship will be provided by answering to the following questions: What does the encounter with the new symbolic order imply for immigrants? What happens to the old symbolic order?

When entering the new symbolic order immigrants, reduced to an infantilised status (“We became like babies, insecure at the age when you must make decisions”<sup>90</sup>), undergo a process entailing social and cultural degradation. Similarly to the castration complex, it means accepting the paternal blackmail and the law founded on a multilayered (incest) taboo – socially, linguistically and culturally perceived. Thus, for example, T.W. Adorno defines the “authoritarian personality”<sup>91</sup> through a set of traits including an obsession with purity of race and, consequently,

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<sup>89</sup> The disentanglement of representation will be discussed in SECTION FOUR in relation to ‘death’. Are both *S/subjects* doomed to Narcissus’ or The Lady of Shalott’s fate?

<sup>90</sup> E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 221. The same experience is expressed by immigrants of different origins such as Walkicz and Jurgensen. Walwicz writes (‘Journeywomen’, 1983): “We were so *big* there and could do everything. When you have lots you know it. Lucky and lucky and money. My father was the *tallest* man in the world. Here we were nothing. There vet in the district and respect. The head of the returned soldiers and medals. Here washed floors in the serum laboratory. *Shrinking* man. *I grow smaller every day*. The world gets too big for me. We were too small for this big country. We were so little. We were nothing. We were none and naught and no money. We were no speak there we were big and big time. Here we were so little. Hardly any. We grew tiny” (qtd in S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1994, p. 85; emphasis added). As for Jurgensen, see “Bonegilla 1961” quoted in G. Sluga, “Dis/placed”, *Meanjin*, 48 (1) Autumn 1989, p. 158.

<sup>91</sup> B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

the need for defining cultural and linguistic boundaries<sup>92</sup>. Striking examples of both can be taken from the literary field. In *The Volcano* it is clearly stated that Anglo-Celts adopt an endogamous attitude towards Italians. A white girl having an affair with a ‘dago’ might have been more or less acceptable but she never had to go as far as to get married to him (cf. *TV*, 25)<sup>93</sup>. In *They’re a Weird Mob* – a novel written by John O’Grady in the fifties discussed at the end of this chapter – foreigners are ostracised and obsessively requested to speak English. *The other* is culturally perceived as inferior up to the point of being considered as having no critical and imaginative powers and potentialities<sup>94</sup>. These ‘moments of forgetting’ of the past and its memories signify a denied legitimacy unless this is pursued through the father (the host country) who gives a visibility with ‘subtitles’. Implicit in this is the association with nostalgia which, since the twentieth century, has become to the dominant a negative “metaphor for the ambivalent immigrant, the inassimilable immigrant, or even the anti-assimilationist immigrant”<sup>95</sup>. Dealing with the inassimilable nostalgic immigrant who remains in a ‘locus’ *other*, inevitably poses a question concerning the definition of this latter in relation to nostalgia. Gunew asks:

What it passes through is not *the* mirror-stage but *a* mirror-stage and, what is more, a succession of mirror-stages. [...] What kind of subjectivity is created (and what form of suppression takes place) when the subject is forced to enter a new symbolic order? [...] What happens to the other and prior language attached to a specific cultural order [...]? Is the first language subsequently rendered alien, shameful, transgressive, particularly if it does not belong to the acceptable repertoire of ‘foreign languages’? [...] It would appear that this first subjectivity, by necessity, is suppressed – but where then is its locus? [...] Is it possible to speculate, for example, that the subjectivity created in one language is subsequently relocated in the Lacanian imaginary, where the subject experiences an illusory totality with a phallic

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*.

<sup>93</sup> Yet, this endogamous attitude should not be thought as specific to Anglo-Celts only. In *The Lonely Hunter* it is Romeo’s family who rejects his Anglo-Celtic girlfriend (cf. V. Armanno, *The Lonely Hunter*, Milsons Point (NSW), Vintage, [1993] 2001)

<sup>94</sup> Cf. M. Kalantzis, B. Cope, “Vocabularies of Excellence: Rewording Multicultural Arts Policy”, in S.M. Gunew, F. Rizvi (eds.), *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp. 13-34.

<sup>95</sup> N. Friedman, “Nostalgia, Nationhood, and the New Immigrant Narrative: Gary Shteyngart’s *The Russian Debutante’s Handbook* and the Post-Soviet Experience”, *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5 Fall 2004, <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ijcs/nostalgia/friedman.htm>

mother?<sup>96</sup>.

As Papalia has stated, nostalgia may perform different functions: an escapist one towards the old symbolic order which has a coherence though it is unrealisable (this re-iteration risks crystallising the community in a self-referential one slowing down any re-elaboration of a new identity<sup>97</sup>); and, the one elaborated in his essay, that is the reworking of two different symbolic orders towards a hybrid identity. This entails that, when he analyses nostalgia – in poems such as ‘Nu vecchju strambalatu’ (Nazzareno Tripodi) and ‘A ccu appartegnu’ (Ignazio Santagati), though here maternally connoted<sup>98</sup> – whether with its negative or positive, utopian or realisable

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<sup>96</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., p. 113.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. G. Papalia, “A dulurusa spartenza. L’espressione linguistica della nostalgia”, in G. Rando, G. Turcotte (eds.), *Calabria e Sicilia. Sguardi italoaustraliani* (special issue of *Studi Emigrazione*), 44 (168) October-December 2007, p. 820.

<sup>98</sup> Kristeva’s semiotic theory, which draws from linguistics – semiotics: the science of signs –, is expressed by a neologism she introduced to avoid confusion and defined as “a critique of meaning, of its elements and its laws”: “sémanalyse” (L.S. Roudiez, “Introduction”, in J. Kristeva, *Desiring Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 4). In her seminal works, *Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969), *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974) and *Desire in Language* (1980), she distances herself from the structuralist theory of Saussure who, though revealing the gap between the signifier and the signified, professed the unity of the sign and the prioritisation of the signified (something Kristeva found summed up in Husserl’s transcendental ego despite what she calls “false multiplicities” – see CHAPTER TWO SECTION ONE). Kristeva, conversely, interprets meaning and subjectivity not as an already given ‘truth’ but, drawing on Lacan’s orders, as a “dynamic signifying process” given by two operational modes or functions: the semiotic and the symbolic. The former (*le symbolique*) is the expression of clear meaning (“the inevitable attribute of meaning, sign and the signified object for the consciousness of Husserl’s transcendental ego”), while the latter (*le sémiotique*) is the heterogeneousness meaning which she detects in “echolalias of infants as rhythms and intonations anterior to the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences”, “glossalalias in psychotic discourse” producing “musical” and “nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness [...] – for example, carnivalesque discourse [...]” (J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to An Other”, in J. Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-34).

In this scheme, like the breathless (punctuation-less) flow of words of Molly’s soliloquy in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* expresses her breathless state after the long kiss (cf. N. McAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, pp. 16, 18), so Ania Walwicz’s “demonic punctuation”, in her poem, ‘Picture’ conveys the ambivalence of a generation that carries a double message which is neither indifferent nor totally dutiful to ethnic culture: “To have children. She said. If you did. That would calm down. You. What. We’ll bring it up. If you don’t want it. I thought I was pregnant. Shingles. You are a nervous girl. My mother. Has children. [...]” (qtd in B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 208). Although using the language of the host society – less readable by mainstream speakers for its ‘asphyxiating effect’ which is not ‘writing’ but has ‘oral’ characteristics and is chewed down in a cannibalistic way – the anxiety of migration is conveyed. Another poem of the same author is ‘Wogs’ where punctuation is completely lacking and the English language symbolic order is disrupted. The semiotic here disrupts the meaning conveyed through the very ‘white’ subject’s discourse who laments the arrival of immigrants and accuses them of the aforementioned *thievery of jouissance* as it is



implications, the past is always symbolically interpreted. Papalia's conclusion that a new symbolic order can be characterised by an hybridity made up of different *symbolics*, pays little attention to the fact that as such it would be based upon differential relations ultimately enabling no change<sup>99</sup>.

The following are some aspects characterising migrants' past in semiotic terms. Papalia refers to a study of Gaetano Rando in which he states that women from the Eolian Islands do not sing the traditional nursery rhymes anymore since there is no correspondence between the reality described and that of the host country<sup>100</sup>. The 'silencing' of these traditions quite clearly proves its recession to the semiotic since it is not perceived as a symbolic language. Kristeva has much to write about it in relation to language and the 'foreigner'. In *Strangers to Ourselves* she explains about the difficulties of being caught between two languages arguing that the foreigner's true identity is in 'silence'<sup>101</sup>. In the aforementioned poem by Santagati, Italy is associated with the mother and the land that has given birth to him, while Australia is the father giving him work ('bread' is a metonymy for work<sup>102</sup>). Again in the poem

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confirmed by the obsessive carnivalesque repetition (By the same author see 'no speak', 'New World', 'past' included in H.K. Petersen, A. Rutherford (eds.), *Displaced Persons*, Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1988; for the uncanny and cannibalistic aspect of language see N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., pp. 214-16).

The semiotic, in relation to the incest taboo, is the transgression, the 'revolution' in the social, cultural, political authoritarian order. Immigrants' cultural order is permitted entering the symbolic only through a blackmail and it is, thus, normalised through 'excesses' (stereotypes, authenticity, the realist genre of ethnic writers) since the uttering of incest is considered 'evil', menacing to the narcissistic social order, the fixed subject and history. However, Kristeva more than interpreting the semiotic as a function substituting the symbolic sees them both as functional to the signifying process and to what she calls "a questionable *subject-in-process*" (J. Kristeva, *art. cit.*, p. 135). It comes with no wonder that she compares the "permanent trial" of the latter to Ulysses' analytic "competency" (*Idem*, p. 137). Therefore she avoids her theory being trapped in the dualistic thinking of Western Enlightenment. In the same vein as the semiotic energises the symbolic mode of signification on an individual level, so it happens on a collective one: minority cultures could energise what is perceived as the culture of the nation (an exclusive Anglo-Celtic one).

<sup>99</sup> In his essay, Papalia interprets this 'encounter' as one between the 'symbolic' (the migrant's language) and 'the Real' (the new environment) (cf. G. Papalia, *art. cit.*, p. 819). To claim a correspondence between the signifier and the signified in the original symbolic order, is to misunderstand Lacan's theory.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 824.

<sup>101</sup> J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York, Columbia University Press, [1988] 1991, p. 15 (tr. L.S. Roudiez).

<sup>102</sup> This interpretation of 'bread' seems to be confirmed by the two modes of belonging to the nation analysed by Hage: "homely belonging" (the motherland) and "governmental belonging" (the fatherland). The former means the safety of the spatial-container – note the reference to the womb – and the nurturing of the mother perceived as a non-working subject; while the latter entails the

by Ivana Costantini Pedretti, ‘L’ultima dimora’, the ‘ethereal whispering’ of her grandparents’ voice recalls an undistinguished sound. One must remember here that Kristeva considered all sensory aspects which are often non-verbal (“sound and melody, rhythm, color, odors, and so forth”<sup>103</sup>) attributes of the semiotic. It could be contested that in literary works the senses Kristeva refers to are expressed through language, the symbolic order. Actually, she affirms that literature should be seen as a painting in order for us to perceive all its aspects, even the semiotic ones. It is like speaking in melody as she does when successfully treating a child with delayed language development<sup>104</sup>. Was not the child still using words? What made the difference? Or, better, what energised, strengthened the symbolic? Music, rhythm, the semiotic. Applying this to the relationship between minority and majority cultures, the enhancing of the former results in the strengthening of the latter towards a less anxious identity – a hybrid one. Finally, the literal caesura, characterising one of the poems analysed by Papalia can be interpreted as a device conveying the rupture of the migrant experience which already begins before leaving one’s homeland. It is a ‘caesura’ (in)expressible through words and semiotically connoted<sup>105</sup>.

Gunew’s reference to the symbolic and the mirror stage may be now understood not as two separate stages occupied by the united subject and the fragmented one, respectively. Instead, as subjects in continuous alienation, simultaneously looking at the Other to ratify their illusory image (imaginary order) and desiring it through speech (symbolic order). The set of questions raised by Gunew in *Framing Marginality*, suggests that entering the new order does not entail accepting the past as a loss or as something that can be won back through the

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protection from anything that might disrupt the safety of the nation’s inhabitants, is the provider of food and represents ‘will’ (cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, cit., pp. 32-38).

<sup>103</sup> J. Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 104 qtd in N. McAfee, *op. cit.*, p. 40 (tr. R. Guberman).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>105</sup> The ‘caesura’ from one’s social reality – thought as taking place when the subject actually leaves the homeland and maybe continuing in the host country (as the result of the clash with the new symbolic order) – might take place at the same time when one decides to leave – corresponding with the loss of the imaginary (the illusory unified image). The (M)Other seems not feeding anymore. The attention is directed towards an-Other who is thought having the ‘phallus’ necessary to fulfil desire (the lost primary unity). The locus of the caesura is the site of the simultaneity of the semiotic and the symbolic. As for the latter, the subject already build a new symbolic order of the new country by means of agreements, publicity, letters, news obtained through the grapevine, etc.

language of the new symbolic order (for example, maintaining one's ethnic background by accepting a 'position' – as an 'authentic excess' – in the multicultural 'order') but the 'encounter' has to do with the uncanniness of one's cultural and linguistic identity<sup>106</sup>. In fact, Gunew connects the semiotic with nostalgia and Freud's uncanny:

The word nostalgia [...] signifies both 'a return home' and 'pain', a prolonged absence from home, and home-sickness. In Freud the closest term to nostalgia is *Heimweh*, a pregnant term containing home, the mother, sickness *for* but also sickness *of* the home. The term also relates to *heimlich*, secrecy, and *unheimlich*, the uncanny [...]<sup>107</sup>.

Nostalgia is a return home which can be connoted semiotically not only because of its maternal connotation but also for its 'secrecy', through the uncanny. Besides, the latter is linked to the semiotic because both represent a 'rupture' of what seems coherent and fixed: the present and the symbolic order, respectively; that is, the 'familiar' and, more consequently, the ontological and epistemological aspect of both migrants' and Anglo-Celts' identities. As with the intertwinement between Kristeva's modes, Gunew's solution is grounded on the succession of mirror-stages which can be accepted only by recognising its simultaneity with the symbolic. The trap of a dialectical and fixed relationship (master-slave, I-other, host society-migrant, coloniser-colonised, man-woman) is, if not avoided, at least repeatedly challenged. It is important in this study to note that the semiotic, though 'feminine', is not to be biologically identified with women but represents only what has not been symbolised. The uncanny 'encounter' between the semiotic and the symbolic, similarity and difference, casts light on a process of signification perfectly expressed by Bhabha's idea of the uncanniness of both identity and cultures. As for the first, Bhabha states:

I have lived that moment of [...] gathering in the *half-life*, half-light of foreign tongues, or in

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<sup>106</sup> For a discussion about the re-appropriation of language in a transformative way and its importance in ethnic writings see CHAPTER TWO, SECTION THREE.

<sup>107</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Framing marginality*, cit., p. 116.

the *uncanny fluency of another's language*; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering *the memories of underdevelopment*, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering *the past in a ritual of revival*; gathering the present<sup>108</sup>.

In Bhabha's essay, 'DissemiNation', the term 'gathering' defines both a space (half-life, a foreign language) and the object of this process. As with the "partial presence"<sup>109</sup> of identity, so the uncanniness of culture – *heimlich* with its coherence and stability and *unheimlich* since, in order to be "significatory"<sup>110</sup>, it needs to be "translated"<sup>111</sup> by others – reveals its openness to new possibilities, its non self-sufficiency and its being positively in tension with other cultures. In sum, they both express a hybrid nature dismantling any ideological discourse grounded on terms such as 'sameness' and 'diversity', in favour of 'similarity' and 'difference'; a discourse which applied to the relationship between Aborigines/immigrants (though with huge differences) and Anglo-Celts uncannily dismantles the legitimacy of the latter and proves the 'partiality' of their presence. No more an 'either/or' paradigm but a 'neither/or' one: differences no more stand for opposition. However the partiality of presence, half-life and hybridity, are not simple positive aspects of a pacific multiculturalism: the space of hybridity is an 'arena', an on-going clash of tensions. In fact, while it has frequently been interpreted as a cross-cultural exchange negating power relations and 'differences' towards a colonial/assimilationist sameness, hybridity does not suggest "that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it involves the idea of an equal exchange"<sup>112</sup>. As a different model of resistance from an 'anti' type of discourse, hybridity characterises subversive counter-discursive practices implicit in the ambivalence of a multiculturalism that marks the exotic and culturally diverse subject.

What has been traced through the semiotic, nostalgia and the uncanny is the gap between the signifier and the signified, the shifting nature of the centre and its

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<sup>108</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 139 (emphasis added).

<sup>109</sup> *Idem*, p. 123.

<sup>110</sup> *Idem*, p. 195.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>112</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

absence. The ‘openness’ of the hybrid subject identifies the historicity of racial and ethnic constructions and reveals that there is no ‘ethnic’ relationship as it is discussed in the next section.

#### **1.4 There is no *ethnic* relationship**

This section starts with an analyses of the relationship between race and ethnicity, then goes on to discuss the negative and absolutist connotation attributed to the second – despite the shift it was to mark in relation to race –, and illuminate its deconstruction and re-appropriation in a postmodern and semiotic perspective that underlines – as already seen – the importance of differences and subjectivity.

The social construction of the subject as a lacking being means that there is no wholeness; something Lacan states in his famous and perversely scandalous remark: “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship”<sup>113</sup>. For Lacan it was not a matter of not having sexual intercourse but, more deeply, that the harmonious relation between partners does not exist since the image of the other is ‘normative’ and not natural:

When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that –  
*You never look at me from the place from which I see you. Conversely, what I look at is never  
what I wish to see*<sup>114</sup>.

It is this asymmetry, the missing of ‘what we aim at’ in the other, that marks the inexistence of the represented ‘other’ and the possibility to achieve *jouissance* only through death – as Lacan points out in courtly love. From the perspective that the unity projected and desired is ontologically inexistent and that racial and ethnic borders are the construction of meaning, where actually there is none, Lacan’s remark can be grafted onto ‘ethnicity’ in order to ‘speak’ the historicity and controlling function of ‘Whiteness’. Ethnicity is normative but presented as ‘natural’, it works as

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<sup>113</sup> S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>114</sup> J. Lacan, [J-A. Miller (ed.)], *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London and New York, Karnac, [1977] 2004, p. 103 (tr. A. Sheridan).

if in the Real in opposition to its first identification with ‘choice’. This would cast light on its different relation to race – not in opposition to it – and on its not being a panacea, at least in the way it was initially perceived.

Seshadri-Crooks in arguing the characteristics that distinguish race from other systems of difference, such as class and ethnicity, puts an emphasis on its bodily markers as a form of essentialism preventing historicity. Conversely, since the visibility of the other systems does not involve essentialism they can be easily historicised. The social construction (in the symbolic order) of class and ethnicity makes them different from the system of race which is posited between nature and culture, sex (something that one inherently is from birth) and culture, the Real and the symbolic. Moreover, she argues that to support the exclusive social construction of race, separating race from racism, is dangerous because it contributes to the naturalisation of the same construct and dismisses racial practices<sup>115</sup>. While she is right to say that its effectivity is not lost, the belief that the above distinction would imply the non-historicity of ‘race’ or, worse than that, a structural durability attributed to its disavowal (a presence grounded on invisibility) clashes with critics arguing for the above distinction without overlooking the risks implied in the invisibility of race but simply shifting their focus onto ‘racism’. If race, perceived only as socially constructed, becomes invisible and thus its racial practices are still operating, is ethnicity doomed to the same fate? Why would not ethnicity – socially constructed – operate in an invisible way? Or why would it be easily historicised? But what does ‘easy’ mean? Has it got a conceptual and diachronic connotation? The affirmative answer to the first question points out the limits of Seshadri-Crooks’ absolute distinction between systems of difference. As for the second question and its implications, the historicity of ethnicity does not wipe away the racism behind it. Even though her view on racial visibility is not at all malleable<sup>116</sup> compared to ethnic

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 18, 20.

<sup>116</sup> Race is more malleable than what Seshadri-Crooks thinks, though this does not dismiss the legacy of its ‘invisibility’. It is both culturally constructed in the same way as ethnicity is and the product of historical processes without negating that popular thinking corresponds to the psychological objective construction of race noticed by Fanon and proved by the behaviour of people who, though denying being racists, do not act consequentially. Furthermore, colonialism with its need to justify theories, proves that racism “is not so much a product of the concept of race as the very reason for its existence.

or class visibility, from a synchronic point of view, whether ‘ethnic’ visibility will change or not, has for the marginalised subject less importance. Thus, her theory based on ethnic visibility runs the risk of overlooking other concrete forms of racism. The point here is to analyse ethnicity as posited between nature and culture and not mapped, in relation to race, on a culture-nature opposition as the term ethnicity suggested when initially used in multicultural contexts. In other words to argue that ethnicity, through its obviously ‘different’ visibility, is burdened with racial implications.

The term ‘ethnicity’, introduced in the 1960s in preference to the demeaning term of race and its scientific racist connotation, did not refer to biologically determined characteristics but to a fluidity of elements such as culture, tradition, language, etc. deployed to positively value a group of people. Thus the first difference between race and ethnicity can be conveyed through an opposition between fixity and choice, nature and culture. Besides questioning the opposition between race and ethnicity, one is willing to ask whether it really catches the difference between the two.

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Without the underlying desire for hierarchical categorization implicit in racism, ‘race’ would not exist” (B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 181). Ashcroft *et al.* support this by referring to the racial difference of Black African Coptic saint-warrior St Maurice recorded with no prejudice in a statue in Magdeburg Cathedral showing his Black features (*Ibidem*). Racism precedes and sustains race. A perspective which Seshadri-Crooks indirectly and unconsciously sustains saying that “we believe in the factuality of difference in order to see it” (K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 5). Does shifting the legacy of racist practices from ‘race’ to racism have implications for our debate? This means not only the priority of racism over race but also, as Goldberg sustains, that the two can be separated as the following excerpt that ironically Seshadri-Crooks quotes to sustain her theory shows: “Its virtual conceptual emptiness allows it parasitically to map its signification of naturalized differences onto prevailing social views [...] to articulate and extend racialized exclusions. [...] This prevailing historical legacy of thinking racially does not necessitate that any conceptual use of or appeal to race to characterize social circumstance is inherently unjustifiable. [...] What distinguishes a racist from a non-racist appeal to the category of race is the *use* into which the categorization enters, the exclusions it sustains, prompts, promotes, and extends. [...] though race has tended historically to define conditions of oppression, it could, under a culturalist interpretation [...] be the site of a counterassault, a ground of field for launching liberatory projects or from which to expand freedom(s) and open up emancipator spaces” (D.T. Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1993, pp. 210-11 qtd in *Idem*, p. 15). Two aspects must be underlined: first, instead of universalising race so as to render it “natural” and dismissing its historicity as Seshadri-Crooks argues in her interpretation of the above excerpt, Goldberg’s aim is to undermine the view of race as based on absolute differences. Besides, his discourse, does not imply the dismissing of historicity as he confirms when stating that “race is irrelevant, but all is race” (D.T. Goldberg, *op. cit.*, p. 6 qtd in S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., p. 21). Secondly, ‘race’ can be a term used to “open up emancipator spaces”, as a self-empowering construct. While in modern Western society it has been a strategy of marginalisation, post-modern self-racialisation has been a means of opposition “against the designation of races as fixed biological entities” (G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

The widespread use of ‘ethnicity’ took place in the USA both to designate the early twentieth century mass migration of Southern and Eastern Europeans and, politically speaking, when it was understood that assimilation had failed which led to a new controlling policy, namely the ‘melting pot’. As in the USA so in Australia the term entered the rhetorical political and cultural language at a time, the 1960s, witnessing the shift from assimilation to multiculturalism<sup>117</sup>. Ethnicity, thus, expresses more than an ethnic group’s neutral set of shifting characteristics; it denotes a hierarchical relationship between different *positions* (of power) that marginalises the other. Himani Bannerji’s statement clearly confirms the above relationship:

Multiculturalism to me is a way of managing seepage of persistent subjectivity of people that come from other parts of the world, people that are seen as undesirable because they have once been colonised, now neo-colonised. [...] We are talking about the undesirables. It is southern Europeans, sometimes, and Third World people who have to be ethnic<sup>118</sup>.

In sum, ethnicity turns out to be another epistemological strategy to define the identity of the other through a process of *othering*.

A further argument in support of the discriminating<sup>119</sup> meaning of the term is confirmed by its connection with ‘white’ values. While the culture of Northern Europeans was considered more similar to British culture and tradition (sharing certain values which would facilitate their social absorption), that of Southern and Eastern Europeans was not. In this scheme, ‘white’, ‘the West’ and ‘Europe’ are conflated into one another as synonyms with ‘Whiteness’ and Englishness or Britishness in a homogenising process which, on the one hand, conflates European into Englishness and not vice versa and, on the other hand, overlooks different

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<sup>117</sup> With the Fitzgerald Report of 1988, Fitzgerald himself claimed that “multiculturalism is so linked in the public mind with immigration and that it is also perceived negatively, as sectional and divisive” (CAAIP, 1988, p. 59 qtd in E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 213).

<sup>118</sup> H. Bannerji, interview in *Other Solitudes*, pp. 146-47 qtd in S.M. Gunew, ‘Multicultural Multiplicities’, *Meanjin*, 52 (3) 1993, p. 453.

<sup>119</sup> The term ‘ethnic’ is opposed to ‘Anglo-Celts/Australian’: the Anglo-Celts/Australian conflation is confirmed by the fact that “many Anglo-Australians and migrant Australians still believe that the ‘real’ Australian is blond haired, blue-eyed and *he* prefers to spend much of *his* leisure time on the beach”



histories relating to colonialism and imperialism. Through such a colonial mapping of Europe, ‘Whiteness’ preserves its narcissistic homogeneity and universalism from which to position *the other*<sup>120</sup> as ‘non-white’: while the centre becomes synonymous with modernity, civilisation, morality, ‘ordinariness’, *the others* (non-English, non-European, non-Western<sup>121</sup>) possess disqualifying attributes.

Yet, Gunew correctly specifies that within Europe itself cultural analysts are not so quick in subscribing to such a homogenising process<sup>122</sup>. The marginalisation implied in the early use of the term ‘ethnicity’ seems to be still valid. The above protean nature of ‘Whiteness’ also leads to question notions of homogeneity between Northern and Southern Italians; the ambivalent ethnic visibility and political invisibility of post-war immigrants and their descendants<sup>123</sup>; and, at the same time, both the constructed opposition between Southern Europeans and Asians or refugees and their conflation in a process of racialisation when in opposition to the British values (recall Pauline Hanson’s ‘first-class citizens’). As Hall did in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” for identities in the Caribbean<sup>124</sup>, so Sicilianness has to be positioned in relation to an Australian presence, a British/European/Italian presence and a Sicilian presence where the first is meant as the place for a new hybrid beginning, as will be discussed in this study.

Failing to represent just a “temporary state”<sup>125</sup> ending in assimilation – a theory similar to Clifford’s linear narrative of an assimilationist process completed within

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(E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 223).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74.

<sup>121</sup> *Idem*, p. 48.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, *cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>123</sup> Other scholars such as Huggan, and in line with Clifford, state the necessity to contextualise multiculturalisms in order to avoid the risk of “remaining bound to an earlier discourse of migration, centred on post-war immigrants in Australia, which makes claiming about cultures that effectively no longer exist” (G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 116). His belief, on the one hand, is evident in the content of his book which focuses more on refugees and Asians and, on the other hand, confirms Gaetano Rando’s fear that Italians are starting to become ‘invisible’ (cf. G. Rando, “Italiani d’Australia: perdita di visibilità”, *Italia Estera*, Wednesday, 24 August 2005 <http://italiaestera.net/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=2752>; first published on *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma*). Recent literary products challenge Huggan’s claim, such as the following autobiographical anthologies: *Doppia Identità. I giovani: conoscerli per capirli: Stories by Young Italo-Australians* (2002), *Growing up Italian in Australia: Eleven Young Australian Women Talk About their Childhood* (1993).

<sup>124</sup> S. Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in J.E. Braziel, A. Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora*, Malden (MA), Blackwell Publishing, [1990] 2003, p. 233.

<sup>125</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, *cit.*, p. 48.

the third generation<sup>126</sup> –, minorities began to be more and more referred to as a ‘problem’ whose cause was identified with their cultural background: no progress, no choice<sup>127</sup>, no belonging. Their broken English (with its implications in relation to the aforementioned equation English language-British culture), “static and backward traditions”, nostalgically trapped in the past and, so, colonially perceived as primitive and uncivilised<sup>128</sup>, their exclusion from the dominant national mythology – recall Hanson and Howard and the anti-memory strategy – mark them both sociologically and anthropologically. As with Shakespeare’s Caliban, their lack of freedom entails the necessity to internalise the way they are situated within the dominant language: “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick”<sup>129</sup>. Although being aware of the different nature of ethnic visibilities compared to racial ones, food, neighbourhoods<sup>130</sup>, clothes, names, behaviours, traditions and writings, the arts, are all features which might mark a person/writer as pertaining to a specific ethnic group/genre.

The racialised misreading of ethnic choices or inability to choose also deprives the ethnic subject of a sense of belonging. In a multicultural society to feel at home, free to express one’s identity, means feeling “to a certain degree a wilful subject”<sup>131</sup>. The wilful-lacking subject is reduced to invisibility, to a child-like condition: ‘You

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<sup>126</sup> J. Clifford, “Diasporas”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3) August 1994, p. 311. Multi-ethnic America is now defined more as a ‘salad bowl’ than a melting pot since the dream of assimilation into mainstream society did not turn real.

<sup>127</sup> In his *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud*, Alfredo Niceforo described Southern Italians as lacking any ‘will’ which he puts in relation to a lack of progress, a practical sense of life, the climate, etc (cf. V. Teti, *La razza maledetta. Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale*, Roma, Manifestolibri, 1993, pp. 190-206).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nation*, cit., p. 17. Gunew analyses the language of representation used by Helen Garner, Rosi Braidotti, Beatrice Faust and John Howard as constructing the binary opposition ‘we-them’ through the opposition of Australians who are able to choose from their heritage and others who are not since they are trapped in their past (cf. *Idem*, pp. 34-37).

<sup>129</sup> W. Shakespeare, *La Tempesta*, Milano, Garzanti, 1984, IV.i.188-89 (parallel translation by A. Lombardo).

<sup>130</sup> Ethnic ghettos are usually seen as ‘abject zones’ that help define the structuralist binary opposition clean-dirty, good-bad. These ghettos represent what is expelled out to define the ‘I’, the abjected spatially placed ‘outside’ from the centre, on the margins. For example, Italians in Brisbane lived at New Farm where rents were lower due to the fact that the neighbourhood was home to brothels, gambling houses, and commonly associated with criminality and with inhabitants of lower-morality.

<sup>131</sup> G. Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-building”, in H. Grace, G. Hage, L. Johnson, J. Langsworth, M. Symonds (eds.), *Home/World. Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney’s West*, Annandale (NSW), Pluto Press, 1997, p. 102.

can become *like me but you have to do as told*'. Again the mirror. In this scheme, while the ethnic subjects' choice to do something good is individualised and thus devalued – and this could be mapped on their literary productions as well –, ironically their possibility of doing something bad is generalised and essentialised as something to which all community is destined sooner or later<sup>132</sup>. Choices are, thus, valued in a power/knowledge relationship to fit *the other*'s identity.

Ethnic absolutism (no class, regional and gender differences) entails that, in relation to race, it cannot be mapped on a culture-nature or choice-fixity opposition since, though it might be defined as race deprived of its biological determinism, it cannot be deprived of its fixity. Ethnicity is thus reduced to a 'natural', 'essentialist' perception of culture, a neo-racism shifted onto a cultural level. In this scheme, multiculturalism is 'without migrants' whose histories and political activism are minimised. This new form of racism, which strengthens the thread of Australian racial history, though not presented as a hierarchical opposition between cultures but only as incommensurable cultural differences, leads to a degree of closure and narcissistic protection of one's national body with the consequential exclusion of foreign bodies up to the point of becoming synonymous with biological inviolability except for an emphasis falling only on compatible differences.

As with race, ethnic visibility is 'presented' as natural, normative, in the Real ("You see, they wear this..., speak like that..., write always about migration, always in the same way...") though determined by the symbolic and for this reason it should be written 'in inverted commas'. Ethnic relationship can never be harmonious till it is conceived in essentialist terms and till 'Whiteness' is claimed to be non-ethnic. It is an 'illusion' (like love) designed to make up for the absence of harmonious relations.

Thus, if one had to decide whether to accept or refuse Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's constructive suggestion that it is up to the concept of ethnicity to change the direction of the racial debate<sup>133</sup>, one would straightforwardly dismiss it. However, the racial meaning of ethnicity does not desensitise the term from a possible self-definition investment operated by minor groups; an investment not necessarily related

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, cit., pp. 66-67.

to the perpetuation of traditions but through memories of the experience of migration<sup>134</sup> and/or places of belonging linked to memory. As with ‘race’, the term – associated with a new form of racism: cultural racism, neo-racism or post-modern racism, etc. – can shift towards a *self-ethnicisation* linked to hybridity and ‘becoming’ and which, as with self-racialisation, would not involve a new form of racism or reverse-racism – though there is a risk<sup>135</sup> – but assert specific cultural differences which have no pretence of superiority and, due to their contingency, are prone to exchanges with other cultures<sup>136</sup>.

With *self-ethnicisation*, the ‘encounter’ referred to in SECTION THREE represents for the immigrant characters in Antonio Casella’s *The Sensualist* and Venero Armano’s *Romeo of The Underworld* and *The Volcano* an opportunity to get access to subjectivity, through *desire*, beyond ‘needs’ and mere identification with or unconscious support to ‘Whiteness’. The Real – seen as the place of the *no-thing* – works as a limit to the symbolic discourse, for instance the trauma which cannot be completely absorbed into the symbolic. The uncanny impossibility of the Real becomes a space of possibility. (If there is no unity since there was no lack in the first place, there is no sameness but similarities, no negative difference – diversity – but differences.) A state of identitarian liminality has a chiasmic nature being at home abroad and abroad at home (postmodern fragmentation).

In order to limit forms of power relations, ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ must remain unexpressed (in the Real) like Lacan’s trauma. The void is:

not part of the signifying chain. It is a ‘hole’ in that chain. It is a hole in the field of representation, but it does not simply ruin representation. It mends it as it ruins it. It both produces a hole and is what comes to the place of lack to cover it over<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>134</sup> *Idem*, pp. 75-79; see also E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, *cit.*, pp. 115-19; G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, pp.15-16; S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, *cit.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. S. Hall, “New Ethnicities”, in H.A. Baker, M. Diawara, R.H. Lindeborg (eds.), *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, London, The University of Chicago Press, [1987] 1996, pp. 169-70.

<sup>137</sup> P. Adams, “Operation Orlan”, in *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual*

The migrant subject can be defined as a ‘questionable’ speaking *ethnic* subject or as the result of sliding *signifieds* which stop to allow for moments of signification immediately questioned, limited by the Real working both to ruin any symbolic, fixed representation of our identity and to mend it. In order not to be trapped in this representation, paradoxically, the encounter with the Real must remain impossible and uncanny (secret) lest it is appropriated and culturally symbolised thus losing its autonomy.

The relationship between the Real and the semiotic (the *feminine*), both uncannily ruining and mending the symbolic, comes without saying. The resistance of ethnicity, sometimes politically unconscious – irrelevant in Bhabha’s theoretical framework since it does not diminish its rebellion as will be seen in the next chapter –, represents the uncanny ‘recognition’ of the historicity of ‘Whiteness’. Ethnicity speaks semiotically, though not exclusively. Kristeva discusses the relationship between the Real and the semiotic in an interview saying that

[...] the semiotic – if one really wants to find correspondences with Lacanian ideas – corresponds to phenomena that for Lacan are in both the real and the imaginary. For him the real is a hole, a void, but I think that in a number of experiences [...] – most notably, the narcissistic structure, the experience of melancholia or of catastrophic suffering and so on – the appearance of the real is not necessarily a void. It is accompanied by a number of psychic inscriptions that are of the order of the semiotic. Thus perhaps the notion of the semiotic allows us to speak of the real without simply saying that it’s an emptiness or a blank [...] <sup>138</sup>.

How can Lacan’s Real, which is unspeakable, be combined with the semiotic which ‘speaks’ though not symbolically? In the next chapter, the Gothic ‘obliquely’ speaking absences and silences will bear *witness* to this ‘encounter’.

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*Differences*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 151 qtd. in S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>138</sup> I. Lipkowitz, A. Loselle, “A Conversation with Julia Kristeva”, in R. Guberman (ed.), *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 23. Although the semiotic cannot be mapped on the Real, Kristeva’s annotation helps understanding Lacan’s the Real as rather an ongoing manifestation, an always ‘on trial’ subjectivity or, in other words, a *no-thing* in the sense of the absence of any ‘pure’ representation. For the relationship between the semiotic and Lacan’s Real see also J. Kristeva, “The True-Real”, in T. Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1986.

## 1.5 (In)visible blackness

The bond between knowledge and power regulates the representation of reality metonymically reduced to an ‘excess’: one ‘*thinks* of something, *says* something, *believes in* something’ and what is *believed in* is automatically *seen*. As Stuart Hall claims in his “Minimal Selves”, the ‘discovery’ of one’s racial visibility takes place individually and historically “in a certain moment” entailing the fact that one learns to see one’s self as such in a ‘narrative’ context, in relation to another subject<sup>139</sup>. As for the ‘Sicilian’ subjects – though no sweeping generalisation is made –, this ‘certain moment’ takes place in relation to different ‘centres’ (Europe, Northern Italy and the Antipodes respectively) and in different historical moments (the imperial period, the process of unification of the Italian peninsula and migration) so that one should speak of it in the plural. ‘Centres’ culturally and racially opposed to a temporal/spatial exotic and dangerous orientalised ‘periphery’ (noble savage and criminal). A brief excursus of the epistemic violence of these discourses will show a double displacement suffered, although not always consciously or overtly expressed, by Southern emigrants and its consequential difference from Northern Italians both in Italy and abroad. In this scheme one cannot talk of an Italian diaspora but of many regional diasporas. Starting from travellers<sup>140</sup>, this section will touch upon ‘insider’ *orientalists* and then move on to Australia’s representation of Southern Italians which was influenced by the first two forms of ‘picturesque’ identitarian narration.

Becoming an anthropological and ahistorical ‘laboratory’ for the definition of the ‘centre’ by travellers – whose works, as revealed in their writings, were not always clear cut from that of anthropologists –, Sicily was mainly defined by the plethora of travel writing as the “pearl of the century for the abundance and beauty” (1061) or “a terrestrial paradise inhabited by demons” (1611)<sup>141</sup>. Juxtaposed to a paradisiacal

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<sup>139</sup> S. Hall, “Minimal Selves” (1987), in H.A. Baker, M. Diawara, R.H. Lindeborg (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>140</sup> Said, in an historical excursus on the construction of the Orient, explicitly states that historians, travellers, scientists, etc. are “the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and [that] they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West” (E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 58).

<sup>141</sup> E. Hart, “Destabilising Paradise: Men, Women and Mafiosi. Sicilian Stereotypes”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 28 (2) May 2007, pp. 213, 214.

setting the image of violent, criminal, sexist, jealous, lazy (due to Sicily's warm weather), superstitious inhabitants<sup>142</sup> was particularly foregrounded in an essential way. Their physical and temperamental aspects were due to climate and history, though the latter – e.g. the several colonisations – did not justify them in a prospective of change<sup>143</sup>. Recall the lack of choice already discussed as characterising the Australian multicultural context. The exoticism and primitiveness in which Sicily and Southern Italy were *textualised* both justified the colonial projects of William Gladstone over the Neapolitan Kingdom of the Two Sicilies – since the repression of the 1848 uprising was seen as a synecdoche of an anti-liberal and anti-free trade resistance<sup>144</sup> – and supported the idea of Sicily as Said's *East*.

The same 'homogenising' stereotypes were given political and sociological weight in the then still to be labelled 'southern question' in relation to the process of unification. What is true for Howard and other Australian political speeches is also true for Italy when it comes to the political speeches given for the process of unification. The roots of national identity were traced back to the medieval city states, the Renaissance and the Italian (Florentine) language which characterised the North more than the South<sup>145</sup>. The symbols and collective memory taking part in the discourse of the nation excluded the South which still remains invisible or, far more telling, 'not enough visible'. Thus, on the one hand, for Renato Fucini the monuments in the South were "occasional and shapeless relic"<sup>146</sup> and royal palaces were not worthy of the name; and, on the other hand, for Benedetto Croce "Italy ends at the

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<sup>142</sup> These stereotypical representation of Sicilians were expressed by travellers such as Creuzé de Lesser, the Scottish Patrick Brydone and W.H. Thompson – just to name a few. P.D. Smecca also argues that travellers and sociologists gave completely different visions even of a Sicily visited or studied in the course of the same years (Cf. P.D. Smecca, *Representational Tactics in Travel Writing and Translation: A Focus on Sicily*, Roma, Carocci, 2005, pp. 98-104).

<sup>143</sup> Essentialism is also found in Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and Leonardo Sciascia (cf. F. Rosengarten, "Homo Siculus: Essentialism in the Writing of Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia", in J. Schneider (ed.), *Italy's "Southern Question". Orientalism in One Country*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 1998, pp. 117-131).

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. G. Gribaudo, "Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as seen by Insiders and Outsiders", in R. Lumley and J. Morris, *The New History of the Italian South. The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1997, p. 85. It is then no wonder that the 'Italy' best known abroad revolves round the *David* by Michelangelo (a white statue!) and that most travellers, in the past and also now, stop at Rome. This also proves, if necessary, the role of recent culture in still promoting imperial definitions of *the other*.

Carigliano”, travellers did not venture into the deep South that “boasts no Dante, Machiavelli or Ariosto”<sup>147</sup>.

In the political framework of unification, the role of the so labelled *meridionalisti* – namely those discussing the ‘southern question’ such as the positivists Cesare Lombroso, his son-in-law Enrico Ferri, Alfredo Niceforo and, their opponents, Napoleone Colajanni and Gaetano Salvemini – was paramount<sup>148</sup>.

Starting with his book *In Calabria*, released for the first time in 1863 and then 35 years later without any great revision, Lombroso attempted to formulate the theory of the ‘born criminal’ (the brigand) – namely the assertion that race shaped social behaviour. In this way, he meant to demonstrate that the South was fated to an unchangeable destiny and to justify the civilising mission of the ‘white’ towards the inferior ‘black’:

It is to the African and eastern elements (except the Greeks), that Italy owes, fundamentally, the greater frequency of homicides in Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, while the least occur where the Nordic races predominate (Lombardy)<sup>149</sup>.

Despite his emphasis on historical, social and economic reasons (feudalism and the necessary use of arms as a defence), he relies on race, the gene and anthropological features to portray *the other* as guilty of the past miscegenation with inferior races<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> *Idem*, p. 85.

<sup>147</sup> *Idem*, p. 86. A representation of the illiterate South is given in an article appeared on *Illustrazione Italiana* (16 April 1881). The stories of Clorinda, Goffredo and Tancredi “painted with rough brushes on the panels of those vehicles which perform the function of illustrated novels: mobile novels, the delight of the wretched people who still do not know how to read” can be understood only by those who have read Tasso (cf. J. Dickie, “Stereotypes of the Italian South 1860-1900”, in R. Lumley, J. Morris (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 134).

<sup>148</sup> The term *meridionalisti* cannot be mapped on Said’s *orientalists*, since it includes both positivists and their opponents. For this reason and because Said’s draws directly from Gramsci’s theory, a more rigorous differentiation would be between *meridionalisti* (Lombroso, Niceforo, Ferri) and *meridionali* (Colajanni and Salvemini) following Said’s difference between ‘Orientalists’ and ‘Orientals’.

<sup>149</sup> C. Lombroso, *L’uomo delinquente in rapporto all’antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie*, vol. 3, Turin, Bocca, 1896-97, p. 30 qtd in M. Gibson, “Biology or Environment? Race and Southern ‘Deviancy’ in the Writings of Italian Criminologists, 1880-1920”, in J. Schneider (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>150</sup> The Semitic race with long heads (*dolicocefalo*), dark hair, dark eyes, inferior race such as Southern Italians; and the Camitic with short heads (*brachicefalo*), blonde, superior race, such as Slavs, Celts and Northern Italians (cf. V. Teti, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-54). It is no wonder that Eastern European immigrants were far more preferred than Southern Europeans by the Australian Government.



Furthermore, though he provided a geographical mapping of ethnic violence (the inhabitants of Palermo were more violent because of the Albanian heritage and those in Catania and surroundings were less barbaric because a rich mixture of ‘Aryan blood’ could be found), the Greeks were, in his view, the least criminal in crimes of blood ‘only’<sup>151</sup>. A floating representation constructed to ambivalently assimilate what was compatible with ‘white’ culture (Greek culture but not those influenced by it) and reject the rest. For Niceforo, a Sicilian anthropologist, two races had come out “from the womb of the Italian nation” and Southerners were a womanly people thus justifying, as Lombroso did, hierarchical power relations<sup>152</sup>.

In brief, the wide-spread ‘orientalist’ image of the South was that of a paradise (exotic) inhabited by devils (menace). A bucolic timeless atmosphere, nostalgically trapped in the past in which poverty, social disadvantage and oppression were romanticised in the picturesque (see PLATE 1) and thus deprived of any possible political power. In relation to this the *Illustrazione Italiana*, a weekly illustrated magazine, provided excellent source-material with the aim of constructing an Italian-ness, ‘white’ and middle class, excluding the historical South, poor and black, though patronising it in a position between Italy (representing those aspects that could be subsumed within the bourgeois aesthetic framework: the pastoral aspect of the South) and the Orient (its uncivilised aspect; see PLATE 2). The image given of the South through the “charming and indolent sons of Capri” (see PLATE 3) was of “[...] dirty children, half covered with rags, [...] sitting in various picturesque poses and enjoying the breeze and the sun [living] on sweet idleness”<sup>153</sup>. The climate determinism underlying the above representation is explained as “the sweet idleness of the beautiful southern climate [which] takes away both your energy and your will,

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<sup>151</sup> Said, discussing the ‘narrated’ meaning (a concept useful for a postmodernist reading) of the past, refers to Bernal’s work *Black Athena* where the historian argues that whenever Greek civilisation was linked to southern or eastern cultures it was resigned as ‘Aryan’ (cf. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, cit., p. 16).

<sup>152</sup> Cf. D.R. Gabaccia, “Race, Nation, Hyphen. Italian-Americans and American Multiculturalism in Comparative Perspective”, in J. Guglielmo, S. Salerno (eds.), *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 53.

<sup>153</sup> *Illustrazione Italiana* (July 16, 1882, 39) in J. Dickie, *Darkest Italy, The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*, London, Macmillan, 1999, p. 92.

leaving only a desire for the pure country air, for sleep and love”<sup>154</sup>. If the South is a place where spiritual recovery is possible (but not for the demoniac inhabitants) away from chaos and civilisation, it is also stereotyped by using the same categories of idleness and love. In this way, for example, though the image of the ‘Latin lover’ is widely perceived as an Italian male’s prerogative, it is actually linked to the less developed part of the Mediterranean societies, earthier in their passions, and to the sexist, patriarchal controlling man still linked to feudalism. These more primitive passions are mapped on the Sicilian ‘gallo’, and its effects diffused both by a picturesque shifting towards the grotesque and a geographical dislocation of the anxieties of the ‘centre’ towards the periphery. Thus, though the Latin lover is associated with Italian men as represented in films such as *Roman Holiday*, its threatening ‘excesses’ are geographically displaced in an attempt at exorcising them<sup>155</sup>.

Colajanni disagreed with the above deterministic view of an endemic corruption and proved not only the incongruence of the positivist racial categories but also focused on the importance of historical, economic and social aspects as the only ones affecting the history of a people. Ethnic groups could change if their living conditions were ameliorated<sup>156</sup>.

This racial paradigm, officially sustained in Italy till the race (anti-Semitic) laws came into effect<sup>157</sup>, was spread in America and Australia. Beginning in 1889 America categorised newcomers in different races on the basis of a eugenicist ground and in 1911 the *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* was published drawing from the Sicilian *meridionalists* Giuseppe Sergi and Niceforo: Sergi’s link between the Hamitic stock

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<sup>154</sup> *Illustrazione Italiana* (July 21, 1877, 38) in *Ibidem*.

<sup>155</sup> E. Hart, *art. cit.*, pp. 214, 222-223.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. V. Teti, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>157</sup> The theory holding that after the Lombards (*Longobards*) there had been no other major occupation in Italy inevitably poses a question concerning the social construction of the racial concept and the proclamation of ‘one’ Italian race in contrast to past theories. The *Manifesto della Razza* – anonymously published on the *Giornale d’Italia* as “Il Fascismo e i problemi della razza” (July 15, 1938) and then subscribed by ten scientists and republished on the first issue of the fascist magazine *La difesa della razza* (August 5, 1938) – explicitly distinguished between Western Mediterraneans and Orientals, Africans, eliding any present relation between Italians and the Semitic or the Camitic races. In this way, Italy as a whole was depicted for the world as a nation of ‘white’ and superior people in line with the fascist beliefs of an Aryan race.

of North Africa and Southern Italians and Niceforo's description of Southerners' ethnical predilection for criminality<sup>158</sup>. The association with criminality is well expressed in the contemptuous term 'dago'<sup>159</sup>. In Australia 'black fellows'<sup>160</sup>, 'black Italians'<sup>161</sup> and 'wogs'<sup>162</sup> were common disparaging remarks used to refer to Italians. The discriminatory path linking Southern Italians to black was explicitly beaten<sup>163</sup>. However, Italians' 'blackness' came into play, as a metaphor for exclusion questioning their racial invisibility, with the increase of Northern Italians which were seen as a labour force that could be exploited in substitution of the Kanakas<sup>164</sup>. While cane growers needed cheap labour, the media began representing Italians by using

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. D.R. Gabaccia., *Italy's Many Diasporas*, London, University College London Press, 2000, pp. 38-39, 42-45; D.R. Gabaccia, *art. cit.*, pp. 44-59; C. Dewhirst, "Collaborating on Whiteness: representing Italians in Early White Australia", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32 (1) March 2008, pp. 42-43.

<sup>159</sup> The etymological origin of the term 'dago' comes either from 'Diego' (many Spaniards were called as such in America and then, at the beginning of the 1900 the term was used for Italians too) or from 'they go', or 'until the day goes' (day labourer) or from 'dagger' ('knife' or 'the person who stabs', as the stereotype about the Italians 'people of the dagger' would support; see PLATES 6-7 and the connection between 'blood' and knife/criminality) (cf. G.A. Stella, *L'orda: quando gli albanesi eravamo noi*, Milano, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2003, p. 286).

<sup>160</sup> In *Western Australia as it is Today* (1906) Leopoldo Zunini, an Italian Vice Consul for Western Australia, stated that public opinion both classed Italians "between the Chinese and the blacks" and "dubbed [them] 'black fellows'" (M. Melia, R. Bosworth (eds. and tr.) [L. Zunini], *Western Australia as it is Today*, Perth, The University of Western Australia Press, 1997, p. 50 qtd in C. Dewhirst, *art. cit.*, p. 35). See PLATE 10: 'The Worker', *Brisbane* 1901.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. V. Moraes-Gorecki, "'Black Italians' in the Sugar Fields of North Queensland: a Reflection on Labour Inclusion and Cultural Exclusion in Tropical Australia", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 5 (3) May 1994, pp. 306-19.

<sup>162</sup> The term 'wog' was explained in the *Camperdown Chronicle* as follows: "A wog sounds a queer sort of creature. You naturally wonder whether it is a bird, beast, or fish. But a wog is a man, a native official of Iraq, and this name for all native officials in that country was coined by the British because they found that Iraqi officials had a habit of styling themselves 'we oriental gentlemen'." The first letters of these words make up the slang name 'wog' (*Camperdown Chronicle*, Thursday 31 August 1933, p. 8). Italians called 'wogs', or even 'black wogs', were placed at the bottom of the human species ladder as between animals and human beings on the same level of black or oriental people (recall the *orientalisation/othering* of Southern Italians).

<sup>163</sup> Niceforo had stated that the wretched race inhabiting Sardinia, Sicily and the South of Italy had to be condemned to death like the inferior races, among others, of Africa and Australia (cf. A. Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna. Note di sociologia criminale*, Palermo, Sandron, [1897] 1987).

<sup>164</sup> Cf. H. Andreoni, "Olive or White? The Colour of Italians in Australia", *Sojourners and Strangers* (special issue of *Journal of Australian Studies*), 77, 2003, p. 81. Once the American Civil War, which had meant an increased exportation of cane sugar, was over it determined in Australia the necessity of cheaper labourers. The latter, after a failed request to the British homeland of a convict transportation revival, was solved by selecting for contracts or kidnapping ('blackbirding') 60.000 Pacific islanders (Kanakas) between 1863 and 1901 with "[c]ases of brutality [...], burning of villages, manhunts in the forests, piracy" (cf. N. Randazzo, M. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, Melbourne, AE Press, 1987, pp. 25-27).

stereotypes like that of the organ grinder<sup>165</sup> (see PLATES 4-5) or others typically adopted to discriminate against Southern Italians, such as the Mafia and the camorra, which were conveyed through the ‘knife’ synecdoche<sup>166</sup>. In order to ‘justify’ an underpaid indentured work, necessary both to cut the costs and because ‘white’ Australians refused to do it<sup>167</sup>, Italians were levelled to the Kanaka’s racial sphere using disqualifying attributes mainly associated with blacks. A colonial form of racism mis-recognising (not in the Lacanian sense) what they actually were and emphasising what they scientifically needed to be (see PLATE 18). Thus, for example, the word ‘southerner’ – with its arbitrary extension of ‘southern’ characteristics (skin colour) to all Italians – was a British conceptual category since Italians did not (and do not) call themselves, as a people, “southerners”<sup>168</sup>. Furthermore, the adopted rhetorical language used for the selection of slaves bears witness to the above ‘levelling’ strategy:

Figures indicate that cane-cutting in North Queensland is not an occupation suitable to migrants other than of southern origin. Most of the cane-cutters are selected in Italy in small villages and are predominantly of rural background. This system of selection was adopted on the request of cane-growers who insisted that the young men be of prime physical condition<sup>169</sup>.

In brief, the qualities of blacks were transferred for colonial necessity on Italians –

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<sup>165</sup> This shows that the representation of others was also adopted from the outside. For a detailed discussion on immigrants as street musicians in London, Paris and New York see J.E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth Century Paris, London and New York*, Canada, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, p. 81; see also C. Dewhirst, *art. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>167</sup> Anglo farmers reported difficulties in hiring white labourers since the latter when moving northwards followed the so called ‘tucker track’ (going as far as Townsville and then to Charters Towers) in order to avoid the sugar fields where ‘black man’s work’ was offered (cf. V. Moraes-Gorecki, *art. cit.*, pp. 314-15).

<sup>168</sup> *Idem*, p. 309. Moraes-Gorecki’s interviews with Italians in North Queensland reveal the reason why these immigrants were dark skinned: “The men were under the sun day-in day-out, planting, keeping the paddocks in order, harvesting and so on. Really, cutting and burning cane before mechanisation used to be very dirty work. Though on Sundays they were clean and decked up to go to church they were still looking very sun-burned or dark, anyhow” (*Idem*, p. 307). Working in the tropical North was also synonymous with non-whiteness, physical and mental degeneration.

<sup>169</sup> J.A. Hempel, “Italians in Queensland: Aspects of Assimilation”, *Quadrant*, 12, 1959, p. 47 qtd in

negatively homogenised as ‘southerners’ – since “only men of the ‘black’ race should slave under extremely strenuous physical and economic conditions” due to their inferiority and docility<sup>170</sup>. The arbitrariness of the term ‘southern’ and ‘black’ is also evident in prose fiction, e.g. *They’re a Weird Mob* in which a Northern Italian journalist visiting Australia is not believed to be an Italian since these are commonly imagined as dark and speaking broken English, while he does not.

A closer examination of what might be perceived as a univocal representation of Italians in Australia reveals a more complex social, economic and political context which resembles other more famous North-South opposition, such as the American one in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Trade Unions represented Italians in negative ways (‘dirty’, ‘abject slave’, etc.) and the cane growers as ‘docile’ and ‘law-abiding’, both aimed to highlight their inferiority for other reasons. As the history of the abolishment of slavery in America reveals behind it the true economic reasons of the Northern Confederation, the same thing happened with the metonymical opposition between white-grown cane and black-grown cane that led the North Queensland planters to propose secession. The rejection of Italians – three petitions were signed while agreements for an assisted-passage program was underway – had no connection with job-thievery but with the fact that their physical and economic settlement in the North might have signified the exclusion of ‘white’ people from the sugar market and the failure of an exclusively-white-society dream. Even if the planters and those standing up for them privileged Italians, this was at the expense of the Southern ones as the second point clearly shows. During the debate on the ‘Italian question’, Premier Griffith ‘tried’ to clarify the unionist Charles Power’s idea that no Italians should be imported<sup>171</sup>:

There is just as much connection between the Italian peasants of Northern Italy and the Mafia of Sicily as there is between the Mafia society and the law-abiding people of Queensland. If suitable persons offer themselves as emigrants under assisted schemes from Germany,

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H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. V. Moraes-Gorecki, *art. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>171</sup> Racism against Italians was not for its own sake. Trade Unions, that had fought for the rights of workers such as the eight-hour day and the election of their representatives in the parliament (e.g. Power), saw the cheap labour and the longer working days of the Kanakas and non-British immigrants as a dismantling of their Unions’ regulations.

Scandinavia and Northern Italy (not south of Leghorn) they will be accepted<sup>172</sup>.

Needless to say that Premier Griffith's 'clarification' did not represent a real shift of the official position on Southern Italians.

Since the increase of migration from Southern Italy in the 20s<sup>173</sup>, during the depression in the 30s – as suggested by the body of evidence of newspaper articles on the issue<sup>174</sup> – and till the post-war mass migration regulated by a policy of (in)visibility<sup>175</sup>, distinction between the two races was increasingly marked, though

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<sup>172</sup> N. Randazzo, M. Cigler, *op. cit.*, p. 31; see also H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>173</sup> After a description of the different invasions in the North and South of Italy reminiscent of the Italian positivist framework, the article published on the *Western Mail* by an anonymous contributor goes on to say that “[t]his brief excursion into history may seem to have led far from twentieth century Australia, but it serves to show that the Italian is not always as dark as he is painted and it accounts for those fair haired, blue-eyed, Italian-speaking aliens who frequently surprise – the stranger in Little Italy. [...] A sketch of the history of Southern Italy reveals reasons for the distinction of preference which the Australian has conferred upon the Northern Italian. Italy in the North has been stamped by Celt and Teuton; in the South Greek and Semite have left an indelible imprint” (“Italy in Australia. In North Queensland”, *Western Mail*, Thursday 14 January 1926, p. 2). See also “Aliens in the North”: “[...] the present alien influx was largely Sicilian - not of the desirable class of Northern Italian, who had participated in the development of the sugar industry” (*The Brisbane Courier*, Wednesday 3 June 1925, p. 7); J. Lyng, a scholar of the University of Melbourne, who in 1927 published *Non-British in Australia. Influence on Population and Progress* also dealing with the two races in Italy (cf. V. Moraes-Gorecki, *art. cit.*, p. 313); the Ferry Report (1925) distinguishing Southern Italians as ‘the Chinese of Europe’ and Northern Italians as ‘the Scotchmen of Italy’(cf. H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, p. 86) which was to be the basis for the *Amending Immigration Act* in mid-1925 enabling the government to exclude those perceived as difficult to assimilate (cf. E. Thompson, *Fair Enough: Egalitarianism in Australia*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1994, p. 76). To the misconceptions of the Report answered the Prime Minister S.M. Bruce who disagreed with the idea of the incapability of assimilation of most Europeans and stated that, while there was no wish to encourage non-British immigration, Europeans would not be excluded (cf. D. Dutton, *One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2002, p. 52). One would ask if non-encouragement has no common ground with discrimination!

<sup>174</sup> “Italian Quarrel. Lombards v. Sicilians” (*Morning Bulletin*, Friday 1 August 1930, p. 8); after the killing of two men the print spoke of Mafia quarrels between Sicilians and Calabrians and asked for more policemen for “closer supervision of the movements of all Sicilians and Calabrians in the area, particularly new arrivals” – “More Police May Go to North” (*The Courier-Mail*, Monday 7 March 1938, p. 2). However, there were Northern Italians taking defence of the denigrated Southern Italians such as Mr. S. Gagliardi, a Piedmonts, who wrote to the editor of the *Cairns Post*, “Foreigners in North” (*Cairns Post*, Tuesday 7 March 1939, p. 10).

<sup>175</sup> The dark-fair opposition was still in vogue at that time. In New South Wales a teacher, who held forth about the low intelligence and undesirability of “short dark southern Italians”, when asked to differentiate immigrants attending her class stated that 17 were from the south and 1 from the north. The truth was quite surprising: 17 from Venice and 1 from Abruzzi (Cf. C.A. Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 52-53). The admittance, as a last choice, of Italians in the aftermath of WWII after the 1951 ‘assisted-passage’ agreement between the Italian and the Australian Governments is further evidence of the above: a higher percentage of Northern Italians were granted assistance (cf. R. Lampugnani, “Postwar Migration Policies with

the above ‘southern’ generalisation<sup>176</sup> was not dismissed (see PLATE 12 taken from *Truth* Brisbane). Not only ‘the Dago Menace’ and ‘the Olive Peril’ represented a fear geographically spread beyond North Queensland but also across social classes and political forces making the ‘alien’ presence a national problem.

The above racist element, though scientific racism was abandoned in the late 60s in favour of ethnicity, is so embedded in the representation of the migrant<sup>177</sup> that it has not been erased from practices – especially cultural ones. For example, the ‘olive’ metaphor has shifted on a cultural level as a way of displacing aggression and hostility which had to be hidden in a multiculturalism context where Political Correctness was an ambiguous agreement (though sometimes with positive effects). While in the next section two novels and their reception will be analysed to underline this displacement through comedy and its dangerous relation with jokes and hoaxes, here light will be briefly cast on how both Italo-Australian (written in Italian and English) and Anglo-Celtic fiction – as a means of further ‘repetition’ – have played an important role in maintaining stereotypes denigrating Southern Italians<sup>178</sup>.

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Particular Reference to Italian Migration to Australia”, *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 33 (3) 1987, p. 198; J.A. Hempel, “Italians in Queensland. Some Aspects of Post-war Settlement of Italian Immigrants”, PhD thesis, Australian National University, Department of Demography, 1959, pp. 91, 106). In other words, the less Southern Italians the less dark-skinned people and, thus, the less threat. If explanations were asked, the Commonwealth Migration Office would send a letter saying that it was contrary to their regulations “to disclose the reasons for the rejection of intending migrants” – which was the exceeding of the arbitrarily-determined twenty-five per cent non-European colour bar (for a Sicilian case in 1955-56 see N. Randazzo, M. Cigler, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-52; for a Calabrian case in 1953 see D. O’Connor, “‘Helping People Has Been My Happiness’: The Contribution of Elena Rubeo to the Italian Community in South Australia” in S. Williams *et al.* (eds.), *The Regenerative Spirit: (Un)settling, (Dis)location, (Post-)colonial, (Re)presentations – Australia Post-Colonial Reflections*, Vol. 2, Adelaide, Lythrum Press, 2004, pp. 96-98). The minor assistance granted to Southern Italians accounts for the inferior return percentage of Southern Italians – for whom more time was necessary to regain the invested money.

<sup>176</sup> “Southern Europeans” (*The Brisbane Courier*, Thursday 11 December 1924, p. 12); “Southern Europeans” [in Perth] (*The Argus*, Saturday 27 February 1926, p. 29); “Southern Europeans. Unsatisfactory Workmen” (*The West Australian*, Wednesday 13 June 1928, p. 18); “Southern Europeans. Ineligible for Admittance” (*Western Argus*, Tuesday 9 December 1930, p. 23); “Black Britishers Preferred” [to Southern Europeans] (*The Courier-Mail*, Wednesday 7 July 1937, p. 16); “Migrants from Europe” in which those Southern Europeans arrived the previous day on the *Otranto* ship were defined physically and mentally beneath the accepted standard – the same day 353 Southern Europeans arrived at Fremantle on board of the *Viminale* (*The Courier-Mail*, Wednesday 18 August 1937, p. 17); “Tastes Differ” (*The Queenslander*, Wednesday 25 January 1939, p. 2).

<sup>177</sup> Italian descendants are still referred by Anglo-Australians as ‘migrants’. The transference of the term inherits all the racial/cultural aspects underlined in this section (Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., pp. 3-4).

<sup>178</sup> In 1937 Gino Nibbi published *Il volto degli emigranti: scene di vita in Australia* (*The Migrants’*

The scholar Gaetano Rando casts a positive light on the relationship between the two Italian races in Giuseppe Luciano's *Italians as They are* (1959) and Osvaldo Bonutto's *A Migrant's Story* (1963)<sup>179</sup>.

As for the first, the sympathetic lenses through which Luciano sees his less educated compatriot Alfio the Catanese (a character whose unsuccessful economic and social settlement in Australia is not the exception among immigrants) might simply be a feature of superiority as when he depicts Alfio's typical Sicilian belief in fate and pessimism or when Alfio, while going away, says "forse ho ragione"<sup>180</sup> (*maybe I'm right*) repeating Luciano's equal statement (*maybe you are right*) and, thus, dismantling his own certainties (he does not say *I'm right*) and reinforcing Luciano's who seems the one who is right. Luciano's culture and philosophy seem superior, not fatalistic. An interpretation reinforced by the assimilationist thesis of the novel.

The context depicted in Bonutto's defence of Sicilians in North Queensland, who may look black but actually are white, is far more ambiguous than the one above. Engaged in a conversation with a barber in the small town of Childers and asked about his origins, he says:

When I told him Italy, his eyes opened wide, he stopped cutting my hair and took a long look at me exclaiming that I could not possibly be Italian. [...] 'simply because you are not black', he explained. [...] It is true, I told him, that this dark pigmentation of the skin was due to an admixture of African blood through ancient but that the majority of even southern Italians were white and not dark.

I later found out that most of the Italians [...] in the Isis District were Sicilians. [...] although they were not black, the majority of them were not blond or fair types either which accounted

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*face: Scenes of Life in Australia*) in which Sicilians are portrayed with a "humorous vein of the superior observer" which is not adopted for the description of Florentine pioneers figures such as Checchi, Cattani and Baracchi (cf. G. Rando, "From Great Works to Alcheringa: A Socio-Historical Survey of Italian Writers in Australia", in G. Rando (ed.), *Italian Writers in Australia: Essays and Texts*, Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 1983, p. 69).

<sup>179</sup> Another literary work containing racist attitudes towards Sicilians is Peter Dalseno's *Sugar, tears and Eyeties*. The work recounts the life of Italians immigrants communities in the cane fields of North Queensland from their arrival in 1924 till 1947 and as for the loss of their community in the 1927 Herbert River flood it says: "Noteworthy was the realization that all the souls who perished were 'Bass'Italia'. By some quirk of fate, they were all Sicilians" (P. Dalseno, *Sugar, tears and Eyeties* Brisbane, Boolarong Publications, 1994, p. 72).

<sup>180</sup> G. Luciano, *Italians As They Are (Gli Italiani come sono)*, Sydney, The Italian Press, 1959 qtd in G. Rando (ed.), "From Great Works to Alcheringa", cit., p. 54.



probably for the barber's mistaken belief. The few Italians he had seen around [...] had all happened to be dark, and he therefore concluded that all Italians were black<sup>181</sup>.

Apart from the resemblance with *They're a Weird Mob* in which an Italian is not thought as such due to his fair pigmentation – a phenotypic boundary which seems blurred by his saying that there are 'whites' in the South too –, Bonutto positions Sicilians on a colour ladder between black and fair: dark. A darkness supporting the barber's 'southern' generalisation but which, at the same time, is seen semantically nearer to blackness. Besides, knowing that Bonutto positions himself on the fair step of the ladder while – as with the 'teacher's case' in New South Wales – even Northern Italians looked dark, it might be deduced that Bonutto's reasoning is trapped, perhaps unconsciously, in a binary opposition according to which the North is immune from any 'admixture' of compromising 'blood' (a metonymy for *other* races). Supporting this interpretation is Bonutto's own superior statement that Southern Italians are "wonderful people if one tried to understand them and overlook their small peculiarities"<sup>182</sup>.

Among other writings in which an overt opposition is embedded, Pino Bosi's most successful novel among Italian migrants, *Australia cane* (*Australia Dog*, 1971), can be mentioned. In this novel, the Sicilian Giovanni Carrano knocking at a door to ask for directions to his brother's house sees it slammed in his face. To this first 'encounter' Giovanni says "“*Australia cane* [...] *tengono dentro le bestie e lasciano fuori i cristiani*”"<sup>183</sup>. Rando observes that only when the term *cristiani* is understood in a set of signifiers in which it denotes 'people' as opposed to 'animals', Giovanni's treatment as less than an animal can be grasped. Again, in Bosi's work Sicilians are affected by the discrimination of Northern Italians. When, in the last chapter, Doctor Cocozza (representative of the official high culture) depicts Giovanni like those migrants who are used to living like beasts and keeping animals in their house, the

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<sup>181</sup> O. Bonutto, *A Migrant's Story*, Brisbane, H. Pole & Co., 1963, pp. 62-63.

<sup>182</sup> *Idem*, p. 64.

<sup>183</sup> P. Bosi, *Australia cane*, Sydney, Kurunda, 1971 qtd in G. Rando (ed.), "From Great Works to Alcheringa", cit., p. 65.

‘people-animal’ opposition mirrors the North-South, high-low culture ones<sup>184</sup>.

In Martin Boyd’s *Outbreak of Love* (1957) the Grand Tour of the main character, Russell, takes place in North Italy. This reveals, on the one hand the association between the ‘white’ North and Anglo-Celtic culture (at the expense of the high-culture-lacking South) and, on the other hand, it bears witness – as if it were necessary – both to the influence of the British Grand Tour tradition and the Anglo-Celtic Australian culture and to the colonial mapping of Europe which Gunew underlines when analysing ‘Whiteness’.

Insofar as the ‘Meridionali’ are concerned, O’Grady pictures the North-South relationship in Italy where Southern Italians are seen as ‘animals’ to be looked at and studied<sup>185</sup>:

[...] at the time I thought the worst kind were what we called Meridionali. These are small dark people with black hair and what we considered to be bad habits. We are big fair people with blue eyes and good habits. Perhaps it is a matter of opinion, and an Australian would lump us all together and call us ‘bloody dagoes’, but we didn’t like Meridionali, and they didn’t like us. [...] they found themselves being officious in the police force. Perhaps subconsciously that is why we did not like them. Nobody likes police forces. [...] I set off by train for Genova to catch my ship, but on the way I began to think that perhaps I would first have a look at the country where these Meridionali came from, as I had never been there. I had heard that Napoli was a good place to see them, and as the ship would be calling there and I could get there first by train, that is where I went. [On the ship he tells us that] all the stewards were Neapolitans and that practically all passengers were Meridionali of some sort, who were emigrating to Australia, and that perhaps it would be as well if I remained in my cabin for the voyage. I explained to him that while no one could call me brave, it would be impossible for anyone to be frightened by a couple of hundred of Meridionali. [...] So I spent the time on the voyage writing articles and stories about Meridionali, which were posted in Fremantle, and which I learned later proved very popular with our northern readers<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. G. Rando, “Italo-Australian Fiction”, *Meanjin*, 43 (3) September 1984, pp. 342-43.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 40.

<sup>186</sup> J. O’Grady, *They’re a Weird Mob*, Sydney, Ure Smith, pp. 10, 11-12.

The interest of this excerpt lies in the boundary created by *textualising* the Meridionali (the *East*) who end up being ‘abject’ subjects and left on the fringes of both society and the text. This is repeated, on the one hand, when job and language come into play for Culotta is a journalist and speaks good English, though not Australian, while the Meridionali are working-class people and speak a sort of Broken English; and, on the other hand, widened because of the further distinction between the Meridionali and the Sicilians<sup>187</sup>. Highlighting that O’Grady’s work is pure ‘fiction’, it becomes clear that his *de-aesthetisation* of *the other* was in time with the aversion against South Italians in Australia. And even when Culotta might be perceived to see his Southern compatriots from a sympathetic view, these are made to repeat the well-known stereotype of criminality<sup>188</sup>:

Then I remembered the knife I had seen in the hand of the man across the aisle. The ‘short sword of the Romans’ has never appealed to me. I would not like to have to use it. I like it less when someone else uses it. I got up again, and crossed the aisle. I said to this man, ‘You will please give me the knife.’ He said no, he would not give me the knife. I bumped him on the top of his head. He slid down in his seat. I said to the others, ‘You will please get the knife and give it to me.’ This one did. I threw it out the window, and sat down again. I was feeling very pleased with myself, and was no longer tired or sleepy<sup>189</sup>.

In a period of assimilationist propaganda during which Northern Italians were definitely preferred to their Southern opposite, these writers played an influential role in both reinforcing the denigrating vision of the latter and keeping white hegemony intact by textually reiterating the identitarian representation of *the other* in the hope of mirroring themselves as ‘white’.

### **1.6 Hoaxing *jokes* or the ‘truth’ of hoaks: John O’Grady and Helen**

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 21-22, 13.

<sup>188</sup> Another interesting example is Judah Waten’s “The Knife” (For a more detailed analyses see A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia. Representations of Italy and Italians in Australian Literature*, Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008, pp. 77-81). See PLATE 13.

<sup>189</sup> J. O’Grady, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

## Demidenko

Hoaxes in Australian literary market sometimes receive what is not a familiar response: the welcoming reception of O'Grady's hoax is a case in point. Compared to Demidenko's writing *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, purported to be an ostensibly biographical novel and harshly criticised both for her anti-Semitism and for her 'passing' as a migrant, O'Grady's work saw its sales duplicated after the hoax was unveiled. However, it makes no difference if Ure-Smith (the publishing house of O'Grady's novel) or the literary judges knew the real identity of the author because the very fact that readers, critics and judges were occulted of the truth, would have been sufficient to produce, once discovered, an anxious unsettledness. Thus, the reason for their diametrical opposite impact on readers/critics does not rest on the longer or shorter span of time of the hoax, but stems from more subtle crucial elements.

In order to understand this, it is worth comparing two forms of humour commonly perceived as interchangeable: the comic and the joke<sup>190</sup>. Emphasis will be laid on the psychoanalytic uncanny framework at work behind both hoaxes in relation to an unmarked Anglo-Celtic 'Whiteness'. The comic and the joke, with their respective containing and rupturing effect, will be analysed as closely intertwined unconscious strategies exorcising the anxiety produced by the historicity of 'Whiteness'.

Let's start by analysing the relationship between the uncanny and the hoax. The un-canny, as discussed above, is the coinciding of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* which in their English translation (canny and uncanny) have among other meanings those of 'humour' and 'mischievousness', respectively. But let the *Oxford English Dictionary* speak:

**Canny**, *adj.* **7. b.** Of humour: Quite , sly, "pawky".

**Uncanny**, *adj.* [Originally Scottish and northern.] **1.** Mischievous, malicious. [*Obsolete.*] **3.**

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<sup>190</sup> In his essay on the duplicity of O'Grady's novels, Carter uses the two terms interchangeably (cf. D. Carter, "O'Grady, John see 'Culotta, Nino': Popular Authorship, Duplicity and Celebrity", in M. Nolan, C. Dawson (eds.), *Who's Who? Hoaxes, Imposture and Identity crises in Australian Literature*, St Lucia, University Queensland Press, 2004, pp. 56-73).

Unreliable, not to be trusted. [*Obs.*] **4. a.** Of persons: Not quite safe to trust to, or have dealings with, as being associated with supernatural arts and powers. **b.** partaking of a supernatural character; mysterious, weird, uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar.

The ‘uncanny’ is never far from something comic and the magic, supernatural. Both the titles and the covers of the two novels already convey this duplicity: ‘weird’ and ‘the hand that signed the paper’ (Whose hand? What paper, when and why did s/he sign it?).

The term ‘hoax’ – probably an alteration of the noun *hocus* standing for “conjurer, juggler” (*OED*, sense 1.a), namely someone who performs magic to entertain people by using tricks (a ‘fabrication’) while presenting it as true – entails at the same time something ‘amusing and mischievous’. Or as an alteration from *hocus-pocus* (1620s), a term probably based on a perversion of the sacramental blessing from the Mass, *Hoc est corpus meum* (“This is my body”), it would entail something ‘absent’ as true<sup>191</sup>. In other words, the hoax is a site where the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* conflate; where its secret ‘fabrication’/(texture) is so “withdrawn from knowledge” as to coincide with the unconscious or with “*everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible*”. The hoax is uncanny.

How is the uncanniness of the hoax ‘unveiled’? As Fink linked the ‘trick’ (‘*linguistricks*’<sup>192</sup>) to the ‘rupture’ of the chain of signification, a threshold through which the unconscious is revealed, so Freud had done in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905c): humour reveals something which is forbidden. The uncanny, jokes and hoaxes conceal an anxiety produced by something which should

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<sup>191</sup> For this etymological reconstruction of hoax coming from *hocus-pocus* see [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hocus-pocus&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hocus-pocus&allowed_in_frame=0)

<sup>192</sup> To distinguish his use of the term from the more common one Fink came up with the neologism *la linguisterie* identifying with it that side of language where the unconscious comes into being through the fissures (the gaps, “ruptures”) created between the signifier and the signified, where meaning fails and there is no Saussurian unity of the sign. Fink translated the term *la linguisterie* as “*linguistricks*” playing on the word ‘tricks’ (S. Homer, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 69; emphasis added), so as to emphasise those *uncannily* performed by the unconscious upon the subject like ‘cracks’ in the language revealing the unconscious and menacing to deconstruct the fantasies ambiguously grounded on it. The same meaning of the term ‘trick’ supports this interpretation: it means ‘to deceive’ someone as a way of a joke and describes a part of the body which feels weak, especially ‘joints’. The relation between these two meanings can be traced as a joint (joke) which stiffens (‘ruptures’) the correct work of the body (language).

have remained secret. Hoaxes, hiding uncanny jokes, when unveiled risk becoming hoaks and ‘telling’ the anxious psychoanalytic truth behind what in this study are referred to by the neologism hoaks or hoaxing jokes.

In other words, when hoaks appear in the site of Lacan’s “lack” jokes, like all other ‘excesses’, they reveal the historicity of ‘Whiteness’. In this scheme and recalling the ambivalence behind stereotypes, while the comic produces a disavowal of differences (metaphor) the joke is the potential rupture of the veil, it is what recognises differences (metonymy) and in a colonial/assimilationist context what reveals the human/social/political sameness of ‘different’ subjects.

Not only *the other* is represented as comic but also race/ethnic relations are presented as such. The ‘excess’ is the difference from the standard (it produces the comic) justifying the civilising mission/assimilation:

‘That’s how he does it’ and ‘That’s how I would do it; That’s’ how I used to do it.’ But children lack the yardstick contained in the second sentence. [...] Their upbringing supplies them with the standard: ‘that’s how you should do it’<sup>193</sup>.

If the child does it differently from how he ought to do he is ‘laughed’ at. Comedy negates this difference and displaces ambivalence (“this is how you ought to do it”). The parallelism between the comic subject, the child and the migrant can be easily drawn. The comic is, thus, a scenario of ‘excess’ in the preconscious<sup>194</sup>.

As for jokes, Freud distinguished them in ‘innocent’ (verbal jokes) and ‘tendentious’ ones (conceptual jokes). The former, determined by aggression, may function in ‘normalising’ the difference (devour the other, a cannibalistic strategy)<sup>195</sup>. The latter

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<sup>193</sup> S. Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, London, Penguin Books, [1905c] 2002, p. 218 (tr. Crick J.). For Freud examples of the comic are: comedy of movement, of character, comic speech (immigrant’s Broken English), mimicry, travesty.

<sup>194</sup> Interesting examples of this colonial use of comedy effacing ambivalence can be found in cinema as well: the 1966 production of *They’re a Weird Mob* directed by Michael Powell; the replacement of the character Effie with a white Anglo-Saxon stereotype in the television production of *The Wog Boy* (cf. H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, pp. 90-91); and the “light and fluffiness” of movies such as *Acropolis Now* (cf. C. Brown, “Ethnic Stereotypes in Television”, *Cinema Papers*, 87 March-April 1992, pp. 54-56; see also D. Carter, “Six Theses on Contemporary Australia”, in D. Carter, M. Crotty (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 55).

<sup>195</sup> Verbal jokes may embed the inhibition of aggression and result in racist jokes. Seshadri-Crooks

is more relevant to the anxiety embedded in the unconscious (the comic is for Freud in the preconscious). The rupture of the joke would mean to face the anxious contradiction of colonialism/assimilation/multiculturalism, to accept the *lack* of the other as something which was never there in the first place and the ‘partiality’ of any form of superiority. It is the gap in language, in the unconscious. Differently from the comic, the joke is an artefact involving three people: the joker, the object of the joke, and the inactive listener (for Lacan the Other/the unconscious). For Lacan the joke is founded on the ambiguity of the unconscious: on difference and sameness. In this conceptual framework, the comic works in the hoax to protect the Subject from the joke.

On what ground was Demidenko ferociously attacked<sup>196</sup> and condemned by the establishment while O’Grady’s success reduplicated<sup>197</sup> since their respective hoaxes were discovered? Was it because the ‘comic effect’ of the latter fitted the

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argues that to regard the comic as the only racist attitude directed to foreigners nullifies the existence of racist jokes unless they are played within the same community and its members. On the contrary, jokes may pursue different functions: they may contain as they release anti-social impulses, they are an expression of a civil society or they may generate new forms of hatred (cf. K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-92). In this scheme, verbal jokes work as the comic. For example, in the sixties/seventies *The Italian Joke Book* was compiled and edited by Tommy Boccafucci (possible pseudonym of George Lombardi) using a racist cartoon which had appeared on an Australian newspaper in the aftermath of WWII (see PLATE 17). The editor, aware of the criticism to which he was laying himself open, wrote an introduction to make clear that humour was the aim of the collection and that the ‘bluenoses’ (puritanical people) who might have taken offence from it were just intolerant. From the editor’s perspective, jokes are seen as an expression of a civil multicultural society. Paradoxically and falsely, in his view, those who did not accept this kind of humour were the true racists (cf. T. Boccafucci [George Lombardi] (ed.), *The Italian Joke Book*, New York, Belmont Tower Books, 1975, p. 7). However, though maybe the joker is an ethnic insider (and thus told from an ethnic point of view), it is difficult to control the nature of the laugh: does the reader/listener laugh *with* or *at* the joker? (cf. H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, pp. 90-91). Racist jokes make up a high percentage of those included in the Institute of Early Childhood Development *Australian Children’s Folklore Collection* (e.g. “A: ‘What’s the difference between an Italian and a bucket of sewerage?’ B: ‘The bucket’” qtd in J. Factor, “‘Drop Dead, Pizza Head!’ Racism in Children’s Culture”, *Meanjin*, 43 (3) September 1984, p. 397). The plethora of prejudices suggests the relationship between “adult mores and children’s perception” (recall Lacan’s symbolic), a formation of an ethnocentric national identity based on the ‘I-other’ opposition and a deterrent to any multicultural society. There is always a correlation between children’s and national antagonism. As for adolescent-fiction inspiring racist attitudes see John Marsden’s trilogy *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, 1995.

<sup>196</sup> Her novel was withdrawn from the literary market as soon as her Anglo-Celtic identity was discovered. For other cases see T. Goldie, “On Not Being Australian: Mudrooroo and Demidenko”, in M. Nolan, C. Dawson (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 89-100; G. Whitlock, “Tainted Testimony: The Khouri Affair” in *Idem*, pp. 165-77.

<sup>197</sup> In its first three years the novel sold 300.000 copies while undergoing 47 reprints and selling nearly one million copies till 1981 (cf. B. York, “A Weird Mob”, *National Library of Australia News*, December 1999, p. 14; D. Carter, “O’Grady, John see ‘Culotta, Nino’”, *cit.*, p. 62 note 13).

assimilationist policy? And, perhaps, because of the connection between assimilation and multiculturalism, the same ‘effect’ would account for its several reprints and good selling in the multicultural period? O’Grady’s novel promoted assimilation both through the content and through its (colonial) comic effect of Nino Culotta – an interpretation accepted by those critics/readers ‘unconsciously’ seem(ed) to defend their own ‘Whiteness’ playing Freud’s role of the inactive listeners. For example A.G. Mitchell, who does both an *apologia* of the “hardworking Australians” and their “Australian speech” and discriminates between classes, argues how the narrator is made acceptable to the reader in a way so “carefully [...] calculated” that, would the novel have had a different character, “there would be material for gentle amusement but not for vigorous comedy”<sup>198</sup>. And when he provides examples accounting for the comedy in the novel he lists, in the narrow-minded Australian hard workers, Culotta’s foreign accent and low intelligence. He concludes his review by summing up the narrative structure of the novel as “an account from an Australian, who knows migrants intimately, trying to look at Australians through Italian eyes”<sup>199</sup>. The interest of this quotation lies in the possibility it gives to highlight two important features of the novel.

First, the playfulness of ‘gazes’ instead of giving power to immigrants reduces them to mere receptacles: what is pictured in their eyes is a ‘white’ discourse unveiling the power/knowledge relationship implicit in the novel – e.g. when Southern Italians are denigrated for their Broken English, skin colour, height and habits. Nino Culotta, trapped in what Bhabha calls ‘colonial mimicry’<sup>200</sup>, is depicted as a comic character from the very illustration by ‘Wep’ on the book cover (see PLATE 14) representing him in bafflement visually symbolising his encounter with a different culture. However, it takes him – as for a child – to undergo a process of adaptation to the new culture<sup>201</sup> by adopting the Australian slang; going to the pub;

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<sup>198</sup> A.G. Mitchell, “*They’re a Weird Mob* by Nino Culotta”, *Meanjin*, June 1958, p. 216.

<sup>199</sup> *Idem*, p. 217.

<sup>200</sup> When introducing Nino to his wife Edie, Joe says: “He’s just started with us. He’s an Italian. He’s orright *though*” (J. O’Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 48; emphasis added).

<sup>201</sup> The novel starts by highlighting the differences between Italians and Australians and between North and South Italians to prove the theory that it is easier to assimilate North Italians; it then describes Culotta’s assimilation and ends by inviting all new immigrants to assimilate.



becoming a ‘mate’; sharing a site typically associated with Anglo-Celts, the beach, with its civilising meaning and ‘baptismal’ function<sup>202</sup>. All situations shaded with comic effects. The act of recognition asked to readers, by means of paratextual elements, serves a “mode of consumption”<sup>203</sup> which reifies ‘authenticity’ (a process that takes into account several elements from the graphical cover to shelf position in libraries) revealing that not much has changed from ‘the Culotta’ to the ‘Demidenko era’ (the *text* enters the Australian literary market as *pre-read*, and the reader enters the text through an ‘unconscious’ constructed ‘threshold’), and, at the same time, asks readers to embrace the values that make one a real Australian (see section one of this chapter). The ‘affiliative’ critical activity enables us to speak the invisible political nature of the text, to locate its worldliness (the invisible hegemonic network of relations: “the status of the author, historical moment, conditions of publication, diffusion and reception, values drawn upon, values and ideas assumed, a framework of consensually held tacit assumptions”<sup>204</sup>) and the place it is spoken from. Comedy in O’Grady’s case is reproductive of power relations and the fact that the novel was given to immigrants<sup>205</sup> at their arrival in Australia as a sort of ‘good-immigrant’ manual clearly proves it. When O’Grady’s hoax was uncovered this reduplicated the

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<sup>202</sup> *Idem*, pp. 27, 47, 31. Drinking beer, at the pub or at home, is a male Anglo-Celtic ritual of spatial belonging, as the beach. Immigrants did not go to the pub and usually their involvement was not encouraged by Anglo-Celts (cf. J.A. Hempel, *op. cit.*, p. 114); pp. 105-20 (Chapter eight). A cultural aspect which has not changed as the Cronulla Riot in 2005 and forms of advertisements testify (cf. A. Lattas, “‘They Always Seem to be Angry’: The Cronulla Riot and the Civilising Pleasures of the Sun”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 18 (3) December 2007, pp. 300-19; A.M. Robinson, “Bodies that Matter: Performing White Possession on the Beach”, *Borders. Theory, Art and Power. Contemporary Borders, Theory and Art Journeys in the Reciprocal Construction of Identity Between Australia and Europe*, paper presented at The 2<sup>nd</sup> Imagined Australia International Research Forum, 17-19 June 2009, Bari-Italy). For the ‘baptism’ function in Powell’s cinematic adaptation see J. Hoorn, “Michael Powell’s *They’re a Weird Mob*: Dissolving the ‘Undigested Fragments’ in the Australian Body Politic”, *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 17 (2) June 2003, pp. 165-67. Furthermore, the last scene in O’Grady’s novel pictures Nino Culotta sunbathing in his backyard. In order not to think about the disgracefulness represents by New Australians (post-war immigrants) he goes on to give the reader a concluding eulogy to life in Australia. Among the many things he can do in the new land – which he perceives in paradisiacal terms as suggested he thinks of God speaking broad Australian-English –, he can go to Cronulla Beach. This entails that the backyard functions as the beach (see PLATE 15) or, in other words, as a ‘white’ space of belonging and usurpation; consequently, both are identitarian discursive sites linking colonisation and immigration through the assimilation and silencing of the others’ identity.

<sup>203</sup> D. Carter, “O’Grady, John see ‘Culotta, Nino’”, *cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>204</sup> E. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1983 qtd in B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 26.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, “Questions of Multiculturalism: Sneja Gunew and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak”,

comic power relations making it clear that the power of representation was (and still is) 'white'.

Second, in the 'mirror' structure of O'Grady becoming Culotta looking at Australians the author is the true victim of his 'passing' – a source of considerable anxiety – in a way that emphasises not his Irishness looking at Anglos through Italian eyes, but the rupture of the joke reveals that the 'looking' subject (Culotta) is a 'double' effacing 'differences'. The latter duplicity embedded in the incipit, to which Carter gives a comic effect, hides a psychological 'assimilationist' (or colonial) ambiguity:

The Culotta family is not famous for doing anything the hard way. It is not famous for doing anything. Because as far as I know it doesn't exist. Not in my family anyway. My family name is something quite different, but I can't use it here. Because this little book is about Australians, and if they knew you wrote it, some of them might put bricks through my windows<sup>206</sup>.

While the incipit reinforces the authenticity of his story, since he is honest to the point of telling the reader that Culotta is a pseudonym, he is also, at least unconsciously, creating a boundary between him and Nino Culotta, between the 'white' and the 'non-white'. However, this necessity originates from the unconscious awareness that between the original (the centre) and the copy (the margin) there is no real difference like in Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant":

A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives'; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse [...]. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh<sup>207</sup>.

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*Hecate. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, 12 (1-2) 1986, p. 136.

<sup>206</sup> J. O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> G. Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant", in S. Orwell, I. Angus (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 240.

Culotta has to avoid the same chance of being ‘laughed at’ and the attentive reader can see this menacing risk lying behind the encounter, on the voyage to Australia, with an “ignorant” steward (one only wonders whether the author thinks him a Meridionali or what!) who he knocked down since he was making fun of him with other people. A violence he had been displacing before getting on board by yelling “dirty Meridionali”. Even on his voyage – which limits any possibility of escaping being on a ship – he keeps the same superior and racist attitude towards the Meridionali: he asserts not to be frightened of “a couple of hundred Meridionali”. However, by remaining in his cabin as he was told by the captain one would only imagine what might have happened if caught in a fight with the ‘stereotyped’ South Italians. The comparison between the outcome of the laughing at Culotta by Australians and the duplicity ‘O’Grady/Culotta’ reveal that to be laughed at is what a O’Grady unconsciously fears<sup>208</sup> since it would mean to confront the anxiety of becoming like *the other*: a ‘passing’ trapped in ‘excess’ (gone *troppo*) unveiling that sameness has always been there and that ‘Whiteness’ might be a synonym for ‘emptiness’. A ‘passing’ which is a deconstruction of the opposition between the enunciating *I* and the enunciated ‘I’. In a letter to John O’Grady Jnr, O’Grady says that he does not want to be Nino Culotta anymore and that he has decided to “let him die”<sup>209</sup>. The ‘passing’ with its shifting nature from power and desire to menace reflect Freud’s explanation of the double in his essay “The Uncanny”:

Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death<sup>210</sup>.

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<sup>208</sup> Otto Rank in his study on the double, in particular referring to Ferdinand Raimund’s Romantic-comic fable *The King of the Alps and the Misanthropist*, argues: “some typical motifs of the double-phenomenon seem [...] to be raised from their unconscious tragedy into the cognitive sphere of humour” (O. Rank [H. Tucker (tr. and ed.)], *The Double. A Psychoanalytical Study*, London, Maresfield Library, 1989, p. 16).

<sup>209</sup> John O’Grady to John O’Grady JNR 12 February 1958, quoted in D. Carter, “O’Grady, John see ‘Culotta, Nino’”, cit., p. 65.

<sup>210</sup> S. Freud, “The Uncanny”, cit., p. 630. The double is uncanny because it signifies, Freud says, “a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and

It seems strange that he needed Culotta to die when everyone already knew that he was only a fictional character; still, O'Grady felt trapped, psychoanalytically speaking, by a presence haunting his identity. Would not it have been easier to get rid of Nino if he had been seen as an-*other*? The truth seems to be quite different: O'Grady has 'gone troppo'<sup>211</sup>. While 'going native' reinforces white privileges, to have 'gone troppo' reveals the true nature of the Lacanian (colonial) split subject and its consequential risks. Being his double, Nino's death is O'Grady's<sup>212</sup>. Sameness can take place as an 'encounter' only in the face of a ('white') death. His survival (the reminder of a difference) is necessary to O'Grady's 'Whiteness' since Nino is the 'site' where ambivalence can be displaced, difference perpetuated and wholeness supported. Culotta has to be 'the same, but not quite' and *performativity* becomes a Freudian therapy to master the unfamiliar by rendering it strangely familiar.

However, this anxiety remains all internal to O'Grady's private life and the comic effect of his hoax covers the joke maintaining what Terry Goldie refers to as "legitimate illegitimacy"<sup>213</sup>. For this reason his novel even in the multicultural arena remains the perfect expression of *the other's* excessive nature and its reception casts light on the relationship between colonialism and multiculturalism. Besides, what has been said testifies that any explanation linking the novel's different reception from other hoaxes exclusively to assimilation as reductive. In this case the *hoax*, as the site where aggressivity is *displaced*, remains veiled and what is uncovered is only the

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from other people" (*Idem*, p. 631).

<sup>211</sup> The term 'going troppo' is the Australian for the more common literary trope of 'going native'. The threat is associated with inter-racial sex or cultural involvement underlying, in both cases, an enjoyment of the other (a desire) shifting in degeneracy (cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 106). In Australia's (literary) context it also means the possibility of choosing among different ethnic identities (cf. G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 103).

<sup>212</sup> Some examples of characters dying when killing their *doppelgänger* occur in R.L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hide*, 1886, and E.A. Poe's "William Wilson", 1839 (for a plethora of examples of 'doubles' see O. Rank's *The Double*).

<sup>213</sup> In her essay, drawing both on Gunew's mapping of Butler's *performativity* on ethnic identity and on Hodge-Mishra's 'bastard complex' theory, Goldie argues that the latter is a way to affirm (legitimate) illegitimacy so to evade anxiety about origins. In this scheme literary impostures represent a loss of authority (see Mudrooroo and Demidenko) and create anxiety (for a more extensive discussion see T. Goldie's essay mentioned earlier).

hoax not the joke: covered by the comic the *hoax* supports the object behind the ‘veil’.

As for the Demidenko case, while it is Darville herself to perform the comic by dressing (see PLATE 16), speaking and acting as if she really were a Ukrainian immigrant<sup>214</sup> and claiming such an ethnic ancestry thus giving authority to her authenticity, the joke is discovered at the same time as the hoax producing anxiety in the readers/critics. It is worth recalling here that for Freud ‘travesty’ was one form of the (colonial) comic<sup>215</sup>. However, what provoked the different reaction from O’Grady’s was the *locus* of the comic and not its unethical use of ethnic histories as the fact that the Ukrainian community was never given voice to take up its own defence<sup>216</sup> – since they had to be ‘authentic’ but not to define what ‘authenticity’ is lest there would be no more ‘white’ ventriloquism. Let’s put the case that Demidenko’s performativity had not taken place through non verbal elements of communication; in other words, that the *paratextual* elements had not gone that far (since her body is an extension of her *text*), would the response have been different? My answer to this question, on the basis of what has been previously said, would be a blunt ‘of course not’ since no comic is left to protect the reader. Her comic is, at the same time, an extension of her *textuality* proving that she could “piss off the establishment”<sup>217</sup> and a defence that probably she unconsciously adopts to protect herself from being trapped in the *textual* passing. However, being herself the locus of the comic once the *hoax* is discovered her comic has no reason to continue: she is not Demidenko. The authenticity ascribed to ethnic writers is essential to identify the Anglo-Celtic ‘legitimacy of illegitimacy’ as unmarked, with no colour, non-ethnic,

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<sup>214</sup> Helen Darville lived on the outskirts of Brisbane in a neighbourhood where there was a strong Ukrainian community.

<sup>215</sup> Even Helen Demidenko’s attitude when interviewed by J. Hyde is revealing of her duplicity. Hyde, in retrospect, sees herself as “playing audience to a fantasist” who kept the conversation one sided since “[m]onologue disguises, dialogue reveals”. She goes on to say: “If Darville left a clue it was in her fear of interaction and the intolerable portent of silence” (J. Hyde, “On Not Being Ethnic. Anglo-Australia and the Lesson of Helen Darville-Demidenko”, *Quadrant*, 39 (11) November 1995, p. 50). Through monologue one imposes something to someone else as with Freud’s comic, while with dialogue the joke is unveiled.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. S. Mycak, “The Authority of the ‘I’. Life Stories and Ethnic Identity”, *Quadrant*, 45 (4) April 2001, pp. 24-25.

<sup>217</sup> T. Goldie, *art. cit.*, p. 93.

the absent presence. Once her authenticity is revealed to be a fake it acts as the transgression of a taboo, a sort of literary miscegenation; it blurs the boundaries between being ethnic and non-ethnic showing its arbitrariness. Losing her ethnicity she also lost her authority and, as a consequence, the Anglo-Celts lost their authority to speak for the ethnic subject through authenticity. It showed the unsettledness of Anglo-Celts' ratified 'wholeness'. The readers are left with a 'cracked' mirror in which they cannot reflect their narcissistic image but 'sameness'. Darville/Demidenko's *hoak* is the performing of an ethnicity disavowed by mainstream society. In O'Grady's case the comic and the joke are in the same *textual* space.

Notwithstanding, the common ground behind both cases is given by the anxiety of wholeness – in the first case as a feeling of possible loss in a period of mass immigration menacing the idea of a 'white' Anglo-Celtic society, and in the second as, in Darville's view, an already suffered *loss*. With the Demidenko's case the privileging of multicultural writings by the literary establishment<sup>218</sup> ('reverse racism'; note that her novel is contemporary to Howard's and Hanson's political era) uncovers the fear of a de-whitening nation losing its authority. Ironically, the attack seems to originate in the unawareness that both those who cry out against reverse racism and those who privilege just a 'compatible' version of ethnicity have the same purpose, namely to absorb the other. It could also be argued that her attack hides a deeper truth: 'Whiteness' is not lost. Claiming an absence means its 'realisation'. Moreover, it reveals that the reader is not preoccupied with 'authenticity' as a way of respecting ethnicities but only as a tool to control ethnic realities, to give them 'subtitles'.

Focusing on the adopted mechanism that should prevent the rupture of the signifier 'Whiteness', of the symbolic chain of signification that derives from it,

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<sup>218</sup> Venero Armanno himself was attacked for the grants he had been awarded as a 'multicultural' writer. The Queensland press, in the year 2000, "prompted by revelations Armanno had collected more than [Australian] \$150,000 in state and federal grants since 1992. Fellow authors and cultural commentators decried the patronage as 'cultural cringe' calling Armanno a 'public servant'. The criticism grew even more vicious as artists rose to Armanno's defence" (J. Szego, "Under the Volcano", *The Age*, 24-25 November 2001, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, UQFL375, Box 31, Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library).

while O’Grady achieves the oxymoron of ambivalence, ‘successful failure’, Demidenko fails. However, being the illegal/impossible desire (wholeness) repressed both by the author and the readers/critics, it continuously haunts both O’Grady’s successive writings and letters and the critics’ still involved in discussing the Demidenko case. In her *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss states that

‘What one cannot keep outside, one always keeps an image of inside. Identification with the object of love is as silly as that.’ Identification, in other words, invokes phantoms. By incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object, the subject vampiristically comes to life<sup>219</sup>.

Feeding on the other’s ‘authority’ and ‘authenticity’ reveals the true nature of *hoaks* as performative strategies<sup>220</sup> functional to affirm one’s ‘legitimate illegitimacy’. In this framework, Darville/Demidenko’s *hoak* with its unsettling joke could not but be rejected. For the hegemonic cultural power, performing ethnicity is recognising through *the other* what one is missing – though uncannily mirroring the nature of the ‘lacking’ Other.

Sucking ethnic identity is a special aspect of a country where identity is on the edge of ‘cracking’, though the danger of going too far is spooking as the following joke uncannily conveys:

‘You have just sucked the blood of one of my countrymen,’ the Italian priest told the vampire in ringing tones. ‘Excuse me while I vomit,’ the vampire said<sup>221</sup>.

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<sup>219</sup> D. Fuss, *Identification Papers*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 1 qtd in T. Goldie, *art. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>220</sup> For the idea of performativity in relation to Demidenko’s case see chapter four “A text with subtitles: performing ethnicity” in S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., pp. 67-78.

<sup>221</sup> T. Boccafucci (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 156.



PLATE II

[*A Vampiric Joke*]

T. Boccafucci (ed.), *The Italian Joke Book* (1973).



## *The cracked mirror or the phantom of 'authenticity'*

“It is the loss of memory, not the cult of memory that will make us prisoners of the past”<sup>1</sup>.

“[W]hat I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory. So that my India was first that: ‘my’ India, [...]”<sup>2</sup>.

“There is always the other side, always”<sup>3</sup>.

Whether perceived as migrant, ethnic or multicultural texts, the literary products of those perceived as non-‘white’ writers have always entered Australian literary market as already-read cultural manifestations – similarly, socially speaking, as it happens with foreign ‘bodies’. Unfortunately a very small number of scholars, except for those whose interest is dictated by the fact that they are ‘migrants’ themselves, give voice to a counter-discourse dismantling the above hegemonic ‘absorption’ of texts. The purpose of this chapter is to dismantle the ‘authentic’ identikit of ethnic writings and to highlight their literariness. Therefore, the necessity of synthesising those elements and start mapping the path followed by Casella and Armanno in re-appropriating and/or going beyond them. In brief, cracking the mirror and liberating the ‘double’.

### **2.1 Object texts**

Literary multiculturalism in Australia can be defined, in line with post-colonial theories, as a ‘discourse’: a set of universal statements, even unconsciously embraced,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture*, New York, Rizzoli, 1982, p. 5 (tr. M. Shore) qtd in L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London, Routledge, 1988, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> S. Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands”, in *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London, Granta Books, 1991, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> J. Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, [1966] 1984, p. 106.

assumed to know the world<sup>4</sup>. The epistemological boundaries established by such a discourse delimits the cultural, social and political identities of the ‘defined’ subject while, at the same time, establishing the space of authority of the powerful and superior ‘defining’ subject. It is as always posing the same question: What rules of this specific multicultural discourse allow the reader to identify ethnic writings? When such reductive discursive practices are mapped on ethnic literary works, even when visibility is granted to the latter, these are believed, as with the excessive body in the differential system of ‘race’, to speak the truth of authenticity. As a result, whatever is placed outside is simply not ‘ethnic’. In this framework, concepts such as ‘authenticity’, ‘truth’, ‘authority’ and ‘ethnicity’ merge into one another ascribing to ‘marginal’ literary texts a biological ethnic absolutism that renders both those texts falling outside of the ethnic category and the dislodging features of the more compatible ones, abject or comic ‘bodies’ of art. ‘Differences’ are disavowed and the texts written by native informants are constructed as paradoxical ‘unproblematic problems’<sup>5</sup> easier to absorb for their homogeneity in a Manichean discursive economy privileging the monologic and epic discourse of the nation-state expressed in political and literary works such as Howard’s and O’Grady’s, respectively. However, as with migrant subjects, even when ‘recognition’ of differences is granted to migrant texts through their inclusion in the literary multicultural field, it only serves to show off a tolerant society without implying any real change in cultural policies<sup>6</sup>. Kristeva, in her essay “From One Identity to an Other”, warns against these “false multiplicities”: “deprived of what is heterogeneous to meaning, these multiplicities can only produce a plural identity – *but an identity all the same*, since it is eidetic, transcendental”<sup>7</sup>. Unveiling differences involves absorbing them in the

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<sup>4</sup> For several interviews with writers who understand multiculturalism as a ‘discourse’ see R. Krausmann, *MATIA Literature*, North Sydney (NSW), Australia Council, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> The oxymoron definition, ‘unproblematic problems’, mirrors the duplicitous perception of migrants: on the one hand, they are perceived as a ‘problem’ and, on the other hand, because of their homogeneity, the ‘problem’ is unproblematic since it is easier to deal with them when they are reduced to a single fixed aspect instead of a multiplicity of ‘differences’.

<sup>6</sup> The issue of funding given to migrants for their cultural activities, against which part of Anglo-Australians cry out as a form of ‘reverse racism’, comes here into play. Critics such as Gunew and Vasta have revealed the true aim behind such policies: to keep migrants quiet in order to maintain the *status quo* (cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., p. 6; E. Vasta, *art. cit.*, p. 214).

<sup>7</sup> J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to an Other”, cit., p. 132 (emphasis added). Gunew says “that if

never-ending ‘successful failure’ of the assimilationist process.

From the above, the unacceptability of the ‘passing’ goes without saying since it is a way of asking uncanny questions unveiling the fallacy of cultural authenticity. In Peter Carey’s *My Life as a Fake* (2003) the stability of the (neo-)colonial distinction between the original and the copy is unsettled by a literary hoax<sup>8</sup>: the fake “has overwhelmed the complacency of authenticity”<sup>9</sup>. This entails Anglo-Celts being reminded of their non-belonging inasmuch as it raises doubts about the colonised-coloniser, self-other distinctions. In the same vein, the Demidenko Affair shows the fallacy of ‘true’ knowledge as Gunew explains by mapping Marjorie Garber’s analysis of gender deconstruction, in David Hwang’s play *M. Butterfly*, on ethnic ‘transvestism’. Gunew substitutes the term ‘ethnic’ to ‘woman’ in the line said by the transvestite Song Liling: “only a man knows how a woman should act”<sup>10</sup>. In this way, Gunew argues that from a dominant standpoint only non-ethnics know what both a true ethnic subject and text are; a truth to which topics and writers must conform like Calibanian puppets authentically iterating such a spectacle through performances. Such a ‘discourse’ of authenticity, as in the case of gender<sup>11</sup>, Gunew goes on, signalling the limits of such understanding, is grounded on a lack of knowledge or

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questions of cultural difference are not linked to analysis of power inequalities [...] then we are lost in the maze of liberal pluralism” (S.M. Gunew, “Multicultural Multiplicities”, cit., p. 456). Gunew and Kristeva do not dismiss ‘power inequalities’ and are aware of the risk of analysing ‘multiplicities’ outside of power relations. See also Hage and JanMohamed-Lloyd on ‘pluralism’ which has, socially speaking, the same false implications as multiplicity (cf. G. Hage, “Analysing Multiculturalism Today”, cit., p. 497; A.R. JanMohamed, D. Lloyd, “Introduction: Toward a Theory of Minority Discourse”, *Cultural Critique*, 6 Spring 1987, pp. 9-10).

<sup>8</sup> In the 1940’s Adelaide, the poet Ern Malley was invented by two conservative poets, Harold Stewart and James McAuley, to undermine the pretensions of modernist poetry in Australia. Malley’s poems were published on the avant-garde magazine, *Angry Penguins*. When the hoax was revealed, the fictional poet had become so real that he was even defended in the Adelaide courtroom against obscenity charges in 1944 (cf. D. Huddart, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., pp. 73-74. In *Orientalism* Said used the theatre as a metaphor for the epistemological and ontological essentialist reading of *the other/the puppet*: “On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe” (E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 63).

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of transvestism blurring gender boundaries see Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and Billy Wilder’s 1958 film *Some Like It Hot* (cf. A. Stott, *Comedy*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 63-70). It is interesting to note that as in both the play and the film exploration of fluid identities takes place ‘outside’ the city – an aspect that goes back to Dionysus’s celebrations (*Idem*, p. 4) – so ethnic transvestism has to do with authors coming from ‘somewhere else’. The ‘outside’

one could add, since the latter seems a too sympathetic explanation, on an Althusserian ‘mis-interpellation’ with its Marxist idea of ‘commodification’<sup>12</sup>.

A Saidian ‘affiliative’ reading reveals the nature of the above ‘multicultural discourse’: the (un)conscious involvement of critics, the establishment, reviewers, education, translators and book-buyers and the consequential proliferation of discriminating invisibilities. It betrays an ‘authenticity’ which comes after the event of ‘silencing’ in line with ‘racism’ preceding ‘race’. When dealing with the creation of the Orient through knowledge, Said states that:

the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each case the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks<sup>13</sup>.

It is not difficult to map his words on the Australian dominating ‘affiliative’ network in order to ‘locate’ texts:

- Darville’s novel was *textualised* by the ‘judges’ of the Miles Franklin Award<sup>14</sup> as resisting “monolithic assumptions about culture and identity”<sup>15</sup> – something Gunew openly disagrees with;
- both ‘writers’, Darville’s and O’Grady, choose a genre testifying the taken for granted autobiographical nature of ethnic writings;
- ‘reviewers’ – as will be discussed in the next section – perpetuate a *de-*

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characterises such an identitarian fluidity as temporary and functional only to reinforce the centre.

<sup>12</sup> Such a mis-representation operates in the everyday life as well. In fact, it slides into an essentialist approach when, for example, immigrants are perceived as a group always inclined towards ‘bad’ things (cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, cit., pp. 66-68).

<sup>13</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Demidenko won three literary awards in the span of two years: the Australian Vogel Award (1993) for young writers under 35, the Miles Franklin Award (1995) and the Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society (1995) – (see PLATE 16).

<sup>15</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., p. 72.

*aestheticised* interpellation of these works<sup>16</sup> or give a picturesque image of the world described<sup>17</sup>;

- G. Whitlock analyses how the *peritext* of Khouri's *Forbidden Love* presents its content as authentic life-narrative thus revealing the "unquestioning acceptance of certain categories of information about other cultures"<sup>18</sup> both by 'readers' and 'publishers';
- the inclusion in *integrationist anthologies* tailored to the wishes of their 'editors' who disavow differences in favour of a thematic and/or chronological homogeneity<sup>19</sup>;

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<sup>16</sup> This is the case of Rosa Cappiello's *Oh Lucky Country*: the reviewer incompetently highlights the realist mode leading to a narrator/author confusion (cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., p. 95).

<sup>17</sup> Such a 'touristic reading', though intensified when the ethnicity of the writer and reader differ, might also occur when their ethnicities match as in the case of Sicilian writer Enza Gandolfo reviewing *The Volcano*. Gandolfo takes pains to point out that the stereotype of the sexist Mediterranean man, as portrayed in Emilio's attitude, is not typical of Sicilian culture. Her solicitude reveals her concern about 'authenticity' and her falling victim of a touristic interpretation of the novel. *The Volcano* is not a complete representation of its source culture as Armanno himself states. After praising the novel for 'its journey through memory, history and mythology', she says: "There are two main criticisms I have of the novel. [...] The second is to do with the male characters – especially but not only Emilio (this is also true of the male characters in *Firehead*). These Sicilian men are too much the stereotypical Sicilian male – violent and overtly sexual; always a 'lady's man'; always a good lover (until he is too old and sick). And sexist, of course. These men find it almost impossible to sustain meaningful and healthy relationships with women. As an Australian writer with a Sicilian heritage, I have read Armanno's novels with interest. I recognise the men he portrays but I also know Sicilian men who are gentle, family orientated, faithful to and respectful of their wives – none of these seem to make it into Armanno's novel" (E. Gandolfo, "Review: *The Volcano* by Venero Armanno", *Network Review of Books*, Perth, Australian Public Intellectual Network, June 2002 [http://www.api-network.com/main/index.php?apply=reviews&webpage=api\\_reviews&flexedit=&flex\\_password=&menu\\_label=&menuID=homely&menubox=&Review=4995](http://www.api-network.com/main/index.php?apply=reviews&webpage=api_reviews&flexedit=&flex_password=&menu_label=&menuID=homely&menubox=&Review=4995)). Here, it seems that the reviewer sees in Armanno's representation the risk of an 'I-other' opposition in which the Sicilian is stereotyped. In this case she unfortunately gives voice to a 'white' perception hinted by her fear that all Sicilian men might be seen as in Armanno's novels. However, this precludes her to read the true function of this characterisation of Emilio: the stereotype is used both in reference to the actual story of Armanno's grandmother – kidnapped by a criminal, like Persephone by Hades, and obliged to live with him – and as a way to punish him at the end of the novel through Desideria's silence.

<sup>18</sup> G. Whitlock, *art. cit.*, p. 173. As for the construction of authenticity in relation to O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* see Carter's essay mentioned before.

<sup>19</sup> G. Markus distinguishes between 'integrationist anthologies' and 'interventionist anthologies'. The former, such as P. Skrzynecki's *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing* (1985), R.F. Holt's *Neighbours: Multicultural Writing of the 1980s* (1991), celebrate national diversity while the latter, such as S. Gunew and J. Mahyuddin's *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing* (1988) and P. Abood, B. Gamba, M. Kotevski (ed.)'s *Waiting in Space: An Anthology of Australian Writing* (1999), have a more critical perspective of diversity or what could be called in Gunew's words a 'positive discrimination' (cf. G. Markus, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-22). Gunew herself was asked by the publisher of *Beyond the Echo* to follow a theme-based criterion when organising the literary material in order to mirror the migrant experience (cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., pp. 8-9).

- in 'education', migrant writings, whose writers were believed to merge with mainstream society in due time, were selected on the basis of an interracial tolerance but, actually, only after passing a "process of conversion into an acceptable currency"<sup>20</sup>.
- the lack of 'translations' into English, as Karakostas-Seda argues by referring to the eighties but still valid today, means less readers for migrant writers, less intercultural exchange and hides the unwelcoming of 'different' views from the homogenised unproblematic ones<sup>21</sup>.

As evident from this far from exhaustive panorama of literary production and reception, it is difficult not to agree with Mishra's idea of a postmodern cultural racism summing up the 'process' through which works enter the literary field as

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<sup>20</sup> A. Karakostas-Seda, "Writers Without Readers, Writers Without Books", *Meanjin*, 48 (4) Summer 1989, p. 675. The problem with Antigone Kefala's works is that they cannot be categorised as socio-historical documents and are threatening to the Anglo-Celtic perception of migrants. Her own version of the migrant experience was excluded from the curriculum since it lacked a "clear story line", was "too rich in adjectives and images" and was "a personal exploration" of the migrant experience (*Idem*, pp. 675, 676). In this scheme, 'good' writing becomes synonymous with Anglo-Celtic writings, with "vocabularies of excellence". It is not surprising that the implications of the descriptive meaning of 'authenticity' also account for the debatable literary quality of 'migrant' writings and for the disinterest of theorisation by part of Anglo-Celtic critics, ultimately silencing the "estranging familiarity" of these writings, and the devaluation of migrant theoreticians (cf. E. Hatzimanolis, "Dissonances", *HECATE. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, 18 (2) 1992, pp. 145-48). Critics such as Robert Dessaix in his essay "Nice Work if You Can get It" published in the *Australian Book Review* (1991) argued, certainly not in defence of non-Anglo-Celtic writers, on the one hand, that multicultural professionals have 'ghettoised' multicultural writers and, on the other hand, that these writings in most cases are no good first of all due to a lack of proficiency in the English language which stands for a universal signifier of good writing (Cf. W. Ommundsen, "In Backlash Country: Revisiting the Multicultural Literature Debate in the Wake of Pauline Hanson", in A. Wimmer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 224). Even Huggan, analysing the 'anthologomania' effect, though highlighting the positive result of Gunew's anthology, does not fail to stress that the aim of some anthologies was rather to redress the social injustice of marginalisation than to point out literary merits (cf. G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 117). The hard-hearted solution Dessaix puts forward for these writers is to give up writing or even better to go back to their country of origin. In the shadow of new attitudes towards multiculturalism, *other* stories are seen as irrelevant and even threatening to Australia's 'white' culture. Their silencing is epitomised by the roar that Dessaix's essay or the Demidenko Affair provoked in the public arena, the latter precluded to those same writings that were at the core of the issue. A fact reinforced in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* where more space is dedicated to the Demidenko Affair than to the analyses of the authority of the 'I' from a non-Anglo-Celtic point of view. The only brief reference to Rosa Cappiello is to relegate her writings in the realist genre (cf. B. Bennett, J. Strauss (eds.), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 323-27).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Karakostas-Seda, *art. cit.*, p. 678.

“already-read”<sup>22</sup>. In such an ambivalent context the attempt to give voice does not signify to speak *to* but *for* the others<sup>23</sup>.

Yet, this monologic reading reveals various strictly intermingled factors. On the one hand it shows the ‘pathologies’ of the Australian multicultural field that press commentator Luke Slattery<sup>24</sup> evidenced when underlining the anxiety behind the longing for authenticity. On the other hand, it brings back Freud’s theory of the comic including, among several other forms of comedy, ‘mimicry’ and ‘travesty’ which hide the unsettling joke, the joint or fissure cracking the mirror. The blurring between the copy and the original implies the possibility that any ethnic writer could do the exact opposite; that ethnic identity, to which literariness is reduced, is not fixed; that no specific genre can be associated with ethnic writers by means of a prescriptive relation underplaying its aesthetic achievements; and, that life-experience narratives can be easily made up dismantling the myth of authenticity.

The reception of these writings as abject objects on which to project ideas both intolerable and indispensable for self-differentiation, explains the cannibalism hidden in the demand for their publication. Drawing on Kristeva, one might say that the ‘migrant text’ is a “a vortex of summons and repulsion”<sup>25</sup>. The next section will focus on the sociological and aesthetical assumptions producing a Foucaultian “épistémé”<sup>26</sup> of what will be called ‘the phantom of authenticity’.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. S. Mishra, “Postmodern Racism”, *Meanjin*, 55 (2) 1996, p. 351.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Pivato argues that critics speaking about and for minorities often and unconsciously make the scrutinising Western gaze their own. And, as the Australian context proves, Pivato is right when arguing that elite academics render a service to the dominant group (cf. J. Pivato, “Representation of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 31 (3) Fall 1996, p. 54).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, New York, Columbia University Press, [1980] 1982, p. 5 (tr. Leon S. Roudiez).

<sup>26</sup> For Foucault, ‘épistémé’ is constituted of the relationships among systems of knowledge of a certain period such as what they have in common, though dealing with different objects of study: here, literary criticism using sociological and anthropological assumptions (*orality*) to value the aesthetic features of immigrants’ literary works as autobiographical forms (cf. S. Mills, *Michel Foucault*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, pp. 61-64).

## 2.2 The phantom of authenticity: the nostalgia for ‘orality’

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin brilliantly sum up the authentic space by saying that “the centre [...] dictates an order in terms of which the cultural margins must always see themselves as disorder and chaos”<sup>27</sup> since they lack what the centre possesses: unity. Disorder and chaos do not contradict what has been said about ‘homogeneity’ for *the others* are ‘all’ seen as ‘chaos’. When speaking of authenticity, terms such as autobiography, realist mode, confessional or elegiac literature, narrator/author fusion, Broken English and so on, convey its meaning. Such features can be interpreted within ‘literary developmental models’ overwriting differences and turning on notions of petrified and fixed identities of a working class nostalgically overburdened with memories of a backward and primitive past, which translates in the attempt to recreate anachronistic social rituals. Various significant implications stem from what has been said. First, the more attention is paid to the backwardness of the world out there, the more the world here is presented as egalitarian. So both the publishing process – as seen in the previous section – and the reading of these texts fulfil a show-off purpose. In addition, such a discourse determines that migrant stories can only be seen as shifting from stories of migrants’ success to those of backwardness<sup>28</sup>. Secondly, it results in the formation of spaces such as ‘Sicily’, ‘ghettoes’ or ‘ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (2009) Armano’s *The Volcano* is presented through an excerpt from part four of his novel, ‘Sicilian Bandits’. One would have expected that a piece describing the “*abandonamento*” (*sic*) or the pre-emigration context (*TV*, 311) which had explained part of the character’s life in Australia, or the disillusionment of Australian (false) egalitarianism (*TV*, 336-345), or the work on the Exhibition Station (*TV*, 464), just to name a few, had been chosen. Conversely, the chosen excerpt presents Australia as the land of ‘gifts’ in which, on the one hand, the characters of Santino e Antonio epitomise the dualistic romantic and violent qualities of Sicilian men and, on the other hand, Australia is a looking-forward country, modern, ‘caring’, in opposition to the migrant’s homeland of starvation and backwardness. Although being aware that an excerpt can never fully give honour to a work of art, the ironic meaning of the one quoted below is grasped only when put in relation to the parts framing it: “these hot, hilly, night-time thoroughfares and avenues held the real gifts he’d earned by coming to this country. A people in constant forward motion; a population ready to propel itself into the next available party not to mention their all-too-plausible good future. The sight of his wife’s new dress billowing against a sign that read ‘*EAT while you SLIM. Don’t starve to reduce: BioChemic Laboratories (Aust), COMPLETE TREATMENT ONLY 47/6*’ lifted his spirits. Here you could worry about how fat you were getting, not how emaciated because of starvation, so why worry about the future?” (V. Armano, *The Volcano*, qtd in N. Jose (ed.), *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2009, p. 1332). Even in this recent opportunity for a multicultural approach in compiling an anthology, ‘differences’ are disavowed and ‘diversities’ foregrounded. The chosen text becomes a new text, one of representation according to one’s ‘positionality’.



texts' or, in other words, the mimetic mode is a colonial assumption that language – at least that used by migrant writers – has references to the 'real' world interpreted as objective 'truth' which postmodernism takes pain to question. In this way, from a spatial perspective, the existence of a 'Sicilyan text' could be argued. Thirdly, in a discourse reading literary texts as social documents with a 'constative' mimetic function<sup>29</sup> rather than being products of art, these texts occupy a 'space' determined by the 'excellence' signifier for which a specific 'vocabulary' has emerged. Defined within a Western high culture framework, sometimes contradictorily, 'excellence' is synonymous with originality, individual creativity, national identity in opposition to the traditional, the communal and heterogeneity. The language of excellence, Kalantzis and Cope argue, becomes 'intangible' in order to play out an inclusion-exclusionist duality<sup>30</sup> which makes authentic ethnic/migrant writings occupy a space outside national literature. This also means that multicultural 'discourse' determines the use of language as a tool for the same to become practical and that culture is not embedded in language<sup>31</sup>. For example, in history, words such as black, race, wog, and so on, have had different meanings all reflecting different discourses in specific historical moments – an aspect which makes them dialogic.

At this point one must ask how can the imposition of the realist mode upon ethnic writings of different generations be justified? The Italo-American context may shed light on it. Comparing Gardaphé's and Tamburri's literary developmental models with the speech-writing dependency model, the ethnographic evolutionary

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida's notion of deconstruction is informed by the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin's 'speech act theory'. In his work *How To Do Things With Words* (1962) Austin distinguished between 'constative' and 'performative' words, that is between those that simply describe the world outside and those that transform it. The performative function is significant to understand deconstruction which, working within a discourse, transforms the latter or at least tries to do so – because of its haunting failure. As such, the transformative function of deconstruction is fundamental to the understanding of the novels analysed in this study since they do not just provide a description of the present but unsettle it (cf. N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., pp. 21-28). Here two considerations have to be made: first, the 'performative' referred to has not got Butler's meaning which seems to deprive the subject of his/her agency; secondly, it can be associated with 'authority' as well, as it is with the 'promise' (or the law, the taboo) of egalitarianism/wholeness/sameness, the gift of the dominant (host) society to migrants, refugees, Aborigines, women, homosexuals, etc. Since the success of sameness is based on its failure and the joke – as seen in the previous chapter – can upset its ambivalence, it is interesting to note that Derrida associated deconstruction, the force 'within', with the 'comical' (cf. *Idem*, p. 28).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. M. Kalantzis, B. Cope, *art. cit.*, pp. 17-20.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. B. Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice. The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures*,

interpretation of history and the use and meaning of terms such as ‘migrant’ and ‘ethnic’ will allow highlighting both the undervaluation of the experience of the first generation as ‘migrant’ writers and the conflation of successive generation writers with the former category.

F.L. Gardaphé, referring to the Italo-American literary production and drawing on Vico’s notion of *corso* and *ricorso* of cultures and civilisations, distinguishes three stages within his literary developmental model. On Vico’s developmental framework (poetic, mythic and philosophical stage) Gardaphé maps his own model from “oral tradition to one based on literary tradition”: *pre-modernist stage* in which he includes oral traditions and narrative autobiographies (Vico’s *vero narratio* – ‘storytelling’) characterized by “a sense of destiny as the means determining one’s fate [...], dominance of Italian over American traits, and [...] a fairly extensive use of Italian language” (pre-immigrant past, the ‘early’ period of social development); *modernist stage* “based on heroic figures who inspire a struggle with destiny [rebellious] against both [cultures]”; and, the *postmodernist stage* with “humans as makers of their own destiny” and a “transition from autobiographical fiction to experimental fiction”<sup>32</sup>.

Tamburri draws on Gardaphé’s model – that he correctly defines generationally based notwithstanding Gardaphé disclaimers<sup>33</sup> –, Aaron’s and Peirce’s, leading him to the “(re)definition” of the following categories: *the expressive writer*, that is the “poetic realist who writes more from ‘feelings’” (Peirce’s ‘non-rationality’) recalls Vico’s *vero narratio* explained by Tamburri in the following words: “[h]e or she no more writes about what he or she thinks than what he or she experiences, his or her

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London and New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 1-6.

<sup>32</sup> Gardaphé, being aware of the risk of a ‘growth’ paradigm leading to the creation of an ethnicity-Americanism opposition, suggests reading these texts not as works of ethnic writers but as ethnic signs produced by their American writers. In other words, he solves the above opposition within an assimilationist paradigm as testified by both the movement from oral to “more sophisticated narratives” and the connection of the first stage with a pre-immigrant past of ‘early’ social development (cf. F.L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 12-17).

<sup>33</sup> Ironically enough, Gardaphé himself argues that Tamburri’s model is generationally based (cf. F.L. Gardaphé, *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 45). They both disclaim those ambiguous assumptions on which their models are ultimately grounded.

surroundings”<sup>34</sup>; *the comparative writer*, who “sets up a distinct polarity between [...] heritage and dominant culture” (Peirce’s ‘practicality’); and, *the synthetic writer* who “can embrace a consciousness of process” (Peirce’s ‘thought’, ‘pure rationality’)<sup>35</sup>.

Following these two models it is evident that authenticity characterises the writings of the first stage with features such as: *vero narratio*, dominance of Italian traits, of feelings and self-experience. Any stage equating generation, genre, content, and aesthetics is doomed to create cultural traps. Even fully attempting a definition through developmental models, their feeling-thought, premodernist-postmodernist, local colourist-American/Australian/etc development would run the risk of merging into evolutionist ones retrieving anthropologic assumptions at the basis of (cultural) ‘racism’. It is not an accident that these models do not take into account those works completely written in foreign languages (thus excluding ‘differences’) perhaps because this is linked to the idea that migrant would gradually merge into mainstream society while dropping their ethnic cultural signs. In addition, this would also explain why a true postmodern multicultural reading strategy, with knowledge of both descent and consent cultures, has never been taken seriously and has resulted in a reading strategy based solely on the mainstream perspective<sup>36</sup>. As Jurgensen explains in his essay on multicultural aesthetics applied to Greek literature in Australia, such a “treatment of migrant themes is equated with a multicultural imagination” and this is for the convenience of “publishers, journalists and critics”<sup>37</sup>.

The barbaric connotation with which the pre-modernist or expressive writings are identified is easier to understand when comparisons are drawn with an evolutionary interpretation of history. The anthropological ‘dependency model’, an evolutionist framework grounded on the hierarchical division of people into primitive and civilised along a stream of ‘linear’ time, binds the dawn of civilisation with ‘writing’

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<sup>34</sup> A.J. Tamburri, P.A. Giordano (eds.), *Beyond the Margin. Readings in Italian Americana*, Cranbury (NJ), Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 248.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem*, p. 250.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. M. Jurgensen, “Multicultural Aesthetics: a Preliminary Definition”, in S.M. Gunew, K.O. Longley (eds.), *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, Sydney (NSW), Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Idem*, p. 33.

thus aesthetically undervaluing ‘orality’<sup>38</sup>. Such a model reinforces the above interpretation of the pre-modernist writings linked to storytelling (oral histories), ‘speech’ and primitive societies as Gardaphé himself assumes. Furthermore, the merging of space and time operated by anthropologists and ethnographers, implying that a space ‘there’ is prescriptively associated with a backward period illuminates the interpretation of the space outside of ‘Anglo-Celtic’ Australia as linked, through ‘memory’, to an immutable past in which subjects have no ‘will’. The voyage of the white subject coloniser to such ‘spaces’, open to colonisation, mirrors that of a reader as an ethnographer exploring past societies<sup>39</sup>.

The negative connotation of the ‘oral’ literary traditions in Australia is testified by what Rando says:

Community leaders, both present and past, have invariably promoted ‘official’ language and culture and discouraged folk culture and dialects, in part because such a position was perceived as identifiable with their own hegemony on the community’s social structure. Bridging institutions such as the Dante Society and the Italian Institutes also promote ‘official’ cultures as also do host society institutions such as the education system. The Australian educated élite, while finding the works of Dante, Michelangelo or Corelli eminently acceptable, has tended to regard in substantially negative terms the culture of the migrant from Sicily and Calabria<sup>40</sup>.

Rando sheds light on the discriminating difference between the ‘high’ culture of

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<sup>38</sup> For a quick entrance to the oral-writing dependency model see B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, cit., pp. 151-53. A neo-imperialist risk of such a model is debated by Gates who carries out an analysis of African-American writings using Bakhtin’s ‘double-voiced’ theory as a form of postcolonial intertextuality (cf. G. Allen, *Intertextuality*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 159-73). This proves, if ever necessary, the relationship between postcolonial studies and multicultural ones since both suffer from a paradoxical ‘silencing’ through ‘speech’.

<sup>39</sup> C. Wallace-Crabbe, in relation to the reception of autobiographies, points out that 1963 is a watershed year in the literary context of Australia. While in H.M. Green’s *A History of Australian Literature* (1961), autobiographies are still included in the section “History, Biography Description”, since 1963 autobiographical works begin to be positively valued as part of a specific artistic genre (C. Wallace-Crabbe, “Autobiography”, in L. Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Ringwood (VC), Penguin Books, 1988, pp. 560-61). The above, entailing that migrant writings were still negatively associated with autobiography in a period of changing academic attitude, reveals the xenophobic aim behind the reception of *other* writings.

<sup>40</sup> G. Rando (ed.), *Italian Writers in Australia*, cit., pp. 6-7.

Northern Italy and the 'low' one of the South. 'Speech' becomes synonymous with the migrant experience and, specifically, with some migrants more than others. The literary reception of these works leads to a merging of them all in the 'migrant' category (first stage) notwithstanding generational, thematic or aesthetic differences. And the same happens to their writers. The 'false' multicultural shift which was supposed to take place from race to ethnicity, from fixity to choice, again conceals a covert 'assimilationist' message: 'ethnic' (or 'multicultural') applied to writers carries a homogenising meaning and acts in a token way.

It is no surprise that writers from an ethnic background resist any ethnic designation denying the myth of authenticity and the authority implicated in such a labelling. In a brief article, Armanno, though seemingly approaching the matter with humour, ironically states:

My first two published novels *The Lonely Hunter* and *Romeo of the Underworld* dealt with themes of ethnicity quite overtly. What surprised me – and it shouldn't have – is that they were received and reviewed in the public domain in just this way. Because they were published in the Keating era of really embracing multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, I found that almost every review or article would seem to end with a statement something like, 'Venero Armanno, *helping to redefine the multi-cultural face of Australia*'.

Instead of being honoured by this sort of commendation, I felt mildly belittled. It occurred to me that maybe I was only interesting as a writer because I was *ethnic*. I often felt like saying 'I'm not a wog, I'm a writer'<sup>41</sup>.

The visibility of his 'wog-ness' and the invisibility of his being a 'writer', the overshadowing of its literary merits by his social nature is a glaring injustice.

For Casella, the decision not to deal with immigration in his first novel, *Southfalia* (1980) testifies to his desire to have his work not "given the 'ethnic' label" and to be

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<sup>41</sup> V. Armanno, "Wider Eyes: Growing Up Different", in A. Wimmer (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 149 (emphasis added). In another interview Armanno discusses the limits of being labelled a "migrant writer" (M.V. Grau, C. Zamorano, "Encounter with Venero Armanno", *Westerly*, 44 (2) Winter 1999, p. 35). Jody Fitzhardinge, in her review of Armanno's *Firehead*, perceives the whole story as 'exotic', an 'excess': a "romanticised picture of the migrant experience" through which Anglo-Celts rediscover "the charm of Mediterranean migrants, re-romanticising their traditions of food and culture" (J. Fitzhardinge,

“judged on its ‘literary’ merits”<sup>42</sup> – aspects which demonstrate his awareness of the risk of entering the literary market as an already ‘read’ text. However, his choice also ensued from his desire to feel integrated and accepted into the Australian ‘way of life’ – one of the reasons why he wanted to learn English. Retrospectively analysed by the same author, the first phase of his life betrays a multiculturalism which failed in its aim of equality (see Casella’s interview in the next section). His counter-discourse, covertly paving his literary career from the very start, is confirmed in an interview about *The Sensualist*:

I would prefer that people concentrate on the book rather than on my background, because in the long run the book has to stand on its own merits.

It’s very much about identity, who we are, what we are. [...] The migrant factor is important in one sense but on the other hand it isn’t and *I certainly don’t consider this to be a migrant story*<sup>43</sup>.

Perhaps, Joyce’s experience paralleling Nick’s rediscovery of the past reinforces the fact that “a similar book exploring identity could have been written about two people who got together from different social backgrounds”<sup>44</sup>.

Though not directly referring to the aforementioned models, non-evolutionary ones seem to be adopted by both Gunew and Longley, in their significant *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretation* and G. Rando in *Italian Writers in Australia*<sup>45</sup>. Gunew-Longley’s use of a different terminology (‘areas’, ‘writings’) and absence of any cognitive or aesthetic evolution linked to genres testify to this change, though it becomes tentative when it comes to find the right terms which, inevitably, always tend to categorise. They differentiate between migrant writings (nostalgic and

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“*Firehead*”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, section: Review of Books, 15 December 2001, p. 134).

<sup>42</sup> A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*, cit. p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> C. McLeod, “Sense and Sensuality in Fusion of Cultures”, *The West Australian*, 21 December 1991, p. 8 (emphasis added).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> Rando’s contribution in an early state of the debate sets out the ‘fluid state’ of this attempt and, consequently, of the resulting categories. He focuses on both writers – in relation to themes, generations, origins (whether Italians or Anglo Australians), time of stay – and on a chronological,

elegiac); writings ‘often’ by second generation writers who “translate one reality into the other and mediate between the two”; and those “forg[ing] new languages and new representations”<sup>46</sup>. Besides providing an explanation, Gunew and Longley clearly state that the works of a single writer could fit all three areas. For instance, first generation Rosa Cappiello’s writings such as *Oh Lucky Country* or Casella’s *The Sensualist* and *Southfalia* and the second generation Armano’s *Romeo of The Underworld* and *The Volcano* might be included in the third area. Conversely, Casella’s ‘An Olive Branch for Sante’ (unpublished novel) occupies a place between the second and the third area. However, while putting forward on several occasions the sometimes ambiguous distinction between ‘migrant writing’ (by those non born in Australia) and non-Anglo-Celtic writing (by those who ‘are born in Australia’ and have access to languages and cultures in addition to English, an ‘access’ that can be implied as direct and indirect and so referring to successive generations of migrants)<sup>47</sup>, in *Framing Marginality* Gunew adopts a common term for these writers – rather useful for this study, dealing with the uncanny – as will be discussed in the next section: ‘ethnic minority writers’.

All the above literary developmental models, such as Gardaphé’s, Tamburri’s, Aaron’s, Peirce’s, or the non-evolutionary ones, such as Gunew and Longley’s, focus on the different intensity of ‘encounter’ between at least two cultures: those of Werner Sollors’ ‘descent’ or ‘consent’ or, as Said referred to them, ‘filiate’ and ‘affiliate’ cultures. Bending Said’s ‘affiliative’ reading strategy of canonical English texts – seen not as self-perpetuating but as ‘acts’ in the world – to the Italian-Australian literary production, even texts of the first ‘stage’ usually dismissed for their low literary quality or for their nostalgic and elegiac theme can be re-interpreted not as stories far removed from the ‘here and now’ but as reframing the same in a postmodern nostalgic perspective.

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non-generational perspective (cf. G. Rando (ed.), *Italian Writers in Australia*, cit., pp. 1-3).

<sup>46</sup> S.M. Gunew, K.O. Longley, “Introduction”, in S.M. Gunew, K.O. Longley (eds.), *op. cit.*, xxi.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., xii; cf. S.M. Gunew, “Postmodern Tensions. Reading for (Multi)Cultural Tensions”, *Meanjin*, 49 (1) Autumn 1990, p. 26.

### 2.3 The phantom of authenticity: “an identikit of markers”

As mentioned in the previous section, ‘authenticity’ is the idea that a set of literary aspects are intrinsic to ethnic literary production, what Gunew calls “an ‘identikit’ of markers”<sup>48</sup>. Although the set of ‘conventions of representation’ that follows does not specifically refer to Sicilian texts some elements do: Broken English or the total or partial use of one’s native language, pastoral elements (for Mediterranean ethnic writers), a lack of unsettling irony, the first person narrator/author confusion<sup>49</sup>, the foreign name and a linear plot. While the last three aspects have already been touched upon and the lack of irony linked to parody will be fully evinced in SECTION SIX of this chapter, mention of the first two elements will be made here.

In Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Prospero’s language has the power to name and define identity and places. Thus, on the one hand, Caliban is dehumanised and defined a ‘slave’ and, on the other hand, he is dispossessed of both his island and experiences. The same can be argued about Aborigines with the *Terra Nullius* issue and migrants with the dispossession of their languages, names and memories. In fact, Prospero’s language, like Miranda’s – whose figure exemplifies the unconsciousness of those who act within the hegemonic system –, has the power to create a world for Caliban which otherwise would not have existed, connecting him more with nature than culture. Caliban is not the King of the island he has always inhabited since it does not exist outside language. The above has a natural consequence: language is

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<sup>48</sup> S.M. Gunew, “Performing Ethnicity: The Demidenko Show and its Gratifying Pathologies”, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 11 (23) April 1996, p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> Apart from Rosa Cappiello’s case, another example involves the short story “Our Daily Bread”, by Sonia Mycak, published in *The Oxford Book of Australian School Days* whose editors, presenting the experiences narrated in her short story as Mycak’s, conflate the author with the narrator thus revealing the desire to read ethnic writings as autobiographical. In her essay, Mycak gets to the core of the problem when saying: “I believe these assumptions indicate a desire to witness autobiography and hence authenticity when reading such works. In other words, the editors of this collection preferred to see an immigrant writing about something that really happened rather than an Australian-born author writing with imagination” (S. Mycak, *art. cit.*, p. 23). In brief, the ‘I’ is no guarantee of authenticity as the hoaxes analysed in the previous chapter testify. However, this is not to say that writings such as Bonutto’s or Ciccotosto’s do not fulfil the requirement of autobiography in which the author, the narrator and the main character coincide. Yet, though Cappiello’s and Mycak’s should be distinguished as ‘autobiographical fictions’ in which the three roles just mentioned are problematised, the more autobiographical writings are no less valuable. An opposite reasoning would just confirm the hierarchical logic of any literary development models.



associated with rationalism, the ability to conceptualise, and makes things come into 'being'<sup>50</sup>.

Applying this to Howard's and Hanson's speeches, to critics, reviewers, and to all those 'within' the aforementioned multicultural discourse, the subaltern subject exists only in the language of the Other. Thus, linguistic naivety (Broken English or 'english') is an attempt to naturalise language as race. Since language is culture, English conveys British culture carrying universalist thoughts. 'White' language can be perceived as expressing 'writing' narratives of the world, while Broken English, limited to 'orality', is understood as a 'speaking' narration of the world or Caliban's "gabbling"<sup>51</sup>. And as Caliban can only 'show' the island to Prospero, so the subaltern subject can only give a 'mimetic' representation of his experience and is in need of someone else's language to convey it in more subtle and 'rational' forms. Are, then, ethnic writers imprisoned in Prospero's language? Can they, like Shakespeare's Caliban, only appropriate that language to 'curse'? Or can they appropriate its power of naming in order to define identities and places of belonging? And what relation has this with postmodernism? What difference is there between writers who use their native language and those using English? Are the first more authentic and, thus, have more authority?

Since language involves 'representation', Pivato says that using a language other than one's own is a sort of translation and seems to suggest that the use of one's native language is a guarantee of authenticity and authority. Referring to specific immigrant writers to support his thesis, he says that "they have not left their communities to speak about them from a distance and in a foreign language"<sup>52</sup> and then, when discussing the Italian-Canadian Antonio D'Alfonso, he links authenticity with the use of minority language<sup>53</sup>. In Pivato's view it seems that those using the dominant language are, in a way, trapped in it. In fact, though he associates the engagement with both languages to a form of translation, when it comes to English authenticity is conveyed through examples of 'silences', as suggested by Joy

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. B. Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice*, cit., pp. 19-29.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> J. Pivato, *art. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 50.

Kowaga, or through the use of the writer's minority language for Hiromi Goto. In addition, Pivato's association of language to authenticity leads him to dismiss postmodernism as apolitical and ahistorical, and for this seen as the erasure of both the subject and his/her agency<sup>54</sup>. To this anti-postmodernist strain, which took place with the emergence of identity politics, Gunew answers by claiming that, refracted through post-structuralism and postmodernism, "identity in relation to agency may be usefully formulated as being both provisional and strategic"<sup>55</sup>. In another essay, by drawing on A.R. JanMohammed and D. Lloyd, Gunew sees ethnic identity as always having been 'postmodern'<sup>56</sup>. Applying the above to Casella's and Armano's writings, if, on the one hand, they agreed with Pivato's association of language to experience this would take place only on an emotional level, but not as a guarantee of authenticity and, consequently, on the other hand, they would maybe agree with a postmodern vision of identity. In this scheme, metonymic gaps, do not convey authenticity.

However, though Pivato's arguments are partly valid, they are not universal<sup>57</sup>. In fact, Ashcroft points out that language, not to be interpreted as Lacan's unconscious, is not culture in an essentialist way but, instead, has to be contextualised within specific 'discourses': language is "not the repository of culture but its agent"<sup>58</sup>. The master, as Derrida himself states, "does not possess [...] *naturally*, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it"<sup>59</sup>. For this

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<sup>54</sup> One has only to argue that the implications of the notion of authority in an anti-postmodernist strain as the appropriation of one's place in the community is risky: it might lead to new forms of essentialism. If Ninetta, the Sicilian character in the film *La Sarrasine* by Paul Tana and Bruno Ramirez, to which Pivato refers in his essay, finds her place in the new Canadian landscape only when telling her own story, it is still a subjective 'constructed' story which speaks only in part for the community she represents. In fact, Gunew argues that the 'I' and language do not guarantee any authenticity and authority (cf. S.M. Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers. Who's on Whose Margins?", *Meanjin*, 42 (1) March 1983, p. 19).

<sup>55</sup> S.M. Gunew, "Multicultural Multiplicities", cit., p. 456.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, "PostModern Tensions", cit., p. 22.

<sup>57</sup> Such a lack of a united front mirrors that of critics in relation to Caliban's power either only to curse and blame the coloniser or to use language to transform social reality (cf. B. Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice*, cit., pp. 16-34).

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> J. Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, [1996] 1998, p. 23 (tr. Patrick Mensah).

reason, Ashcroft suggests that in postcolonial studies, and not only, it is fundamental to distinguish between two meanings of language as a ‘social practice’ and as ‘discourse’. The first would lead to visions of authenticity which, one can argue here, appears to illuminate Pivato’s analysis. As for the second, the *iterability* of language ascribes to itself transformative powers, as is the case for both postcolonial Caliban and migrant writers. The latter have the responsibility of *re*-naming, through a subtle form of dialogic intertextuality, so as to reclaim possession of their eclipsed experiences and a place of belonging, dispossessing any centrist position – see ‘postmodern nostalgia’ below.

What Ashcroft defines as strategies of appropriation of the dominant language are dialogic ‘deterritorialising’ intertextualities, for either it belongs to the Other or it has undergone dispossession and control. If, on the one hand, Caliban ‘appropriates’ Prospero’s language, on the other hand, he ‘*re*-appropriates’ his own identity (culture, place, etc.), something dispossessed. Thus, while the materiality of language (the physical space it occupies on the ‘white’ page), orthography, syntax, rhythms, punctuation, and so on, fit the first group, metonymic gaps (unglossed words, code-switching, glossing, untranslated words, interlanguage, code switching and vernacular transcription) make up the second one. The novels under consideration in this study provide a significant source for such strategies and particularly for the second group: untranslated words such as ‘stronzo’ in *Romeo of the Underworld* and glossing in *The Sensualist*<sup>60</sup>.

All these strategies foreground a distance between dominant and minority cultures, a gap – “I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience”<sup>61</sup> – and, at the same time, a “bridging”<sup>62</sup> between cultures, as Bhabha’s

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Casella claimed about a translation into Italian of an excerpt of ‘An Olive Branch for Sante’, that the Italian version seemed more in tune with the message and feelings he wanted to convey (personal communication). As for Armanno, in *Romeo of the Underworld*, he associates Sicilian language with sincerity in the character of Mrs Aquila, though he never makes her speak in her native dialect, while Mr Michele Aquila’s Broken English is functional to Romeo’s hybridity. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel the ‘I’ narrator states the impossibility of translating the Italian word ‘stronzo’ (cf. *R*, 1-2) without betraying its cultural connotations.

<sup>61</sup> B. Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice*, cit., p. 175.

<sup>62</sup> *Idem*, p. 177.

real meaning of hybridity would suggest.

As for the pastoral mode, this is part of the cultural tourism exoticising the ‘native informant’ both safely located ‘outside’ the nation – so as to curb the unsettling past to which it is bound – and depowered through its sentimentalising which, in the case of Aborigines, “accrues power to the sentimentalist rather than sharing it with the victim”<sup>63</sup>. In this way a presence perceived as menacing is simply silenced. The ‘idyllic’ landscapes of the pastoral mode (spring/summer; songs are performed; never-ending love; lack of danger) characterise the country-life of shepherds as simple and care-free overlooking the toughness of the labour in the countryside. As the ethnographer’s or the travel writer’s picturesque meant the appreciation of the land as a lost Eden but not of its inhabitants (“a terrestrial paradise inhabited by demons”), so the Anglo-Celtic reader/critic sees the land and the people populating ethnic writings. Thus, the latter’s pastoral elements are metonymically interpreted as a nostalgia for the past with all the implications aforementioned among which ‘primitivism’ should be recalled. For instance, in her review of *The Sensualist*, Patricia Rolfe states that “Nicola Amedeo likes listening to disgruntled immigrants, mostly from his native Sicily; they remind him how lucky he has been. Amedeo sees himself as a hungry young savage who has become a top dog in Australia”<sup>64</sup>. Despite the fact that Nicola (or, here, it would be far better to say Nick) cannot stand ‘disgruntled immigrants’ and that the main disgruntled one is Oreste Ancelli from Northern Italy, it is not Nick but instead Steve who sees him “as a hungry young savage who has become a top dog in Australia”. Both errors, far from being innocent ones, reveal: on the one hand, Rolfe’s homogenisation of Sicilians as unhappy non-assimilated subjects as opposed to northern ones (although she says “mostly” it would have been more appropriated to name Oreste Ancelli); on the other hand, knowing that it is Steve who perceives Nicola as a ‘hungry young savage’ – with its primitive cannibalistic denotation – becoming a “top dog” (Nick) sheds a complete different

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<sup>63</sup> E. Hatzimanolis, *art. cit.*, p. 147. For such a romanticizing strategy in relation to publishing practices see also G. Whitlock, *art. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>64</sup> P. Rolfe, “Adonis Flung Back”, *The Bulletin*, February 18, 1992, pp. 98-99. See also Josephine Barcelon who defines Nick’s early childhood as “exotic” (J. Barcelon, “Letters”, *Australian Book Review*, 138, February-March 1992, p. 62).

light on the novel. Steve's perspective – claiming *to know* immigrants very well – epitomises that of the Anglo-Celts of which Patricia Rolfe is not immune.

The above reading of the pastoral mode is subverted in Armanno's and Casella's novels since Sicily is not presented as a romantic land of idleness or easiness. For instance, in the bucolic scene of the encounter between Emilio and Desideria, the latter's enchanting face is described as Medusa's thus inserting a disrupting element into an everlasting love. Moreover, the same idyllic landscape is in sharp contrast to a land bringing about oppression and death. In *The Sensualist*, Flo's letter addressed to her sister Joyce, a form recalling travel writing<sup>65</sup>, serves ironically to dismantle the idyllic vision of Sicily that both Uncle Desmond and Joyce nurture and that the latter, consequently, associates with Nick whose strength of the romantic shepherd she sees as ensuring safety from the 'void' of her life, metaphorically expressed by the spatial 'centre' of Australia where she lived her adolescence.

Once literary developmental models have been 'dismissed', together with authenticity, one has to ask how to refer to this literary production without limiting its potentialities. And one has to keep in mind that to deal with ethnic writings outside such power relations would be to act in a "wild zone"<sup>66</sup> which, far from deconstructing such relations, foregrounds their equal grounding invisibility. These writings, occupying a literary space functional to a project of visibility, have been referred to by multicultural critics, such as Gunew and Pivato, as 'ethnic *minority* writings'. The latter underpins the uncanny relationship between minority and majority literature.

#### **2.4 Ethnic *minority* writing: 'defining' boundaries**

Analysing literature within Australian nation and adopting financial, excellence, and symbolic criteria, Castan identifies three literary fields: major/canonical literature

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<sup>65</sup> Letters were a kind of 'narration' which permitted to share and authenticate one's experience of the place visited by claiming eye-witnessing especially in the epistolary books such as those, Smecca lists, written by Patrick Brydone, Peter Beckford and others (cf. P.D. Smecca, *op. cit.*, p. 133).

<sup>66</sup> G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 160. The term can be applied to a risk highlighted within feminist and post-colonial studies and is extendable to all marginal groups, though it is obvious that each single group adopts specific strategies to dislodge power from within (cf. *Ibidem*).

achieving distinction (read ‘excellence’) and symbolic status, financially successful literature (still part of the canonical), and what she defines the field of ‘art for the art’s sake’ or ‘minor literature’ – though claiming a different use from Deleuze and Guattari’s<sup>67</sup>. It is worth remembering some of the features defining Castan’s use of the term ‘minor literature’ so as to determine its difference from Deleuze-Guattari’s use and try contextualising the term in the Australian multicultural context without aiming to discover a universal formula. Among them, Castan includes: its being positioned as ‘minor’ from within the major literature; its lack of marketability; disinterest of scholars; using styles and genres lacking self-consciousness (recall the first stage of the literary developmental models); and, the deterritorialisation of language already expressed by Deleuze and Guattari<sup>68</sup>. When applied generally, various contradictory implications stem from such a use of the term, though they are not always that overt, which would seem to exclude Armano and Casella from a minority perspective.

First, Castan seems to identify the term ‘deterritorialisation’ with a linguistic evolution spatially and temporally determined mainly in relation to those authors writing in their native tongue. Conversely, Deleuze-Guattari include Castan’s meaning in what they call ‘literatures of minorities’, while with deterritorialisation they highlight the first characteristic of minor literature, that is its production in a major language whose use is ‘subverted’ through minor strategies (here the authors refer to the use of Standard American-English by African-Americans). Thus, Castan’s use, significantly differing from Deleuze-Guattari, erases the ‘revolutionary’ force contained in it thus softening writers’ counter-discourse<sup>69</sup>.

Secondly, the lack of marketability that Castan identifies as an aspect of ‘minor’ literature seems to exclude those ethnic authors, writing in English, whose works are widely published. Even taking into account that this aspect is justifiable for she speaks about the literary production in migrants’ native tongues (Greek in her case), it

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. C. Castan, *art. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> In fact, her use of the term ‘minor’ highlights “the attitudes of the literary elite and is therefore undesirable” opting, for such reason, in preference to the term “community literature” which, she argues, expresses a sharing of values, culture and experiences (cf. *Idem*, pp. 232-34).

ends up meaning that selling more copies is synonymous with being part of mainstream literature as she seems to suggest by her threefold division of literary productions. Such a confusion is to dismiss the very cultural struggle, which continues at every level, that renders even best-selling or reasonably well-selling ethnic writings part of a ‘minor literature’, especially when embedding a counter-discourse. This is particularly true when taking into account that ‘compatible’ writings are metonymic examples of false integration and tolerance – as happens with food – while their exclusion is played on a sociological and aesthetic level. For example, though Casella’s and Armanno’s novels – but it is more the case of the latter – are accessible to a larger number of commentators since English is the language adopted, they have suffered from critical disinterest except by some scholars motivated by their own ‘ethnic’ origins<sup>70</sup>. For instance, the Calabrian Gaetano Rando remains the foremost scholar in the study of Italian-Australian writings both in English and Italian or dialect. However, the analyses he gives of these two writers focuses more on sociological than aesthetic aspects and unfortunately sometimes maintains stereotyped images of both the Italian-Australian immigrant and writer<sup>71</sup>.

Thirdly, Castan shifts the other two characteristics Deleuze-Guattari assign to minor literature, namely its political and collective value, onto the term

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<sup>70</sup> For example, in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* reference is made to Rosa Cappiello’s name only but none to her works (cf. B. Bennett, J. Strauss (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 324); in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* while Cappiello’s wrong spelt “*Paesa Fortunata*” published in 1981 in Italian and translated into English by G. Rando in 1985 was included, Antonio Casella, though publishing *Southfalia* in English in 1980, saw no space dedicated to him (cf. W. Wilde, J. Hooton, B. Andrews, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 540); even in the more recent *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* Casella has no place while Armanno only among other names of writers to whom the Vogel Award was awarded (cf. P. Pierce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 515).

<sup>71</sup> For instance, apart from a recent and brief reference to both writers in Rando’s study on Italian-Australian literature (2004), few articles have been published: one on Casella’s *The Sensualist* focusing on the patriarchal figure of Nick (2003); one on different writers including, again briefly, Casella and focusing on rural Australia (2008), and another one on both writers (2008) dealing with images of Sicily and Australia; two essays on Armanno’s novels were written by N. Caltabiano and S. Torre discussing Armanno’s notion of ‘apartness’ in his novels (2000) and by J. Carniel on hybridity (2006) though not dealing with the Gothic suggestions in the novels closely linked to a concept of ‘postmodern nostalgia’.

‘community’<sup>72</sup>. By drawing on Erickson’s difference between traditionalist and multiculturalist models of the canon based on single and multiple traditions, respectively, Castan prefers the term ‘community literature’ in order to propose a “canon of ethnocultural traditions”<sup>73</sup> including also Anglo-Celtic ones. Her choice stems from the risk of nationalistic “singularity and purity”<sup>74</sup> as the signifier ‘excellence’ conveys (recall the ‘individual’ creation of art). Despite the ambiguity of the term ‘minor’, meaning also something less important – a meaning avoided by Deleuze-Guattari –, the risk of the term ‘community’ in a context where cultural power relations are constantly performed through the desire for ‘authenticity’ is to create a ‘wild zone’. That is, a ‘zone’ where new essentialist forms of ‘authenticity’ might either entail “a different type of codification of the same relations”<sup>75</sup> or leave dominant power relations unchanged as Gunew, Griffith, Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Ashcroft have extensively argued<sup>76</sup>. Conversely, the deconstructive hyphen between cultures – which seems to be maintained in the minority-majority dialogism or in the *arrivant* – expresses a ‘gap’ and a ‘silence’ which “is never enough to conceal protests”<sup>77</sup> thus establishing a framework of ‘impure’ cultures, historically constructed.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. C. Castan, *art. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>73</sup> *Idem*, p. 230.

<sup>74</sup> *Idem*, p. 229.

<sup>75</sup> M. Foucault, “Truth and Power”, in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, Harvester, 1980, p. 122 qtd in S. Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> These critics are informed by Foucault’s idea that the discursive relationship of power, knowledge and truth positioning the subject is inescapable. As for Said, when he invites the critic to speak truth to power not as a politics of blame but as one of secular interpretation linked to the possibility of a society of differences, this entails that the intellectual at the same time is a reminder of colonialism (any form of power) and that he carves out a space for post-colonial societies. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Said emphasises the role of Caliban’s talking back to the centre and argues that among the three alternatives the other has (be a ‘native informant’; reconstructing the past without shedding the future; ‘nativism’), the hybrid one permits the ‘voyage in’ without running the risk of positioning one’s discourse as a substituting monological alternative (cf. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, cit., p. 258). Among several novelists, Griffiths discusses Sally Morgan’s *My Place* in which deconstruction is carried out from ‘within’ the ‘white’ discourse through mimicry. Sally Morgan’s character Arthur Corunna takes up the stereotype of being black deconstructing the authority of the discourse that ‘constructs’ him and, at the same time, affirming his identity (cf. G. Griffiths, ‘The Myth of Authenticity’, in C. Tiffin, A. Lawson (eds.), *Describing Empire*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 78, 83). Morgan’s character follows a dis-identification path as Michel Pécheux would put it. The latter identifies three modes in which the subject is determined: identification (‘good’ subjects); counter-identification (‘bad’ subjects which he sees as affirming what they try to deny as for Négritude); dis-identification, that is practices which work ‘on and against’ dominant discourses (cf. B.



And, though such force of minority writings “may not be a conscious aim of the authors it may be generated, inescapably, by the ideological conflict that inevitably takes place in the text”<sup>78</sup>. Bhabha supports this idea by arguing that even this unconscious resistance is important since, though not all texts are political, they still have political implications.

### **2.5 Acquiring visibility: the literature of the *arrivant***

Against any flattening of ‘differences’ Gunew significantly contributed to the debate with her project of visibility. Based on ‘positive discrimination’, with both anthologies *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women Writing* and four years after *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, she goes beyond the self-other opposition allowing derivative and reductionist one-to-one confrontation which would end up in reinforcing the power of whoever is constructing the other. As she points out, her project of ‘positive discrimination’ has nothing to do with adding “more new names to the existing canon but [with] learning to read [...] differently”<sup>79</sup>. That is, on the one hand, to give voice to socio-historical differences (class, gender, ethnicities, regions, ‘individuals’ instead of undifferentiated terms such as ‘Italians’, ‘Asians’, etc. or even worse ‘immigrants’) and, on the other hand and consequentially, to make ‘ethnicity’ a visible feature of the colour-blind dominant group and not a specific feature of ‘minority literature’ only. Her program, as Said’s ‘fallacy of authenticity’ attempts to do in revealing that there is no real ‘Orient’<sup>80</sup>, is not to substitute one monolithic truth with another coercive knowledge<sup>81</sup>.

In this framework, Gunew’s project of double visibility, tied to a *re-appropriation* of the term ‘minor’ as ‘minority’<sup>82</sup>, tends to maintain a postmodern oppositional

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Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, cit., pp. 169-71).

<sup>77</sup> J. Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>79</sup> S.M. Gunew, “Multicultural Literature: Toward a New Australian Literary History”, *Antipodes*, 2 (2) Winter 1988, p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 322.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, “Multicultural Multiplicities”, cit., p. 457.

<sup>82</sup> The meaning ascribed to the term ‘minority’ was set out by Gunew in *Framing Marginality* (1994) and was still maintained in *Haunted Nations* (2004). In the first she explains the reasons why the term

characteristic grounded on concepts of hybridity and the uncanny. Far from being a literature of 'blame' or in the shadow of a Shakespearean Caliban whose language is limited to cursing, though it starts from focusing on injustices so not to forget, it rather works towards the construction of a different future.

Ethnic minority writings can be thus defined, at the same time, as a "literature of recognition"<sup>83</sup> and a "literature of dislocation"<sup>84</sup> operating in a postmodern manner within the same assumptions they question. The similarity of the difference rather than the sameness of diversity. With a term that perfectly sums them both up, it can be identified as the literature of the monstrous *arrivant*, 'on shore', always a presence 'within':

[The arrivant] surprises the host – who is not yet a host or an inviting power – enough to call into question...the very border that delineated a legitimate home<sup>85</sup>.

A monstrosity can only be 'mis-known' (*méconnue*), that is, unrecognised and misunderstood. It can only be recognized afterwards, when it has become normal or the norm<sup>86</sup>.

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is suitable to describe the ethnic literary production in Australia and still remains valid notwithstanding the introduction of terms such as 'transculturalism' (of which Gunew, drawing on Fulvio Caccia, recognises the effort to stress hybridity forms of culture though, when lining it with multiculturalism, it is burdened with the negative Eurocentric and racist implications she examines in her book; if an uncoupling of multiculturalism from both nationalism and colonialism takes place in Gunew's work this is only by going beyond 'multiculturalism' towards "multi-multiculturalisms" – cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., pp. 127, 132) and 'interculturalism' adopted by the Indian theatre critic Rustom Bharucha as standing for practices "potentially disruptive of state formations and [...] transnational in orientation". The limits of the latter, namely an "uneven global exchange in cultural commodities" is underpinned by G. Huggan though, he claims, its discursive space stresses an awareness of the above unevenness that multiculturalism lacks (cf. G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-27). However it would be too naïve to dismiss the term multiculturalism so easily for having an essentialist meaning or referent; it is true that each term is given a multiplicity of meaning according to location and the adopted perspective. Thus, multiculturalism is perceived as state multiculturalism or critical multiculturalism – the latter linked only to minorities – (cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., pp. 16-17; and here the ambiguity of the term 'multicultural writings') involving all of Hage's set of differences: descriptively-prescriptively, welfare-structural socio-economic, patronising-nationalistic, social-cultural multiculturalisms (cf. G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, cit., pp. 58-60).

<sup>83</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> S.M. Gunew, "Dissonances", cit., pp. 144-45. Derrida understands literature as an experience of displacement, a questioning of any sense of place; a literature of transgression, where there is freedom of thought; a literature of democracy (cf. N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., pp. 44-45).

<sup>85</sup> J. Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – Awaiting (One Another at) the 'Limits of Truth'*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 34, (tr. Thomas Dutoit) qtd in N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., p. 111.

<sup>86</sup> J. Derrida, "Some Statements and Truism About Neo-Logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and

The *arrivant* is that which needs recognition and dislocates at the same time: it is presence and absence. Ethnicity with its heterogeneity, continuously putting all subjects and history ‘on trial’, both questions metaphysical constructions that gives an essentialised ‘authentic’ definition of ‘ethnicity’ – as feminists argue for ‘women’ – and that understands individual and collective history as linear ‘progress’, and opens to forms of dialogism.

Having said that, it is easier to perceive minority writings as supplements<sup>87</sup>, fragments<sup>88</sup>, grotesque representations<sup>89</sup> or transgressive ‘excesses’ defamiliarising

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Other Small Seismisms”, in D. Carroll (ed.), *The States of ‘Theory’: History, Art and Critical Discourse*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 79, (tr. A. Tomiche) qtd in *Idem*, p. 112.

<sup>87</sup> The ‘supplement’ is, at the same time and paradoxically, a ‘surplus’ enriching something which has a plenitude and filling a void (J. Derrida, “Questo pericoloso supplemento...”, in *Della grammatologia*, Milano, Jaca Book, [1967] 1969, pp. 166-67). It is a presence and absence blurring any opposition (inside-outside, centre-periphery, I-other, Anglo-Australians-migrants/refugees/Aborigines, superior-inferior). Neither presence nor absence, both presence and absence at the same time, it is ghostly: it is hauntology. This is why the supplement is not accepted that easily: when one says that other cultures are enriching one also admits that his/her own culture lacks something. In addition, the supplement is associated by Derrida with the apparently ‘minor’ (texts or peritextual elements): ‘apparently’ *comes* from ‘to appear’ (*Latin, apparere*) which etymologically signifies ‘to come in sight’ (presence); it was not there (absence). Derrida also compares it to a ‘virus’ (cf. *Idem*, p. 181) which, here, can be substituted with ‘wog’ since the latter term also stands for ‘germ’, ‘parasite’, or ‘unpleasant insects’ (cf. S.J. Baker, *A Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang*, Melbourne, Robertson & Mullens, 1941; Ramson, W. S. (Ed). *The Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988). And this unsettles even Anglo-Australians since, as G. Gianporcaro argues, all people living in Australia apart from the natives are ‘wogs’ (A. Clark, “A Bad Word Made Good”, *The Guardian*, Thursday, 13 October 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/13/australia.andrewclark>). Here it is important to clarify Derrida’s poststructuralist relationship between speech and writing – referred to by Ashcroft as too “simplistic” for the written precedes the oral (cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, cit., p. 152) – for the speech-writing opposition is at the core of the literary development models previously analysed. Deconstructing Saussure ‘sign’, Derrida interprets as writing not the graphic reproduction of speech leading to a unity between signifier and signified but a ‘trace’ marking the absence of a presence and preserving the presence of something absent (absence/presence). This feature of the trace characterises both speech and writing so that, when Derrida says that writing precedes speech he is actually referring to ‘writing’/‘trace’. Like the ‘trace’, writing in the narrow sense is not the “reappropriation of presence” (authority, truth, the sign): an aspect, the absence of the referent (unity), overtly expressed in postmodern writing. Leaving it to Royle’s rigorous analysis of Derrida’s supplement: “In the beginning was the supplement” (N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., p. 54). In this sense ethnic minority ‘writings’, at least those analysed in this study, go beyond any speech-writing opposition in which literary development and dependency models imprison them.

<sup>88</sup> Since each new wave of immigrants were narrated as ‘fragments’ to be domesticated by the dominant structure, they are also uncanny for their power to dislodge the myth of continuity and totalising narratives (cf. B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 180).

<sup>89</sup> Michael Steig underlines the “fearsome” and “ludicrous” nature of the grotesque (cf. M. Steig, “Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 29 (2) Winter 1970, p. 255) which recalls that of the uncanny and the sublime with its dismantling ‘absence’ (see this chapter, SECTION FOUR). Moreover, since cognitive gaps are hated by the

the monological cultural borders by stressing the continuation of colonialism through multiculturalism; by highlighting, as S. Hall does in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, positions ‘outside’ that dismiss both England and Ireland as the only referents for the ‘I’ (centre)<sup>90</sup> and, thus, the same unity of the ‘I’ which is made up of multiple identities; by playing between cultures which stand for a postmodern “revelation of cultural artifice”<sup>91</sup> and thus against the fantasy of hegemony.

The Lacanian ‘absence’ at the centre of Australia, sometimes physically figured, does not remain ‘invisible’ anymore but it is ‘spoken’ through ethnicity and, in this study, through the aesthetic re(orient)ation of uncanny elements<sup>92</sup>. Such a marginal vision is both one of *plurality*<sup>93</sup> and one where creativity flourishes. It is from this marginal space that Casella, with *The Sensualist*, writes back a sort of ‘hit-back-at’ novel:

There were problems of language and of assimilation. These days migrants in Australia are encouraged, *at least at an official level*, to maintain their culture. In the 1960’s you were

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Manichean structure of the human mind, the grotesque is depowered by being associated with what is usually called comic-grotesque (cf. *Idem*, pp. 258, 259). Conversely, in his study on the grotesque, Harpham underpins the unaccommodating nature of the same, its paralysis of language, its taking the form of a taboo, its being a *no-thing*; something rendering strange the familiar: “a source of anxiety, horror, astonishment, *laughter*, or revulsion” (emphasis added). The grotesque is “marked by such an affinity/antagonism, by the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, ‘high’ or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerate, ‘low’ or material.” The grotesque is liminal, “a gap or interval” (G.G. Harpham, *On the Grotesque. Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, Princeton (New Jersey), Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 4, 16, 21).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> S.M. Gunew, “Postmodern Tensions”, cit., p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> The presence of a ‘void’ defines the centre in *The Sensualist* and the market scene in *The Volcano* when Emilio traces the greengrocer’s line of descent back to the convicts. Even other novels and short stories by Armano stem from the theme of ‘apartness’ leading to a *liminality* of those subjects whose quest for identity is dramatised. For instance, in *Strange Rain* such a quest is a voyage to the centre of Australia and in his last novel *Black Mountain* (forthcoming) the main character is ‘uncannily’ engaged in the same search.

<sup>93</sup> Such a plurality can be grafted on Said’s celebration of the exile who “sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation” (E. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, London, Vintage, 1994, p. 44 qtd in B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 41) or on Du Bois’s *double consciousness* characterising “the seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. [...] this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others [...]. One ever feels his two-ness [...]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, [1961] 1998, p. 8).

meant to assimilate; that is bland in with the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. My reaction was to assimilate externally, but *to resist at an internal level*. [...] a contrary force worked in me, that is the desire to affirm my Italian origins and in the process, *to hit back at a socio-political environment which I considered antagonistic towards my culture*. [...] In *The Sensualist* I came out of my cultural closet and I laid bare the world of my ancestors [...] <sup>94</sup>.

Sharply critical of assimilation, Casella implicitly points out that the problem is not specific to the 60s only. The (multicultural) encouragement takes place in “[those/these] days [in the early and late 80s when the novel is set and was written, respectively, and in the 90s, the year of the interview being 1996] at an official level”. Armanno, on his part, positions himself in an interstitial space that he defines as one of ‘apartness’ which, as is discussed in CHAPTER FOUR, characterises all his novels and collection of short stories, even those dealing with themes different from the ethnic one – a fact reinforcing the idea of a postmodern deconstructed world of subjects living in the elusive state of *liminality*:

without realising it, every artist has his or her area. And it took me a long time to realise that my area is apartness. Not being part of the main society, always being on the outside. It’s like everybody is having a party, but you’re not invited, you can only go to the window and look in. That’s my theme in life. In a way it’s what I have taken from the migrant experience, never actually being a part of the new society. But I am aware how limiting this train of thought is and I am aware that this is not true for all migrants. I hate to generalise. I’m talking only about my own experience <sup>95</sup>.

Both these Sicilian writers and their novels on which this study focuses, experience with Howard and Hanson a period characterised by the revival of anti-immigrant politics, as Casella’s suggests in “these days” and that Armanno overtly expresses by saying:

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<sup>94</sup> S. Greco, “Interview with Antonio Casella, (1996)”, in *Terra e identità nella narrativa contemporanea italo-australiana dell’emigrazione*, University of Bologna, Unpublished Thesis, 1999, pp. 185-86 (emphasis added).

<sup>95</sup> M.V. Grau, C. Zamorano, *art. cit.*, p. 33.

[...] we've had the change to a Liberal government, which decided they didn't like multiculturalism, or Asia. [...] But part of the reason the Labor government fell was because people didn't like the idea of Australians being called Asians. [...] Australia to me seems like the place I hated when I was a kid. It's up to the artists to write about this, to do something about it, or else there's no change, there's no memory. [...] I feel again like a stranger in a strange land. I think it's important to remember the past<sup>96</sup>.

It is interesting to mention here, *en passant*, two aspects: the connection between memory and change, the past not as passive nostalgia but as something that influences the future – an intergenerational connection constituting a theme winding its way through *The Volcano* but also a function devolved upon other of his novels; and that there is no total homogeneity between Casella's marginality and Armanno's apartness since they write from 'different positions' looking back to, consequently, different 'societies' – though having common aspects. For instance, his being a second generation immigrant, involves both the discovery of his ethnic past through the elders and the coming to terms with the 'double message' like many migrants of his generation; his relationship with a society that for those born in Australia is not seen as a host society though it actually is so; living in a different city, Brisbane, which has a different history; and of course, last but not least, their own individuality and cultural/literary backgrounds.

The questionings of the literature of the *arrivant* – through a simultaneous reappraisal of nostalgia – characterise both the aesthetic form (*textuality*) and the content of Casella's and Armanno's novels as aspects mirroring one another.

## **2.6 Re(orient)ing the Gothic: monstrosities and intertextuality**

In the social and political framework of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gothic novels can be interpreted as bourgeois textual rituals exorcising the 'excess' and ratifying the

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<sup>96</sup> *Idem*, p. 38. Comparing Armanno's article quoted in SECTION TWO of this chapter, in which he rejects both the terms 'ethnic' and 'multicultural writer' ascribed to him since the publication of *The Lonely Hunter* (1993) and *Romeo of the Underworld* (1994), and the interview granted to Grau-Zamorano, in which he states that the Keating era was favourable to multicultural publication (cf. *Idem*, p. 7), it becomes clear, in line with Casella, that what was promulgated on an official level

smoothness of the discriminating framework of the Enlightenment. Gothic fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century projected the spatial and temporal other (Sicily, Italy, the countryside, the medieval) in order to exorcise the limits of the rational and individualist new-born bourgeoisie (A. Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Gothic gave voice to social, urban and domestic fears focusing on the capital and the colonies (C. Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, C. Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*, B. Stocker's *Dracula*), the role of women (E. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*) and the fear of human involution after a period of evolution which followed Charles Darwin's theories (R.L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hide*)<sup>97</sup>. In the same vein, *the other* in Australia has been depicted by the 'white' middle-class through a Gothic language of exclusion (recall the cartoons, newspapers and works of fiction analysed in the previous chapter: criminals, rats, wogs – read virus – barbaric and primitive subjects) and dislocated to a spatially and temporally designated past. This discourse, while exorcising *the other*, showed to the latter the way back home from the cultural, geographical and chronological margins and thus, as postcolonial novels pointedly prove, the dominant subject's unstable control over power and knowledge. As for the Australian context, though Frederick Sinnett (1830-66) in his "The Fiction Fields of Australia" (1856) claimed the impossibility of the Gothic in a land where "[t]here are no ruins for that rare old plant, the ivy green, to creep over and make his dainty meal of"<sup>98</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> century work by Markus Clarke, *His Natural Life* (1874) and its more Gothic revised version *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1885), dealt with the atrocities of the convict system denouncing the barbarity of the motherland. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a famous example is the ghostly reworking of Dicken's *Great Expectations*: Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs*<sup>99</sup>. In the

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(cultural politics) produced little effect on a more practical one (the perception of *the others*).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, London and New York, Longman, 1996; C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, London, Routledge, 2007; W. Hughes, "A Singular Invasion: Revisiting the Postcoloniality of Bram Stocker's *Dracula*", in A. Smith, W. Hughes (ed.), *Empire and the Gothic: the Politics of Genre*, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave, 2003, pp. 88-102.

<sup>98</sup> G. Turcotte, "Australian Gothic", in M. Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. K. Gelder, "Australian Gothic", in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 115-23; G. Turcotte, *art. cit.*, pp. 10-19; D. McInnis, "Re-orienting the Gothic Romance: Jean Rhys, Tayeb Salih, and Strategies of Representation in the Postcolonial Gothic", *Ariel*, 39 (3) July 2008, pp. 85-105. The

framework of a shifting centre, Gothic vocabulary perceived as exclusively possessed by the centre (the *doppelgänger*, ghosts, vampires, zombies, darkness, the spatial and temporal *other*, dreams, mirrors, narcissism) is reappropriated within postmodern<sup>100</sup> and postcolonial theories – theoretically and historically linked<sup>101</sup> – so as to give rise to a ‘marginal Gothic’ objectifying<sup>102</sup> unspoken emotions about haunting, unhomeliness and *unpresentable* “diasporic identities”<sup>103</sup>. Specifically speaking, the Gothic elements reappropriated in the three novels here analysed convey more an interior drama due to social uneasiness than a dramatic spectacle or, in G. Turcotte’s words, “the living”<sup>104</sup>.

This posits two important aspects for this study. On the one hand, that both the down-under landscape (isolated stations, getting lost in the bush, the invisible presences in the outback) and the city already had typically Australian Gothic effects. Turcotte, though not providing any concrete example, argues that these effects also inform ethnic minority writers as an expression of their exclusion and dislocation<sup>105</sup> which, in turn, mirror Anglo-Australians’ ‘illegitimacy’. The Gothic mode ‘appears’ to be a significant ‘performative’ reading strategy to understand a society whose meaning cannot be simply grasped through the mimetic mode. It is a reworking, developing and challenging of cultural debates. On the other hand, it entails – as Beville points out by drawing on both Todorov’s shift from the fantastic to the Gothic and Morris’s idea that “artificial supernaturalism of Gothic novels carries no

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Gothic elements of traditional novels constitute a ‘threshold’ not only to get into and defamiliarise a homely space, but to compulsively stay *on* the threshold, in an eternal openness.

<sup>100</sup> A.L. Smith lists some similar concerns between the Gothic and the postmodern – some of which overlap with those expressed by post-colonialism: “indeterminacy; surfaces/affectivity; nostalgia/archaism/history; pastiche/reflexivity; criminality/the unspeakable/excess; and science/technology/paranoia” (A.L. Smith, “Postmodernism/Gothicism”, in S. Victor, A.L. Smith (eds.), *Modern Gothic. A Reader*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1996, pp. 6-19) R. Jackson defines the fantastic as an *oxymoron* genre which does not solve its own oppositions but keeps them in an on-going tension (cf. R. Jackson, *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*, London, Routledge, [1981] 2009, p. 12) – an analyses that can be applied without problems to postmodernism.

<sup>101</sup> The connection between postmodernism and post-colonialism is at the same time theoretical and historical. As for the latter aspect, both are grounded in the questioning of the grand narratives taking power in the 1960s, a decade which also corresponds to the beginning of a widespread reaction against logo-centric, essentialist and ethno-centric discourses (cf. L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 61).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. G.E. Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> D. Punter, “The Uncanny”, in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>104</sup> G. Turcotte, *art. cit.*, p. 13.



presumption of truth”<sup>106</sup> – that the Gothic mode, as with J. Rhys’s Antoinette who is defined as a zombie, characterises Emilio, Mary, Romeo, and Nick not as a real werewolf, vampire, ghost and grotesque figure (animal-human), respectively, but as a set of devices conveying their uncanny and unrepresentable identities.

At the same time, drawing on Todorov’s notion of the literariness of metaphorical language, it blurs such a clear-cut distinction between the dead and the undead<sup>107</sup>. Such a “crisis in relation to language”<sup>108</sup>, a “non-signification”<sup>109</sup> as Bellemin-Noël would put it in reference to the opposition between the fantastic and the realist genre, entails that ‘pure’ *signifieds* are synonymous with “approximation”<sup>110</sup>. And as such are to be interpreted the appropriated Gothic elements: a disruption of the very structuralist logic of the ‘sign’. Thus, for example, ghosts, zombies and vampires are connected with the society in which they appear: they are double-voiced metaphors whose etymological meaning bears similarities with ‘transposition’ (to carry across). The disempowerment of the English language to express the monstrous, supplementary hybrid identity proves that language cannot express one culture in a structuralist sign-signified relationship but it works as a postmodern/postcolonial intertextual form of mimicry using the same questionable object. Language is “at once our own and the other”<sup>111</sup>. Thus, the act of appropriation entails that speech is always permeated by the other, that there is always a social and aesthetic intertextual relationship. While for Bakhtin intertextuality operates more on a semantic level, for Kristeva, as she states, it works on a “semantic, syntactic, or phonic”<sup>112</sup> level. And here the syntactical aspect associated with a formalist interpretation of narratives is paramount in understanding its semiotic disruption through intertextuality<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 17.

<sup>106</sup> D.B. Morris, “Gothic Sublimity”, *New Literary History*, 16 (2) 1985, p. 309 qtd in M. Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism. Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*, New York, Rodopi, 2009, p. 93.

<sup>107</sup> Such devices will be discussed in detail when dealing with each specific novel in CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR.

<sup>108</sup> A. Bennett, N. Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, Harlow, Longman, 2009, p. 40.

<sup>109</sup> R. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>111</sup> A.L. Nielsen, *Writing Between the Lines. Race and Intertextuality*, Athens GA and London, University of Georgia Press, 1994, p. 26 qtd in G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>112</sup> M. Waller, “Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation”, in R.M. Guberman (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>113</sup> Kristeva herself saw Bakhtin’s dialogism as having the potentialities to make theory go beyond

If one were to briefly explain the connections between these theories, one could say that the semiotic elements in the novels here analysed, including intertextuality, express the ‘Real’ where hybrid subjectivity has its *locus* and that such inexpressible experience is also perceivable through its ‘objectification’ in the form of the intertextual sublime<sup>114</sup>.

The core aspect of the novels analysed in this study – the aforementioned de-centering of the diasporic subject – bears reference to Freud, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida whose aim is not that of destroying the subject but of ‘situating’ it. In other words, recognising the differences in the meaning-producing ‘split’ subject no more determined by the signifier. The latter statements entail a fundamental difference between psychoanalytic subjectivity and socially constructed identity. The aim of these thinkers, though following different paths, bears similarities with Kristeva’s re-elaboration of Bakhtin’s intertextuality whose embodiment of the other dissolves any concept of unity<sup>115</sup> and with Lytoard’s unrepresentable and unspeakable subjectivity.

In Kristeva’s theory, the ‘not-I’ is what confirms the split nature of the (migrant) subject, as discussed in the previous chapter, and by extension of the *arrivant* text. What she calls transposition in substitution to intertextuality, traditionally understood as merely the influence of one text on another, implies the transformation of those texts in the attempt to unleash the semiotic force of the *genotext* which continuously energises the *phenotext*. Transposition is thus the link between the signifying fields of the symbolic and the semiotic. At the heart of the latter there is the *chora*<sup>116</sup> which

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Russian formalism (cf. *Idem*, p. 189).

<sup>114</sup> In this scheme a shared ground between postmodernism, postcolonialism, ethnic minority literature and the Gothic can be identified with the following points: indeterminacy; the unrepresentable aspects of subjectivity (surfaces/affectivity) and the consequential sublime effects of terror; mystery and suspense; pastiche; nostalgia and history; the dissolution of ‘negative differences’; the fascination with liminal states and the opposition to grand narratives.

<sup>115</sup> It is interesting to note that even Said when speaking of the worldliness of the text is foregrounding the intertextual relationships of the text *with* the world in its being *in* the world. Even his idea of the perfect critic, with his/her continuous oppositionality, is a poststructuralist and postmodernist way to dismiss a dogmatic centre. The latter is interesting if one thinks that Said did not embrace poststructuralist theories for their endless *deferral* of meaning (cf. B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18).

<sup>116</sup> ‘Chora’ is a term Kristeva borrows from Plato’s *Timaeus* where it is used to identify “a passage or bridge between worlds”. Thus, its meaning already embeds a ‘transposition’, a metaphor, a hybrid process (cf. R. Selden *et. al.*, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Harlow, Longman, 2005, p. 133; J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to An Other”, *cit.*, p. 133).

she perceives as being characterised by ‘heterogeneity’ and defines as “unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, and to the father”<sup>117</sup>. While the connections between Bhabha’s hybrid subject, Lacan’s the Real and the semiotic have been discussed in the previous chapter, here more attention will be given to the aesthetic connection between Burke’s sublime, intertextuality and the semiotic in order to confirm the experience in the Real, that ‘there is no *ethnic* relationship’. The ‘sublime’ will work both psychoanalytically to express the Real in the semiotic and aesthetically to objectify it through intertextuality.

In the novels here analysed, the characters’ private subjectivity or the postmodern dilemma of the failure of self-definition, more than being expressed through subjective experience, is also ‘objectified’ – a process dear to the Gothic genre – through form, that is the uncanny intertextual narrative structure which ‘speaks’ the semiotic and the sublime, what is unnameable and unattainable.

Since Burke’s *Enquiry*, the sublime has had emotional and spatial ties with both terror and horror<sup>118</sup> and specifically here to the terror of the uncanny ‘lack of the lack’, of “absence”<sup>119</sup>. To be terrified is to wander without knowing where one is going, to be for a moment beyond homogeneity, not knowing where one is standing<sup>120</sup>. It has to do both with the lessening of the subject’s power and with his/her ‘self-preservation’. (Un)represented in the vastness, infinity, darkness and

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>118</sup> Radcliffe was one of the first English writers to theorise on the connections between the sublime, terror and horror. Diametrically opposite to Burke, for her “[t]error and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (A. Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry”, 1826, qtd in A. Smith, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 26). In the same vein, for Botting, ‘horror’ is metaphorically linked to death and absolute darkness while the sublime, linked to terror, is not. Besides, the source of horror remains uncertain and possesses a tenacity with more pervasive fears than the temporary ones of the Gothic even after the source is discovered (cf. F. Botting, “Horror”, in M. Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 124-25). This study is informed, on the contrary, on the connection between the sublime and terror with Freud’s death drive as put by G. Sertoli’s and Adam Phillips’s introductions to the 1985 Italian edition and 1998 English edition (Oxford University Press) of the *Philosophical Enquiry*, respectively.

<sup>119</sup> D. Punter, “Terror”, in M. Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 236; A. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-13.

<sup>120</sup> The definition of darkness as a source of sublime draws parallelisms with the uncanny: “in utter darkness, it is impossible to know in what degree of safety we stand; we are ignorant of the object that surrounds us; we may every moment strike against some dangerous obstruction; [...] in such a case [...] he who would pray for nothing else towards his defence, is forced to pray for light” (E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beauty*, Oxford, Oxford

void of the object as ‘experienced’ by the perceiver, the sublime is a tension between terror and delight<sup>121</sup>: between a menace to the subject and the delight due to the distance of the menacing object. As Burke says, putting into relation astonishment and terror: “Astonishment is that state of the soul, *in which all its motions are suspended*, with some degree of horror”<sup>122</sup>. Astonishment is that state which “robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning” and “hurries us on by an irresistible force”<sup>123</sup>. Thus the sublime is the ‘unrepresentable’ and, at the same time, an harbinger of “*pain, sickness and death*”<sup>124</sup> or, the pain of the Lacanian *no-thing*, the death of socially constructed symbolic identity. The sublime derived from delight and pain is comparable to Freud’s Eros and Thanatos and to the *subject-in-process* – the latter associated by Kristeva to the above drives as always in rebellion to the law<sup>125</sup>. Here, the same *locus* welcomes the encounter between the sublime, death drive and the semiotic as dynamics of transgression<sup>126</sup>.

Burke’s idea of the sublime lies behind Lyotard’s idea of the unrepresentable. In fact, though stylistically referred first to a magnificent rhetorical style and then to a simple one<sup>127</sup>, the sublime can be referred to a traditional aesthetic idea rigorously analysed by Haggerty and, in more recent times, to Lyotard’s unnameable with its postmodern intertextual implications. The postmodern critic says:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself: that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that

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University Press, [1757] 1998, p. 130).

<sup>121</sup> Burke distinguishes between “delight” and “pleasure”: the first refers to the feeling that follows the disappearance of pain or danger; the second to what he calls a “positive pleasure”, that is a pleasure caused independently from pain or danger. In the first case, the reason of delight is a sort of “deprivation” – ‘void’, ‘darkness’, ‘solitude’, ‘silence’ (cf. *Idem*, pp. 33-35, 65).

<sup>122</sup> *Idem*, p. 53.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>124</sup> *Idem*, p. 36.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. I. Lipkowitz, A. Loselle, *art. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>126</sup> It can be argued that while the sublime represents a sort of identitarian stagnation, the semiotic refers more to a ‘process’ – fluidity. However, if the notion of the uncanny, to which the sublime bears similarities, as a space of possibilities is recalled from the previous chapter, then, the affinities between Burke’s and Kristeva’s concepts come to light.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. G. Sertoli, “Presentazione”, in E. Burke [G. Sertoli, G. Miglietta (eds.)], *Inchiesta sul Bello e il Sublime*, Palermo, Aesthetica Edizioni, 1985, pp. 9-21.

which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impact a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. [...] the artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*<sup>128</sup>.

“Good forms” and “the consensus of a [shared] taste” are linked to an unattainable transcendental but for this reason, nonetheless, still existing in a sort of Lacanian fantasy. Intertextuality, with the shattering of the pure into heterogeneity, questions any possibility of such a transcendental, of representation itself, and produces subliminal/uncanny effects: a “future anterior” (“will have been done”), a being-in-process. In this framework, the experience of the sublime with its blurring power seems to express both that of the blurring semiotic-symbolic relationship and of the Real. It empowers subjectivity over identity, fluidity over fixity. In brief, the sublime with its focus on ambivalence and liminality and its connection to the death drive, is expressed through the uncanniness of intertextuality.

Furthermore, it is in the connecting space between darkness and the sublime that both the destructive function of authority and power and the empowering of heterogeneity are to be found<sup>129</sup>. On the one hand, as with ‘Whiteness’, it is in the darkness (invisibility) that authority operates at its best, effacing differences and spreading the fear of non-identity (to be ‘white’ means acquiring humanness). It is no coincidence that the terms used to define ‘Whiteness’ fit the categories of power, vastness, infinity (the master ‘Signifier’, wholeness, universalism). On the other hand, it is in the darkness of the uncanny ethnicity that the migrant main characters of

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<sup>128</sup> J-F. Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” (tr. R. Durand), in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, [1979] 1984, p. 81 (tr. B. Massumi, G. Bennington).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. E. Burke, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 56, 59-65. A further aspect useful to understand the sublime as the threshold to the Real through language is what Burke calls “partial darkness” or “blackness”. Burke says: “Black bodies, [...], with regard to sight, are but as so many *vacant spaces* dispersed among the objects we view. When the eye lights on one of these vacuities, after having been kept in some degree of tension by the play of the adjacent colours upon it, it suddenly falls into a relaxation” (*Idem*, p. 133; emphasis added). Burke, in order to exemplify what he means with ‘relaxation’ gives two examples: sleep and silence. He explains ‘relaxation’ as that experienced “on the first inclining towards sleep, [when] we have been suddenly awakened with a most violent start; and that this start was generally preceded by a sort of dream of our falling down a precipice” (*Idem*, p. 134). These ‘black bodies’ can be understood as the ‘gaps’ in language that Lacan links to the unconscious drawing on Freud’s dream-work. In fact, it is while asleep and in silence that the unconscious creeps in the subject’s mind.

the novels here analysed wander not merely to rediscover their own ethnic roots but their liminal subjectivity. As with Tiresias, blindness and lightness uncannily coincide: darkness is seeing<sup>130</sup>. So, Romeo, returning to Brisbane and engaging in a sort of journey through memories, wanders as a werewolf spotted by the ‘moon’ in a physical and psychic darkness, the city and his memories respectively. Nick’s uncanny return of his ethnic identity is linked to the darkness of dreams; of his canteen where the Gothic ritual parodying that of the Eucharist takes place; of the river’s and the sea’s black waters with their darkness or associated with a lack of visibility (the mud on the seabed); of the mist that seems to shroud the novel itself and of Joyce’s confession to Nella taking place in the dark. And, Emilio’s memories unfold in the darkness of his mind while the twists and turns of the plot – especially in the second half of the novel when he is hospitalised – unravel through continuous flashbacks in a telepathic-textured kind of narration. Yet, darkness, linked in Freud’s “The Uncanny” to absence, death, solitude and silence (all aspects that ‘return’ in the three Sicilian-Australian novels), is shattered since “if one speaks, it gets light”<sup>131</sup> which, in turn, entails someone listening to and thus the importance of ethnic storytelling, of the cult of memory.

Drawing a brief conclusion, the semiotic, the sublime and its intertextuality work together as a counter-narrative showing “the other side”<sup>132</sup> of cultural and social values and that, through terror, they let the subject return to the world sadder but potentially wiser<sup>133</sup> by knowing that there is no ethnic relationship.

## **2.7 Postmodern nostalgic ‘creatures’**

It is now necessary to move on to give some practical examples of uncanny postmodern intertextuality, as are to be found in Casella’s and Armano’s novels, with relation to how Bakhtin’s notion of intertextuality has been appropriated by

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<sup>130</sup> A telling and famous example is the blind Mr De Lacey in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* who is the only one not to be scared of the Creature since he does not see him. The gaze, which in Western tradition is linked to knowledge, on the one hand, is no guarantee of ‘true’ understanding producing oppositions, and, on the other hand, reveals the nature of the culture it represents.

<sup>131</sup> S. Freud, *Three Essays in Sexuality*, p. 147 n.1 qtd in N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 111.

<sup>132</sup> J. Rhys, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

different theoretical perspectives. As already mentioned, the Gothic mode bears similarities with postmodernism. In fact, Linda Hutcheon refers to the latter with terms such as a “creature” and a “beast”<sup>134</sup> and, though she does not make it explicit, the creature she refers to brings to mind the Gothic one in *Frankenstein*, “a crypt of body parts that can be stitched together in a myriad of permutations”<sup>135</sup>, and Falstaff’s ‘stitched’ body, representative of the carnival, in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* part 1 and 2<sup>136</sup>. As the characters of the novels are made to wander in darkness, so the dislocated reader is made to meander around uncanny narrative architectures “one does not know one’s way about”<sup>137</sup> and, as a consequence, around the sublime darkness of identity.

For Kristeva, Bakhtin’s subversive carnivalesque is a telling manifestation of ‘heterogeneity’ accommodating aspects such as polyphony, Menippean elements, dialogism, double-voiced discourse. As for *polyphony*<sup>138</sup>, that is the combination of different voices that the narrator cannot control in a God-like manner so that his/her authority is disempowered, *The Sensualist* is a case in point. The Anglo-Celtic first-person narrator with its superficial point of view, the migrants’ third-person narrator and the intrusion of an external voice, probably Nicola’s, in both the text and the dreams, become a plethora of voices highlighting the different discourses constructing subjectivity. The disempowerment of the ‘creator’ leads to the manifestation of his/her heterogeneous identity, to fragments of representation and to moment of crisis<sup>139</sup> or, in other words, Lacan’s ‘unveiling’. Further aspects, incorporated in the polyphonic novel, are the Menippean elements: dreams, daydreams, doubles, elements of the fantastic, the mix of styles and genres. The latter mix of genres, denoting the writer’s “distance”<sup>140</sup> from other texts, has analogies with

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. D. Punter, “Terror”, cit., p. 235; G.E. Haggerty, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>134</sup> L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 57.

<sup>135</sup> C. Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, London, Reaktion Books, 2006, p. 156.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>137</sup> S. Freud, “The Uncanny”, cit., p. 620.

<sup>138</sup> Bennett and Royle identify ‘heteroglossia’ with both *polyphony*, interpreted as “a space where one encounters multiple voices” (A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 78), and Kristeva’s intertextuality, when read as “the distribution within a text of different discourses or genres or ‘voices’” (*Idem*, p. 258).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. M. Waller, *art. cit.*, pp. 189-91. In this same interview Kristeva associates the moment of crisis with speechlessness and the absent mother (*Idem*, p. 193).

<sup>140</sup> J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, cit., p. 83.

postmodern ‘pastiche’. While F. Jameson interpreted pastiche as a ‘blank’ form of parody<sup>141</sup> lacking the disruptive power of laughter, Jenks proved the exact opposite in architecture. Postmodern pastiche is a ‘double-coded’ form of parody bearing witness to Bakhtin’s notions<sup>142</sup>. In Hutcheon’s words, both work “*within* the very system [they] attempt to subvert”<sup>143</sup>. Here, reference to Hutcheon is made not only for her influence on postmodern literary theories but specifically to foreground the fact that though she uses the term ‘parody’ in relation to intertextuality this could be substituted with pastiche<sup>144</sup> but not in the way A.L. Smith does with the Jamesonian sense of the word. This is reinforced by the definition Hutcheon gives of parody: “repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity”<sup>145</sup>. Its “critical distance” recalls Kristeva’s with reference to Menippean elements. The past is not repeated for art’s sake but with a ‘make it new’ attitude or, to put it another way, an uncanny one<sup>146</sup>. It seems that pastiche is a network of parodied elements which are not necessarily derided but corrected according to their purposes<sup>147</sup>. Pastiche is typical of the postmodern age. Lyotard saw contemporary culture as ‘eclectic’ or, as Bennett and Royle put it, “hybrid”<sup>148</sup>. In this way the ‘pasting’ process is a parody of all those genres used singularly in a

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<sup>141</sup> Jameson links pastiche to “[t]he disappearance of the individual subject” but sees it as lacking parody (F. Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991, p. 16). Although partly agreeing with Jameson’s argumentation, what he seems to miss is the parodic effect pastiche does not of the genres it uses but of its attempt to convey a ‘univocal’ message through a form-content equation.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 11; G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 186; A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-86.

<sup>143</sup> L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> C. Baldick, as Jameson, differentiates pastiche from parody since the former lacks the mockery element of the latter (cf. C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 162). Conversely, Cuddon does not establish a clear-cut opposition between the two terms. Defining ‘pastiche’ he says: “a kind of imitation and, when intentional, may be a form of parody” (J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, London, Penguin, 1992, p. 685). Even though accepting Baldick’s distinction, pastiche would devalue the ‘original’ form which it borrows thus highlighting the arbitrariness of the original: it can be reproduced. Pastiche is thus ‘a’ form of parody.

<sup>145</sup> L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>146</sup> Royle interprets Victor Shklovsky’s ‘making strange’ or ‘defamiliarisation’ as a form of uncanniness (cf. N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., pp. 4-5).

<sup>147</sup> For example, Ishmael Reed’s *The Terrible Twos* mirrors such a function of ‘parody’ by intertextually ‘correcting’ Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* and Dante’s *Divina Commedia* to express a different meaning but not one that ‘derides’ that of the works it draws on (cf. L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-31).

<sup>148</sup> A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 286.



structuralist way (signifier-signified) to represent a univocal ‘truth’ (sign)<sup>149</sup>. In both *The Volcano* and *The Sensualist* there is a ‘medley’ of genres: the classical drama (tragedy) structure of the novel, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the Bible, Gothic elements, letters (travel writing), poems, songs, popular culture in *The Sensualist*; Gothic elements, documentary sources (newspapers and letters), crime story and references to novels (Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*) in *The Volcano*.

However, *The Volcano* also fits postmodern ‘historiographic metafiction’. In defining the latter, Hutcheon, in addition to underlying its element of parody, lists its involvement with literature, history and theory: it reworks the past from its “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs”<sup>150</sup>. In other words, both fiction and history are forms of narration and this is clearly stated within the work of fiction. If history is just a narration, like memory, then Hutcheon argues that a distinction between ‘events’ and ‘facts’ must be made: what one gets to know are ‘facts’ or, in other words, the ‘event’ plus interpretation but never the pure event itself and, thus, what is handed down to posterity is its *textuality* as it is to be found in the archaeology of documents, evidence, eye-witness accounts, and so forth<sup>151</sup>. In this framework, ethnic novels can be considered as other ‘documents’ – not in the positivist sense –, acts of memory ‘reworking’ and handing down the past with “differences”<sup>152</sup>. The recuperation of the past, which the host country links to the transgressive nostalgic excess, does not end up in a “transcendental timeless meaning” but entails a “dialogue with the past in the light of the present”<sup>153</sup>. Its self-

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<sup>149</sup> For instance, Las Vegas, which is usually seen as a postmodern city copying from all other cities without a satirical purpose, is however also interpreted as devoid of meaning. Is not the latter a satire of those styles wanting to represent the ‘truth’ of reality?

<sup>150</sup> L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> *Idem*, p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> As Hutcheon states in her study, postmodernism seeks to assert “provisional” differences contesting dominant cultures from within but without denying them since its aim is not to construct an-other monological discourse in their place. The postmodern work is one of “unresolved paradoxes”. Furthermore, Hutcheon warns that the provisional aspect of knowledge does not entail the uselessness of the activity of thinking but, on the contrary, it “will guarantee that we never stop thinking and rethinking” (*Idem*, pp. 6, 12, 20-21, 53 and for a postcolonial perspective of the ‘ex-centric’, see CHAPTER FOUR). Her use of the term ‘differences’ is in line with a postcolonial meaning and, one might conclude, in opposition to ‘diversity’.

<sup>153</sup> *Idem*, p. 19. Foucault, discussing the relationship between the past and the present, dismisses the

reflexivity casts light on the ‘worldliness’ of the text, its social and political involvement, through what might be called ‘postmodern nostalgia’ in line with a notion of hybridity and a reconsideration of the idea of the ‘homeland’. While Hutcheon, though underlining that not all references to the past are nostalgic, avoids the term ‘nostalgia’<sup>154</sup> – at least in this work<sup>155</sup> –, Hage distinguishes it from ‘homesickness’ revaluing the former. In his distinction nostalgia, a feeling abounding in everybody’s life, is strictly linked to home-building in the here and now:

nostalgic homely buildings [...], far from being an escape, they are more often deployments actively fostered to confront a new place and a new time [...]. It is only when faced with the impossibility of home-building that nostalgia can degenerate into a debilitating homesickness<sup>156</sup>.

This interpretation of nostalgia is something in between Boym’s notions of restorative and reflective nostalgia – the former meaning that the past is re-created in the present situation while, the latter, involves it being critically dismissed<sup>157</sup>. Hage’s nostalgia is not a form of ‘escapism’, but a dialogic intertextuality between the past and the present: the former is recalled through “imagined metonymies” (a person, a

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superiority of the present over the past, sees the latter as challenging the former and questions notions of ‘progress’. As Kendall and Wickham put it: “To use history in the Foucaultian manner is to use it to help us see that the present is just as strange as the past, not to help us see that a sensible or desirable present has emerged ... or might emerge” (G. Kendall, G. Wickham, *Using Foucault’s Methods*, London, Sage, 1999, qtd in S. Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 78). In order to understand the present, one needs to think it as strange as the past: strangeness, the uncanniness of any ‘time’ becomes an epistemological, reading strategy.

<sup>154</sup> By saying that “the past is always placed critically – and not nostalgically – in relation with the present”, Hutcheon maintains a traditional opposition between nostalgia and a critical perspective of the same (L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 45).

<sup>155</sup> In comparison with her previous work, in “Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern” Hutcheon departs from her early perception of nostalgia since she now sees it as the rubbing between two times – past and present. It is this ‘rubbing’ which makes *irony* ‘happen’: “Irony is not something *in* an object that you either ‘get’ or fail to ‘get’: irony ‘happens’ for you (or, better, you *make* it ‘happen’) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge. Likewise, nostalgia is not something you ‘perceive’ *in* an object; it is what you ‘feel’ when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight. In both cases, it is the element of response – of active participation, both intellectual and affective – that makes for the power” (L. Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern”, 1998, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>).

<sup>156</sup> G. Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West”, *cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, pp. 41-56.

sound, a smell, food – supporting the idea of the migrant past as ascribed to the semiotic) “to have a base from which to perceive and grasp Australian opportunities”<sup>158</sup> and promote intercultural interactions. In characters such as Emilio, Mary, Romeo, Nick and Michele Aquila and Oreste Ancelli the fundamental features of nostalgia and home-sickness are demonstrated<sup>159</sup>.

This also leads to how critics and writers perceive memories: on the one hand, as another form of *textualisation* of the past and, on the other hand, as the creative power of language. Through memories the subject has no intention of reproducing the past and the identity that comes with it, but he/she ‘colours’ that past from the present standpoint. It is to be interpreted rather as a ‘place’ than a ‘space’<sup>160</sup>. This means that the past is transformed depending on the subject’s present needs: a way of compensation for a lack and of showing the directions in which to think about both past and present events. All this against a history of forgetting but also against any form of essentialised ‘authenticity’: language has no direct referent. In this way

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<sup>158</sup> G. Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West”, cit., p. 108. A significant number of critics, in addition to G. Hage, interpret nostalgia positively in relation to the ‘here and now’: Susan Vromen, Fred Davis, Leo Spitzer, A.D. Ritivoi, Z. Skrbiš. Even Judy Giles, for whom nostalgia means an overvaluing of the past over the present, sees it as a form of critique to the present for the future. A ‘longing for’ a safe place (the maternal one) is ‘a search for belonging’ (cf. P. Sugiman, “Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese-Canadian Women’s Life Stories”, in V. Agnew (ed.), *Diaspora, Memory, And Identity. A Search for Home*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 64-65; A.D. Ritivoi, *Yesterday’s Self. Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, Lanham (Maryland), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, p. 37; A. D’Costa, “Anglo-Indian Nostalgia: Longing for India as Homeland”, Paper presented to the Second Annual Rhizomes: Re-visioning Boundaries Conference of The School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, 24-25 February 2006, <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:7724>).

<sup>159</sup> It goes without saying that host societies prefer interpreting the concept of nostalgia as homesickness, since the latter precludes a sense of belonging avoiding any possible recognition of the ‘outsider within’. This entails realities such as the scattering of immigrants across Australia after their detention at the Bonegilla camp, the ‘imprisonment’ of refugees in detention camps and migrants’ assimilation through ethnic food in a globalised world disrupting any form of home-building.

<sup>160</sup> As Loretta Baldassar, an Australian born to first generation migrants, testifies, the remembered past is a *space* which, even when the migrant returned back home, would not be there (cf. L. Baldassar, “Tornare al paese: territorio e identità nel processo migratorio”, *Altreitalie*, 23, July-December, 2001, [www.altreitalie.it/ImagePub.aspx?id=78364](http://www.altreitalie.it/ImagePub.aspx?id=78364)). Furthermore, the image the migrant subject has of a the past is a mythic one – a *time* when the child-infant dyad was perfect –, that is a sum up of all the best aspects excluding those sad ones effecting the decision to emigrate. It relies on an “imaginative truth” part real and part fiction. In his *Imaginary Homelands* Salman Rushdie states that looking back from another place “inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, [places] of the mind” (S. Rushdie, *art. cit.*, p. 10; for the mythic nature of the homeland see also: A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1) February 1992, pp. 6-23; S. Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, cit.).

language, far from being an “ontological prison”<sup>161</sup>, re-fashions new identities. Language appropriates its “representational and re-creative power”<sup>162</sup>; an aspect having affinities with Hall’s idea of “re-telling”<sup>163</sup> the past rather than re-claiming it. Consequently, the dialogic relationship between the past and identity is not an essentialised one but mythic and performative.

Nostalgia is thus a protean signifier: it can signify a total distinction between the past and the present both by homesick subjects and the dominant group, or a postmodern concept of dialogic relation that adds something to the vision of the present. The latter is the one also expressed by Antonio Casella:

It would appear that I have an incurable case of nostalgia that makes me want to reconnect with the physical landscape. On another level, of course, I want to return to the emotional landscape of dreams and memory. Just like Nick Amedeo I keep wanting to return to a world reconstructed in my imagination. In one sense I am chasing an illusion. And yet, just as the mind realizes that such a remembered world never existed, the heart believes in it with utter conviction: *opposite realities co-existing simultaneously, despite the contradictions*<sup>164</sup>.

Such opposition of co-existing realities, that Casella highlights in his critical study on the Italian Diaspora in Australia as part of the Italian experience of migration, fits Mishra’s paradigm of the “diaspora of the border”<sup>165</sup>, the latter is defined by Casella himself as “a less rigid, more amorphous, more contemporary form, one in which exchanges and transactions occur both ways”<sup>166</sup>, one in which “*bridges* and networks rather than walls”<sup>167</sup> are constructed even by those successive generation migrants who do not speak Italian but still feel part of such a Diaspora. In Casella’s own words

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<sup>161</sup> B. Aschcroft, *Caliban’s Voice*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> *Idem*, p. 13.

<sup>163</sup> S. Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, cit., p. 235.

<sup>164</sup> G. Messina, “An Interview with Antonio Casella. ‘On leased land’: *The Sensualist* by Antonio Casella”, *Westerly*, 55 (1) July 2010, p. 86 (emphasis added).

<sup>165</sup> A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*, cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>166</sup> *Idem*, p. 180.

<sup>167</sup> *Idem*, p. 181 (emphasis added).

[n]ostalgia, is no mere attachment to the past, it's more an ideology of living that values (some might say overvalues) the importance of the past in order to fully experience the present<sup>168</sup>.

Both the Menippean elements and the postmodern novel do not lead to a dialectical relationship but rather a dialogical one; towards “a coexistence (an ambivalence) of ‘the double of lived experience (realism and the epic) and ‘lived experience’ itself (linguistic exploration and Menippean discourse)”<sup>169</sup>. All the above aspects, dear to the different discourses of the silenced *other*, recreate a particular “rhythm – that is a polyphony”<sup>170</sup> disrupting the more linear one represented by the traditional syntactic narrative structure<sup>171</sup> and (un)representing the postmodern notion of subjectivity.

In conclusion, though polyphonic features can be found in *The Volcano* and *The Sensualist*, these elements do not make the latter a historiographic metafiction. Besides, even though the aim of both historiographic metafiction and pastiche can be identified with the dismissal of the idea of a capitalised ‘Voice’ in opposition to ‘voices’, pastiche does not explicitly state this limit of mimesis in the novel as the other genre does – or at least not in the same way. For example, this could be applied to ideas concerning with memory, the uncanny return of the past and the representation common to *The Volcano* and *The Sensualist* – but stated differently. Thus, *The Sensualist* could be defined as a ‘polyphonic novel’, *Romeo of The Underworld* as a more ‘dialogical novel’ and *The Volcano* as ‘historiographic metafiction’. Armanno and Casella use different dialogic models befitting liminality, itself a sort of metaphor, in between a tenor and a vehicle, a transposition. However, as Hutcheon argues, though the Bakhtinian dialogic model is interpretatively useful

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<sup>168</sup> *Idem*, p. 164.

<sup>169</sup> J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, cit., p. 89.

<sup>170</sup> J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to an Other”, cit., p. 142.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 135. Kristeva links “grammar, logic, ontology – sentence, judgement, being – syntax, syllogism, reference” (J. Kristeva, “The True-Real”, cit., p. 220). The similarities these bear with a diachronic and synchronic dimension of the symbolic can easily be applied to the linear development and systematic structure of narration (for the two dimensions of the symbolic see I. Lipkowitz, A. Loselle, *art. cit.*, p. 21).

there must be no conflation between form and history<sup>172</sup>.

## 2.8 Uncanny intertextualities: dreams, memories and metaphors

Interpreted either as the dialogic nature of a word, an utterance or a novel, as the psychoanalytical relationship between fields of signification or, more recently, as a postmodern dialogue between texts, intertextuality casts light on a network of social, psychoanalytical and textual relations that in Derrida's words would be addressed as 'traces'. In this scheme, dreams, memories and metaphors are for their double-coded nature examples of uncanny intertextualities, the *locus* where the conscious-unconscious, past-present, tenor-vehicle encounters between different cultural worlds take place. All these examples of 'interstitial spaces' are not only closely intertwined but all revolve around the 'absence' of a psychological, emotional and social landscape of migrancy which because of its 'invisibility' is difficult to access and reconstruct.

### *Dreams as counter-identities*

As criticism is levelled by some critics against the Gothic, for its being 'on the edge' of what is known (*seen*), so likewise it happens in the case of dreams. Thus, as for the former, there is a need to shed light on the latter. Two aspects support the function and validity of the dreams in the novels here analysed: on the one hand, the theories that dismiss dreams; on the other hand, and as a consequence of the first aspect, both the 'dream-dream report' relationship and the possible silencing of their meaning deeply embedded in the unconscious.

As for the first aspect, dreams have always been debated as something controversial both for their meaning and their value. For instance, several critics have analysed different styles of interpretation all ending up in a critical attitude dismissing the validity of the object of study. The first two forms of interpretation interpreting dreams as either producing a meaning that refuses to accommodate to the established

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-01.

norms of thoughts and to what is known through reality – at least what one thinks is reality – or as lacking a one true meaning<sup>173</sup> are dismissed for the interpretative anxiety they bring about; the third, deriving from superficiality or bad intention, results in an “equation-like interpretation”<sup>174</sup> or in the camouflage of the meaning and its effect on society<sup>175</sup>.

In dealing with the second point, a first distinction should be made between the experienced dream and the dream report. Although the latter is not the actual experienced dream, it is the only and best means for representing the latter. If the dream is accepted as narrative – though not all reported dreams have a narrative structure<sup>176</sup> –, then it can be analysed along the lines developed by narratologists. But when reporting the experienced dream is not it culturally accommodated through language? To answer this question one needs to differentiate between the narrative form of the report which is still connected to Freud’s manifest meaning and the semantic level connected to the latent meaning of the dream. Although Jung and Freud do not agree on the emphasis the former puts on the different meaning levels of dreams – for Freud it is the latent meaning which is more important –, those are both useful as there is a latent meaning which is not easily understood and, following Jung, the dream façade cannot be easily disregarded for having no straightforward meaning<sup>177</sup>. To put it simply, the verbal translation of the experienced dream does not silence its meaning but, as Bakhtin’s ‘word’ when contextualised dialogically ‘speaks’ the other, so does the dream-image. As Mageo states:

The differences between dream images and their waking originals betray secret feelings we hesitate to share with others and even with ourselves. Dreams offer images of how we feel and think about the cultural world beneath ordinary awareness [...]<sup>178</sup>.

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. V. Crapanzano, “Concluding Reflections”, in J.M. Mageo (ed.), *Dreaming and the Self. New Perspectives on Subjectivity, Identity, and Emotion*, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 175-197.

<sup>174</sup> D. Egan, “The Manifest Content of Dreams”, *American Anthropologist*, 54, 1952, p. 473 qtd in J.M. Mageo, “Theorising Dreaming and the Self”, in J.M. Mageo (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. J.M. Mageo, “Theorising Dreaming and the Self”, *cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. P. Kilroe, “The Dream as Text, The dream as Narrative”, *Dreaming*, 10 (3) 2000 [http://www.asdreams.org/journal/articles/10-3\\_kilroe.htm#\\_ftn1](http://www.asdreams.org/journal/articles/10-3_kilroe.htm#_ftn1)

<sup>177</sup> Cf. K.P. Ewing, “Diasporic Dreaming, Identity, and Self-Constitution”, in J.M. Mageo (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>178</sup> J.M. Mageo, “Subjectivity and Identity in Dreams”, in J.M. Mageo (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Dreams stand for the “capacity to rearrange the contents of the real world according to a nonhistorical, extratemporal, and subjective directive”<sup>179</sup>. Jung analyses the internal identitarian opposition of the self between an ‘I’ and ‘the Self’ defining the latter as the result of a “disidentification”. ‘The Self’ is a ‘not-me’, the construction of others onto whom ‘the Self’ projects those aspects unacceptable by society or/and the same ‘I’ as is clear when Mageo points out that dream characters may stand for feelings that others have about us and that have been internalised. Dream symbols are, thus, ‘interstitial spaces’ where one can hear multiple voices, where the subject and the social world meet, a combination of the social ‘I’ and the unconscious ‘the Self’<sup>180</sup>. Neither backward looking nor forward looking, neither to be interpreted only as the product of individual conflicts nor reduced to an exclusive social meaning, ‘diasporic dreams’ are a fusion of past and present experiences functional to the repositioning of the subject<sup>181</sup>.

The diachronic relationship of the ‘then’ and ‘now’ is recreated in dreams in the coherence of a social synchronic unique memory, a one, ‘dialogic’, bizarre image. The latter, on the one hand, as States specifies, “should not be regarded only as obvious visual deformation but as a continuous and ever dynamic process [...] of imagination [...] – at least in the sense that imagination is the power of the mind to [...] recombine [...] elements according to a creative association”<sup>182</sup>; and, on the other hand, having paid attention in her studies to Pakistani and Turkish diasporic dreams, Ewing concludes that the bizarre image “may be an expression of cultural differences and an effort to *synthesize* disjointed experiences”<sup>183</sup>. In this theoretical framework, as the brain works in a synecdochic way categorising reality on a ‘part-whole’ basis so the dream-work, through resemblance and opposed to a Freudian theory of total censorship, keeps alive the dreamer’s desire by recalling, like a

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<sup>179</sup> B.O. States, *Dreaming and Storytelling*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 29.

<sup>180</sup> J.M. Mageo, “Theorising Dreaming and the Self”, *cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. K.P. Ewing, *art. cit.*, pp. 47, 50-51.

<sup>182</sup> B.O. States, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>183</sup> K.P. Ewing, *art. cit.*, p. 51 (emphasis added).



flashback, a past image<sup>184</sup>.

Linked to desire, *jouissance* and subversion, dreams work similarly to jokes as Freud demonstrated in his book on jokes and their relation to the unconscious. Both, working through condensation and contiguity, bear the traces of repressed desires and other discourses in a dimension that has to come to terms with the censure from the *superego* whose existence is evident from that of the dream-work. However, though they both have to avoid censorial practices, it is through the dream-work and the joke-work that subversion takes place.

*Memory: (de)realising presences and realising absences*

As Portoghesi said in his *After Modern Architecture* “[i]t is the loss of memory, not the cult of memory that will make us prisoners of the past”. If one assumes that to be true, then it goes without saying, as S. Wills illustrates, that Australia in negating *the other’s* memories is prisoner of its own ‘lost’ past. It is no fortuitous aspect that the narratives of the migrant experience articulated by the host country concentrate on the gains (‘pull’ rather than ‘push’ factors) and that refugees are locked up, together with their loss, in concentration camps<sup>185</sup>. Australia has, thus, to rediscover the memories of ethnic groups or, in other words, “to broaden the boundaries of memory in order to ensure the dignity of all [...] to be treated as those with a right to voice the hidden pain of a migrant nation”<sup>186</sup>. As haunting fragments, the traces of the past must be recalled by mourners since, in their mourning, they iterate a promise of responsibility for the future. In this way, acts of memory with their differential difference (presence/absence) speak against the socialised forms of forgetting, as it happens with the novels here analysed which can be considered as ‘places of memory’ unveiling the tyranny of language with its representational power and redrafting history. Memories, acts and writings are all *performative*, that is, in Judith Butler’s words, “statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. B.O. States, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 39-42.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. S. Wills, *art. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>186</sup> *Idem*, p. 89.

power on the action performed”<sup>187</sup>. Furthermore, they are acts of ‘performative *addressivity*’. In Bakhtin’s words this would be called *addressivity* of the utterance:

Orientation of the word towards the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other’, I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong<sup>188</sup>.

Yet, in diasporic places, “the community to which I belong” cannot be limited to just one. These ethnic novels of memory are performative ‘supplements’, rituals of revival, which do not merely describe but transform both the migrant and host community entailing that the personal act of remembering is intertextually related to society and has political, social and cultural implications. In this way, memory works as an ethnic reading of spaces such as the bush, the garden, the ballroom, the restaurant, the neighbourhoods, etc, that function as settings of the two writers’ novels. Remembering, in Casella’s and Armanno’s “founding texts” or “habitual spaces[/places]”<sup>189</sup>, means storytelling as a form of repetition and agency. Casella ‘hits back at’ a colonial multicultural society and Armanno redefines the identity of successive generations as hybrid enhancing, for that purpose, first generation storytelling. Both redefine what it means being Italo-Australian and Anglo-

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<sup>187</sup> J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, New York and London, Routledge, 1993, p. 234 qtd in A-M. Fortier, *Migrant Belongings. Memory, Space, Identity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>188</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, C. Emerson, M. Holquist (eds.), Austin (TX), University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 86, (tr. V.W. McGee) qtd in G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>189</sup> A-M. Fortier, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 112. Fortier, analysing the Italian community in London, refers to founding texts as the possibility of retrieving Italians from invisibility thanks to the shift of emphasis from racial to cultural elements (*Idem*, p. 25). Although a comparison between the British and Australian context goes beyond this study, it is crystal clear that the ‘race-culture’ shift did not translate into a cultural re-configuration of ethnic identity. Fortier uses ‘habitual spaces’ to refer to physical spaces that represent, for their grounding of identity, ‘architecture[s] of reassurance’. In this study, the term ‘architecture’ has different implications but is perfect to express both the idea of (textual) home-building and, though not distinct, intertextuality. However, drawing on this different perspective and according to the aforementioned difference between place and space, it is more correct to speak of ‘habitual *places*’ in relation to ‘texts’.

Australian.

Such a project of visibility which, as Fortier claims, takes place in ‘moments’ of crisis or, rather than limiting it to diachronic moments, one would say that it occurs in spaces of invisibility (marginality), receives a new twist when analysed through Derrida’s notion of the *pharmakon* since it links writing with memory and forgetting. In the same vein the *pharmakon* is both a remedy and a poison, so writing, as Derrida’s shopping list demonstrates, “helps *and* hinders memory”<sup>190</sup>. Writing foregrounds acts of remembering but ‘at the same time’ conveys the possibility of forgetting. It denounces a lack of presence:

were this self-identity or self-presence as certain as all that, the very idea of a shopping list [writing] would be rather superfluous or at least the product of a curious compulsion. Why would I bother about a shopping list if the presence of sender to receiver were so certain?<sup>191</sup>

The novels here analysed ‘(de)realise’ “the presence of a sender to receiver” in line with the necessity of a project of visibility. In all three novels characters express, whether verbally or not, their need to relate their stories trans-generationally with a personal purpose of continuity and communality – though the latter may operate unconsciously and independently from other artists<sup>192</sup>. It is not fortuitous that many

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<sup>190</sup> N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>191</sup> J. Derrida, “Limited Inc a b c ...”, in *Limited Inc*, Evanston (Illinois), Northwestern University Press, 1988, (tr. S. Weber) qtd in *Ibidem*.

<sup>192</sup> Dreams and memories, States argues, “through narrative [...] might, in a sense, remember experiences” that always occur in different ways. In the light of this, a “‘communality’ can be built up among various versions of the same experience that might serve as the basis for forming a new knowledge structure or for modifying or confirming an old one” (B.O. States, *op. cit.*, p. 120). In this way, the experience of migration is relived in different ways by different generations and individual subjects and the same experience is not trapped in the past when it occurred. States, still giving voice to Roger Schank’s ideas, says that “any new case of something [...] verifies a hypothesis we carry around in our memory” (*Ibidem*). The latter illuminates the ‘encounter’ between generations, their past and present stories. Such experiences work as scripts or archetypes: sharing knowledge structures, always modified. Armanno seems to be in line with this in a dialogue-review he writes of C. Booker’s *The Seven Basic Plots* (cf. V. Armanno, “Losing the Plot or Seven”, *The Courier-Mail*, 12 February 2005, p. 6) in which he points out the differences (“inflections”) between plots even when they might be linked to seven archetypal ones. Against an anxiety of influence he substantiates his claims of originality, linked to the necessity each generation has to re-create a specific reinterpreted culture, by referring to *The Volcano* which takes shape from an old story told by his grandmother (the storytelling of the novel was uncanny at its very origin): taking up the stories of his previous generations means re-

of Armanno's characters are 'artists' conveying their inner world to a 'receiver' whether a 'narratee', an implied or an actual reader. Such a necessity of repeatability, fundamental to signification in Derrida's theoretical framework, involves the 'impurity' of the text or in other words its reference to past and future elements, neither to be found 'here'. As for the shopping list, its necessity of repeatability is due to the possibility that one forgets what to buy or that one dies. What Derrida is questioning through the shopping list is the presence of a full identity: the author is not present in his writing or vice versa<sup>193</sup>. Both Casella and Armanno feel the lively 'desire'<sup>194</sup> to write since the necessity of visibility is haunted by time, by the possibility that it might be too late, and thus by death. The repositioning of Derrida's subject is a matter of *différance* – neither/nor, both/and, either/or, 'neither/or' –; not an essence but a positioning, a dialogic space of sameness and change. Re-telling the past, Hall argues, is not a rediscovery, an unearthing of identity but entails its production as a process always within representation so that there cannot be any claim of authority and authenticity<sup>195</sup>.

The return home, though not always physical and also possible as encounters with someone from the homeland visiting the subject's country of migration, always speaks out that subjects have changed. It is always a form of readjustment to one's new identity. In this sense, the flashback-structure of Armanno's novels seems to

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defining them for his own and the future ones. This entails, on the one hand, the necessity of the presence of a reader and, on the other hand, of a reading that goes beyond mere romanticised and depoliticised terms.

<sup>193</sup> Both Derrida's and Hall's notions of identity as process directly recall Lacan's differentiation between the enunciating 'I' and the enunciated 'I' (cf. S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", cit., p. 234).

<sup>194</sup> Ritivoi, discussing the meaning of Odysseus's return to Ithaca not as the end of the plot (a return to his identity before leaving) but as a rite of passage through which to rediscover himself reconciling differences with sameness (*ipse* and *idem*), interprets 'desire' as an "experienced lack of", an absence symbolised by Ithaca's 'otherness' and thus open to new possibilities: desires "inaugurate [...] a search in which the individual becomes aware of the world, of alternatives, of the outside". A symmetrical difference is that made by Ritivoi when examining Robinson Crusoe's life as a shipwrecked: his (colonial) nostalgia leads to no 'openness' (cf. A.D. Ritivoi, *op. cit.*, p. 106; see also p. 65 for the relationship between memory – "spaces of experience" – and desire – "horizon of expectation"). One must note that desire is already part of nostalgia: *nostos* means 'going home, longing for one's home' and, thus, that the remedy for the future is to be found in the past. Such a return, with its implications and though not physical, can be mapped on Casella's and Armanno's desire to virtually go back to their 'roots' through writing. In a way, writing and memory are their Ithaca and they always entail a process of identitarian readjustment.

<sup>195</sup> S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", cit., pp. 234, 235.

perform a continuous 'return' as a way of re-discovering one's present identity; flashbacks work as 'rites of passage'<sup>196</sup>. In his essay, "Under the Volcano", Armanno states:

Two century ago Goethe visited the island and after his stay wrote, "without Sicily, one cannot form any idea of Italy. The key to everything is here." In the strange way history works, sometimes nowadays Australia can be a sort of key to Sicily. And for me, vice versa<sup>197</sup>.

As the Gothic castles with their inside vastness produced by numerous stairs, corridors and rooms dislodges one's sense of location, so the anachronic structure of these narratives – typical of dreams as well – erases any linear plot and operates temporal and spatial dislocations that effect a loss of stability of the character and the reader alike, of the metaphorical and geographical centre:

What we find in the numerous conjunctions of Gothic and postmodern is a certain sliding of location, a series of transfers and translocations from one place to another, so that our sense of stability of the map is [...] forever under siege [...]<sup>198</sup>.

Such deconstructions, on the one hand, are in line with the dehumanization of those immigrant characters described as creatures of the night – zombies, vampires and ghosts – and, on the other hand, they make subjects struggle to achieve an identity that they can effectively find in interstitial spaces, if such a thing is possible, after their symbolic death. Rather they can discover subjectivity. The connection between flashbacks and 'death' leads to an interesting relation with the sublime.

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<sup>196</sup> For Casella's characters such an identitarian rite is valid as well. It is something he works out from real experience: "I have known second-generation and third-generation Italo-Australians who have never been to Italy but long for it as much as their parents. In most case these children and grandchildren of migrants cannot speak the language, but they still have a strong desire to visit the land of their cultural origins" (G. Messina, *art. cit.*, p. 84).

<sup>197</sup> V. Armanno, "Under the Volcano", in G. Rando, G. Turcotte (eds.), *Literary and Social Diasporas. An Italian Australian Perspectives*, Brussels, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2007, p. 30.

<sup>198</sup> D. Punter, G. Byron, *The Gothic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, p. 51 qtd in C. Spooner, "Gothic in the

In these novels, flashbacks follow a repetitive structure that has the reader ‘hanging on’ for other flashbacks. That is what Burke says happens with sounds: the subject, though accustomed to a repetitive sound, does not know when the next one comes and, when it does, it produces surprise. However, the tension, intensified by the waiting and the surprise, turns into pain and produces a sublime feeling<sup>199</sup>.

*Spectral metaphors: realising absences*

Dealing with the relationship between *the said* and *the unsaid* entails having to do with binary ‘spectral’ oppositions such as presence-absence, consciousness-unconsciousness and language-thought. ‘Spectral’ and ‘ephemeral’ because such is the hyphenated space of those oppositions, an interstitial space where the ‘gap’ of meaning is at home. Thus, though our thought is generally reducible to language – a seemingly rather easy process –, this fails either when it comes to uncanny experiences that defamiliarise one’s own sense of identity or when it is ‘translated’ from a space the subject does not own. When applied to the subaltern subject and to literature two questions need to be answered: can the subaltern ‘speak’ and through ‘what’ means? While for Spivak the subaltern can never really speak out, Bhabha argues that the subaltern may speak – sometimes even unconsciously – through a metonymic language and Ashcroft’s metonymic gaps support this perspective.

Besides, though Bhabha notices that metaphor has a shaping function at the service of nationalism, Derrida’s ‘metaphoricity’, and Black’s *comparison view of metaphor*<sup>200</sup> and Wheelwright<sup>201</sup> seem to support his idea since they both state that similarity is not so much antecedent as ‘induced’, however metaphor is also a strategy of the subaltern subject. Like Caliban’s language, metaphor and metonymy cannot be imprisoned in a natural function. Thus, by recalling Ashcroft’s theory of appropriation and Derrida’s notion of *iterability*, metaphor is also a *postcolonial* strategy of shaping reality. After all, metaphor and metonymy fulfil the same purpose

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Twentieth Century”, in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. E. Burke, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. M. Black, “Metaphor”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 55, 1954-55, p. 283.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. P. Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*, Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press,

in a colonial context as it is proved by the way ‘Whiteness’ works. If the latter metaphorically shapes reality it also maintains the chain of metonymic substitutions as the *migrancy* of the uncanny proves. If there was any need, even Todorov’s structural connection of metaphor with the fantastic, read in the light of appropriation, expresses what has been absented<sup>202</sup> and supports its use as a Gothic ‘counter’ strategy.

Fred Botting, analysing the relationship between Lacan’s language theory and the Gothic, pinpoints that not only the unconscious is not reducible to language – though it is constructed by it – but that it also represents a “space of metaphoric substitution”<sup>203</sup>. Botting says:

In the two narratives articulated by the name of the Father, the one that is presented as the proper symbolic form and the other, its Gothic and *repressed* counterpart, *the gap of the Thing still remains, a leftover like the ruins and the castles on the romantic landscape*<sup>204</sup>.

The gap is the remainder of the Real, “a point where meaning is both distinguished from and dissolves in non-meaning”<sup>205</sup>. G. Haggerty states that through Gothic devices, such as metaphors, subjective states of feeling can be objectified, made more palpable, and thus absences realised<sup>206</sup>. Therefore, Gothic symbols are metaphors that act as *signifiers* of rather different and hidden *signifieds*. In sum, Gothic metaphors are ‘thresholds’ to the Gothic castle of Lacan’s ‘the Thing’, textual-semantic strategies that supplement what is absent from linguistic resources. Such is the function of the ghost of the King in *Hamlet* which is not the *signifier* of the absent body, but of different *signifieds*: crime, vengeance, Claudio and Gertrude’s guilt – the unfinished business. By applying Haggerty’s analysis of the Gothic on metaphor, the

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1962, p. 80.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 81 (tr. R. Howard and R. Scholes).

<sup>203</sup> F. Botting, “The Gothic Production of the Unconscious”, in D. Punter, G. Byron (eds.), *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, London, Macmillan, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibidem* (emphasis added).

<sup>205</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. G.E. Haggerty, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

ghost would be the *vehicle* while the *tenor* would remain inexpressible. The haunting past is such when it is absent and, as the result of ‘forgetting’, it stimulates memory forcing its way in the present (in the case of Nick and Romeo) and/or staying with the subject in the present (in the case of Emilio). It ‘realises’ a semantic space with, in this study, semiotic connotations. The reader’s role is to shed light on associations and correspondences in order to realise absences, to fill in the semantic gaps. And all this is reinforced by the fact that metaphorical Ghosts, doubles, ‘shadows’, vampires and zombies, in order to exist, can act neither in a context of sameness (reconciliation) since there would be no anxiety to express nor in one of total difference since there would be no resemblance and thus no haunting. Ghosts act in the space of the abject where desire and rejection are always in tension. This makes even clearer the fact that where there are ghosts there are anxiety and tension<sup>207</sup>. In fact, as with Freud’s condensation in the dream-work, these figures are the only way to get through ‘censure’ and transgress it by apparently observing it. These aspects confirm that novels with Gothic suggestions may follow a dream logic.

Gothic metaphors are not only intertextual, when interpreted as figures of speech, but also describe the narrative structure of, specifically, Armano’s novels which unfold in a dialogic relationship between past-present, first-successive generation migrants, Sicily-Australia. In his analysis of metaphor in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Daniel Erickson, starting from key points similar to Botting’s, draws on I. Richards’ metaphor theory to point out, as Wheelright does, the two-frames-of-reference structure of Pound’s poem ‘In a Station of the Metro’. For Richards metaphor is made of two frames of reference (*tenor* and *vehicle*) in which the vehicle is not dismissed as a decorative element but considered as important as the *tenor* and, thus, interchangeable. Richards says:

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. K. Gelder, J. Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 42.



In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction<sup>208</sup>.

The bidirectional semantic transfer of this type of metaphor is connected with what Max Black calls *interaction view*. Black distinguishes three types of views of metaphor: comparison, substitution and interaction view – the first underlying analogies and similarities (“Richard is a lion”); the second filling in a lexical gap (“Cherry lips”); the third, which is more useful for this analyses, imposing an extension of meaning. Black considers the two expressions “The poor are the negroes of Europe” or “Man is a wolf”<sup>209</sup> as examples of the interaction view of metaphors and underlines the shifts in attitudes and the interchangeability of the two frames: a man is like a wolf and a wolf seems more human than it usually does. This also entails that the relation between dreams and reality is a metaphorical one.

Such a distinction from the more conventional metaphor, with its one-way process of substitution, suggests the use of the term *reversal metaphor*: a two-way process of interaction in which the two frames can be tenor and vehicle at once denying the existence of the other frame; a denial which is temporary and, as such, ephemeral<sup>210</sup>. Erickson sees metaphor as “an operation of referential augmentation, the superimposition of a distinct secondary object, situation, or context foreign to the primary subject”<sup>211</sup>.

Metaphor is a strategy of individual and collective *substantialisation of places*, forgotten histories and identities (displacement) of the ‘marginal’ past – not exclusively the one located in Sicily – in an intertextual relationship with the present,

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<sup>208</sup> I. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* qtd in M. Black, *art. cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>209</sup> *Idem*, pp. 285-91.

<sup>210</sup> Erickson goes further in his analyses of Pound’s poem by pointing out the flickering spectral nature of both metaphor and its meaning. A flickering nature, already hidden and/or present in the term “apparition” used in the poem, caused by the interchangeability of the two frames of reference. As a duck-rabbit game, the reader focuses only on one frame at a time. Every time one frame is hidden while the other becomes the focus of the metaphor, one of the two is displaced. The flickering nature of metaphor will be useful for our analyses of displacement (cf. D. Erickson, *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 14-15).

<sup>211</sup> *Idem*, p. 9.

like the postmodern architecture revolution at the 1980 Biennale in Venice and can be summed up in the famous motto “the presence of the past”<sup>212</sup>. The same etymological roots of the word suggests the (metaphorical) idea of a ‘bridge’ between different worlds: *meta* “across” *phorein* “to carry” (*OED*). In this sense metaphor has for both Sicilian-Australian writers a heuristic function. A form of “wandering”<sup>213</sup>, as Nelly Dean accuses Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, metaphor cannot be limited to the “restrictive linguistic structures of meaning”<sup>214</sup>. And, though the reader is encouraged to give a fully satisfying interpretation, this would never be definitive. There is always a leftover.

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<sup>212</sup> C. Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?*, New York, Academy, 1989, p. 41 qtd in G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>213</sup> E. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, New York, Norton, [1847] 1972, p. 105 qtd in G.E. Haggerty, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>214</sup> G.E. Haggerty, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

## Spatial and temporal representations of *the other*

The plates included in this section intend to show how Sicilian identity is narrated spatially within Italy and abroad, and temporally also in connection with other marginalised groups.

**PLATES 1-3** picture Southern Italians in romantic exotic terms as a to understand uncultured and menacing others. Besides, art (“*A painting has now become the necessary ornament of our drawing rooms...*”) becomes a strategy to legitimise a self-definition of the ‘us’ as superior, with its obvious implications for the others, since they are capable of appreciating art. Such a division was both socially and geographically marked. The picturesque representation of the South was also a strategy to control and exorcise the menacing reality of poverty characterising part of the country and thus representing the abject ‘within’. A way of controlling the *unhomeliness* of the home.

Such representation is found in Great Britain, America and Australia too – just to name a few countries where Italians emigrated. **PLATES 4-7** show the way Italian street musicians and members of the lower class were perceived: as louse among ‘lice’ (read Italians) in John Leech’s sketch, as Mafiosi and black people for cheap labour. **PLATE 5** also proves the link between the social inferiority of street musicians, the Italian workers in the tropical and the menace they represented.

Finally, **PLATES 8-18** narrate the construction of *the other* during colonialism (Plate 8), assimilation to a White Australia which meant the expulsion of the non-white grotesque immigrants (Plates 9-11), and multiculturalism. Aborigines and Italians – the latter negatively perceived especially when coming from South Italy or when a ‘southern’ generalisation took place (Plate 12-13) – were seen, at the same time, as menacing and necessary (see again Plate 9) to the definition of a ‘one’ national identity. This means that not much had changed when the assimilationist policies of the fifties, well expressed by O’Grady’s novel (Plates 14-15), gave way to multiculturalism. The latter, on the one hand, has been seen by its detractors as a form of ‘reverse racism’ (Plate 16) and, on the other hand, partly as a social and psychological displacement of aggressiveness (Plate 17) still keeping alive the distinction between Sicilians and Italians (Plate 18).

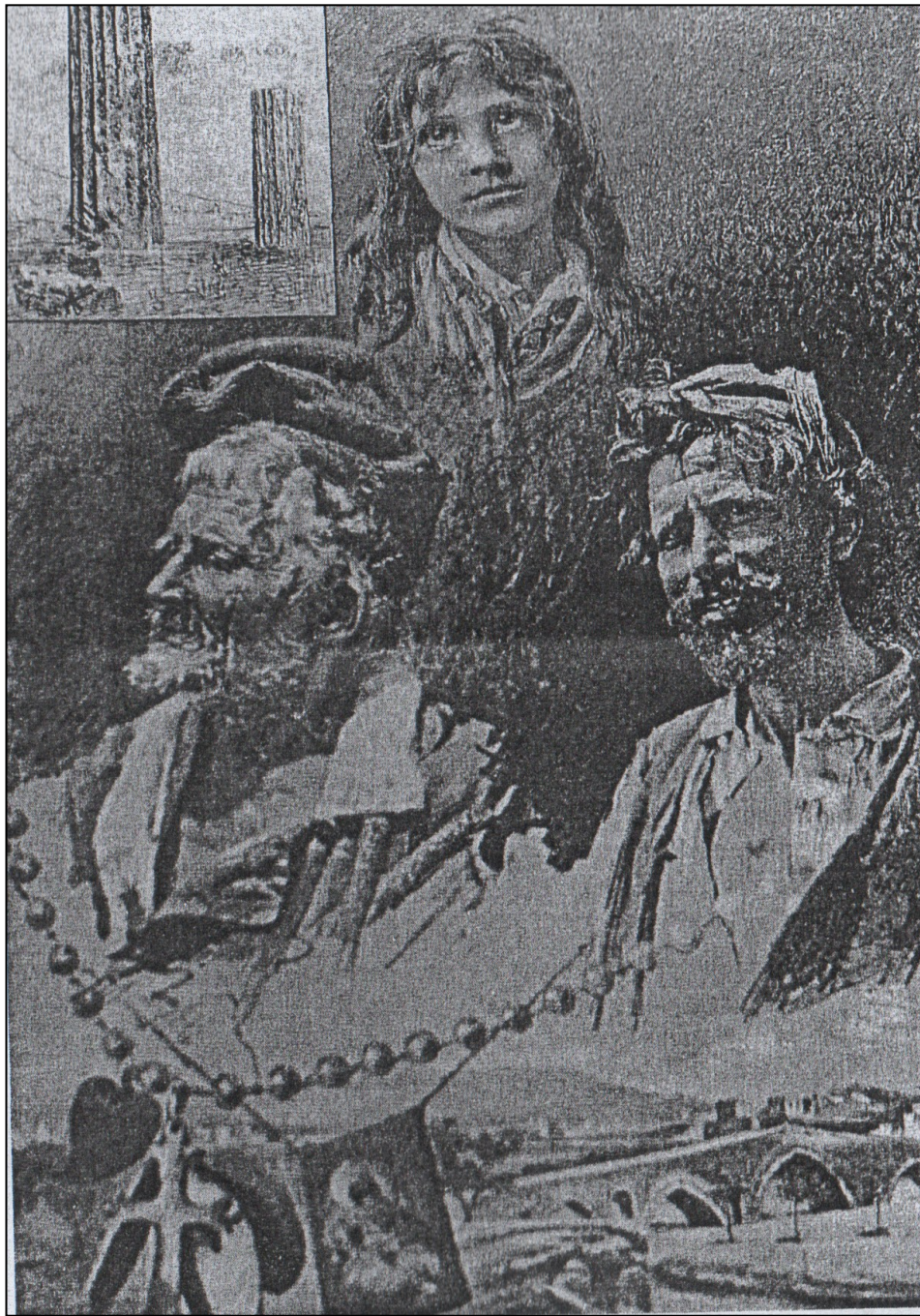


PLATE 1

*“A painting has now become the necessary ornament of our drawing rooms...”*

Vincenzo Caprile

*Illustrazione Italiana*, 29 November 1885, 355.



**PLATE 2**

*Tipi Siciliani* (Sicilian Types)  
Alfonso Muzii  
*Illustrazione Italiana*, 11 October 1885, 234.



**PLATE 3**

*I figli di Capri*  
*Illustrazione Italiana*, 16 July 1882, 44.



PLATE 4

John Leech, *Sketch from a Study Window*  
*Punch*, 45, 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1863, p. 53.



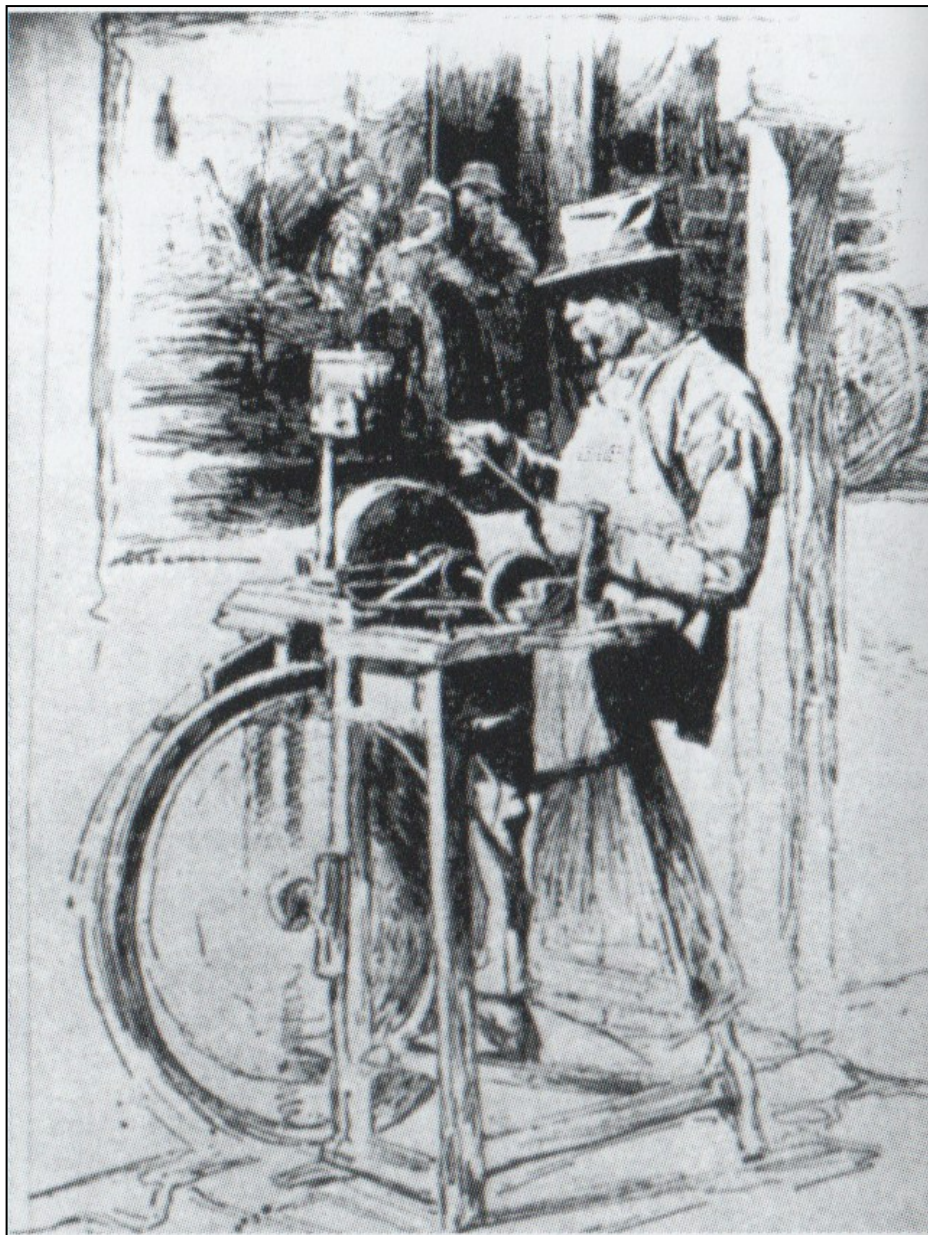
PLATE 5

[*Cheap Labor*]

*Bulletin*, 22 August 1891.

Caption reads: "Fears about the initial introduction of indentured Italian labour into Queensland".





**PLATE 6**

*“Sharpening the stiletto of a new Orleans assassin.”*

*Illustrated American, 4 April 1891.*

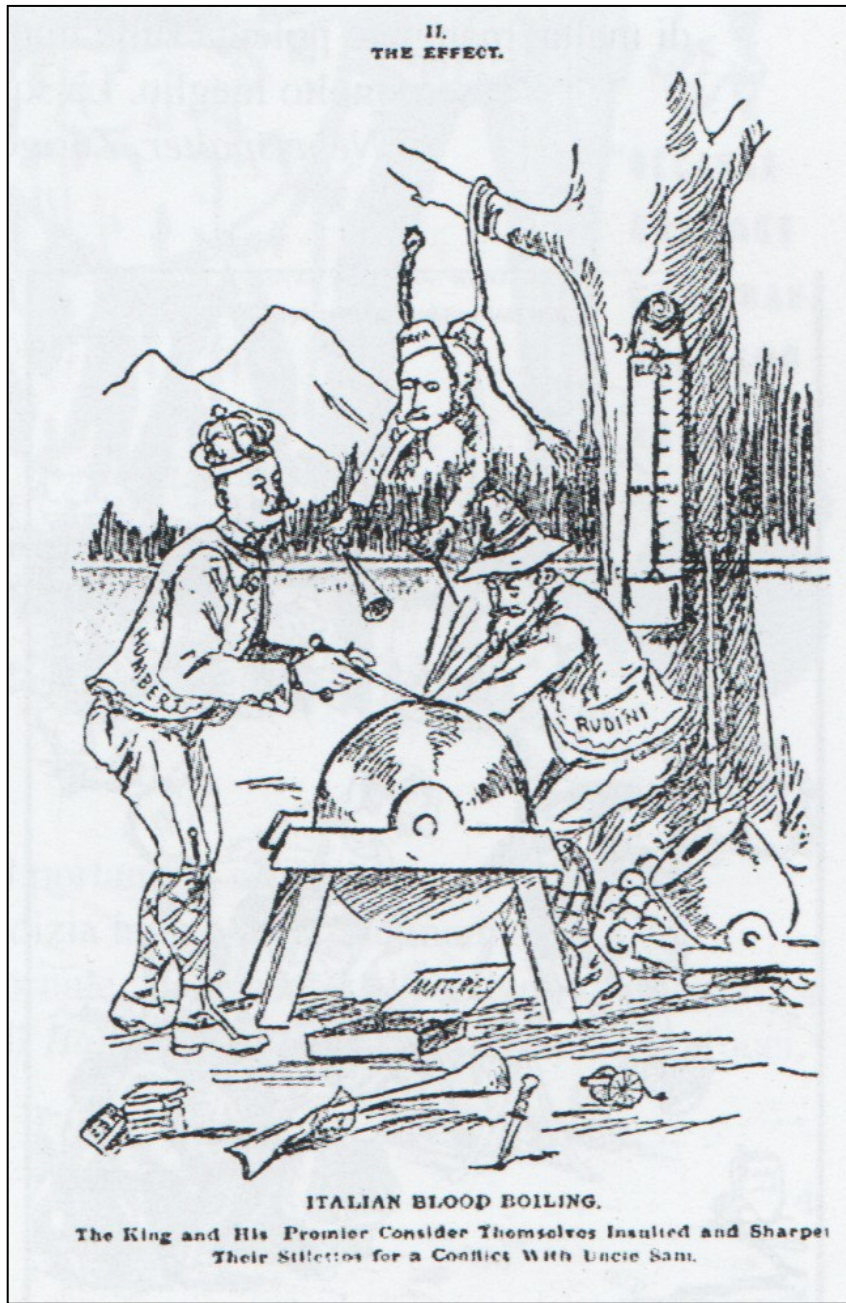


PLATE 7

*Italians Blood Boiling*  
*Philadelphia Enquirer*, 12 April 1891.



**PLATE 8**

***First Interview with the Native Women at Port Jackson in New South Wales***

William Bradley, Watercolour, 1788

Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.



PLATE 9

*The Chinese Pest*  
*Melbourne Punch*, May 10, 1888.

Caption reads:

Victoria: 'Girls, there's but one way to rid ourselves of this unsightly thing, and that's by all taking hold together. A strong unanimous heave with this lever and the job is done.'

Chorus: 'Yes and if John should be the means of bringing us together, we'd have something to thank the Chinese question for after all' (qtd in K. Goldsworthy, *art. cit.*, p. 218).



PLATE 10

*White Australia vs the 'Perils'*  
*The Worker, Brisbane, 1901.*



**PLATE 11**

***Australia's Lie for Britain's Sake***

Caption reads: "Australia's Lie for Britain's Sake.' 'Tisn't the colour I object to:  
That's nothing. It's the spellin'".



PLATE 12

[Untitled], Lance Bressow  
*Truth*, Brisbane

Cartoon published in the Brisbane newspaper *Truth* with the aim of dehumanise immigrants. The Italo-Australian newspaper reprinted it playing on the word 'truth' to dismiss all accusations made by the newspaper and trade unions against Italian immigrants<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> (Cf. G. Cresciani, *Emigranti o compari. Vita italiana in Australia/Migrants or Mates. Italian life in Australia*, Sydney, Knockmore Enterprises, 2000 [1988], p. 165)



### PLATE 13

#### [*The Knife*]

“It’s a dago!... He’s got a knife.”

“Look out! He’ll use it again.”

All their secret images of evil seemed to flow together and take a single shape.

“A knife!... He’s got a knife”<sup>2</sup>.

‘When you get into a blue do yer pull knives? Knives all bloody over ‘em. Pull knives. Australians don’t pull knives, do we?’

[...]

He stood up and moved towards the Meridionali. I called a warning. The man nearest jumped up. I saw a knife in his hand. [...] The ‘short sword of the Romans’ has never appealed to me<sup>3</sup>.

‘[...] they got a temper and they’ll come at you from behind cause they’re cowards and every single one of em’s hidden some sorta knife. You gotta look out for yourself when you go up to the cloudland Ballroom these days’ (*TV*, 26).

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<sup>2</sup> J. Waten, “The Knife”, 1957, <http://www.orgsun.com/books/fiction/stories/other-stories/the-knife-judah-waten.php> (first published in *Meanjin*, 6 (2) Winter 1957, pp. 101-07).

<sup>3</sup> J. O’Grady, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 55.



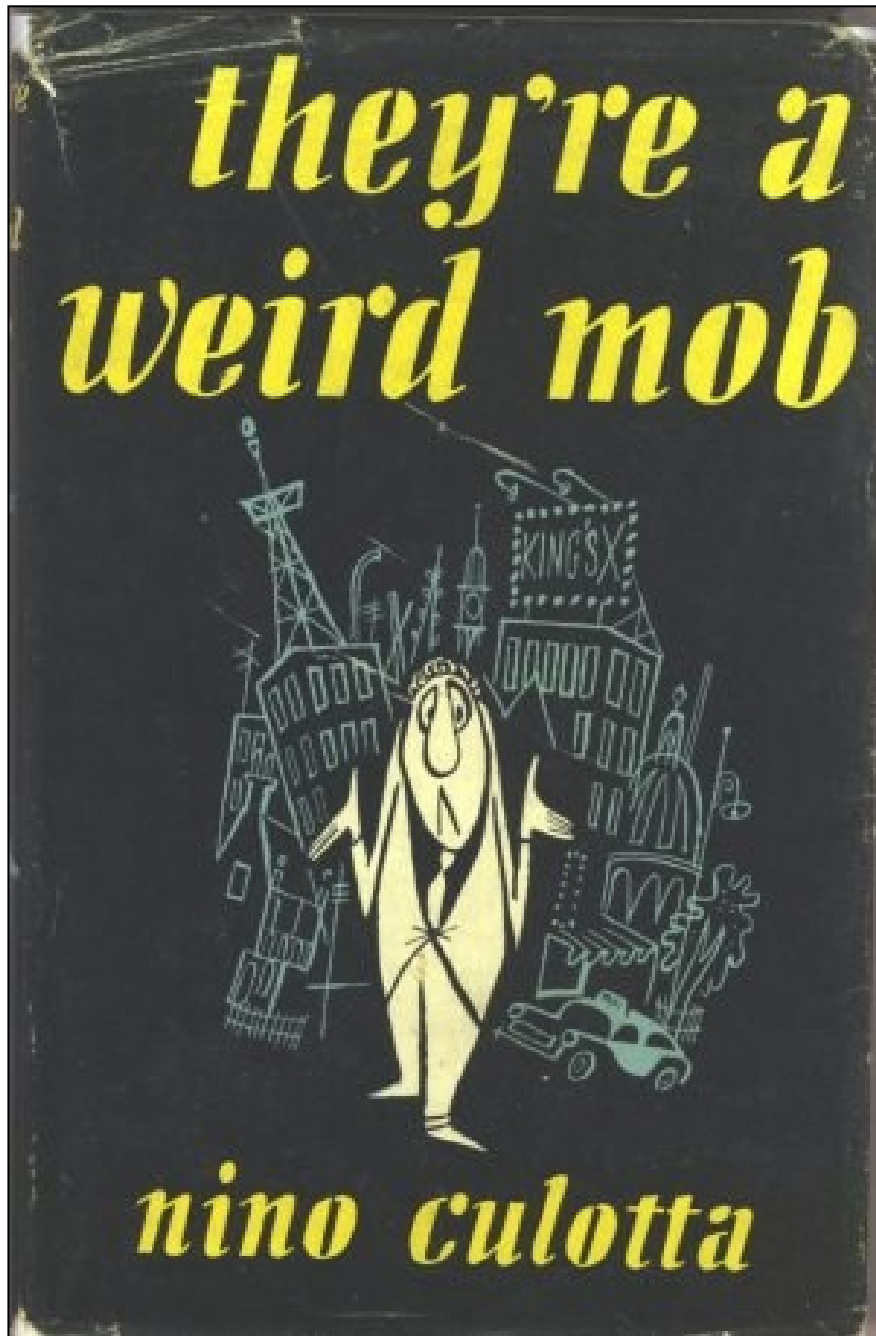
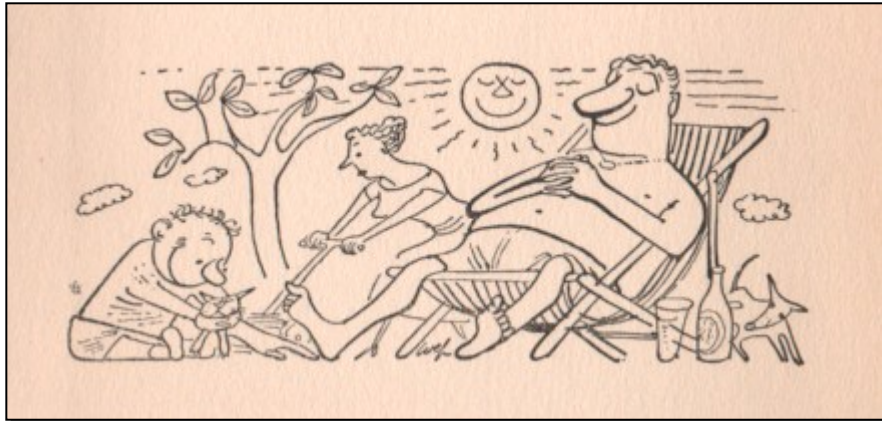


PLATE 14

[*Nino Culotta*]

'Wep', 1957

Cover of O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* (1958).



**PLATE 15**

*[Nino Culotta sunbathing in his backyard]*  
‘Wep’, 1957

J. O’Grady, *They’re a Weird Mob*, cit., p. 205.



**PLATE 16**

*Helen Darville as Helen Demidenko* [in ethnic dresses]  
Robert Pearce, Photograph.

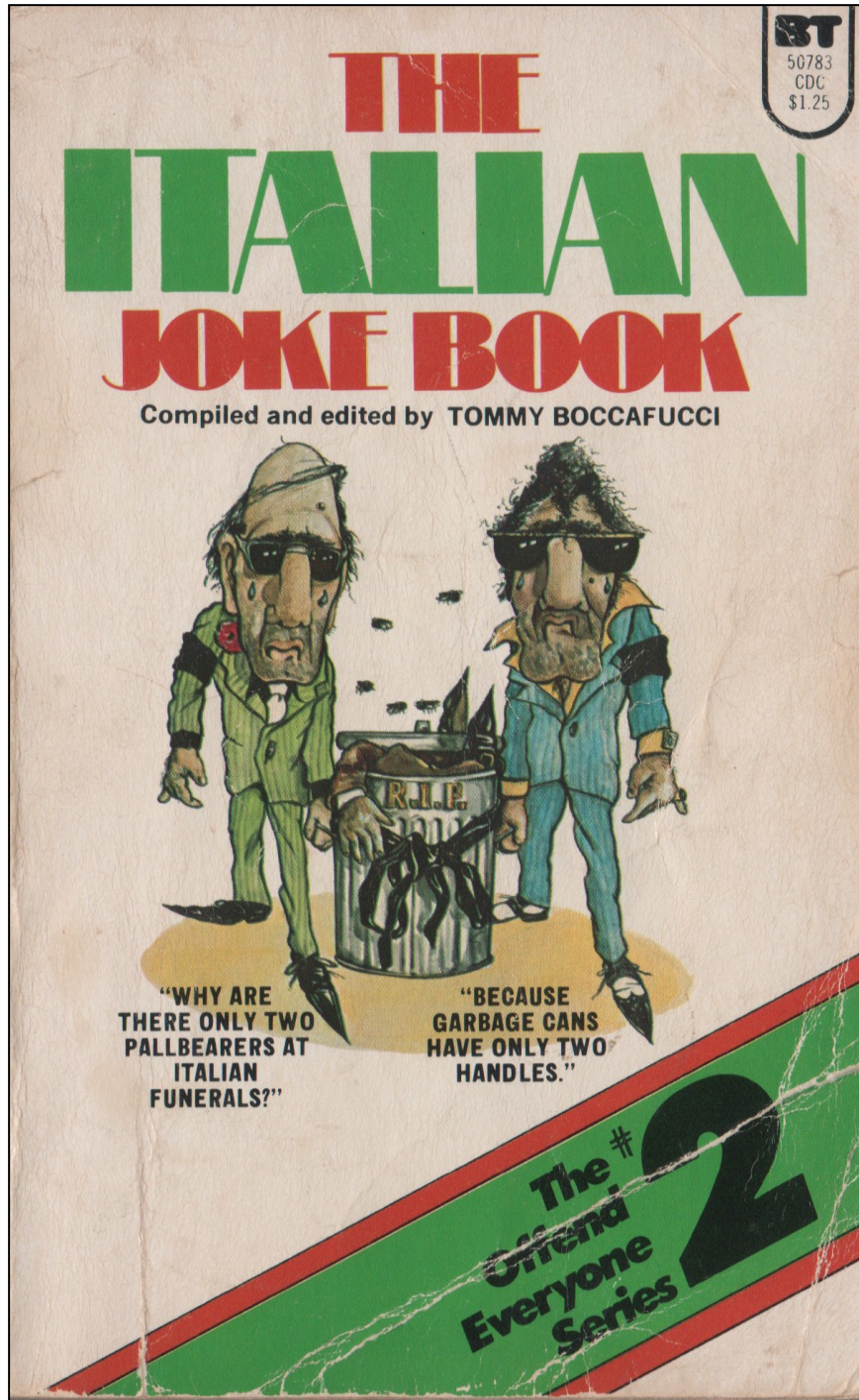


PLATE 17

Cover for *The Italian Joke Book* (1975)

Caption reads: "Why are there only two pallbearers at Italian Funerals?" "Because garbage cans have only two handles."



**PLATE 18**

**[*Jokes about Sicilians*]**

Caption reads: "What do you get when you cross an Italian with a gorilla? A Sicilian".



## *The sublime experience of living 'on leased land'*

'I'd like to show to the younger generation what you can do if you just stick to your culture and be proud of your culture and where it can take you'<sup>1</sup>.

It's your home, the birthplace of your children and yet you feel a foreigner, as if you lived *on leased land*, a land you can never own, can't entirely trust and maybe fear to know too intimately. He worked in the bush, cleared thousands of acres, thought nothing of it (*TS*, 297).

The metaphorical Gothic *topoi* – shadows, ghosts, silences, darkness, doubles, dreams, mist, ceremonial rituals and the Australian outback – that inhabit, haunt and shroud Antonio Casella's *The Sensualist*<sup>2</sup> at once express Nick's identitarian liminality and, through the transgression of social, aesthetic and thematic taboos, unsettle 'Whiteness', the transcendental signifier. The tension expressed in what can be considered a paraxial text, is experienced by the reader not only through a semantic Bakhtinian dialogism but also a Kristevan structural intertextuality of genres, styles and influences, both functioning as semiotics thresholds to the (unconscious) 'experience' of unattainable *jouissance* or hybridity.

### **3.1 The comic/Gothic rituals of 'polyphonic' identities**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the polyphonic construction of identity

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<sup>1</sup> Billy Doolan in L. Whitehead, "Italian Through Australian Eyes", <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2011/s3153483.htm#> Billy Doolan is a Melbourne-based Aboriginal artist who visited Sicily and listened to the tales and history of the people living on the island. He immediately grasped the similarities between his Aboriginal culture, history and mythology and the one he was discovering in the other part of the globe. These stories resulted in eight paintings depicting Sicilian culture and history using traditional Aboriginal techniques: Catacombs of Siracusa, Caves of Pantalica Dreaming, Lake Pergusa Dreaming, Mt Etna Dreaming, Papyrus Dreaming, Pettirossi Dreaming, Salt Pans Dreaming and Sword Fish of the Dreaming. Maria Sanciollo-Bell is a Sicilian art critic interested in his work which has toured Italy's major museums in 2011. Billy Doolan is due to tour Sicily in 2012 with his exhibition called "Between Sea and Sky: Songs of a Voyage".

<sup>2</sup> See *Appendix A* for Casella's biography and *Appendix C – Chart A* for the Character Chart of *The Sensualist*.

foregrounds ethnic, class and cultural divisions within society. Consequently, words, utterances and, one could add, narrative episodes are two-sided; they respond to pre-existent patterns of meaning. Such a dialogic feature in defining identity is reinforced by a set of oppositions between narrators and characters that pull identity into different directions. In *The Sensualist*, this is evident from its ‘circular narrative structure’ – Steve’s first-person narration opposed to the third-person narrator showing Nick’s and Joyce’s points of view<sup>3</sup>; Nick’s character (the present) and Nicola’s haunting presence both in dreams and as a prosopopeic figure of whom only the voice is heard (the past); Flo’s and Steve’s different superior stance towards immigrants.

However, this section will focus on identities as constructed through performances or rituals such as the chorus at Joyce’s birthday party, revealing the rituality of ideology, and the Eucharistic ritual divided into transubstantiation and communion, respectively parodied through the stuffing of the pig and the subsequent consumption.

The first ritual during Joyce’s fiftieth birthday party held at Nick’s place shows Nick’s sister in law, Florence, and her partner, Harold, both university lecturers, acting as a Greek chorus commenting on what is ‘performed on the stage’ from an Anglo-Celtic standpoint:

Harold, sober and in a pose of ascetic contemplation sits next to her at the six-chair patio setting. Four empty chairs look conspicuous and further accentuate the general tone of posed dejection. The conversation, too, might be out of a sixties drama. [...]

FLO’: That’s it. This is the last time I come to one of that man’s bashes. ... Look at them down there, the garden is full of beer-gutted slobs and yobbos of both sexes.

HAROLD: (superior, condescending, posing to the point of embarrassment) I don’t know. I look on them with a certain envy. There is a kind of charm in their naivety, don’t you think? I mean their sins (call it baseness if you will) are so primary, elemental: food, sex, that sort of thing. We are the really debauched people. That’s what education does, it changes the nature

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<sup>3</sup> In adopting a multiple voice narrative, Casella was influenced by William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* “where the different voices intermingle, contrast, reprise and harmonise much the same as a tightly constructed piece of music” (A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*, cit., p. 130).

of your sins. Give a man ...

FLO': Or woman!

HAROLD: Or woman ... the cross of self-analysis, through education, and you've deprived him of one of the greatest luxuries of survival: ignorance of guilt. Unable to escape guilt, that man in turn...

FLO': Or woman! We do exist you know!

HAROLD: Right, 'or woman', will tend to isolate himself...(anticipating her) or herself (by gad, Flo', if you women persist along these lines, you're going to make communication impossible, you know!)...anyhow, where was I? or yeah, guilt plus isolation, essential ingredients for debauchery. It's like a mathematical formula really.

[...]

FLO': (with an expression suggesting she has had enough) Oh I'm so bored!

HAROLD: You could have brought along some of your university crowd. Nick wouldn't mind; as you say, the more the merrier with him.

FLO': Are you joking! Bring my friends to this place! They'd never speak to me again! (notices Joyce, eager to change the subject, though not her tone) Oh, do have a drink, Harry and wipe that superior smirk off your face. It's positively unnerving. (TS, 244-45)

Harold's seemingly less racist beliefs are merely ironic. At first sight, Florence's attitude could be defined assimilationist, more direct in a *non-interpellation* or *abnegation* attitude, whereas Harold's statements are more in line with *mis-interpellation*<sup>4</sup>. In fact, while Florence uses denigrating terms such as "slobs" and "yobbos" meaning lazy, untidy, rude, violent people and "savage" (TS, 258) to directly refer to Sicilians, Harold defines migrants' sins, such as their appetite for food and sex, as primary and elemental whereas the sins of the educated Anglo-Celts are acquired and thus a form of debauchery. Yet, Anglo-Celts appear far from being

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<sup>4</sup> By drawing on the French philosopher L. Althusser, Hage further distinguishes on a generational basis between three forms of racism against immigrants. For Hage, the first two forms (interpellation and abnegation) are suffered from first generation migrants who were/are either non-interpellated or negatively interpellated as 'inferiors'. The first means "to find no space for yourself in the ideological plane which constitutes people as subjects of a particular nation" while the second is "a form of recognition, but a recognition of someone as less than human" (G. Hage, "Multiculturalism Today", cit., pp. 503-04). Hage goes further to say that only the first produces invisibility. Yet, if racist inferiorisation produces visibility it still creates an invisible subject when it comes to take part in the national project. As for the third form of racist attitude, related to successive migrant generations, Hage explains 'mis-interpellation' through the concrete example of a society waving to immigrants only to turn its back on them as soon as they reply to the calling (*Idem*, p. 504). However, Hage's generational distinction fails when, for example, even assimilated first generation subjects suffer a sort



more sinful than migrants since the awareness of guilt makes the former ‘moral’ subjects in line with P. Hanson’s beliefs. Working as stereotypes, metonymically essentialising identity and metaphorically operating as “‘truer’ than the objective truth itself”<sup>5</sup>, *the other* is trapped in an inferior fixity depicting migrants as ignorant, primitive and savage. This suggests at least three elements. First, a ‘superiority’ hidden behind a seemingly neutral discourse grounded on cultural differences which results in the migrant subject occupying the space of the ‘barbaric terrain’ in the ‘I-other’ opposition mentioned in this study. Secondly, Harold’s representation of Nick as an ‘absence’ paradoxically hides, besides what has been said in the previous chapter in relation to Caliban, the horror of miscegenation with which multicultural society is filled, a fear of hybridity

which might completely transform the nature of the colonial relationship and consequently Caliban’s power over discourse, and thus over the island itself<sup>6</sup>.

This fear associated with Sicilians becomes more obvious when they are degraded to the same moral and social level of Aborigines – as if for the latter such associations could be related to nature. Furthermore, the prohibition of miscegenation undermines any form of hospitality. Thirdly, the automatism of the stereotype, which equates identity with destiny, is what renders comic the stereotyped ‘childish’ subject<sup>7</sup> with all its implications seen in the previous chapter.

The shift of racism from ‘race’ to ‘culture’, discussed in the first chapter, is well conveyed by the ‘olive’ metaphor. ‘Olives’ both recall the dark colour of skin and stand for a cultural metaphor. In fact, they have been used as a denigrating metaphor for migrants’ skin colour, especially Southern European ones, since the 1901 *Emigration Exclusion Act* – a racial-based policy with the Dictation Test as its practical means. Its use is well illustrated in a 1902 cartoon with a caption saying “‘Australia’s Lie for Britain’s Sake’ ‘Tisn’t the colour I object to: That’s nothing. It’s

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of colonial mimicry: “the same but not quite” or mis-interpellation.

<sup>5</sup> D. Hook, *art. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> B. Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice*, *cit.*, p. 23.

the spellin”<sup>8</sup> (see PLATE 11). Both Florence and Harold, with their comments on what is perceived as the “continuing performance on the balcony” which “is difficult to escape” (*TS*, 256), reiterate such a stereotype essentialising and proving the ‘truth’ of their assumptions – laziness, sinfulness and cultural inferiority:

HAROLD: Here, have an olive, darling.

FLO’: Bloody olives; I’ve been trying for years to develop a taste for them. Do you think I can? And I can’t even pretend that I do.

HAROLD: Now that is drastic in your case, Flo’. I thought you could pretend anything you wanted to, dear.

FLO’: (taking no notice) I guarantee that half of those who profess to love olives do it out of pretentiousness.

HAROLD: Well, it’s a social handicap not to have acquired the taste, that sacrifice needs be made. Fortunately, however, my love is genuine, especially for the black ones.

FLO’: (giving him a loathing look) You’re despicable, Harry. I dare you to go down there and give it to the Sicilian savage. Go on. If you do that I’ll admire you forever. Surely that’s got to be worth something. (*TS*, 257-58)

Furthermore, while Florence accuses of pretentiousness those who love olives, not to love them is interpreted by Harold as a “social handicap”. Actually, his genuine love for olives, “especially for the *black* ones” (*TS*, 257; emphasis added), is ironic. It is a metaphorical displacement of hostility, the ‘olive’ is an *exotic* element, the symbol of multiculturalism assimilating and metaphorically ‘eating’ the other – Gunew speaks of cannibalism and Hage of domestication – without fully and truly acknowledging *the other’s* culture<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 43, 46.

<sup>8</sup> H. Andreoni, *art. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Nick’s assimilation is posited both from the Australianisation of his name and the very start of *The Sensualist*. As for the first, it is “one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language” (S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., p. 126), “a shift from one community to another” (A.D. Ritivoi, *op. cit.*, p. 156). Besides, even Oreste Ancelli, in his Broken English, points out Nick’s assimilation by defining him as a “kangaroo, not interested in de great stories, only to make monee” (*TS*, 41). Its dialogic opposition with the use of Nicola by his Uncle Basil and the ‘voice’ intruding into the text, which both link him to the past, reinforce this interpretation. As for the second, his path in Australia is described as one from a “hungry young savage into a *top dog*” (*TS*, 6; emphasis added), an Australian slang expression referring to someone who has achieved a position of authority.

However, drawing on Bhabha's theory of *iterability*<sup>10</sup>, the 'olive' is a 'statement' uncontrollable by the hegemonic power because its reappearance in different contexts – here the one created by Casella – leads to 'the difference of the same'. The repetition of stereotypes, though Nick is already assimilated, betrays the fleeting narcissistic desire and political paranoia of the hegemonic discourse. Besides, since assimilation can be analysed as a form of colonial mimicry – “almost the same, but not quite”<sup>11</sup> – the hegemonic power always creates new monstrous 'migrant' stereotypes with the aim of perpetrating an 'ambivalence' fundamental to maintaining its own power. It is such an ambivalence that the text highlights through Harold's words and it is of its 'slippages' that Casella takes advantage by ironically writing back to a society and its policies of assimilation and multiculturalism – cultural metaphors for a land of false equality and integration. In a nutshell, the hegemonic power is haunted by its own discourse within which the desired certainty of unity, harmony and cohesion is dissolved. The ambivalence of the hegemonic power is 'within' the text, not revealed through Nick's awareness and, thus, more subtle and indirect.

The latter unhinging process characterises Nick's assimilation. In fact, while on the one hand, Nick acts as a real 'puppet', on the other hand, it foregrounds mimicry/mockery. Harold's interpretation of Sicilian's naivety leads to perceive Nick as a fool, someone who, deprived of the desire for the 'knowledge' that led to the expulsion from Eden, would not question the *status quo*<sup>12</sup>. Conversely, in a mimic dimension, the fool acts as someone who, at once, mimics the 'original' and through his/her own discrepancies and contradictions laughs at the same symbolised authority and narcissistic virility defining the true nature of a male assimilationist policy. This proves that the simple fact of 'mimicking' the other, even when the

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<sup>10</sup> Bhabha's reading method, as *iterability* can be considered, draws on J. Derrida's notion of 'iteration' and M. Foucault's idea of 'the statement'. The former is the necessity to repeat any idea in order for this to produce meaning; the latter refers to Foucault's notion of discourse: a network of statements that lies behind the ideas taken for granted. Bhabha's reading method means that though all statements have to be repeated this always happens in different contexts. The reader's role is to analyse all specific 'contexts' since they change the meaning of any statement (cf. D. Huddart, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18). In this scheme, the “difference of the same” is what takes place in the “slippage[s]” of the dominant power that the latter cannot control (H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 122).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

subject is unaware of it, might work as ‘mockery’. In this way it could be argued that assimilation is performativity. When seen as mimicry, a form of transvestism, it blurs the boundaries between the original and the copy. The ‘no-thing’ of the other is one self’s nothingness, something beyond language and cognition as it is framed in real life and which is ‘communicable’ only through laughter, irony and parody. Thus, laughter is at once a subversive and a self-defence strategy.

This is confirmed throughout the novel and emblematically in the description of the Gothic/comic pig-stuffing ritual whose parody of the sacred stands for that of authority too as pointedly demonstrated by the following quotation which, although extensive, is worth quoting in its entirety:

*These are the revelations of the cellar.*

The cellar, like no place in the house, like nothing else in his appearance and actions, turns Nick Amedeo inside out. The assorted jars now sitting on the bench are kept in a special tabernacle of a pantry next to the floor-to-ceiling shelf which houses his other collections: the wine bottles, home-made tomato sauce and pickle jars. From the ceiling hang garlands of garlic and onions and dried chillies. All of them symbols of that one obsession around which, through which, and by which Nick Amedeo’s life moves.

To wit, dominating the ceiling area is a pumpkin: round at the base, and extending in a proboscis-like shape that more than any other points to the man’s need to surround himself with shapes of power and aggression.

And if that were not enough, winter reveals even more unsubtle images in the form of strands of pork sausages (size and shape unmistakable) hanging from hooks off the ceiling. As ultimate proof of their purpose (if proof were needed by the most cynical, stubborn, bloody-minded of Doubting Thomases), it’s well to point out that they are not (or hardly ever) eaten by their owner or guests, rather they are left there hanging all winter (for dreaming under) until, come spring, they are duly disposed of in the rubbish bin. For now, the hooks stand there like eunuchs, waiting for winter.

*These are the icons of the cellar.*

In the concrete cool, where the air pricks the nostrils with concrete sharpness, stands Nick, smelling of time past; wide-eyed in the dark, face bathed in spice scents and oils. He stands suitably solemn, the sacrificial pig stretched out on the table in front of him.

The clean white apron, already prepared for this, goes over him like a robe and enhances his aspect. All the sins, all human connections, all thoughts are dispelled by the flesh, and images of the flesh, on hand.

He becomes – she can see it in the shine of the balcony glass door that she has been trying to mirror-polish for half an hour – not himself, not the mortal Nick Amedeo, controlled by the power of his senses, but himself the controller; the High Priest of physical gratification; the maker and dispenser of nature’s sensual gifts.

Come forward, advance a few paces, watch him prepare for the rite, watch his nostrils dilate for the flooding of frothy pungency and his fingers feel the flesh still quivering from all too recent death. There lies the host, spread out on the table, the legs (the four of them) outstretched, tendered in invocation of pleasure and gratitude; making of itself an offering to human frailty.

*This is the body of the pig.*

His hands go up. Those same hands that have laid bricks; stroked (ever so gently) his baby children’s cheeks and (ever so sensuously) the cheeks of his women’s bottoms; collected earth fruits and fruits of women with equal facility; pressed her nipples and those of molls with equal passion; those hands are now intent on rubbing brine and thick smooth olive oil into the pig’s loins with a delicate touch he applies to nothing and nobody else.

The new entrails are poised to enter the body. In go the onions, capsicums and chillies; potatoes, and eggplant; the olives, garlic and herbs...all revived by the power of his breath and tucked firmly in the recesses formerly hosts to the heart, liver, lungs.

Now for the stitching, done with the skill and the care of the expert seamstress hemming the most sumptuous of gowns.

And in time – always Time it is – behold a miracle. The sacrificial pig, butchered and hung and bled of one life, begins to resurrect into another.

Behold the pig changing colour from pure white to tallow, the trotted spread outwards in an act of prayer ... or in joy that it will serve the purpose for which it was created: to give enjoyment and nourishment. No longer is the body emptied out and the head hung down in suffering. There you’ll see a new chubbiness, a quiet peace and an expression of gratitude too that finally it has come to know its purpose. *This is the resurrection of the pig.*

When she decides, on the spur of the moment, to go and invade his inner sanctum, she is surprised to see, as he looks up from his pig, that his face has the radiance of a child’s. But then, it’s a paradox of Nick Amedeo that while he has done more than most men are able to imagine, and experienced life in its most elemental rawness, the very same man will startle you with glimpses of pure childhood. His corruption grows from roots of innocence.

‘Hey, *Bedda Mia*,’ he says. He used to do that often, address her in Sicilian, when they first started going out together, perhaps to impress her, perhaps to assert that side of himself (TS, 194-96).

The above is a postmodern parody of the first part of the ‘Eucharistic’ ritual as it is evident by the carnivalesque discontinuity between form and content<sup>13</sup> of the religious register used to discuss a less elevated issue.

The (ethnic) ritual becomes a carnival experience that, interpreted not in a strict festival sense,

celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was [...] the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed<sup>14</sup>.

Effects of ‘lowering’ are evident in the pig stuffing and sexual allusions (the phallic “icons of the cellar”: the pumpkin with a “proboscis-like shape”, the pork sausages with their “size and shape unmistakable”<sup>15</sup>), the very first description of the cellar (the jars kept in “a special tabernacle”; the ingredients as symbols of the obsession “around which, through which, and by which” his life moves) and its parody by the mock ritual expressions highlighted in italics marking the different phases of the same ritual. The emphasis on the physicality of the body inasmuch as an exaggerated attention is invested on specific parts rather than its entirety, leads to perceive the same as grotesque and carnivalesque. It is a celebration of interconnectedness: it is through ‘sensuality’, symbolised by the pig, that Nick gives

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1984, p. 10 (tr. H. Iswolsky).

<sup>15</sup> The link between fertility, sexual allusion and comedy, both with their subversive power, goes back to the God Dionysus described as having a minor god named ‘Phales’ carrying obvious associations with the word ‘phallus’. The fertility element of traditional rituals was recuperated by Cornford in his *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914), an influential work to Modernism in its search for people’s fundamental roots in an alienated world such as the one at the turn of the twentieth century (cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 27). In Postmodernism, and Casella’s novel, the rituality of comedy works to disrupt egocentric views of society.

pleasure to others. In fact, Nick is portrayed as a High Priest of physical gratification and, through the above “shapes of power and aggression”, as someone who controls others<sup>16</sup>. A power, however, that betrays the fear of being laughed at and which, as proof, is linked to the death drive, the semiotic and nostalgia. Analysing Freud’s essay on the uncanny, Royle claims that the same feeling

would appear to be indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or ‘coming back’ – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat. At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or ‘homesickness’, in other words a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive<sup>17</sup>.

Through the lenses of ‘repetition’ the uncanny feeling can be linked to the ceremonial which, in its repetition, involves a coming back of something forgotten. This would be more than sufficient to link the ceremonial to Nick’s past. However, by taking this further, it can be said that as *unhomeliness* is connected with both nostalgia and the death drive so is the ceremonial on the basis of other common aspects: ‘power’ and ‘mastery’. Royle, drawing on the ‘silent’ and uncanny connection between the pleasure and the death principles, discussed by Freud in both his *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, links the

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<sup>16</sup> As his soul-mate Steve underlines, power and aggression constitute the secret of his success: “I understand now part of the secret of Nick’s success; it is his ability to change and be changed. Great survivors are those best able to adapt to changing circumstances. Nick can do that better than anyone I know. He uses it to exert control over things and people around him. He is a marvellous monster with many heads; a chameleon forever changing his pigmentation, or conversely painting the world with his various hues. The result is a little kingdom of his own, in which everything and everyone exists for his comfort and pleasure” (*TS*, 68-69). Nick’s authority is also revealed by his sexist attitude towards his wife; in fact, he refuses to satisfy her sexual fantasies confining her only to the sphere of motherhood in a whore-Madonna opposition which comes from a peasant tradition. The latter is also testified by the promiscuous behaviour of Nick’s grandfather. Yet, Gaetano Rando’s interpretation of Nick as a *padre padrone* figure (cf. G. Rando, “The ‘Padre Padrone’ Figure in Frank Paci’s *The Italians* and Antonio Casella’s *The Sensualist*”, in J. Pivato (ed.), *F.G. Paci. Essays on His Works*, Toronto, Guernica, 2003, pp. 107-31) is in contradiction with his attitude towards his own family members. In fact, Nick does not oppose Nella’s choices though they break with traditional Sicilian conventions.

<sup>17</sup> N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 2. Although Royle speaks of ‘homesickness’ recall its distinction from ‘nostalgia’ discussed in CHAPTER TWO.

latter to “the instinct of mastery” and “the will to power”<sup>18</sup>. The ritual, entangled through silences with the death drive, mirrors what Punter calls ‘ceremonial Gothic’ and is linked to the ‘powerful’ figure of Caesar<sup>19</sup>. On a typical Nick’s Friday, introduced to the reader with extreme theatrical preciseness, Nick is described as such: “First thing, as always on the Friday, it’s the rounds of the tenants, as a reminder that Caesar’s dues are to be paid” (*TS*, 36); and as for Caesar the sun symbolises power so it does for Nick: “[Nick’s] personality dominates the moment as pervasively as the sun outside reigns over the buildings [...]” (*TS*, 69). One might take this analogy a bit further to suggest that as Caesar and Napoleon, Nick represents the narcissistic authority of a nation still colonially imposing itself on others. However, elements such as his “pig-like” features “above the square jaws the cheeks puff about the eyes” (*TS*, 33), besides connecting Nick to Jesus<sup>20</sup>, already upset his royal image of “‘the Boss’ spread-eagled” attitude (*TS*, 33) making a short paragraph semantically dialogic.

The above function of the ritual, that is the parodic unseating of the host country’s monological discourse identified with Jesus, the king and Caesar alike, is closely interconnected to the presence-absence of Nick’s Sicilian roots.

As with the Eucharistic one given by Jesus to be performed in his absence, “Do this in *remembrance* of me”, so the Gothic ceremonial accomplishes a double function: it ‘realises’ the object it celebrates to keep it, at the same time, ‘absent’ since its actual presence would negate any function and meaning of the ceremonial itself. It is both presence and absence. What is kept at bay is Nick’s Sicilian past and nostalgia. The more the latter is put at bay the more his Australian ego is sustained while, in the opposite case, ‘nostalgia’ is associated with the desire to die; the death of symbolic identities whatever is their positions on the chromatic ladder of race. In fact, Nick’s recovery of his Sicilianness, resulting in his diasporic identity, uncannily “articulates

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<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D. Punter, “Ceremonial Gothic”, in D. Punter, G. Byron (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> The triad pig-Nick-Jesus is also confirmed by the dead pig described as a corpse covered with a “white sheet” (*TS*, 190) and by Nick to whom Joyce metaphorically gives “vinegar” instead of water, like Jesus on the cross, the same day he dies. Besides, the plot unfolds in three days, from Friday to Sunday, recalling those days in which Jesus’ lives out his passion, death and resurrection; Nick’s death takes place at around three p.m.; and, Nella’s final monologue is set at Easter, seven years after Nick’s death.



those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical differences that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority”<sup>21</sup>.

The loss of his authority, and of the one it mirrors, is epitomised in the second part of the carnivalesque Eucharistic ritual – the core of the party is defined an “orgy” (*TS*, 288) by the narrator – as well as in Nick’s ‘self-destructing dance’, performed for the audience symbolised by Flo’ and Harold (*TS*, 256), which causes “embarrassment and [...] anguish” (*Ibidem*) and to which Joyce does not take part abandoning Nick to his own fate. While the crowd usually resurrect Nick, rendering him a “king once again” (*TS*, 237), since it feeds his authority as when “they fall in behind in a noisy procession and follow the pig around the pool” to “where the table is laid out with priestly white cloth” (*Ibidem*), the same crowd has Gothic-cannibalistic features. In fact, though Nick had regained his power through the “pilgrims’ [...] consummation” the narrator, by reminding his facial pig-like features, suggests a cannibalistic reading of the pilgrims’ eating of the sacrificial pig:

His frame dominates, larger than ever in the floodlight, surrounded by a clump of dark figures. He turns, his face sweaty and rubicund stamps the darkness; and there in the chiaroscuro of twilight he takes on the charred face of a pig.

They move in now, the vultures, pecking at the quartered body. ‘There’s something about the smell of a pig on the spit,’ says someone in a shivering voice that announces the setting of the dusk. As the sun drowns itself in the Indian Ocean, pomegranate-red like a mask in an oriental melodrama, the people’s faces are for an instant, and only for an instant, timid, reverent; tentative before the unmasking.

New images tremble in the aisles. Now they advance from the dark to the table of sacrifice. Silence and shadows festoon their insane eyes, curling down to the corners of their mouths to reveal hidden perversions (*TS*, 237-38).

Furthermore, Nick’s loss of his Prosperian authority is set out in his uncontrolled train of thought only connected by an intimate logic (see the supplementary ‘dots’<sup>22</sup>) – an incident Steve doesn’t know how to explain (cf. *TS*, 255) – so that

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<sup>21</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> Besides whatever Derridean explanation of the three dots, Kristeva’s ‘sentential rhythm’ focusing on

[t]he more he tries the less convincing he sounds, and the crowd stops listening to the words and concentrates instead on the struggle played out in the intense lines of his face.

‘It’s great to have you all here to help us celebrate. I mean to say ... your wife ... the mother of your children ... she is special ... she puts it all together.’

He smiles ingratiatingly, but it’s obvious that he’s losing control of his thoughts. Gone is his arrogant swagger. Suddenly he looks vulnerable, totally exposed. The old lion has opened his mouth too wide, to show that his teeth are decayed (*TS*, 254).

If the *Logos* ‘was made flesh’, an act performed by the priest through repetition, here its truth and judgment are shattered<sup>23</sup>.

In brief, the automatism of the stereotype is overturned by the repetitiveness of the ritual. The rituality of Nick’s party in which he is perceived as a fool, hides a disrupting element as the doll’s death-in-life in Hoffman’s “The Sandman” challenges what is seen as ‘authentic’. In line with this, the ritual Nick performs on this particular occasion has a different meaning as it is anticipated by the fact that he is carrying it out without Steve, unconsciously refusing that part of himself symbolised by his Australian friend. It represents, as for the pig/Jesus, a struggle leading to resurrection of his hidden part, Nicola. The very setting of the ‘ritual’, the cellar which is the most private place of the house, is a metaphor for the rejected part of his life. When Joyce invades his inner sanctum, which invites readers to follow and share her point of view, he addresses her with the Sicilian expression “Bedda Mia” (“my beauty”) and she relates “*that side of himself*” to both his “pure childhood” and “roots of innocence” (*TS*, 196; emphasis added).

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the ‘three dots’ is a case in point here. The rupture of the linearity of the syntactical structure, “through nonsense and laughter”, signifies an “emotion” implied by the “instinctual drive that precedes and exceeds meaning” leading to *jouissance* (J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to an Other”, cit., pp. 141-42). ‘Three dots’, non-sense and laughter characterise some of those threshold moments that see Nick remembering the past.

<sup>23</sup> The repressive nature of religion characterises some of Casella’s stories such as “The Nun of

### 3.2 Realised absences: *silences and darkness*

It is no coincidence that the architectural metaphor of the house/home that all migrants want to 'build' in the new country hosting them is built on a cellar, the past, the unconscious and that the same metaphor is extended to the text built on a subtext 'hovering over' the former through closely tied silences, darkness and the aforementioned unidentified voice. Darkness is associated more with Joyce's figure since she listens to her unconscious; a reason why she can be considered as her husband's alter ego:

They [Nella and Joyce] walk without saying a word for a while. Away from the crowds Nella is not quite so much in command. The darkness and the semi-deserted streets have silenced her. So there are some things which intimate Nella after all. [...] Silence is obviously another. [...] Not prepared to risk further, Nella races ahead, taking long, ungainly strides back to people and the lights (*TS*, 145-46).

Such an aspect is not exclusively Nella's but as Joyce clearly states, it is typical of the Amedeos (cf. *TS*, 146). Throughout the novel, darkness is seen as evocative of hidden depths of the mind, interior landscapes populated by the specters of the unconscious. For instance, when speaking openly to Nella, Joyce draws back in the shadow while Nella, afraid of the dark and silence, stands in the light. In the same vein, when Nick tries retrieving the past with the help of his uncle, the dark of the city represents his unconsciousness. The structural tension of the novel between darkness and light mirrors that of the subjects', the form expresses the content. In this scheme, darkness becomes a discursive site of ghostly omissions and emissions; it is itself ghostly and mysterious.

On the contrary, Nick is haunted by those displaced silences of a past he does not give voice to<sup>24</sup>; silences return as realised metaphors or, in other words, attempts at realising what is absent through personification or objectification, what is

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Monza" and "I'm Bored, Said Lucifer" in which anarchy and homosexuality are some of their features.  
<sup>24</sup> The link between darkness and silence, and the unconscious, is supported by the synesthetic description of silence as 'dark': "in the inner sanctum/of his darkest silence" (*TS*, 128).

untranslatable or unspeakable into another culture: “the sleepy silence around” (*TS*, 22), “pockets of uncomfortable silence” (*TS*, 73), “silence is the cruellest thing” (*TS*, 229), “silence threatens” (*TS*, 261), “the silence of the big house” (*TS*, 62), “listen to silence” (*TS*, 83), “frightened of scraping against it [quiet]” (*TS*, 174), “filling the silence” (*TS*, 180). Silences substitute, like the perceptible ghost in Morrison’s *Beloved*, what is absent: “spectres” (*TS*, 299) claiming their very existence. A ‘supplementary’ example of the link between the silences and the past is provided in this scene, which takes place just before Nick is ‘resurrected’ from his reverie by the crowd:

That silence again. It has been pitter-pattering inside his brain all day, way below those masses of images that have been crowding to the surface for deliverance.

‘You know, Uncle, I’ve been thinking, I’ve been thinking all day, strange things, fantastic things.’

‘Yes, yes, Nicola ...’

‘Things about the past ... do you ever do that?’

Uncle giggles. The folds of loose skin under his chin quiver. ‘What are you saying, Nicola, for years I have had all day for thinking, and all night for dreaming.’

‘It just hit me like that ... I thought I had forgotten it all, you know? But suddenly there it is, as if it happened today ... only I’m not sure about some of the things. I mean, did they really happen like I remember or am I just imagining? I was just a kid then. You ought to be able to tell me, Uncle. We haven’t talked about it in years.’

[...]

‘It’s not as if I can check with anyone else. It’s just occurred to me ... quite weird really ... there is no one to talk to ... apart from you, I mean (*TS*, 235; see also 255).

Of course, as mentioned, silence and darkness are in relation to death and the semiotic. The death drive is, drawing on Sarah Kofman, an identification with the forbidden mother and at the same time a menace<sup>25</sup> for, Freud’s argues elsewhere, the mother is the place of birth and of non-birth, a place of life and death, of end and

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 87.

beginning as Nick will ‘experience’ in the ‘estuary’ – see next section. This interpretation is supported by the connection between femininity, death and silence pervading *The Sensualist*<sup>26</sup>. Elizabeth Bronfen underlines that in Western culture women and death are “privileged tropes for the enigmatic and for alterity”<sup>27</sup>. The feminine is ‘alterity’, a word associated with a postmodern decentring perspective: “in place of the centre, but not in its place, there is alterity, otherness, a multiplicity and dispersal of centres, origins, presences”<sup>28</sup>. By extension, the same text does not adjust to social cohesion (assimilation) by virtue of a sacrifice, such as rejecting one’s ethnic past, but it replaces the lost object through realised metaphors<sup>29</sup> or supplementary silences and darkness.

In this *light*, silence/darkness are uncannily related to sound/light. Behind Nick’s ‘listening’ to the haunting and enlightening sounds – the uncanny is what brings understanding: from ignorance to light<sup>30</sup> – what ‘comes’ from the past (both the Cimarra Mountain and the bush – see SECTION FIVE and SIX of this chapter) is connected to light. The silence of the unconscious, but not its silencing, is not opposite to its very emergence in the light. In this dimension works the voice, a presence existing only as language and struggling to be heard against the noises of a busy life.

### 3.3 “On the sharp edge of ... [metaphor]”

Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia bears similarities with Freud’s notions of melancholia and mourning, respectively. Despite the fact that even restorative nostalgia can be perceived as ‘critical’, the difference between the two can be summarised in the presence or absence of Freud’s ‘working through’.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, cit., p. 185. Kristeva’s quotation of Freud’s ‘joke’, “Love is homesickness”, meaning the return to the locus of the proto-subject, reinforces the link between the semiotic and Lacan’s the Real since death and the feminine are closely tied together (*Ibidem*). It is interesting to note that even Seshadri-Crooks, with relation to the Real, provides the same joke as an explanatory example (cf. K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 84).

<sup>27</sup> E. Bronfen, “The Death Drive (Freud)”, qtd in N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 87.

<sup>28</sup> A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, “From One Identity to an Other”, cit., p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. M.M. Tatar, “The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny”, *Comparative Literature*, 33 (2) Spring 1981, pp. 167-82.

While the shadowy and sad character of Oreste Ancelli, for whom the past is always better, is an example of restorative nostalgia characterised by an absence of ‘working through’, Nick’s nostalgia is not the exact opposite. His nostalgia, consequential to the uncanny, is neither reflective nor restorative but an ‘abnormal working through’: a state between mourning and melancholia resulting from an ‘apparently’ successful mourning process. This entails that the self becomes ghosted by images of projection of innermost anxieties; of uncanny metonymical and metaphorical shapes such as shadows and ghosts, respectively<sup>31</sup>:

A feeling of gladness and wonder buoys him for the second time this morning. He can spot it in the heat that wavers mirage-like off the asphalt. There is something there, something ... there it is near the last olive tree, a shadow rising towards the foliage, stretching to reach it like breeched pants.

For a moment he senses some connection between the dog and the shadow, but when he looks up again to confirm its shape, it’s gone. (*TS*, 41-42)

The deserted road floats like a noon ghost as the car advances, devouring it between the wilting hedges.

It’s only when he reaches the inner city, past the Mt Lawley golf course, that he meets the first pedestrian [...].The curious thing is that the man’s dark trousers appear to be floating on their own just ahead of him. (*TS*, 76)

In the two above examples, Nick interprets shadows and ghosts simply not as supernatural phenomena: the shadow of a passing car and the heat haze rising from the ground, respectively. Yet, these Gothic elements cannot be easily dismissed following a Todorovean interpretation of the ‘fantastic’ since the latter cannot be interchanged with the uncanny, though they may be found in the same piece of work. Although by the end of the novel the reader may accept Nick’s solution to what might be considered an ‘intellectual uncertainty’ – agreeing with a psychological

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<sup>31</sup> The metaphorical projection of ghosts and shadows operate like Freud’s dream-work based upon condensation (metaphor) and displacement (metonymy). The manifestation of the unconscious is re-shaped so to protect the sleeper from ‘awakening’ because of the libidinal desires transgressing taboos. In the same way, these metaphors transgress the ‘taboo’ of incest or, to put it another way, the desire to return to a semiotic ‘space’: the mother’s womb.

explanation more than a supernatural one<sup>32</sup> – the uncanny and unsettling effect of Nick’s past does not vanish at the same time as intellectual certainty is established<sup>33</sup>. These spectral aspects, supplementing reality, unveil an absence, an uncanny deficiency in the present which has implications that last longer than any ‘intellectual uncertainty’. Likewise, the box in “An Olive Branch for Sante” reveals to Ira-Jane, who thinks that good memories of the past just lead to a “wasting disease called nostalgia”, a past in need of being rediscovered for which reason she sets off for Sicily:

Sometimes she woke up and thought she heard Nonnu’s steps shuffling into her tidy, manageable, busy present. But when she looked up into his face, she couldn’t tell whether the smile on the weatherworn face, was friendly, amused or mocking. Secrets and confusion can devour you slowly. So it was time to act, to connect again with those early years, to reassure

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<sup>32</sup> This is in line with the idea of an external ‘realisation’ of his absent past as testified by the dog-shadows-past connection both in the above quotations and in his three dreams, analysed in this section.

<sup>33</sup> In his essay on *das unheimlich* the Viennese psychologist claims that the uncanny can occur in both ‘real life’ and in ‘fiction’. For Freud the latter is possible under two conditions: first, events must occur in everyday reality which is suddenly ruptured by strange elements; secondly, the reader is kept in the dark about the nature of the latter estranging elements. Both conditions are at once satisfied in *The Sensualist* and are shared by the fantastic as well on both the verbal (the creation of ‘doubt’ in the reader) and syntactic levels (suspense in the plot through spatial and temporal relations). Furthermore, for Todorov a text can be considered as ‘fantastic’ if, though not mandatory, the doubt is expressed by a character and if interpretations, of the fantastic elements present in the text, as “pure representation” or “pure figurativity” are rejected. Even these conditions are satisfied by the novel under examination (cf. P. Borghart, C. Madelein, “The Return of the Key: The Uncanny in the Fantastic”, *Image & Narrative*, (special issue: *The Uncanny*), 3 (1) January 2003 <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/uncanny/borghartmadelein.htm>). Thus, does *The Sensualist* pertain to the ‘fantastic genre’ or does it have only uncanny elements? Or are the fantastic and the uncanny synonyms so that it does not make any difference? M. Tatar, for example, considers both concepts as interchangeable when defining the uncanny as a process from an absence to a presence of knowledge (cf. M. Tatar, *art. cit.*). An overlapping between the two cannot be completely excluded as the same Freud says in his challenging and ‘uncanny’ essay. However while the fantastic is an intellectual uncertainty, the uncanny is a psychological one. The former has to do more with one’s ‘reason’ while the latter with one’s ‘perception’. In other words, the former implies more the origins of the object (natural or supernatural), the latter its effect on the perceiver regardless of any origins – though the two are linked to each other. Therefore, while in the fantastic there is a clear cut opposition, this is lacking in the uncanny since this is characterised by the overlapping of the familiar with the unfamiliar. In conclusion, part of literary texts only excite uncanny elements, others are only fantastic and, finally, in others they are reconciled though maintaining their own peculiarities. A practical example will be of much help in ‘illuminating’ the above difference. Whether the reader intellectually accepts the figure of Dracula, in Bram Stoker’s novel, to be a vampire having a supernatural or natural explanation, its presence still provokes an uncanny effect since what was to remain hidden has come to light: the *undead*. In the same way, once the reader of *The Sensualist* discovers that the Gothic suggestions might be a psychological realisation of something absent, and thus having a natural explanation, the

herself that the present was not built upon a fantasy castle. The time was right to bring that dusty box out of the drawer, open its secrets, look the demons in the face and strip them of any power they still possessed.

The Box did not disappoint. [...] an envelope, yellowed by the time and – judging by the torn state of its edges – opened by nervous fingers. Inside she found the photo of what looked like a couple and their child<sup>34</sup>.

And, in the short story “San Rocco Comes to Visit”, Nando Miranda, a successful businessman who longs for his Calabria, near the end of his life meets a man walking a dog, “with thinning hair and skin so pale and delicate, that he must have been a tourist newly arrived from the winter of the northern hemisphere”<sup>35</sup>.

While in real life Nick can rationally dismiss uncanny presences by clinging to his busy life<sup>36</sup>, such a controlling power is lost in his dreams which become a *locus* where the absence/presence connection silently exorcises and reveals the past underlying Nick’s liminal identity. To the analyses of his three dreams this section will now turn.

In Nick’s first dream, his feathered bird-dog ‘Lupo’ is a bizarre and monstrous metaphor for Nick’s virility, vanity and power to control others – as seen in the ritual scene. However, the dismantling of his self-image as a top dog<sup>37</sup> repeats, in the “cocoon” of his lounge, “a lack of fit with [...] cultural-historical worlds”<sup>38</sup> beyond

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dislodging effect of the uncanny is not dismissed.

<sup>34</sup> A. Casella, “An Olive Branch for Sante”, (2006) <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/507/> Although there are similarities between Nick and Ira-Jane, the latter acts with more decision.

<sup>35</sup> A. Casella, “San Rocco Comes to Visit”, *Antipodes*, 9 (1) June 1995, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Nick’s busy life, as a form of self-defence, is uncanny due to its repetitive element and, as such, it hides anxiety. Repetition, in Freud’s theoretical framework, is the rehearsal of one’s death and, as such, an infinitive release of tension until and towards the ultimate one. The first only serves to exorcise the second and, ultimately, to exorcise the sublime experience of an identitarian dislocation. (cf. P. Thurschwell, *Sigmund Freud*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 86-88). In this sense, the connection between being busy, noise and the spatial dimension of the city goes without saying.

<sup>37</sup> Although the expression ‘top dog’ does not socially refer to assimilated immigrants, this is the meaning it has in the novel because success is achieved at the expense of his [Nick’s] own roots which he had to abnegate according to a society that fostered a culture of assimilation. It could be defined as a “public symbol” conveying a social message (J.M. Mageo, “Subjectivity and Identity in Dreams”, cit., p. 33) within the world of the novel and through dreams.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, p. 32.



any possibility of cheating and pretending (cf. *TS*, 128, 131-32) and results in the split of the self (“he must have been out” of himself, of his own body):

An image rouses him, fluttering like tail-feathers, there on the sharp edge of slumber. He tries to fight it off, but he cannot shake off the counter forces of ecstasy and disgust that possess him. Here enclosed in the cocoon of his lounge, he can no longer pretend. What was that at the office this afternoon? More importantly, what might have been had Rosie not turned up? ... Shit! What the hell is happening to him? What is happening to Nick Amedeo at age fifty-four?

[...]

He wakes to the programmed hysterics of a sports commentator howling over the noise of a stadium crowd at a rugby game.

Not a restful nap. He must have been out a half an hour and the whole of that time was marked by a confusion of voices, of faces running into other faces and into a blurred whole. They were familiar faces too: Rosie, Nella, Steve, Mrs Stansfield, Lily, that whats-er-name from Wonga (her again!) and Joyce of course. Women mostly. Bloody women giving him nightmares! (*TS*, 129).

Nick’s liminal identity is also conveyed by Bakhtin’s idea of *heteroglossia*, by the “confusion of voices, of faces running into other faces and into a blurred whole”, which is reinforced by the scene in the bathroom. What Nick sees, and whose meaning he does not fully grasp, is by analogy with the dream a sort of ‘mirror-work’:

In the misty mirror he advances, wipes the surface and a shape comes into the clear: a huge rhino out of the pond. He lets the towel fall to his feet, bends over and takes his scrotum in the cup of his right hand. There it nests inside his stubby fingers, a pathetic bird sitting patiently on two eggs. You can rummage all you want, turn it whichever way, but in the end all there is to a man is there, what he can hold inside the cup of his hand. He thinks this without sadness and rancor, but it does not clear altogether the fog of his confusion.

Had it done so, he would know that sex is for the feeble, an indefensible admission of one’s weakness, a desire to murder and be murdered. Such a revelation would astound Nick Amedeo.

She [Joyce], on the other hand, can't resist a smirk of self-satisfaction because in this shiny car that's coasting along this shiny river on a steamy summer night, edging perilously close to fifty, she is given to see it all clearly as that, while other, wiser men and women are groping the mist of self-deceit.

Through the bathroom mist it's the familiar faces that reappear. Rosie's hand soaps up twelve hour stubble, Dorothy Stanfield is the razor that glides over the cheek and tickles his skin, Nella is the swish of water and Joyce the lotion that scents his face with pine freshness, Steve is the navy blue shirt that grabs around his trunk...and for a moment it seems that Nick Amedeo is no longer himself but a fragmentation of all those lives.

Slowly, sifting for power with his stubby fingers, he knots up his tie. And when he catches sight of his freshly shaven face on the polished rosewood door he feels reassured by a new vigour (*TS*, 131-32).

In the mist of the bathroom, the mirror works to reveal a split Lacanian subject. In the 'imaginary' phase, the subject seeks unity by identifying with a figure perceived as an already whole-being and then desires the object that attracts the mother's attention, the 'phallus', in order to win her back and re-construct the harmonious unity. In the same way, and unconsciously, it happens to Nick who seeks through assimilation the 'object' symbolised by the signifier 'Whiteness': the desire for equality and success promised by the host society when entering the 'white male' mainstream society. However, the mirror (mimicry) unveils the true nature of 'Whiteness'. Although success is not forbidden, this is not synonymous with equality and integration. The achieved completeness is a *mis-recognition*, an illusion of the ego perpetrated in real life and metaphorically suggested by the 'mist' of the bathroom, a "mist of self-deceit" (*TS*, 132). Nick's fragmentation stands for his identitarian incompleteness since those he needs for his own recognition come to take the place of the 'I'. His own image is mediated by the others' 'gaze' which dismantles his *aggressivity* and the aforementioned controlling power. However, in Nick's case the opposition between the experience of alienation and the image of unity is not a conflict between the 'I' and the real others. The latter, in fact, symbolically represent the fragmentation of the 'I' and, thus, the return of the 'not me', the hidden and unsaid part of the self. It

is interesting to note that Rank, defining various examples of doubles, characterises them as two distinct beings separated by amnesia.

Getting back to the first dream, the bizarre animal with its contradictions offers commentaries on the top-dog/Nick – the waking original copy/Nick – and on the way Nick feels about “the cultural world beneath ordinary awareness”<sup>39</sup>. Nicola represents a Stevensonian<sup>40</sup> ‘counter-identity’ (Nicola): “Monsters may represent potentially empowered yet alienated parts of ourselves that challenge our positions in and ascription to cultural worlds”<sup>41</sup>. In this scheme, the double in the process of subject formation reveals both the emergence of different identitarian possibilities in the pre-symbolic and the encounter between the social structures imposed upon the individual subject.

The function of this first dream, the re-appropriation of a ‘space’ for the ‘not me’ (Nicola), is more marked in the second dream as Nick’s different standing positions reveal. Although both of them are set in Nick’s (business) property, as it is suggested by the cyclone fence, in the first the reader is not told where Nick stands, if he even is an actor in the dream, while in the other one he is locked outside of his property in the ‘dark’. Both his being an actor/spectator in the second dream and the dark setting signify his knowing (but not recognising) of the presence of the ‘not me’, of his double Nicola as proved by the bizarre dog with a human “too bloody familiar” face. The dog is at the same time, through a process of condensation, the old dog and the stray dog: on the one hand, appellatives such as “Old Dog Nick” and the Australianism “Ole” (*TS*, 165-66) mark the dog as a metaphor for Nick’s assimilated identity (manifest meaning); on the other hand, the dog’s language characterised by the use of the ‘third person’ when referring to Nick, Italian words such as “*veloce*” (*TS*, 165) and the grammar mistakes considered typical of at least first generation

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<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> In Stevenson’s famous novel, Mr *Hyde* is the repressed double of Dr Jekyll. Both Nick and Dr Jekyll – but see also Oscar Wilde’s character Dorian Gray – hope to become part of a society they long for. In order to achieve this, society asks them to repress what cannot be ‘accommodate’. Consequently, the double is both a direct product of society and speaks out its inconsistencies. In this scheme, the double, if permitted expression would present itself less monstrously and ghosts, bizarre images and shadows would not exist. Its ‘presence’ speaks out the right for the marginalised – whether it is a repressed desire, one’s culture, language, etc. – ‘to belong’.

<sup>41</sup> J.M. Mageo, “Subjectivity and Identity in Dreams”, cit., p. 38.

migrants all suggest the ‘familiar’ face to be Nicola’s (latent meaning). In this scheme, the ‘dog’, in opposition to the Old Dog, is a metaphor for Nicola’s and thus for migrants’ diasporicity as the dog’s true pedigree, “an Aussie by birth/a Dago by name/Aussie-Dago by culture” (*TS*, 167), bears witness to. While for Freud the latent content was more important and involved looking at the past, for Ewing the manifest content means looking at the present. As one can see both meanings are important in dialogical terms<sup>42</sup>.

The return of the ‘not me’ is reinforced by Nick’s passivity which, in Lacan’s characterisation of the dream, is synonymous with gazing: the character can *see* what is happening without affecting its course. Nick is outside, in the dark, gazing at the Old Dog lacking the agency possessed in his waking state, the “helplessness of the dreamer in the face of his own creation”<sup>43</sup>. While the ‘gaze’ in Western culture is associated with agency – in the sense of shaping reality since the act of *seeing* means *understanding* (the power of the eye/I) –, in the dream and the fantastic<sup>44</sup> this relationship is overturned. The subject’s agency in dreams is decentred. This feature of the dream is called by Lacan “it shows”: “our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows”<sup>45</sup>. While the subject is passive it is its double to be agentive or, in other words, it is the ethnic ‘not me’ who actually *sees* in the darkness of dreams.

As for the last dream, it focuses on the relationship between the tragic event and his Sicilian roots. Though this dream is an ‘awakening’, since Nick visualises in it his mother’s murder and his grandfather who carries it out as a consequence of the Sicilian code of ‘honour’ for she had committed adultery, as soon as Nick awakes he erases these images from his memory:

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. K.P. Ewing, *art. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> B.O. States, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Common to both dreams and the fantastic are their ‘oxymoron’ nature (creating a space of uncertainty), disguised elements, transgression of reality and epistemological function.

<sup>45</sup> J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London and New York, Karnac Books, [1977] 2004, p. 75.

It was no dream of course, but an awakening.  
A piercing screech, a frantic rush, an imploration. ‘*No, aiutu!*’ (No, help!) Two sharp shots.  
Ptang! Ptang!

Then, through the window, running down a star-whitened slope a naked figure: dark trousers in hand, billowing.

Then Mother breaking into the bedroom, dragging herself along the pavement trying to reach his little boy’s legs as he rushes out through the door to the safety of the stable. ‘*Aiutu! Aiutu! Niculimu!*’

Then one more shot reaching him as he clings to the belly of the mule.

And then, one instant’s lucid realization that these images must be erased from his memory (*TS*, 278).

Had Nick rejected his ethnic roots as a mere consequence of his childhood trauma, he would have been more involved with the outcome of such a revelation, at least in order to come to grips with it. Instead, his quick dismissal suggests that his trauma is not the real object of the haunting past but it works more as a signifier of another signified: Nick’s Sicilian roots. The murder of his mother is a ‘metonymic’ narrative device for the return of the past:

Crossing the ocean on a small paddle boat, being stuck in the middle of a huge expanse of water that suddenly covered by slimy green surface algae. He knows that his little boat just cannot cross all that and he will face a long, lonely life surrounded by a slimy expanse.

A Pair of trousers floating in form nowhere, floating because there is no wind: a plastic calm over a plastic ocean. A small boy Nicola is in a paddleboat, alone except for that pair of pants hung over the side like someone sitting with the legs hanging out. But he can’t see who it is above the waist.

‘What the hell do you want?’ he says, ‘who are you?’

Nothing, just a question billowing without wind. All his dreams are about questions. Are everyone’s dreams the same? There, another question. Trouser legs rise up dark against a backdrop of fluffy clouds, held up by a stick because it isn’t the sea any longer but a field of green wheat. The trousers belong to a faceless scarecrow in the middle of the field (*TS*, 277).

The water imagery has several meanings in this dream: migration, the semiotic – which accounts for the very nature of these dreams –, Nick’s infantile trauma symbolised by the pair of ‘trousers’ and his unconscious. It is in the waters of the estuary, as discussed below, that ‘struggle’ goes on and to the same, together with the “intimate dark” (*TS*, 259) and silences, Nicola’s unconscious is connected:

Always he is attracted to the water – him, Nicola Amedeo, born in a place where the sea was barely visible in the furthest horizon.

[...] in the comparative darkness of Mill Point Road ancient fears return. The river cares nothing for his private anguish. The reflections of the lighted buildings sink deep like splinters. And it occurs to him that this old/young river has only the appearance of being easy. Tonight it has become too big, too much. Something is sure to stir in the underbelly even if its well-contoured, limestone flanks are licked by lapdog tongues of water. Who knows what eternal mystery or threat may lurk beneath its calm surface? (*TS*, 271).

And all anxieties – the past, time and dream – are linked to water and as such they ‘flow’ throughout the novel:

The dark intensifies the flow of anxiety. It reaches across the seat to the old man [Uncle Basil] and the echo ... the echo flows back from another world. The images it evokes are of mouldy stone joints. Nick has spent near on half a century trying to erase them. And now, so many years on, he finds himself back there: a bone-cheeked, dusky boy-figure sitting still on top of that old stone wall watching the flow of time. Does he dare rouse the child out of that long, turgid dream?

*‘Che c’è!’*

No need. The ninety-two year old voice recalls it for him, out of the well of his past (*TS*, 260).

The more the reader gets to the end of the novel the more time disappears, as waves breaking on the shore, and the more the past holds the main character the more the imagery of water is present.

The above interpretations of the water imagery are supported by the excerpt

that immediately follows the third dream telling the reader about his departure from the port of Messina. Finally, getting on the boat, after feeling “overawed by the sea” – Nick nurtures a mixed feeling of ‘respect’ and ‘fear’ connecting the sea and the ‘lady’ both to each other and to a sublime experience:

he was rewarded with the magnificent sight of all that blue mass holding him up gently and safely in the sway of its breathing. In reality his fear had been a poor boy’s trepidation on the presence of a great lady. Now that she kindly took him to herself he poured out his love for her; so much so that when he first arrived in Australia he seriously considered working as a fisherman (*TS*, 281-82).

Besides, the ‘estuary’ – the semiotic setting of many “nameless creatures[’...] struggle” (*TS*, 297) – that opens to the vastness of the Indian Ocean<sup>46</sup> where “[t]he mist has cleared” (*TS*, 298), is a *locus*

[h]omebound.

To return, now that it’s come to the end and therefore back to the beginning.

[...]

To return then [...] to some form of beginning that is merely a signpost of convenience, arbitrary, whimsical: an imaginary spot in the imaginary configuration of time (*TS*, 317).

Both a *locus* of life and ‘death’, a safety and frightening prenatal state in a similar way to the uncanny experience of the womb, a “‘nowhere’ of the mother’s body”<sup>47</sup>:

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<sup>46</sup> “Visions of a vast green ocean at sunset try to enter his mind but deliberately he blocks them out” (*TS*, 299). “He acknowledges nothing about that sun or that vast sea beyond that bridge” (*TS*, 308). “Sometimes after he can feel the boat move down the estuary out towards the open ocean” (*TS*, 317). The ‘ocean’, especially the Indian one which from Australia means looking towards the west, is identified with ‘home’. Such aspect, associated with the sky and the mist, resembles Anna Couani’s ‘Italy’ in her use of nature as a device to recall the past: “past everything else in the distant eastern sky and the horizon which is always vague and misty” (A. Couani, ‘Italy’, qtd in S.M. Gunew, “Home and Away: Nostalgia in Australian (Migrant) Writing”, in P. Foss (ed.), *Island in the Stream*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1988, p. 40).

<sup>47</sup> P. Thurschwell, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [Home] of all human beings, to the place where each of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before,’ we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body<sup>48</sup>.

“In their boats under a silky hot sky scheming his death” (*TS*, 300), a scene which takes the reader back to the Prologue (*TS*, 5)<sup>49</sup> as if the text were haunting itself, Nick’s dialogic foreignness – since as such he has always been perceived by the Other<sup>50</sup> – is put forward for the reader to experience:

So much of this land that he doesn’t know. *Too vast, too open*. Impossible to measure where you stand.

[...] the mountains separated your little world from the outside and made it your own. Old people could point to a certain almond tree, or a house, and there was sure to be a story about it. That’s the important thing, really: the story to help you make sense.

No stories here; that’s the difference. It’s your home, the birthplace of your children and yet you feel a foreigner, as if you lived *on leased land*, a land you can never own, can’t entirely trust and maybe fear to know too intimately. He worked in the bush, cleared thousands of acres, thought nothing of it (*TS*, 297; emphasis added).

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<sup>48</sup> S. Freud, “The Uncanny”, cit., p. 637. Although Freud spatially localised such feelings of return through the figurative meaning of the ‘womb’ in the dream-work, it still bears similarities with Kristeva’s non localisable semiotic since both represent a return *to* and *of* repressed aspects of the subject linked to the mother. This connection is also reinforced by the fact that both Freud and Kristeva discover this motherly connoted experience – the uncanny and the semiotic, respectively – drawing on the analyses of neurotic patients. Besides Kristeva, explaining the link between death and the feminine, quotes Freud’s excerpt (cf. J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, cit., p. 185). Water imagery in dreams also reinforces the above interpretation: for Rank it has to do, at once, with birth and death (cf. O. Rank, *op. cit.*, p. 66).

<sup>49</sup> The Prologue already sets out an absence and is haunted by the past, other stories outside and prior to the text, before it begins: the uncanny haunts the very origins. The reader has to answer to such questions: What is this ‘shadow’? Where does it come from? What does it want?

<sup>50</sup> Since ideological struggles characterise language they are also mirrored in the text itself. The word ‘foreigner’ retains on ‘otherness’ *coming* from society. In the next section, this relationship will be made more explicit.



As with the sublime, there is a tension of in-betweenness at once terrifying and exciting (terror and delight) suspending all motions – a state objectified through Nick’s impossibility of moving when he has an heart attack<sup>51</sup> and the “delicious pain” in the Prologue:

Now, at the ocean-end of the boat, visible only when the cabin ups like a monster, is someone. He steps on the person’s foot (a wooden clogged foot), and the boat rocks up and down, pumping up blood inside and sweat outside and heat all over. (oh delicious pain, ready to burst!) (*TS*, 5).

Besides, the vastness and openness of the land – the *locus* of absence dramatising the gap between the signifier and the signified of an always deferred meaning – and Nick’s foreignness conveyed through the ‘not-me’ complete his sublime experience of non-signification. When he ‘experiences’ the vastness of the land this, coinciding with his foreignness, means that he ‘sees’ from a Lacanian perspective the absence of the *object petit a*; the realisation of his ‘subjectivity’ and the absence of a presence, that is of identity. As already mentioned, subjectivity as a process of heterogeneity coincides with extinction. Such a return of the repressed, linked to death is, on the one hand, related to the joke rupturing the delicate screen of the unconscious and paradoxically, on the other hand, does not affect Nick’s ‘awareness’ about where he ‘stands’. As for the first aspect, when burying his dog – one of his many doubles – Nick starts laughing as a way to unconsciously exorcise his own death. Avoiding to see in the dog’s death his own signifies to reject the stranger within one’s self; to not let the official ‘I’ die, what was thought to be objective and transcendental. With regard to his ‘awareness’ – conveyed by both a third-person narrator and the *prosopopeia* alike – Nick’s inarticulation of his diasporicity is coherent with and completes his unspeakable liminality<sup>52</sup> and the polyphonic quality of the novel.

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<sup>51</sup> “Lying face up, he listens over the numb sounds of the estuary to John as he gloats over his catches. [...] This sea is huge, stagnant. The smell too is awful: a smell of putrefaction” (*TS*, 316).

<sup>52</sup> Here one has to define the conceptual boundaries between displacement and hybridity since Nick might be argued to ‘experience’ more a form of displacement than hybridity especially when compared to Ira-Jane’s character, in ‘An Olive Branch for Sante’, who ‘acknowledges’ her in-betweenness.

Nick's failure to name the open space, as it was perceived and named by the first colonisers, mirrors, since he is a subject of mimicry/assimilation, Prospero's failure to name Caliban once and for all. Besides, his hybridity is a manifestation of the need to reconcile different views in a postmodern nostalgic framework; a necessity that parodies that of the first colonisers to accommodate the 'new' world into their 'old' language, and that de-centres the latter between the centre and the margins, embracing none of the two in a definite way.

### 3.4 A paraxial text

The emergence of different possibilities of the unrepresentable contrasted to unity is reinforced by the timelessness of the novel, which is a feature of the unconscious. The unrepresentable is a disturbance of the linear progression of time: the more subjectivity emerges the more time (reality) is effaced. The same is true for the 'mist' which involves a close relationship with time. The latter renders reality something 'misty'. In fact, while in the first part of the novel, the factuality of events is registered through time and mist characterises those scenes associated with the past, towards its end time fails to fulfil that purpose and the mist clears. The more one relies on time, the less he/she can tell what is real and what is dreamy. This also means that time is erased when the past invades the present; in other words, when postmodern nostalgia is effective. As already established, postmodern nostalgia, like intertextuality, is timeless.

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Besides the fact that displacement and hybridity do not always define opposite identitarian realities – as it is, on the contrary, for Oreste Ancelli or Carmine del Monte in the short story “The Flowering Broombush” –, the reappraisal of nostalgia challenges the idea that all migrants live diasporicity as displacement (neither here nor there) linked to an essentialist cultural interpretation of ‘space’ (territory). Conversely, displacement can be a positive aspect of hybridity as a form of liminality: being foreigner everywhere to be at home anywhere. Thus, the conceptual boundary between displacement and hybridity needs to be de-constructed, dis-located. As Stuart Hall puts it, deterritorialisation (as recreating one's past identity in another place) means that there is no ‘essentialist’ link between territory and identity. Seeing migrants as exclusively displaced persons is another ‘marker’ of sociological and psychological authenticity and, thus, of power as suggested by Verdicchio (cf. P. Verdicchio, *Devils in Paradise. Writings on Post-Emigrant Cultures*, Toronto, Guernica, 1997, p. 90). To be ‘neither fish nor fowl’ could be far from a negative status. Of course, the monological discourse needs to dismantle the power that this in-between ‘process’ has since it dislodges polarities and reveals partial identities. For the monological discourse it means to exorcise a writing of difference or better of *différance* and not just a writing of the different.

The dream and the mirror perform the same function as both ‘time’ and ‘mist’: epistemological devices that reveal a different hidden side of both the self and reality, which is difficult to perceive as both the mist in the bathroom and the metaphorical nature of the dream confirm. As in the mirror stage, when the subject ‘pretends’ the achievement of the unity of the self (whereas, in the end, it moves in an unarticulated and uncontrolled way), the dream performs a ‘not me’ on which the subject has no control. Both the dream and the mirror, like the fantastic, represent what R. Jackson calls a “paraxial” space, that is an area where the reflected image and the object seem to coincide. Actually, it is a point where there is nothing (or in Lacan’s terms ‘the *nothing*’); one of non-signification<sup>53</sup>. The diasporic subject occupies the same paraxial space of uncertainty which, in Nick’s case, is reinforced by a lack of awareness of his diasporicity – though he acts as if he were aware. *The Sensualist* itself is a paraxial text since it blurs the boundaries between dream and reality. Even the metaphorical *paratextual* titles of the novel’s three central sections (‘The Dog’, ‘The Pig’ and ‘The Crab’)<sup>54</sup> support such a liminal interpretation of the subject collapsing the distinction between human and animal. The three animals all have, in one scene or the other, Nick’s face becoming Bakhtinean grotesque bodies which are “not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed completed unit; it [...] outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits”<sup>55</sup>.

It can also be intimated, from what has been said, that the text is haunted by all these supplementary extensions and for this it is a place where meaning collapses, where the margins of the grotesque, like in the paintings of the Renaissance, usurp the role of the centre by attracting the attention of the viewer away from the main topic of the work of art. These supplements are the result of a ‘deterritorialisation’ of both the bizarreness of the dreams to the whole text and of real life. The *paratextual locus*, ‘on the sharp edge of’, is the marginality where the certainties of the social fabric are

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. R. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> These titles (‘The Dog’, ‘The Pig’ and ‘The Crab’) can be considered metaphorical, or grotesque metaphors as Arcimboldo’s paintings, for every time something reminds of what it is not, the brain makes a bizarre move in the form of a metaphor (cf. B.O. States, *op. cit.*, p. 29).

<sup>55</sup> M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

altered. For instance, Steve's claim of knowledge in the Prologue<sup>56</sup>, that he knew immigrants very well, is unsettled when Nick is carrying the pig over his shoulder and,

[a]t the door, just inside the garage, that leads down to the cellar, he spins around. He has stopped laughing. Then I notice, to my shock, that his face (looking decidedly deranged from this angle) and that of the pig perched on his shoulder show more than a passing similarity (*TS*, 193).

Besides unsettling Steve's epistemic 'truth' and his intention "to write the story of Nick Amedeo" (*TS*, 5), the grotesque image represents an escape from the socially imposed 'forms' as it occurs in Kafka's works. Such a deterritorialisation is the ultimate result of a process from reterritorialisation (assimilation – not in Hage's sense seen above in relation to postmodern nostalgia), represented by the symbolic presence of the dog, to a deterritorialisation through the 'pig' and the 'crab'. If the dream reveals parts of reality which are hidden to one's sight, not fully understood but, however, not less 'real', then the dilemma the reader is invited to face through the introduction to the second dream is whether dreams are more real than reality itself:

Could even be that his whole life is just a dream. Or a story somewhere there, in the recesses of consciousness since ... oh long, long ago. So, maybe physical action is not real. Could be that the real is in the memory, in the remembrance of what was. Or maybe in intimations of a possible future. So, stir yourself. Wake up, Nicola Amedeo! Wake up! ... (*TS*, 164).

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<sup>56</sup> The power/knowledge embedded by Steve is also stylistically confirmed by his being a first person narrator: as Prospero he possesses language. Conversely, both Nick's and Joyce's parts are narrated by a third-person narrator. Steve's language is one of usurpation, one that 'literally' interrupts by juxtaposition migrants' narrations consequently silencing them. For instance, when Nick is about to listen to the sound of the river that recalls both his experience in the bush and his childhood past in Sicily, Steve intrudes by calling him. As soon as he does this, Steve's part begins and both Nick and the reader are diverted to something else (cf. *TS*, 183). However, and ironically, Steve's view is limited and his 'I' unreliable. The reader gets this idea only by comparing the two narrators and highlighting, as giving presence to an absence, what the third-person narrator tells and Steve omits for lack of knowledge.

Not even the body, the practical life, is a valid criterion for distinguishing between the two experiences (dreaming and waking) as it happens to Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*<sup>57</sup>. The German Phenomenologist Medard Boss, analysing a more common experience than the one in Kafka's fiction, explains the 'Two-Body Problem' as follows:

While waking observers see him fast asleep in bed in Zurich, the dreamer may feel that he is skiing, with consummate physical grace and pleasure, down an Alpine slope. The question now is, which body is the real one, the body that others see lying in bed, though the dreamer is unaware of it, or the body that the dreamer himself feels so intensely but that no waking observer can perceive? [...] In any case, however, physicality has shown itself to be no criterion for distinguishing between the human waking and dreaming states<sup>58</sup>.

It could be said that in these cases it is the dreamer's body itself that undergoes metamorphosis, whether in physical shape or only in a different context, while in Nick's case it is the dog's body. Nevertheless, the blurring between the two experiences produced by only one element, like Dali's clock, extends to all other aspects. Although the dog's face metonymically resembles Nicola, the same recalls Nick as the *motif* of the double in literature exemplifies. However, it must be said, that though Nick is not conscious of this blurring experience, the reader is and the text has the same function which both the mirror and the dream have. The instability of the concept of reality means that its ideological status as an ontological and epistemological battleground should emerge more clearly. Ultimately, the dilemma leads to another one: if reality is not that 'real' then, by extension, the same can be said for the identity experienced in the waking state.

It is as if the mist got out of the bathroom and shrouded both the landscape and the text by creating a misty atmospheric condition. Even dreams, difficult to interpret and recall, are metaphorically 'misty'. Dreams, mist and 'veil' all reinforce the interpretation of the novel as having dreamy qualities. Between dream and reality

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. F. Kafka, "Metamorphosis", in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, London, Penguin, [1915] 2000, pp. 76-126 (tr. M. Pasley).

there is a sort of metaphorical intertextual relationship: both are ‘constructed’, are narratives. One never gets the ‘event’, the true dream but the dream report – the ‘fact’. There are two frames of reference: dreams are like reality and reality is as indeterminate as dreams. The absence of hesitation by Nick towards the uncanny elements in dreams is adopted in reality as well; an aspect reinforcing the function of the ‘voice’ and the narrator that speak for someone who lacks awareness. Nick interprets reality in the same way he does with dreams: simply showing no hesitation and dismissing it. The ‘voice’ stands on the other side of the paraxial mirror, as the sub-text does, and shows the unrepresentable. In a nutshell, the ‘spaces’ of the text become the locus of non-signification mirroring that of the liminal subject.

### **3.5 *Sicilyan* textual ‘spaces’**

Another important theme developed throughout the novel and closely interconnected with the one discussed in the previous sections, as evident in the ‘estuary’ scene or when shadows and silence try to engulf Nick’s mind, has to do with Nick’s work in the bush. The reader wonders why Nick should worry about his work in the bush, unless its meaning were connected to Casella’s hitting back at the White Australia policy whose colonial dimension is still a feature of multiculturalism. This entails that a new dialogic light has to be cast on its function in the novel. In fact, it raises two interesting and wider issues: the connection with the past and immigrants involvement in the polluting memories of the demise of Aboriginal communities and their cultures and, thus, their complicity with Anglo-Celts’ (neo)colonialism.

While the former issue will be analysed in this section, within what was referred to in the second chapter as a *Sicilyan* text, the latter will be dealt with in the following section. Therefore, the bush is more than a metonymic signifier of the past as a souvenir or a photo would be – an object directly linked to the past –, it is the ‘vehicle’ of an uncanny metaphor connecting two frames of reference: the inhabitants

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<sup>58</sup> B.O. States, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

of the bush and Sicilian natives as Flo' tells Joyce in a letter sent to her while visiting Sicily<sup>59</sup>:

*Albergo Fante  
Via Roma 98  
San Michele  
21/9/'70*

*Dear Joyce,*

*At last I have proof of what I suspected a long time, that Desmond has been duping us with this fabrication. Either that, or (worse still) he has been deceiving himself.*

*Let me tell you [...] that I could find no trace in this village of the myth that darling uncle Des has been creating of the place. All I see is depression and squalor. If you ask me, he's extremely lucky, your Sicilian rogue, to have left early enough in his life to have absorbed so little of it.*

*It isn't simply that the country is dirty and unkempt, what's more distressing is that the people, these inheritors of millennia of noble civilisations, are so dull and so sedentary. Even the few young ones you see about the streets look like ghosts of the Dark Ages, like the buildings they inhabit: without style, without energy, closed and obtuse.*

*[...] (A comparison with our Aborigines would not be entirely off the mark.)*

*The countryside, I grant you, is quite inspiring. It overpowers you with its deeps and sharpness. The coastline, with its plunging peaks and valleys of olive groves and orchards, has more arrogance than a beauty queen.*

*And yet its white stones ridges that remind me of desiccated bone are as lonely as our outback.*

*[...] As for myself, I prefer the more vibrant throb of a modern city.*

*[...] The old cradle smells too much of must and cemeteries. I shall spend a few days in Paris [...].*

*Love,*

*Florrie (TS, 87-88).*

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<sup>59</sup> P.D. Smecca divides travel books focusing on Sicily into four groups: diaries, letters, retrospective travelogues and autobiographies. As for letters she says: "Through them, the travellers manifest their intention to share their experiences with friends living in the mother-country or in some other distant place. This desire [...] chiefly involves people bound by family ties and close relationships; therefore, [...] the writing style is still personal and frank: it may be rich in abrupt remarks and express a strong emotional involvement" (P.D. Smecca, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-33).

Flo's letter vividly recalls travel literature, which often adopted an epistolary structure that lent credibility to its content, and an ethnographic approach: Sicily is a paradise inhabited by devils, an island with "more arrogance than a beauty queen" peopled by lazy and sedentary creatures having no 'choice'. And, as ethnographers and travel writers alike, she too adopts a temporal approach to space so that the space of Sicily is seen as opposed to that of Paris, Hong Kong and Melbourne on the temporal ladder of progress. On the lower rung of the latter she makes stand both Sicilians and Aborigines since the "white stones ridges" remind her of the outback, an uncanny place inhabited by 'dead' people as the image of "desiccated bone[s]" suggests and the reference to "ghosts" overtly confirms. 'Ghosted' people, represented and alienated from their respective landscapes and reduced to mere informants for both an exotic and evolutionist approach.

Before analysing the novel's subversive response to Flo's vision, through the empathetic relationship between Sicilians and Aborigines, the various representations of Sicily that Casella's polyphonic novel provides will be taken into consideration.

Although Flo' explicitly opposes her vision of Sicily to the more pastoral "fabrication" of her uncle Desmond, both see Sicilians as primitive inhabitants of a timeless space. In fact, though claiming the lack of "*any trace of shepherds*" (TS, 88), she sets out the negative aspects of the island overlooking any historical or cultural aspect. In the same way Desmond's mythic perspective, as the pastoral genre inspiring travel literature, pictures the Sicilian island of WWII as the cradle of civilisation and, therefore, only in mythical and exotic terms:

'I've been to our cultural roots,' he said, 'I've trodden the ground where began the origins of Western civilisation,' [...] 'it's a feeling ... a feeling ... it can't be described' (TS, 178).

He spoke with a mixture of genuine passion and civilized condescension of 'high, broad foreheads of Greek figures and eyes that seemed to look at you out of classic marble statues' (TS, 21).



Besides the direct reference to the Greek origins of civilisation which – as discussed in CHAPTER ONE for C. Lombroso – aims at ambivalently assimilating what was perceived as connected to Aryan culture and thus compatible with ‘white’ culture, Desmond’s ‘fabrication’ is a form of escapism for a modern Ulysses, as he sees himself (*TS*, 290) and as Joyce and her mother Millie might be when listening to Desmond’s stories of the Mediterranean. This is evident when Joyce experiences her mother’s paranoia of the outback (*TS*, 293) and sees in Nick, the Sicilian shepherd, her rescuer<sup>60</sup>; or when Desmond says that one is “trapped by time, and the physical space that encloses us, while the imagination free-ranges through other times and other spaces. [...] We all want to be someone else, something else, somewhere else: the somewhere else of our dreams” (*TS*, 178); or through the metaphor of the ‘window’ for Joyce’s imprisonment: “windows are forever recreating themselves, projected a few paces ahead. For some who dare cross that threshold [...] it does not take long for the outside to become the inside, for new walls to come up, for new windows to frame the space and shut them in again” (*TS*, 289). This dreaming of somewhere else makes them all migrants without a centre or not recognising themselves with any as discussed below in the garden-outback opposition where the outback suggests a sublime and uncanny experience of symbolic death: “Desmond’s talk of the Mediterranean provided the perfect vehicle for putting *comfortable distance* between themselves and that space of red earth and blue sky” (*TS*, 293; emphasis added).

As for Nick, the ‘landscape’ of his childhood comes back through memories holding him captive, albeit in an acknowledged way. In fact, memories are realised through *prosopopeia* and as the latter entails the absence of the body so it is for the objects of memory: affectively connoted, the Cimarra river and all that comes with it, survives only in Nick’s memory. This is reinforced by his understanding of that past world only instinctively “without rationalizing it (he lacks both the education and the intellectual ability to be able to articulate such concepts)”<sup>61</sup>. Memories, conveyed

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<sup>60</sup> As for Joyce, Casella says that she is “drawn to a man almost her opposite and tried to live her life through this instinctual, sensual, physical man” (C. McLeod, *art. cit.*, p. 8).

<sup>61</sup> A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*, cit., p. 159.

through sexualised images such as “the peaks” and the “silver snake” and the “orgy of white foam” that makes the sea stand for the ‘womb’, are realised at the very beginning of the second part of *The Sensualist* in which the climax of the novel is achieved. The ‘voice’ tells Nick:

Remember the San Michele Torrent? You and everyone within sight of it knew it as the Cimarra. Even though it was born somewhere up in the mountains, it stayed dry for most of the year. Then in winter, when rain finally came to moisten the stony landscape, the Cimarra rushed down in a froth as it washed away the dust of the long summer. By late winter, when the peaks of the Nebrodi stayed white, the bed filled and wriggled like a silver snake between the steep hills capped by clay-washed villages, before it fell into the embrace of the sea in an orgy of white foam.

The names come back to you with a drum-roll, like a list of long-forgotten friends. Sant’Arcangelo, Dauro, Civa, Sant’Alfio, Filicuddi. Names with tastes of dried figs, grapes and prickly pears; of black olives done in brine with chillies, lemon rind and bayleaves; of chestnuts eaten stealthily at night over a winter fire in a brazier of charcoal (*TS*, 173).

The landscape of Nick’s childhood is in contrast both with Desmond’s and Flo’s representation of the same – more explicitly with the former who occurs to be in Sicily in the forties – and with Joyce’s Binji Cross station. As for the first, though even the Sicily the reader experiences through Nick’s lenses possesses a Greek and bucolic charm, their exoticism fails to grasp other aspects:

[T]he poor Sicily of the rural hinterland, in the nineteenth thirties, when life was hard, families were large and patriarchal, time appeared fixed, people’s lives were governed by the daily struggle to survive and by age-old customs, rituals and superstitions. [A society in which people,] who had very little in life except their dignity and honour, [...] are prepared to kill for them<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

As for Joyce's relationship with her 'place', neither her childhood memories of the station nor her desire to live in Melbourne represent a concrete solution to her identitarian crisis – it would be just as with the 'window' metaphor. In fact, while life on Binji Cross station is the direct cause of her present desolation, the city has uncanny connotations highlighting her dis-location. When she tries to open herself to Nella, this is how the city is presented as if objectifying her feelings:

[Joyce] has entered the narrow King Street towards the forsaken deadness of St George's Terrace. The offices have been vacated for the weekend. Tall, identically rectangular, identically smooth-surfaced in glass and steel, they look like upright coffins.

[Nella] searches straight back down King Street, towards the ghostly terrace buildings she was glad to leave behind. Her eyes rise to the skyline pierced by the phantom buildings. Nella's imagination takes to fossicking among the crevices and nooks.

[...] There is so much [Joyce] wanted to confess, but there's nobody. The giant ghost of the ghostly city are left behind (*TS*, 146,147).

Thus, Joyce is 'de-centred': neither the outback characterized by drought nor whatever city perceived as a metonymy of the British motherland in contrast to the outback – a colonial 'encounter' for defining identity in a space where "a new city [is built] on the banks of this old, curling river" (*TS*, 271). And this is valid for both Melbourne, where her mother wanted to go when living on the station and where she wants to go now, or Perth. Story repeats. As Casella states:

'Nick is very much part of his childhood landscape and that helps explain his sense of self-worth and helps provide the strength that is evident in his adult life.

'Joyce is the opposite. She was brought up to fear the outback Australian landscape in which she was raised. It wasn't hers, she was not part of it and didn't establish the important bond with her childhood'<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> C. McLeod, *art. cit.*, p. 8.

For the three characters mentioned above, ‘Sicily’ is an identitarian metaphor and as such a ‘construction’: it defines the Anglo-Celtic ‘I’ through polarities (Joyce), it is a nostalgic aspect of what Anglo-Celtics are not and thus a form of escapism from the reality of a lost innocence (Desmond) and, finally, it is what could be defined as a ‘my-place’ of the mind ‘partially’ defining Nick’s subjectivity through a temporal and spatial dimension, through history and territory.

### 3.6 Polluting memories of colonial ‘roses’

As for immigrants’ involvement in the polluting memories of (neo)colonialism one needs to analyse the bush-garden opposition which extends *The Sensualist* itself. As Kristeva says, a text does not have a unified meaning but is a medley of social texts, what she calls an *ideologeme*<sup>64</sup>. As with the bush it is impossible to limit one’s interpretation to the text itself; conversely, the reader is taken outside of the text to the significance of the bush-garden opposition which is not Casella’s invention but part of the British culture of colonisation.

The bush pleads Nick, and the reader especially as a consequence of Nick’s ‘deafness’, to listen to its tragedies, to its creeping secrets. Unsavoury narratives of barbaric moments. And it is no coincidence that they are related to Nick’s work in the bush where he “cleared thousands of acres, thought nothing of it” (*TS*, 297). So, for instance, when “[h]e enters the bush [...] put[ting] distance between himself and Steve” (*TS*, 181-82):

Thamph! Thamph! go the soles of his boots as they press the untreated soil. Snap, crack, go the prickly moses (*sic*) under his feet. The spike-fingered hakea attempts to hook him by the socks while spikes of blackboys brush the hairs on his bare legs (*TS*, 182)<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. G. Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>65</sup> The importance of listening to silences is also confirmed when Nick is driving towards the country: “As he reaches the top, the city folds away into the rear-vision mirror. Now is the time for listening [...]” (*TS*, 180). Here the opposition city-country stands for chaos-silence, conscious-unconscious.

As the ‘sensual’<sup>66</sup> main character does when physically stepping in the bush, the latter representing a ‘space’ of memory, so the reader can ‘hear’ the silences which echo through the novel. However, both for the reader and Nick, ‘senses’ here have no Western connotation since what one sees, hears or smells has only indeterminate referents and guarantees no straightforward knowledge.

Besides, the landscape of the outback represents, metaphorically and not, the locus of the decentred ‘white’ subject. It is a place of encounter: where some identities are ‘erased’ and others risk erasure<sup>67</sup>. Resembling T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* as one reads in the Prologue, which already contains unsettling elements and connects Joyce’s identitarian sterility to the outback, while the modernist writer expresses the fragmentation of the age to rediscover a new unity through mythology, Casella registers that fragmentation as an inescapable aspect of all postmodern subjects which are perceived, in line with Bhabha, as ‘migrants’:

A country that still mourned its sparse down of she-oaks and salmon gums; a landscape that listened for the music of black-boys played like zithers by the easterlies. And the devastated land marked the desolation of men and women (*TS*, 4).

The bush is the frightening outside of the yard with its objectified presence of a ‘scraping’ silence and opaque objects whose uncanniness is enhanced by the pre-dawn. The Gothic is “intensely realist in method”<sup>68</sup> characterising the outback life as an experience of ‘imprisonment, claustrophobia, and emptiness’ (cf. *TS*, 290), ‘desolation’ (cf. *TS*, 4), ‘heat and thirst’ (cf. *TS*, 177), spatial immensity of a changeless land (cf. *TS*, 176), ‘superstition’ (cf. *TS*, 47), isolation and the

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<sup>66</sup> With reference to Nick, the term has a double meaning: on the one hand, it describes him as attached to appetites such as food, sex, drink, power so that he lacks self-knowledge (see SECTION TWO of this chapter); and, on the other hand, it defines Nick’s hearing ability which will allow him to rediscover memories buried in the past. However, in the latter acceptation, the term has a double function since ‘sounds’ and ‘sights’ also distract Nick from his inner world as when he feels a stranger looking at him and “the sound of footsteps at the door” rescues him (*TS*, 159).

<sup>67</sup> This proves the interconnectedness of history: one cannot speak of ‘white’ history without speaking of Aboriginal history and vice versa. Moments of forgetting cannot be accepted if reconciliation is the aim of a future democratic society.

<sup>68</sup> G. Turcotte, *art. cit.*, p. 15.

overpowering sunlight (which “does something to your brain ...” *TS*, 177)<sup>69</sup>. These features already set its own opposition to the yard:

First thing is to get the ute from the yard. Outside it’s that pre-dawn quiet; a quiet so sharp that he’s frightened of scraping against it. So, as the Mercedes takes the road, he is glad for the sound of the tyres flip-flapping on the bitumen (*TS*, 174).

[...]

He reaches the yard and realises that it has changed too, changed in ways he would not have thought possible. Like its size for instance. It is smaller, just a little plaything in the midst of a huge sunrise.

All around the yard objects are opaque like stones at the bottom of rippled water. Even the sound of engines on the road has become less intrusive, doubtful. This is a world in transition, not quite made: a world in a womb (*Ibidem.*).

The opposition between the bush – inhabited by “arrogant living things” (*TS*, 76), “impenetrable”, “solitary, stoical” (*TS*, 182) – and the yard – symbolising civilisation with its safeness – is one of domestication and colonisation. The latter is conveyed through nouns such as “battle”, “triumph”, and verbs such as “to battle”, “to reshape”, “to alter” (*TS*, 76), to “violate and subdue” (*TS*, 182). While it also has a personal meaning for Nick, as when he tries to hear the echoes of the river of the Sicilian Cimarra, the bush is connected to the sexualised dispossession of the Aboriginal land perpetrated since the first encounter between ‘whites’ and Aborigines on the ‘shore’ as recorded in lieutenant Philip Gidley King’s *Journal* (1793) and William Bradley’s sketch *First Interview with the Native Women at Port Jackson* (1788)<sup>70</sup>. The above juxtaposition – structurally expressed by the conjunction “but” – is fully evident in the following description of the Hathaways’ life on the station:

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<sup>69</sup> R.D. Raynes specifies that what is valid for the desert, was and still is for the bush though in a lesser degree. In fact, the more the bush is cleared the more the Gothic comes to be associated with the desert, the only remaining wilderness (R.D. Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: the Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 114).

<sup>70</sup> King records: “They wanted to know what sex we were [...] as they took us for women, not having our beards grown. I ordered one of the people to undeceive them in this particular, when they made a great shout of admiration, and pointing to the shore, which was but ten yards from us, we saw a great number of women and girls, with infant children on their shoulders, make their appearance on the

There [Binji Cross], the elements conspires to devastate the land. All morning the wind tore over the flats and bent the trees so that they stood uniformly on an incline. Further south, in Greenough, the reclining trees were a sight that characterized the area. Then, with the midday stillness, the land rolled on a float of dust as the sun became unmerciful.

But the station at Binji Cross had a garden too. It was a tiny garden with a latticed fence and she-oaks planted along the eastern and western edges to stop the winds. It reassured her in the mornings, when she looked out from the veranda to that drum-roll landscape of hump chasing hump to the furthest horizon, to know that she could counter it with intimacy, with the familiar smell of roses. The roses more than anything else reassured her (*TS*, 176).

The garden at the Binji Cross station with its “intimacy” and “familiar smell”, at least for Joyce<sup>71</sup>, recalls the safeness of the womb which is set against the bush and its wildness. Even the flora of the two spaces suggests this opposition and must be dialogically interpreted, as a word in relation to other contexts: ‘roses’, together with daffodils, typical Western flowers defined as the ‘aristocrats’ of the garden<sup>72</sup> and quintessentially English<sup>73</sup>, are opposed to the ‘hakeas’ and ‘blackboys’ characterising

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beach, all in *puris naturalibus* – pas meme la feuille de figueur. Those natives who were round the boats made signs for us to go to them, and made us understand that their persons were at our service. However, I declined this mark of their hospitality, but showed a handkerchief, which I offered to one of the women. [...] She [...] suffered me to apply the handkerchief where Eve did ye fig leaf. The natives then set up another very great shout [...].” (P.G. King, in B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 33). Hodge-Mishra political and moral reading of this foundation event points out the virility of the ‘white’ man, far superior than that attributed to Aborigines; their moral superiority in rejecting women as an offer of the only property Aboriginal men possessed, thus meaning that the land was not theirs; and, Aboriginal women’s innocence (noble savage) and *fallenness* as Eve in Eden who had to be expelled. All elements that read women as a metonymy of Aborigines, legitimised the colonisers’ superiority and their right to rule and civilise the inferiors (cf. *Idem*, pp. 32-34). For Bradley’s sketch see PLATE 8. The foundation event represented in the latter examples reveals the importance of the ‘shore’ as another discursive site of identity enhancing Australia’s cultural production as *They’re a Weird Mob* and the Cronulla Beach riots confirm.

<sup>71</sup> Joyce’s mother does not take care of the garden which, symbolically speaking, stands for her deteriorating relationship with her family and a lack of a peaceful familiar atmosphere. She, as Kipling in his poem “In Springtime”, hates the “endless sunshine” – though the British writer desires Spring and she the rain in Melbourne. The colonies for both, India and the outback respectively, are desolated lands. Besides, her longing for a place elsewhere signifies that, as far as the garden is associated with her, it does not signify the nationhood but probably only a subjugated and limited femininity.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. K. Holmes, “Gardens”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 23 (61) June 1999; D. Jones, “Cultivating Empire: The Gardens Women Write”, *Gardening in the Colonies* (special issue of *SPAN*), 46, April 1998, pp. 34, 36.

<sup>73</sup> *The Royal Readers* was a collection of books for children widespread in all British colonies and, thus, contributed to the colonisation not only of the newfoundland but of the mind of its inhabitants too (cf. H. Tiffin, “‘Flowers of Evil,’ Flowers of Empire: Roses and Daffodils in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison”, in *Idem*, pp. 60-61, 70 note n. 3). Although Tiffin applies

the bush. The presence of the garden signifies the taming of the landscape, through the flattening of its humpy aspect or the fencing of its vastness, and thus works as a spatial colonial and epistemic metaphor for civilisation, racial and class superiority, progress, good citizenship, Western cognitive frameworks. Briefly, both “a ground for assimilation”<sup>74</sup> and for claiming ownership. Its *textuality* implicitly justified the *Terra Nullius* and the decision to establish a colony by the British government since Aborigines were considered, like Caliban, to live in a state of nature and thus as part of the land to be colonised<sup>75</sup>. And, still now, justifies forms of neo-colonialism.



**PLATE III**

***Albion House, Augusta, 1836***

Thomas Turner, Pen and ink and watercolour  
Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia

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this to Caribbean natives it is valid for those who are descending from colonisers alike, as a way of looking to the new land and naming it from a hegemonic perspective.

<sup>74</sup> K. Holmes, *art. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>75</sup> Aborigines were represented by British artists in Western Australia as picturesque elements, passive, nomadic travellers and cultureless, thus reinforcing the principle of *Terra Nullius*. William Westall and Frederick Garling usually presented a land ‘uninhabited’, lacking history, that is a “blank page”. Their real aim was to represent to potential colonisers the new land as a ‘promised land’ for a new colony (cf. J. Gooding, “Presence and Absence in the Western Australian Landscape”, *Westerly*, 44 (3) Spring 1999, pp. 99-108) in order to solve the problems of overpopulation and criminality back in the home country.



The extension of the *metaphoricity* of the garden is confirmed by she-oaks, typical Australian bush-flowers that on Binji Cross station are made part of its flora and tamed. In fact, they are “*planted along the [...] edges to stop the winds*” (*TS*, 176; emphasis added) so to “impose order on a chaotic environment”<sup>76</sup>. An aspect A.B. Tracy, in her *The Gothic Novel*, associates with search for identity and which is strictly linked to the power of re-naming, of inserting something in another relational system of signs.

As Paul Carter states, the practice of land-clearing signifies the colonisers’ unwillingness to communicate with the natives:

the result of ground-clearing was to institute one system of memorialization at the expense of another. It was as if the colonists set out to erase the common ground where communication with the ‘Natives’ might have occurred. To found the colony, to inaugurate linear history and its puppet-theatre of marching soldiers and treadmills, was to embrace an environmental amnesia; it was actively to forget what wisdom the ground, and its people, might possess<sup>77</sup>.

An incommunicability resulting in a substitution of

a new silence for the old one. In fact, the ‘silence’ that is attributed to the ancient landscape is an important rhetorical weapon in the silencing process [...] The lie of the land is associated with a noise that must be silenced. To inhabit the country is to lay rest its echoes. And these strategies do not belong uniquely to remote episodes in the history of European imperialism [...] they continue to be the traumatic weapons we use to quieten down the voices of the old ground<sup>78</sup>.

The dispossession of the land that Aboriginal communities have possessed for more than forty thousand years involves an erasure of identity, at least from the

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<sup>76</sup> A.B. Tracy, *The Gothic Novel: 1790-1830. Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, p. 10 qtd in G. Turcotte, *Peripheral Fear. Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction*, Brussels, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009, p. 61.

<sup>77</sup> P. Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, London, Faber and Faber, 1996, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Idem*, p. 8.

dominant perspective, of what was perceived as an already vanished race. This attitude towards Aborigines is evident in both Joyce's parents. Besides being culturally stereotyped as lazy (cf. *TS*, 176), their presence on the station is a nameless one or occurs through an English name reflecting, ironically, how little they were regarded by Joyce's father's, Cecil:

But Dad's biggest success came with the Aborigines. Cecil Hathaway's Aborigines were relatively well-treated, worked hard and, most importantly, stayed with him. His best friend was an older Aborigine they called Len. That was a name of convenience standing for something else, although what that something else was Dad never bothered to find out; his regard did not extend that far (*TS*, 177).

Not totally different was her mother's attitude towards those feared people. As Joyce's tells the psychiatrist Dr Camberwell, an aspect that links her unsolved confusion to her childhood life on the station:

'I don't think it was racism, because she was positively fond of Aboriginal children and felt very protective towards them. With the adults she was reserved, distant, but never mocking or patronizing as were most of the whites

'[...] the very fact that she feared them implies a respect for their culture that was missing among the whites those days (*TS*, 47-48).

However, once Joyce's knowledge of her mother not being racist is compared to another scene and once the reader gets to know that her fear has nothing to do with respect but is determined by an affair with a black man, new light is cast on her behaviour:

Outside, emerging from the dust like a vision, a slummocky Aboriginal woman carrying a child on her hip, and an older one walking alongside her. She came to the gate and walked straight into the garden in that casual, possessing stride of someone who spends most of her existence outdoors and feels at one with the ground she treads (*TS*, 293).

Sympathetic as it might be, it reveals a ‘compromise’ between a philanthropic and a utilitarian approach. In fact, the way of life of those Aborigines that beg at her door, sent away because “‘you’ll always have them back otherwise ...’” (*Ibidem*), and her standard of life and privileged position are closely interconnected consequences of colonisation. Symbolically, the crossing of those spatial limits of the garden unhinges any fixed *positionality*. The dispossession of their lands means both taking away from them their own ‘way of life’ and obliging them to depend on Western food, clothes, and so on.

Having pointed out that the one who is really dispossessed is the ‘white’ subject – an aspect that will be analysed in details in the next section on homosexuality and miscegenation, this section turns back to the key point from which it started: Nick’s ‘complicity’ with the above memories of colonisation and the shameful stain on Australian history. Perhaps, the real question to pose has to do with the meaning given to multiculturalism. If it stands for the affiliations with origins, then migrants will not feel implicated with what is considered Australian history. As Hage claims, it has to do with “the process of ‘caring’ for the memory of the other” and “the transmission of affect”<sup>79</sup>. Hage discusses the way one does get polluted, tainted by memories (of genocide) of the community with which one identifies, whether this is one’s family or not, since “for what we have received we are expected to give back”<sup>80</sup>. In other words, a “participatory belonging”<sup>81</sup>. As for migrants, it is when the gift of social life is well given and migrants experience a sense of being cared for that they can identify with the Howardian ‘we’ and its implications. Yet, concluding with a sort of anthropological and literary narration of his research, Hage makes his fictional character say:

And now I learn that they’ve killed all these Aboriginal people when their ancestors invaded Australia. So it wasn’t your mother’s breast after all: you stole it. You’re worse than me!

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<sup>79</sup> G. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, cit., p. 97.

<sup>80</sup> *Idem*, p. 99.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*.

[...] *Why should I be grateful to you anyway for letting me have a suck? [...] You haven't offered me anything. Stolen goods: that's what you have offered me. I don't owe you anything. You thought you didn't offer me hospitality. In fact, you couldn't. It's not your land. I am liberated. NO OBLIGATIONS.*

[...] *The guy Noel Pearson said that Australia is made out of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. I like that. Finally a category that puts me and John Howard in the same position. Maybe I can belong here ... Who says I don't care ...?*<sup>82</sup>.

In the light of this, Flo' and Harold's metonymic neo-racism, testifying to the lack of social gift, entails that Nick's thoughtless experience of the bush does not pollute his belonging 'here'.

### **3.7 Unsettling 'Whiteness': homosexuality and miscegenation**

In addition to the coloniser-colonised relationship that occurs on the station, the bush and the garden become shifting signifiers.

While it is a female space to violate before colonisation it then becomes a male one after it is subdued, a symbol of lawless power and sexuality; an extension of the first power of the garden which is now enclosed by the domesticity of the house and, as such, a powerless female space<sup>83</sup>. As a discursive identitarian site, the garden symbolises not only the encounter between the West and the East but also between the homeland (England) and the settler colony. The latter opposition entails that domesticity is "depicted as a site of conservatism and a threat to national values"<sup>84</sup>. The garden, thus, sums up the identitarian ambivalence of the Australian self who, at the same time, acts as a coloniser and a post-colonial subject.

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<sup>82</sup> *Idem*, pp. 102-03.

<sup>83</sup> Although women were associated with gardens, when they discovered new plants and flowers in Canada and Australia not only they had no power to name them but none were named after them (Cf. D. Jones, *art. cit.*, p. 34). This depicts, on a more general level, that their role was at once essential to the new nation, since they raised families and were the purveyor of civilisation for an obedient society, and minimised for the 'enterprise' in setting up the new nation was fundamentally masculine (cf. B. Bennett, J. Strauss (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 40).

<sup>84</sup> *Idem*, p. 93; see also p. 97 for women's exclusion from both the bush and political life.

The image of a paradisiacal garden dated back to the Old testament and is associated, as in *Henry III* and the imperialist period, with nationhood and the feminine highlighting a contrast between the heavenly homeland and the wasteland of the colonies. However, the imagery of the colonies was more complicated than that. They represented, at once, paradises where to start a new life and hells – a tension known as the ‘colonial dilemma’<sup>85</sup> and evident in Bhabha’s ‘ambivalence’. Yet, when the second image prevailed, it was the settlers’ aim to recreate, through the garden, the homeland<sup>86</sup>. It becomes obvious from what has been said that the bush is a space of struggle for one’s own identity and, because of that, *the other* has to be kept on its margins: a space “establishing symbolic enclosures”<sup>87</sup>. The bush is what the castle represented in traditional Gothic upon which epistemic and ontological fears of blurring polarities are projected.

Yet, being a *locus* of crisis, the bush is also, like the pub, the space where the mateship value began as a metaphor for the androcentric narcissistic and paternalistic nature of Australia monoculture, the concrete translation of its signifier – ‘whiteness’, privileges, superiority. Seshadri-Crooks, in her Lacanian analyses of Conrad’s ‘The Secret Sharer’ sees the homosocial bond between the captain and Leggatt as the representation of a “total masculine self-sufficiency available only in those lawless spaces beyond England and Europe”, a “masculine *jouissance*”<sup>88</sup> in a space not subjected to the paternal metaphor where the Subject is not lacking but achieves full ‘whiteness’: the mastery of humanity and of sexuality. The bush provides, thus, the lawless place where the Australian Subject’s (read ‘white male Anglo-Celts’) fantasy of full ‘Whiteness’ may be realised and from where women (also read ‘Aborigines, immigrants, *others*’<sup>89</sup>), due to their incompleteness, need to be excluded. Where there is the necessity of being part of a group in order to feel at ‘home’ there is always some form of exclusion.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. D. Jones, *art. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>87</sup> P. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History*, London, Faber and Faber, 1987, p. 168 qtd in J. Gooding, *art. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>88</sup> K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>89</sup> The parallelism between women and Aborigines is reinforced by the relationship between Joyce’s parents (like Nick and Joyce) and that between Joyce’s father and Aborigines (like Anglo-Australians)

It is in this scheme, however, that both Nick's and Steve's homosexuality and the relationship between Joyce's mother and an unnamed Aboriginal man – a type of relationship deemed unthinkable – are better understood as unsettling the mythical monolithic construction of the nation: 'male' and 'white'.

As for the former it unsettles the mateship legend 'narrating' the Anglo-Celtic identity and the foundation myth of the country as conveyed in Howard's speech, the 'white paper' and in *They're a Weird Mob* – to give just a few examples.

And there was something about Lupo. Foxy old Lupo, what was it? Lupo as a bird. That's it. Lupo growing feathers. Gorgeous multicoloured feathers, puffed up like a peacock, parading himself up and down the yard. And all the women came to admire this bizarre hybrid, cheering (or was it howling?), their faces fat and ugly, criss-crossed by the squares of cyclone fencing.

In the midst of all this arrives a young man. Steve's young brother Geoff, only in the dream he couldn't remember his name. Anyway, he rushes forward, warning everyone to keep off the fence.

'It's a trick of the Devil, can't you see?'

No one listens; so he throws himself against the fence and starts to shout some mumbo-jumbo that sounds very much like abuse. But the effect on Lupo is quite extraordinary. He starts to shed his feathers. They fall to his feet in a heap of leaves and expose his coat of raw flesh. Undeterred, the dog proceeds to pace up and down, trampling on a carpet of its own feathers, looking skinny and grotesque in its coat of crimson.' Are you happy now?' yells Steve's brother, more fanatical than before. 'I warned you, didn't I? See what you've done?'

But the people, more angry than afraid, jeer and boo.

'What did you do that for? The poor thing! Dress him up again. Put the feather back on him.'

And they start to chant.

'*We – want – our – bird-dog! Give – us – our – bird-dog!*' (TS, 127, 130-32).

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and immigrants).

Nick's subconscious re-elaborates, through a process of condensation and in a form of self-deceit and self-defence<sup>90</sup>, images and occurrences of daily life (Freud's "day residues"<sup>91</sup>). In fact, before falling asleep he had been watching a documentary on a 'courtship' between birds in New Guinea and, in the afternoon, he had had an 'intimate' encounter with Steve:

*Following its mating instinct the male Bird of Paradise gives a dazzling display of song and dance, fanning out its magnificent feathers to attract the female.*

On the screen, gaudy with jungle green, wings blue and glittering are beating with orgasmic (*sic*) frenzy.

*... Several females are lured to the performing male, whose numbers have been reduced by tribesmen hunting them for their feathers. The female watches the ritual, and is mesmerized by the frenetic performance (TS, 126).*

'Relax, Steve, the workday is finished. Take your tie off.'

[...]

'[...] I reckon you must be controlled in other ways for staying single so long. Although ... I don't know ... I don't know. I reckon you're a dark horse. I reckon you might be screwing them by the bundle.'

He smiles wickedly, savouring this newly created image of Steve.

'I wish I was.' Steve smiles nervously.

'And if you're not, what do you do, Steve? What do you do about it?'

[...] All he wants to do is cross the space between them to pull it loose.

[...]

'I don't want you to leave, Steve. No need, it's always worked out well between us. You're like a son to me, Steve, more than a son.'

At last, it's working! Steve is beginning to let go. His fists open to reveal the dampness on the palms. He shivers, shaking off the tension.

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<sup>90</sup> In this psychological framework, the division between light and dark in the novel could be argued as the desire to maintain clear distinctions between opposites and dismiss dreams and shadows as having no part in 'objective' reality.

<sup>91</sup> J.M. Mageo, "Subjectivity and Identity in Dreams", cit., p. 5.

Off goes his tie with a free jerk that twists his face. The grimace stays as he struggles with his shirt-button.

What else can Nick do but move in?

‘Here, let me give you a hand.’

His nail inside Steve’s collar is like tortoiseshell, the same levigate timelessness. So easy to succumb to a warming numbness. The air inside the room is drunk with the mingling odours of two men’s bodies, charged with desire for freedom, for expression.

Rip! Off comes the button dropping to the tiled floor with a glassy sound. It breaks through that invisible shield to a delicious promise. At last Steve breaks out in perspiration, you can see it through his shirt that’s wet and clingy. At last, after eleven years, Steve Lambert’s eyes and his look directly into each other. His mouth, that fleshy, baby-pink, baby-limp mouth of Steve’s falls open, waiting.

‘Bloody hell, Nick. Bloody hell mate!’ And Steve’s eyes are watery with pleading (*TS*, 108-09).

From the relation between the ‘daily residues’ and the content of the dream, on the one hand, and the description the narrator gives to introduce the reader to the dream, on the other hand, the metaphorical meaning of the bird goes without saying. The reference to Nick’s latent homosexuality signifies the loss of his confidence which is both metaphorically conveyed by the shedding of the bird’s feathers and the consequential “skinny and grotesque” image (*TS*, 129). And, though the characters appearing in this dream are all women but one, Steve’s homosexuality accounts for his presence in the dream. One might object to the latter claim on the basis that Steve’s brother, Geoff, is also present. However, though that is true, he is not part of the group that the dog-bird tries to attract – as the scene at the mirror demonstrates as well – but overtly stands against it. This makes the reader position Steve among the group of women chanting to have back their bird-dog.

It is interesting to note that both the double and the sublime – as for the latter see next section – are linked to self-preservation<sup>92</sup> and to death, Eros and Thanatos<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Nick’s present identity as ‘a top dog’ depends on forms of recognition – through his desire for a son; the ‘grooming’ of his body; the rage, delight or despair in the eyes of other people – revealing his need to re-create himself regularly (cf. *TS*, 126).

<sup>93</sup> Cf. O. Rank, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-74.



Narcissus self-love masks the death drive that Rank relates to homosexuality. In this scheme Nick's vanity, power and homosexuality serve only to mask the thanatopic significance of his reflection in the mirror. After all, if a man is measured by his sexual power it is also true "that sex is for the feeble, an indefensible admission of one's weakness, a desire to murder and be murdered" (*TS*, 131-32). Rank, providing Dorian Gray as an example, associates the idea of death with the one of becoming old. Yet, though Nick is no Dorian Gray swearing that "When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself"<sup>94</sup>, his death can doubtless be linked by the reader to his getting old (cf. *TS*, 256). The two drives have to do with mirrors, as with water, and Rank refers to the mythological tradition of Dionysus. Interestingly enough, Nick bears striking similarities to Zagreus who is reborn in Dionysus:

In this story of rebirth, too, a mirror has its share. The polymorphous Zagreus was looking at himself as a bull in a mirror made by Hephaistos, when the Titans sent by Hera, his enemy, came and tore him apart despite his metamorphosis<sup>95</sup>.

Both look in the mirror as animals and both are torn apart, though Nick only metaphorically speaking. Yet, Nick is associated with the image of the bull especially in connection to his virility (cf. *TS*, 11). Rank goes on to say that homosexuality, read through the double, leads the subject to choose his/her "love object [...] with a narcissistic attitude toward one's own image"<sup>96</sup>. In fact, Nick's love object, Steve, expresses the former's narcissistic desire to assimilate; while, once Nick begins to go back and regain his true identity, he loses interest in Steve, a symbol of his adopted identity. It goes without saying that Nick's relationship with his doubles, Nicola and Steve, only enhances his identitarian multiplicity, his inbetweenness avoiding any one-to-one relationship ending up in fixing identities. Finally, and paradoxically, the more Nick loves himself the more extreme is his crisis since, if the double is a 'within' part, the former is directly proportional to the latter.

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<sup>94</sup> O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, qtd in *Idem*, p. 71.

<sup>95</sup> *Idem*, p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> *Idem*, p. 75.

Nick's fragmentation 'at the mirror' is not limited to *The Sensualist* but recalls the one expressed by Patrick White, whose homosexuality and life Hodge and Mishra see "as a quintessentially Australian phenomenon", as the very title of his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass* suggests. In fact, if in Lacan's theoretical framework the mirror should construct a single self or a double into whom to assimilate, conversely, White's mirror with its 'flaws' produces "a multiplicity of defective doubles"<sup>97</sup>, a disruption of the mateship monolithic construction of the nation.

In relation to the second aspect, it is an overturning of the 'white man-black woman' affair conveying a sexualised relationship with the land and already anticipated by the unhomeliness of what is outside the garden<sup>98</sup>. It was in the bush that, as Flo' tells Joyce during the party, their mother "disappeared ... yes, vanished and nobody knew why or how" (*TS*, 268) to return pregnant with a baby it was not their father's, as it turns out when

[t]he father – the real father, that is – turned up at the back door sometime later. I was alone in the house with Mother that day. I have never seen a person so stricken with terror as she has when she discovered the man there. The point is, Joyce, he was black as the ace of spades ... (*TS*, 269).

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<sup>97</sup> B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 213. As Hodge and Mishra say, historian Dixon traces this attitude back to the discursive foundation site of the nation. In the unofficial anthem "Waltzing Matilda", 'Matilda' stands for a swagman's swag so that the female subject is constructed as "an item of property of a male who rejects women" (*Idem*, p. 212). The latter interpretation of the mateship value and of women reduced to mere objects is well explained by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick distinction between homosexual and homosocial desire. 'Homosocial' includes relationships which do not imply physical desire but whose aim is that of "maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (E.K. Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 25). In this scheme, while homosocial desire excludes women (read 'the marginalised') from the sphere of desire, though not officially, it also rejects the fear of homosexuality among heterosexuals (of the 'queer' among the 'normal').

<sup>98</sup> The garden-bush opposition, with the bush as a metonymy for Australia, also stands for others: the mother and the non-mother, West-East, England-Australia, city-bush. Life is more comfortably located in the city where the land is covered over but, however, being always perceived as 'elsewhere', in need of other referents and other cultures – as Desmond perfectly expresses –, 'white' identity seems to be always beyond reach. Australia is, therefore, the stillborn mother, the dead centre where people get lost, or even the mother who ingests life.

The very fact that she was pregnant with a black baby has important implications as suggested by the visit of the black man to reclaim his child. And, although she had to give him up since victim of a patriarchal system as her state of fallen woman suggests, the act of miscegenation means a recovery of moral and political agency by Aborigines. In fact, on the one hand, the prohibition of miscegenation marked 'white' subjects as morally superior since if the taboo was transgressed black women were blamed for their supposed immorality<sup>99</sup>; and, on the other hand, the aim of the taboo was not only to avoid marriage or cohabitation, but to mask the fear of having to recognise legitimacy. And, as a consequence, the fear to lose "the possibility of incest"<sup>100</sup> which meant to position oneself above the paternal law where *jouissance* is. The very possibility to transgress the taboo of incest was an affirmation of authority for the 'white' subject. That such were the case, Seshadri-Crooks goes on, was testified by the anxiety generated by an affair between a white woman and a black man since denying legitimacy to their children would have meant recognising the same power to the black man. Therefore, the only solution would be the expulsion of the mother<sup>101</sup> or/and abortion. Applying this to Joyce's mother it is easier to understand, in a patriarchal system, her abortion and her state as a fallen woman, a sort of social expulsion though she does not live the typical Victorian downward path. In *The Sensualist*, the 'baby', standing both for the inheritance of the land and the immorality of the 'white' subject, haunts the very sexualised foundation myth with its *terra nullius* and moral superiority. To reclaim one's land means to legitimise one's identity, memories and 'will' thus disrupting any notion of the nation-state.

The 'dead centre' makes Millie suffer from an existential angst which proves the fragility of the human condition and, in turn, detaches her from her family, as her turning away from the care for the garden symbolises. If one assumes the bush to be a metonymy of Australia, it is logic to see all Anglo-Celtic characters living an identitarian crisis; it epitomises an interior void, a condition of loneliness. So, for

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. J.J. Pettman, "Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Australia", in D. Stasiulis, N. Yuval-Davis (eds.), *Unsettling Settler Societies. Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*, London, Sage Publications, 1995, p. 72.

<sup>100</sup> K. Seshadri-Crooks, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*.

instance, Joyce's mother commits suicide, her father is trapped in his nostalgia and they do not get along with each other anymore, Joyce needs a psychiatrist to make sense of her past, secrets are kept between Joyce and Flo' about life on the station, Desmond and Steve are homosexuals. For them the return to the Mother is impossible since the 'mother' is sterile as the connection between Joyce's identitarian "confusion" and "sterility" (*TS*, 3) and the land where she lived her childhood suggests. The only possibility is expressed through the metaphor of the 'window' or the 'elsewhere' both signifying that whatever life it is uncannily going on somewhere else. Unhomely family, outback and identitarian sterility make up a perfect triad in the logic of the novel. The silences in and of the bush that Nick does not listen to ask the reader to focus on life in the outback and lend his/her own ears to the secrets of that world, for the 'white' subject, the 'loss' of innocence and of a "certain kind of colonial optimism" conveyed through "weird melancholy"<sup>102</sup> resembling a ghost story and, for the black subject, land dispossession and their right to reclaim it back.

In the same way as *The Sensualist* is haunted by repetitiveness, so this last section is by the beginning of this chapter, that is by the relationship between multiculturalism and colonialism which masks a feeling of identitarian anxiety, an 'unsettledness'<sup>103</sup> mirrored by the same immigrant who is the 'outsider within' as Nicola the migrant is the stranger within Nick, the latter metaphorically 'transvestite' as an Anglo-Australian subject. Furthermore, the above entails that if Australia needs referents positioned somewhere else, then there is no centre and migrants can become, with their pasts and memories, other referents in creating a multicultural Australia or since the term carries negative connotations a *post*-multicultural one.

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<sup>102</sup> K. Gelder, *art. cit.*, p. 117. In his preface to the colonial writer Adam Lindsay Gordon's book of poetry, Markus Clarke drawing on Freud's melancholy interprets its Gothic description of the outback as projections onto the landscape of the loss of the colonial optimism felt by colonisers when starting their adventure in the outback (*Idem*, pp. 116-17).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. K. Gelder, J.M. Jacobs, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

### 3.8 A polyphonic *jouissance*

As discussed in the previous chapter, heterogeneity defines the semiotic, the pre-logic force of the subject in process which manifests in the symbolic. In the same vein, writing is never exclusively semiotic or symbolic but a *texture* of both. Grafting the notion of the subversive semiotic (rhythms, melodies, repetitions) on narrative intertextuality and pastiche means that both, following different paths, disrupt monologism. Practically speaking it signifies, for intertextuality, that the ‘otherness’ of other signifying systems brought – or one should say ‘transposed’ – into the text in question unleashes their semiotic force by being transformed. And, for pastiche, that a medley of genres, styles, media, high and low culture, of narrative arrangements, disrupts the syntactic/syntagmatic axis of narration and repositions the *thetic*, the subject’s *positionality* as non-unitary. This kind of novel, Kristeva claims, is “on the fringe of official culture”<sup>104</sup> as its carnivalesque structure proves indicating like Bakhtin’s dialogism a “*becoming*”<sup>105</sup> and a logic of “*nonexclusive opposition*”<sup>106</sup>. Ultimately, it represents the possibility of reading and rewriting history.

Casella’s *The Sensualist* perfectly exemplifies these two dimensions of the text. First conceived as a play, its author says, the work retains some structures and elements of classical dramas such as the three-day period in which the plot unfolds in order to achieve intensity in a “narrow span of time” until its catharsis is accomplished and mirrored by what function “like acts”, that is the three central parts of the novel (The Dog, The Pig, The Crabs). Furthermore, as in classical drama, “you have the ‘king’ (in this case Sicilian migrant-made-good Nick Amedeo) at his most arrogant and powerful before a number of things overtake him and he is metaphorically undressed, stripped of his power”<sup>107</sup>; the ritual sacrifice as the term ‘tragedy’ originally denotes (Greek, ‘goat song’) which epitomises the king’s self-destruction; ‘hope’ comes after the tragedy while hopelessness and inevitability

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<sup>104</sup> J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, cit., p. 86.

<sup>105</sup> *Idem*, p. 71.

<sup>106</sup> *Idem*, p. 72.

<sup>107</sup> C. McLeod, *art. cit.*, p. 8. Nick has, like tragic figures, qualities of excellence and passion, virtues and gifts that lift him above the ordinary – in his case above other migrants. Yet, these qualities are insufficient to prevent his self-destruction.

characterise its development – Nick’s foreseeable and unavoidable death once the reader understands the parallelism between Christ, the pig and Nick; it expresses a rage against what caused tragedy, not Nick’s past but its rejection as a result of the assimilationist policy in Australia<sup>108</sup>; and an extended notion of the classical unity of place since the plot develops in Perth since life on the station and Sicily are mentioned but only through memory. Yet, though tragedy, as far as its plot is concerned, represents the shattering of certainties both for the main character and the reader since the fall and death of the former mirrors the latter’s<sup>109</sup>, from a strictly aesthetic perspective the genre serves to recreate the world that has been upset as the function of the chorus demonstrates. Its unities are fundamental to impose the classical belief in a rational world regulated by superior divinities. Such aesthetic unity, mirroring a philosophical and moral one as well, is dismantled by pastiche and intertextuality.

In addition to different narrators, the device of *prosopopeia*, their polyphonic relationship and the carnivalesque element discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, *The Sensualist* makes use of different genres and styles: ‘poetry’ to express Steve’s and Nicola’s unconscious and to introduce Sicilian popular culture as *metonymic gaps*; of the biblical style of rituality which is parodied; Florence’s ‘letter’ to Joyce is included as a reference to travel literature whose ethnographic vision of the exotic is put forward to be dialogically rejected through what the land represents for Nick; the ‘framing of actions’ characterising Steve’s representation of the actions of others which puts him on the same level of Flo’ and Harold; isolated ‘stage directions’; the blurring between tragic figures – Nick as a ‘king’ – and people ‘low’ by nature – Nick is laughable, disgraceful for its attachment to the material aspect of life (food, sex, drink, businesses)<sup>110</sup>. If one tries to visualise the writing ‘space’ (“the

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<sup>108</sup> All these elements develop in a way similar to Freytag’s pyramid: exposition (background information of Joyce’s and Nick’s identitarian problem is provided); rising action (the internal conflict is complicated by other elements such as Joyce’s life on the station and her mother’s paranoia; Nick’s memories of her mother and its relation to his present identity), climax (the party when truth is discovered both by Joyce and Nick), falling action (liminal identity), and dénouement (Nick’s death).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-16.

<sup>110</sup> For the relation between Gothic novels and dialogism, as far as the incorporation of different genres is concerned without any mention to postmodern pastiche, see J. Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction. A Bakhtinian Approach*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 44-52.

close relationship between language and space, compelling us to analyse them as modes of thought”<sup>111</sup>), as painting transmits essence through form<sup>112</sup>, it comes up with no doubt that the structure of tragedy is at once developed and disrupted. In fact, it is a prose that switches into and is shattered by the unleashing force of poetry, letters, song’s lines, theatrical dialogues and stage directions resulting in ‘rhythmic’ elements dislocating the reader’s positionality. The latter has to come to grips with different signifying practices that break the narrative line and positions the subject before the ‘mirror stage’ where there is fragmentation.

Since emphasis has been put on the other genres listed above, here poetry will be discussed as that which reveals the ‘tension’, the “inability to keep [oneself] on a temporal line because the massive, archaic past will not go away”<sup>113</sup> and, consequently “the narrative construction ... the result of a ‘working-out’ of the self, but also a defence and consolidation of the self in relation to its experience of crisis”<sup>114</sup>. Of all the poems present in the novel associated with the past and the unconscious, a brief mention will be made with relation to Steve and Nicola.

Lying on the floor and watching the same nature show as Nick, which creates a sort of telepathic effect reinforcing the idea of Steve as a double, his writing in the form of poetry is associated with the unconscious<sup>115</sup>:

And then, an urge takes hold of me. Something I have never done before. I go looking for pad and pen and ...

The old sun  
flushed pink with bluster and anger  
has finally conceded its own bluff  
and sinks down vanquished.

The night then,  
with the promise of steamy hours  
and the newts and the moths

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<sup>111</sup> J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, cit., p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*.

<sup>113</sup> M. Waller, *art. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>115</sup> It is also interesting to note the striking parallelism between the content of the poem and that of the novel as if the first were a sort of ‘womb’ containing the latter.

chasing lightbeams in the milky dark,  
will not be curbed ...

So it's no use trying  
to stop the curdling milk.  
And, to be sure,  
concessions will be made.  
The morgue-lighted passage  
must be crossed.

After that  
it won't be difficult  
to drag his shadow  
making sure of course  
to avoid the mirror.  
In the heaving bathroom  
penetrated only  
by the squalid yellow light  
through the church-brown  
of the frosted glass  
it will come easy  
to cheat and to pretend  
with the conscience properly sealed  
under steamy lids.

Crouching  
in the shower he will step  
there to be anointed  
like a Roman before the battle  
or a Priest before the ritual;  
for in the inner sanctum  
of his darkest silence  
there are no limits to his definition.  
There, where blood-heat echoes  
on the ceramic surface,  
to the primeval rhythms of some distant past,  
a man may be born again in himself.  
'Clean in body, clean in spirit.'

After that  
he will emerge something less  
and something more, as always;  
[...] (*TS*, 127-289).

And in a poem titled "Confessions of an Old Dog Dying", Nicola tells about Nick's identity:

For then I could argue  
with convincing ardure  
(and a spin of the tail)  
'bout my true pedigree  
about Alsace/Lorraine  
(for instance) or just Alsace.  
Whether I be Kraut or a slimy Frog



or even (time permitting)  
an Aussie by birth  
a Dago by name  
Aussie-Dago by culture (*TS*, 166).

Narrative pastiche decentres who produces history, the modes of ‘representation’, “the possibility of final meanings or of being in the presence of pure ‘sense’ [,] the authority of one ethnic ‘identity’”<sup>116</sup>. It is itself a liminal phenomenon. In the pastiche, if form reflects the content then the lack of a unique and fixed one mirrors the postmodern lack of unity of the subject, his/her hybridity always in process. And, if Jameson would argue that pastiche is “blank parody”, what has been said pointedly demonstrates that the simple fact of making a medley of different genres is *per se* a form of parody or, as Cuddon would put it, a correction of the dominance of established ‘conventions’ up to the point that the distinction between genres is blurred. Pastiche is, thus, not “devoid of laughter”<sup>117</sup>.

The disrupting force of the latter is augmented by the intertextuality of other discourses which entails a repositioning of the ‘I’ always different depending on the signifying systems which make up the text unhinging any trapping notion of ‘authenticity’. For Kristeva, ‘transposition’ is the

signifying process’ ability to pass from one signifying system to another, to exchange and permute them; and *representability* the specific articulation of the semiotic and the thetic for a sign system. Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it implies [...] the articulation of the new system with its new representability<sup>118</sup>.

And, as she states in one of her interviews:

We have to work with discourses that are much more fragmentary and closer to the semiotic than to the symbolic. This explains why I feel that we have even greater need of models that

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<sup>116</sup> A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>117</sup> F. Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>118</sup> J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York, Columbia University Press, [1974] 1984, p. 60 (tr. M. Waller).

insist on the semiotic, because in the discourse of today's patient, this level is more apparent than ever before<sup>119</sup>.

Therefore, Casella, as a writer and a migrant, repositions himself in a different way than his previous and future writings and in writing *The Sensualist* his *positionality* depends on reference to the discourses about Aborigines, the postmodern use of the Bible, his literary influences (such as the modernists James Joyce and William Faulkner, and the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga) and composer Pietro Mascagni<sup>120</sup>.

As for the latter, reference is made to Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* as the reader learns during a dinner at Nick's house. When the famous 'intermezzo' starts playing, for Joyce it comes as a rescue from "the Nick Amedeos of this world" (*TS*, 124) and the reader who knows the Sicilian tragedy of *cumpare* Turiddu starts associating Joyce with Santuzza, Turiddu's fiancé on whom he cheats with Lola. It is Santuzza that wishes him the *malapasqua* – a time which links the novella and the novel – and it is Joyce who symbolically gives Nick 'vinegar' instead of water. Easter is reinterpreted in *The Sensualist* since it is given a post-multicultural twist. Both Turiddu and Nick assume Christ's role and yet, if for the former Easter does not represent a moment leading to resurrection but only to death, for Nick it is the resurrection of his subjectivity. In the scheme of the characters in the opera, one might argue that John is more a character like Alfio attached to money, while Nella is more a Lola, who knows how to get the desired object as Lola does with Turiddu and Nella with Geoff. Besides, this intertextuality works as a form of metonymic gap since it consists of "concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader"<sup>121</sup>, thus, constructing a 'gap' between cultures<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> I. Lipkowitz and A. Loselle, *art. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>120</sup> This is what happens in real life as well: Interviewer: 'How do you think other people see you?' Casella: 'See me? It depends who it is and where you are. [...] I'm a bit of a chameleon, and I think most people are like that' (S. Iuliano, "Interview with Antonio Casella", *Vite Italiane*. *Italian Lives in Western Australia*, Perth, The University of Western Australia, 2005, p. 25).

<sup>121</sup> B. Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice*, cit., p. 175.

<sup>122</sup> Other forms of metonymic gaps typical of post-colonial cultures writing back to the centre are also found in other 'marginal writings'. In *The Sensualist*, though glossing (the parenthetic translation) is

In conclusion, the aesthetic polyphony discussed in this section can be considered as the transgression of the taboo of ‘authenticity’ paralleling other forms of taboo. Such a desire in writing – which ties dreams and body as well<sup>123</sup> and is linked to the drives preceding the *thetic* phase by erasing the inhibition imposed by ‘language’ – leads to a non-adjustment by virtue of a sacrifice to the symbolic. In brief, an aesthetic pleasure whose aim is to attain a deeper one: perhaps, as for the joke, *jouissance* in the Real. Yet this unhinging of one’s social identity is difficult to admit because, as S. Homer explains drawing on Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, one will “settle for any experience rather than fall out of the symbolic into the trauma of the real”<sup>124</sup>. This accounts for the tension in *The Sensualist* between, at the same time, unveiling and masking.

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widely used to foreground a cultural distance, untranslated words reveal a refusal to be subsidiary. In other words, even though readers can locate the meaning by adopting a sort of linguistic compensation strategy used when getting in contact with a foreign language, they have to expand their cultural framework in order to achieve understanding: this happens with terms such as “*catoiu*” (*TS*, 198) or “*roba*” (*TS*, 203). Furthermore, vernacular transcription and code switching convey the ‘alterity’ of one’s own culture: ““*No, per Dio no*, I never hear such a ting. In my town de women kept de skirt on and de honour. Iss de woman that invite de rape”” (*TS*, 41); ““What for you think she divorce me?”” (*TS*, 241); ““You know the Amedeos, they was the most respected family in San Michele. Your grandfather, he was a fine man. Every Sunday morning he would come to the town for church. Like everyone from all around the *campagna*. ‘My father when he hear the sound of your Nannu’s *carrozza*, he go to the front door step and call us children. “*Affaciativi carusi, viniti cca a salutari ‘u cumpari Amedeu*”. (You understand that, no? ‘Course you do!)”” (*TS*, 142). The latter question posed by Charlie to Nick can be asked to the reader. All these ‘gaps’ are examples of intertextuality that, at the same time, express a point of view ‘other’ and the interweaving between different cultures of a subject always on the edge of being constructed.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, cit., p. 78.

<sup>124</sup> S. Homer, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

## *Searching for home or the uncomfortable halfway*

‘And this is the beauty of being a writer, that’s when it’s really rewarding, when you feel like you’ve just been a conjurer for something else...’<sup>1</sup>.

‘One of the ways migrants will hold on to the past is...to remember it, to tell their stories, over and over again, to each other and to the next generation. I’ve always loved stories so they had a ready audience in me’<sup>2</sup>.

‘A wolf within – a man outward only’<sup>3</sup>.

Melancholy is a psychoanalytical way of keeping the lost object alive. Only a working through – which Armanno’s characters seem to search for in his novels – permits them to move on to a new phase in which the lost object is reframed and re-elaborated in order to survive. Such a survival stands for personal and collective memory and identity which dismantle any fixity: neither Sicilian nor Australian but Sicilian-Australian.

Armanno connects the immigrants’ story with the ‘underworld’ one of the city where he has lived most of his life: Brisbane. The reasons for such a loss of community are grounded on immigrants’ social mobility, lack of vigilance, enclosure, involvement in the criminal underworld, incomprehension, but also on Brisbane’s history of corruption, exploitation and discrimination whose implications effect ethnic communities in both overt and covert ways. In brief, on a general loss of innocence.

The above entails interpreting melancholy as a ghost story of obsession and, at the same time, as an ambivalent feeling which through self-reproach and self-denial masks a social anxiety that is projected onto the *unhomely* city and conveyed through Gothic *topoi* of liminality. In this light, Emilio, Romeo and Mary are a ghost, a

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<sup>1</sup> A-M. MacDonald, “The Spark and the Grind”, *E-Writeabout*, 1 (5) June 2006, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> “Venero Armanno in Conversation with Dr Philip Neilson”, cit., Box 31, Folder 8.

<sup>3</sup> C. Bourgault du Coudray, *The Curse of the Werewolf. Fantasy, Horror and the Beast Within*, New

werewolf and a vampire respectively always in search, the last two through forms of starvation and anorexia, of their hybrid identity which is (re)discovered little by little. Liminality is also conveyed by the structure of both novels: spatial and temporal narrative dis-locations, multiple narrative voices, past-present conflation, unstable narratorial ‘I’ and the intertextuality with other media texts – with its history-fiction uncanny relationship – all awaken in the reader a ‘sublime’ dislocation mirroring the characters’ liminality in line with a Freudian theory of transference.

Ultimately, the *locus* of this unsettlement is an ‘uncomfortable’ but necessary halfway place, or ‘apartness’, that permits the subject to look in all directions shaking totalising ways of perceiving the world. Therefore, polarisations – such as Sicily/Australia, hero/villain and good/evil – are blurred through the overlapping of metaphorical frames of reference and objectified on an ontological and structural, epistemological level – death/life, present/past, reality/dream, place/space<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4.1 A weird melancholy

Often he believed that if he could just keep the *picture* of an affectionate donkey named Ciccio in his mind then the animal was as good as alive. If that was so then those old years weren’t gone either, they lived, and with all his *young boy’s decisions and hopes intact*. [...] The more the decades passed, the more Emilio clung to his earliest years with the *melancholia* of a man *who believed he’d been cheated* (TV, 23; emphasis added).

Emilio’s mood in the last fifty years of his life – since splitting up with Desideria and Mr Sosa’s and Rocco’s murders – can be associated with Freud’s melancholia. Whereas mourning is a regular reaction to “the loss of a loved person, to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal, and so on”, melancholia – though the cause may be the same – has symptoms such as

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York, I.B. Tauris, 2006, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> See *Appendix B* for Armanno’s biography and *Appendix C – Chart B and C* for the Character Charts of *Romeo of the Underworld* and *The Volcano*.

painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity of love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment<sup>5</sup>.

The above characteristics perfectly mirror Emilio's mood: first, he lives in solitude and loneliness (all his old friends have marginalised him after his involvement with criminality); secondly, he suffers from self-reproach (his relationships with women are seen as signs of weakness, as a betrayal, a replacement for Desideria); thirdly, he is haunted by a sense of self-punishment symbolised by the devil. Melancholy is a feeling characterising Romeo as well: he is obsessed by Monica and his past, he cannot get rid of her up to the point of treating other women as simple surrogates, and his death drive is the hidden aspect of his Narcissism. Freud, analysing melancholia, argues that the subject, after experiencing a loss, internalises the object identifying his/her own ego with it and, thus, contributing towards the building up of his/her character as double<sup>6</sup>. He, then, goes on to say that this identification is 'ambivalent'. In fact, on the one hand, he states that the libido is attached to the loved-object with which it is identified while, on the other hand, when the object is lost, the libido does not displace its relationship from the object to a new one, but unconsciously perceives part of the Ego (the object-ego) as the survival of the loved object. The role of the other part of the ego, since the Ego is split in two, is that of criticising the object-ego. Yet, because all this happens within the Ego of the subject, the agency of the ego is expressed in the form of self-reproach while, psychoanalytically, it is a reproach projected onto the lost object itself or what it represents.

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<sup>5</sup> S. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953-74), London, The Hogarth Press, Vol. 14, pp. 243-44 (tr. J. Strachey).

<sup>6</sup> The death drive and self-destructive attitude are linked by Kristeva to the lost object which can be identified with the melancholic subject's double. As she says, the love/hate feelings towards the lost object ensue an aggressiveness towards oneself up to the point of thinking that because "that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself" (J. Kristeva, *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia*, New York, Columbia University Press, [1987] 1989, p. 11 – tr. L.S. Roudiez). The death drive, "overshadowed by the fear of losing the object" (*Idem*, p. 25), leads the subject to find a new 'unity' in sadness.

Applied to Emilio's attitude<sup>7</sup>, the above ambivalence entails a feeling of self-reproach for the loss of the Sicilian community in Brisbane and for not having fulfilled the dream of an egalitarian life in Australia because of his involvement in Brisbane's criminal underworld. Yet, as the reader learns from the unfolding of Emilio's storytelling, that reproach is directed towards his Sicily (a place he loves and, at the same time, a land which has not provided for migrants need); Australia (a non-egalitarian society due to discrimination – black words – and mis-interpellation); and the Sicilian community in Brisbane (loss of innocence and self-destruction/closure<sup>8</sup>).

Melancholy, thus, is an expression of social anxiety as Lepenies explains by drawing on Robert Merton's sociological theory of *retreatism*. Although melancholy is commonly associated with homesickness<sup>9</sup>, it is a rejection of both the goals of the society one presently lives in and of its means. *Retreatism* is a non-belonging to society<sup>10</sup>. The melancholic subject's lost interest in the outside society, insofar as it does not recall the lost object, brings about the fancy of a somewhere-else place. Ritivoi, ultimately, sees melancholia as a manifestation of nostalgia:

Because I yearn for another place and time, which are unavailable to me at the moment, I am apathetic to the present and oblivious to my surroundings. This conflation [...] sheds some light on the possibility of defining nostalgia as intense awareness of the past, an awareness [...] that can simply be valorized as a cognitive function<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> As for Romeo's melancholia see this chapter SECTION EIGHT.

<sup>8</sup> In his essay on Persian diasporic literature in India, N.E. Bharucha asserts that 'isolation' leads the ethnic community to a kind of self-destructive behaviour which neither permits assimilation nor an openness to other cultures (cf. N.E. Bharucha, "The Earth is Not Flat. Minority Discourse Against Fundamentalism", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 43 (2) 2007, pp. 183-90). The same can be applied to ethnic communities in Australia and, specifically, to the Sicilian one depicted in Armano's novels.

<sup>9</sup> This is the case, among others, of S. Boym. Defining *reflective nostalgia*, she states that "it is a form of deep mourning that performs a labour of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future" (S. Boym, *op. cit.*, p. 55). Taking this further it would seem obvious to believe *restorative nostalgia* as negatively identified with Freud's melancholia/depression (Cf. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression. From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986, p. 321). However, this dates back even to the seventeenth century when melancholia became associated with bereavement and, thus, with a definite object such as the loss of one's beloved, delusions, the departure from one's home – homesickness (cf. *Idem*, pp. 378-79). Because melancholia and restorative nostalgia (homesickness) can easily be perceived as similar responses to homesickness – although not exclusively – Boym's implicit association seems to be proved.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. A.D. Ritivoi, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

This ambivalent attitude, which does not allow any clear cut distinction, bears similarities with Gunew's aforementioned association of 'nostalgia' with the uncanny: Freud's "closest term to nostalgia is *Heimweh*, a pregnant term containing the home, the mother, sickness *for* but also sickness *of* the home"<sup>12</sup>, where 'home' – seen as dispensing societal 'hope' – is also the host country. Therefore, "another [safe] place and time" rather than being spatially and temporally located in the past, it is also one in a 'somewhere-else' future (an egalitarian society) which does not exist in the present. It is this situation which creates melancholy, a dialogical feeling towards the past and the present. It is in this framework that Armanno seems to write his novels dealing with 'identity'; in his trilogy and *Firehead*, melancholy is linked to

the desperate seeking out of a sense of belonging. Belonging. The longing for a home, the home in the heart<sup>13</sup>.

The connection between Emilio's and Romeo's melancholy and their desire for a 'home' is imbedded in their solitude, loneliness and sadness<sup>14</sup>. In fact, these feelings

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<sup>12</sup> S.M. Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, cit., p. 116. Leo Spitzer's significant contribution to the debate supports the ambivalent interpretation of nostalgia by emphasising both the positive and negative aspects of the past: longing for and criticising the past (cf. P. Sugiman, *art. cit.*, p. 64). Spitzer's notion, Sugiman says, also functions as a counter-discourse against efforts to erase or deny the past or, in other words, it leads to the survival of "'the best past, and [a] welcome [to] the future!'" (*Ibidem*). This interpretation transforms nostalgia in a 'marginal' place as if changing the field of perception in the present by intertextually looking at the latter through the past. As a result, to resist assimilation means also to avoid social amnesia, to give visibility to what was but is no more. Nostalgia has a collective function of patching memory gaps, of *realising absences*, of recalling the forgotten or suppressed, one's own and collective roots. In Bhabha's 'DissemiNation', as his autobiographical excerpt quoted in the first chapter of this study shows, the duality of 'gathering' can be pinpointed by just focusing on its taking place *on the edge of 'foreign' cultures, in the half-life* and on its object, that is *the past in a ritual of revival*: on the one hand a life lived in a land which is not possessed by migrants, a gathering of the past (people, stories, dreams, memories, myths) in the half-life, on the edge, in the margins; on the other hand, a life that sheds light not only on migrants' displacement (through memories, myths, dreams, stories which create the gap between past and present), but also their displacing of the concept of the nation as the very title of his essay suggests.

<sup>13</sup> V. Armanno, "Wider Eyes: Growing Up Different", cit., p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> Ritivoi, drawing on other critics, distinguishes between 'isolation' and 'solitude': the former is interpreted as a form of loss, the latter is a way to hold on to something. Emilio's solitude, and by extension marginality, is thus in line with Freud's melancholia (cf. A.D. Ritivoi, *op. cit.*, p. 86).



work as a compensation for a lost affective unity, a “narcissistic support”<sup>15</sup> and a denial which nonetheless

leads the subject to commit suicide, without anguish of disintegration, as a reuniting with archaic non-integration, as lethal as it is jubilatory, ‘oceanic’<sup>16</sup>.

The sublime state, as Helen’s case testifies, can be immediately linked to the “oceanic” semiotic or the reunion with the ‘Thing’ or lost mother. Analysing Helen’s case, Kristeva refers to her melancholy as an “oceanic death”<sup>17</sup> and being “in those states of stupor that are so painful”<sup>18</sup>. Melancholy, thus, is the desire for the inorganic state of the semiotic and results in a sublime feeling, the only way the unnameable ‘Thing’ can be experienced. In this light, the act of suicide – symbolic as it might be in Armanno’s novels – is linked to something lethal and jubilatory (Thanatos and Eros) and ultimately to the semiotic and the sublime. In relation to the latter, Burke pointed out ‘solitude, deprivation and loneliness’ as some causes of the sublime of which one can draw similarities with Freud’s melancholic feeling and opposite but coexistent drives. Burke links the idea of death – and, thus, of the sublime – to that of solitude: “an entire life of solitude contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror”<sup>19</sup>. In other words, the permanent lack of good company, of a friend and of whatever desired object might result in “grief” or melancholy having “no resemblance to absolute pain”<sup>20</sup>. Solitude, a harbinger of death<sup>21</sup>, is a feeling that for him had to do with self-preservation. It is through those pictures nurtured in loneliness that Emilio, similarly to Romeo, keeps the past alive

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<sup>15</sup> J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, p. 76. This is what Kristeva tells about Helen’s states of stupor and pain: “I found myself glued to the spot, as if paralyzed, I lose the ability to speak, my mouth fills with chalk, my mind is completely empty.” [...] quickly followed by utter dejection that separated Helen from the world, caused her to withdraw into her room, dissolve into tears, and remain speechless, thoughtless for days on end (*Idem*, p. 72). It brings to mind Burke’s definition of sublime as a state “*in which all its [the soul’s] motions are suspended*, with some degree of horror” (E. Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 53).

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 36.

and dreams of a place of preservation ('halfway') where he can go 'after life'; a third space that sweeps away all 'representations' and is linked to the death drive as testified by the ghosts that people it. Therefore, the subject both experiences affliction/terror and pleasure for the hopes of self-preservation.

The ideas of solitude and silence are both linked by Burke to privation<sup>22</sup> or, one might suggest, 'forgetting'. In fact, Emilio's solitude, as also for Romeo, can be linked to their desire to speak their 'unheard' stories; a desire which comes from an actual silence. Those memories, fragments or remnants of the past<sup>23</sup>, are Lacanian 'gaps' that disrupt the monological language of forgetting', a practice supporting a 'white' narration of the nation as seen in CHAPTER ONE through the analyses of Howards' speeches. Memories are a sort of darkness, an underworld where the subject loses his/her 'identity' and discovers a 'momentary' subjectivity. In this psychoanalytical framework Armanno's characters are, like the child when losing the mother, as if trapped in-between the semiotic and the symbolic or, in other words, they are potential melancholy subjects who 'disavow' the negation of any castration or the fear of losing the object. And, as far as these characters are concerned, mourning seems to be incomplete even after a process of 'negation'<sup>24</sup>. In both cases, when there is a disavowal and when the incompleteness of negation comes to the fore, "the phallic power is [...] attributed to the mother"<sup>25</sup>.

At this point, three conclusions can be drawn: first, nostalgia is an ambivalent feeling about the past lost object – sickness *for/of* and *love/contrast*; secondly, melancholy is the mood brought about by nostalgia towards the present<sup>26</sup>; thirdly, and

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 55; S. Rushdie, *art. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Negation and disavowal are connected to mourning and melancholia, respectively: the former is the negation of the loss and its replacement through language; the latter, on the contrary, is the refusal of the above approach to the lost object to which the subject painfully remains attached (cf. J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., pp. 43-44).

<sup>25</sup> *Idem*, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Being melancholy a consequence and not synonymous with nostalgia, Boym's interpretation of 'nostalgia' as a melancholic fidelity bond to the past which entraps the subject in a form of stasis proves a mere categorisation. Boym's interpretation of nostalgia focuses on Russians who emigrated to a more egalitarian West and, thus, sees in restorative nostalgia the risk of condoning injustices experienced in a totalitarian regime. Although her interpretation is understandable, however, it cannot be considered as universal not even for Russian migrants themselves who adopt their nostalgia as a political means: for example, recent Russian writers living in America, engage in a political restorative

consequently, both nostalgia and melancholy unsettle, similarly to ghost stories<sup>27</sup>, both the past and the present.

#### 4.2 “This is my explanation”

One of the figures whose life was, like those of most Sicilian workers, dictated by Sicilian social, economic and political conditions is Salvatore (Turiddu) Giuliano. Smuggling wheat and stopped by two policemen, he tries to escape because he is unable to show any identification. Wounded in the left hip, he kills one of the policemen in self-defence which marks the dawn of his banditry in 1943. Emilio’s Sicily, as depicted in his first dream, is explicitly connected with this figure for it is set in the same year of the onset of Turiddu’s hiding, a connection made by readers when Emilio tells Giuliano’s story to Mary (cf. *TV*, 406)<sup>28</sup>. The banditry in the island, – as this section will focus on, is historically linked to the Southern question, emigration<sup>29</sup> and the unity of Italy. The presence of this historical figure in

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nostalgia in order to resist assimilation and, from this perspective, it is far from static (cf. N. Friedman, *art. cit.*) also showing how power works.

<sup>27</sup> Derrida puts his theory of ‘hauntology’ in connection with Freud’s melancholy and what is spectral in a way that the more the ghost is present the more melancholy is the feeling experienced, since the past has not been solved (cf. J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, London and New York, Routledge, [1993] 1994, p. 90). In other words, when mourning has not occurred, a ‘trace’ of the past such as the ghost is left over. One can highlight here the network between the ghost, the double, metaphor, the ‘trace’ and melancholy.

<sup>28</sup> As for Giuliano, the main important aspect underlined by Emilio in *telling* the hero’s story to Mary is the relationship between the Mafia and politicians – especially those from the north – epitomised in the ‘Portella della Ginestra’ massacre when during May Day celebrations in 1947 many innocent people were killed. Giuliano was a separatist who fought for Sicily’s independence and against “the Mafia and the government, the two institutions the Island of Sicily has despised and suffered from the most” (*TV*, 407). He was seen as the only possibility of saving Sicily (cf. *TV*, 410), he was the unelected King of Sicily. To stop his popularity and the risk of losing “the favour of the south, because there were influential blocks of votes there, and the bread basket of the mainland economy too” (*TV*, 408), the Portella della Ginestra massacre was depicted to Giuliano as the first step towards independence. On the contrary, it gave politicians the public support to stop him – at least this is Emilio’s version of the story as he himself states. Giuliano was killed on July 4, 1950.

<sup>29</sup> When describing the aftermath of WWII – Sicily being in the throes of economic recession –, Emilio points out how this ended up in the *abbandonamento* phenomenon, families being turned out from the fields they had worked for generations because many landowners were themselves financially ruined leaving their houses that were to become “ghost houses” (*TV*, 311). In his essay, “Under The Volcano”, Venero Armanno writes about a “faded baron” telling him that: “[i]n the 1950s he had simply run away from his fields, his wife and children only taking out of their grand palaces whatever fit into their maid’s Fiat – which they stole. They left everything else to be plundered by whoever wanted it. Baron Pietro’s estate fell to ruin, all the peasant families had to leave, the government acquired the land and then let it rot. It is still rotting, but only metaphorically. I touched the dirt, the

Armanno's *The Volcano* intertwines different historical periods and their implications, which permits the reader to interpret the present in the light of a silenced past.

Salvatore Giuliano is a ghost whose presence stands for Emilio's melancholic obsession with the past. As in post-traumatic stress – for instance, Freud's shell-shocked soldiers – the subject externalises an experience from memory repeating it endlessly, thus being haunted by a *revenant* presence: a melancholic obsession becoming a spectre or, in other words, a ghost story of melancholy. Derrida's French term *hantise* (translated in English as 'haunting') comes from the verb *hanter* meaning "obsession, [...] a fixed idea"<sup>30</sup> thus highlighting the link between obsession, repetition, memory and the spectre.

According to Derrida the spectre comes – though it is not a first coming, since it has always been present, but one of many<sup>31</sup> – to disrupt the present. In fact, the ghost is something which seems forgotten and closeted in the past but, actually, it haunts the present with the (re)membering of its spirit 'realised' in the spectre. G. Huggan and A. Smith respectively state:

[h]istory is reintroduced into the arena of the present, but in such a way that it threatens the fixity of existing social structures. Ghosts [...] walk through historical walls, co-existing with the present, and *literalising the memories we consecrate in metaphor in order to contain them*. [...] They function, to be sure, as agents for *the reconstruction of historical memory*. [...] They] may help construct a kind of counter-memory, in Foucault's sense of the transformation of (linear) history into a different form of time<sup>32</sup>.

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earth. It is reach, reach beyond imagining – but the government will not let anyone profit from it. You figure out the reasons" (V. Armanno, "Under the Volcano", cit., p. 30). For all this, Emilio blames not merely the war but also the north for its enacted policy promoting the importation of the necessary produce instead of supplying its own, because after all "the south was the south, the 'black people of Italy' – the lousy peasants" (*TV*, 311).

<sup>30</sup> J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, cit., p. 177 (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> This repetitive aspect of obsession, of the ghost's nature, is evident in *The Volcano* when Emilio tells Mary that he has been dreaming of Salvatore Giuliano "very often. In the days and in the nights" (*TV*, 406).

<sup>32</sup> G. Huggan, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

[Ghosts] provide us with an insight into what haunts a culture. Ghosts, of course, cannot die and as such are a persistent reminder of what a culture can only express in oblique terms<sup>33</sup>.

The ghost revives ‘other’ unofficial historical memories, counter-memory alternative sites of reading unfolding through Said’s contrapuntal reading.

However, before moving to a contrapuntal reading of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard* in relation to *The Volcano*, it is necessary to briefly recall the Italian North-South opposition discussed in CHAPTER ONE SECTION FIVE as it is depicted in Armanno’s novel.

One of the key aspects looked at in the novel is Italy’s (internal) colonialism: on the one hand, Emilio identifies a state of coloniality in reference to the north and its deep-seated beliefs of a “south [...] full of animals” (*TV*, 28) and Sicilians as the “black bastards of Italy” (*TV*, 162)<sup>34</sup> so as to justify its exploitation of the island as its own bread basket; on the other hand, the difficulties of Sicily are ingrained in the colonial past<sup>35</sup>. Gramsci, in his *La questione meridionale (The Southern Question)*, gives some examples of this hegemonic ideology that Said extensively applies in his studies on *orientalism*:

The South is the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in the civil development of Italy; Southerners are biologically inferior beings, either semi-barbarians or out and out barbarians by natural destiny; if the South is underdeveloped it is not the fault of capitalist system, or any other historical cause but of the nature that has made Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> A. Smith, “Hauntings”, in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup> The belief of the North still perceived as intolerant by the South is pointed out by J. Cole who analyses the racism against immigrants during the 1990 Carnival in Florence (cf. J. Cole, *The New Racism in Europe: a Sicilian Ethnography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 100-03).

<sup>35</sup> Sidney Tarrow, a political scientist, underlines such a belief of an (internal) colonial power, to which the island was subjected, when stating that these powers “from the Norman establishment of a centralized monarchy in the twelfth century to the unified government [...], governed with a logic of colonial exploitation” (S. Tarrow, “Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putman’s ‘Making Democracy Work’”, in *American Political Science Review*, 90, 1996, p. 394 qtd in P.D. Smecca, *op. cit.*, p. 105).

<sup>36</sup> A. Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, [1966] 1972 (tr. P. Verdicchio, *The*

The Southern question, based on racial prejudices resulting from the theory of social Darwinism, asserted race to be accountable for its economic underdevelopment. Gramsci goes on to argue that the economic regression of the South was, instead, due to the political decision made by the North – only interested in developing a capitalistic economy in that part of Italy – to which the southern intellectual bourgeoisie contributed by maintaining the *status quo*, metaphorically narcotising any revolutionary movement to change the situation.

The situation described above has to be seen as the direct political consequence of the unity of Italy. The novel's plot, through references to Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel, takes the reader back to the mid-nineteenth century Sicilian politics at the time of Garibaldi's expedition (1860) before Italy was born, thus binding the origins of the *Southern Question*, the figure of Giuliano and the unity of Italy. Armanno's novel engages *The Leopard* in an intertextual contrapuntal conversation as a form of 'reading back':

we begin to reread [them] not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. [...] Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native<sup>37</sup>.

The upper social class played an important role in legitimising the power of the 'centre', be it the new Italian government and/or the bourgeoisie, as far as it included the fading aristocracy. The famous dictum in the novel epitomises the aristocrats' chameleonic nature: "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi"<sup>38</sup>. If the power of the aristocrats continues, this is at the expense of the peasants: 'nothing changes' means that the feudal system keeps on going even under the new social class of the bourgeoisie. By convincing the masses that their interests were those of

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*Southern Question*, Toronto, Guernica, 2006, p. 33).

<sup>37</sup> E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, cit., p. 59.

the entire population – a hegemonic strategy that Gramsci calls *novismo*<sup>39</sup> – they kept their hegemonic power as proved by the plebiscite for the unity of Italy held on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1860 disappointing all promises. In *The Leopard*, Don Calogero, the bourgeois mayor despised by the Prince of Salina, epitomises the middle class that exploits both the land and the peasants by keeping alive the feudal system. Hence, it is far too obvious that the cycle of impoverishment was not a mere economic problem but, even more so, a political one. In Emilio's Sicily (1943) the situation had not changed: the superiority of the 'centre' depended on the inferiority of the 'margins'.

Similarly, the construction of 'Sicilianness' in relation to past (colonial) invasions is different when the subaltern's perspective is the main focus. Although seen as an essence, unchanged albeit absorbing many different cultures, the Prince of Salina and Emilio provide two different explanations. The former's ahistorical explanation is a more essentialist anthropological one since for him Sicilians' fixed essence – rooted in their pride, vanity and sense of superiority – signifies a pessimism of 'will' or the unwillingness to change. The latter provides a historical justification ascribing the Sicilians' black heart full of pessimism and lack of trust to the imperialist invasions 'raping' the island. Emilio states:

Since ancient times Sicily has been overrun and raped and bled dry so that we've had to carry the burdens of other civilisations and wait on them as their race of serfs, watching their fortunes grow, their families fattening and profiting, and those genealogical lines from afar mingling with ours so that soon enough there was very little 'ours' left. Is it any wonder we call ourselves *Bastardi Puri*, the Pure Bastards, the product of complete racial overdose? Do something simple for me, Mary. Look at any good Sicilian cookbook and try to trace the influences inside every dish. This will drive you to distraction, but write them down anyway.

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<sup>38</sup> G. Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1958, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Gramsci defines *novismo* as the strategy of refashioning the 'old' though only exteriorly (cf. G. Baratta, *art. cit.*, p. 32). In his *Notes from Prison*, Gramsci stated that the so called passive revolution was a re-statement of the *thesis* (hegemonic power) against the *antithesis* (alternative power) (cf. *Idem*, pp. 32-33). A revolution-restoration through which "everything must change so that everything can stay the same". In this way, everything is presented as progress for the benefit of the island such as the unity of Italy which actually did not result in any form of development for the south: "What did the north's socialist revolts against the landowners have to do with the south? As usual, nothing" (*TV*, 11). Yet, Emilio believes, or at least hopes, that change could be possible if only his fellow workers woke up from "their mute submission to slavery" (*TV*, 21), which indirectly supported the hegemonic power,

You will see that though you've travelled the ancient globe you are still in Sicily. [...] that's what civilisation after civilisation through generations and generations conquered us for, to better realise their imperial dreams (*TV*, 412).

His representation of Sicily implies two aspects: first, there is no essentialism in the case of Sicilians since they have managed to absorb different cultures as is conveyed by the oxymoron 'pure bastards'; secondly, the island is seen as a 'raped woman'<sup>40</sup> and a colony – rather than a bucolic land of architectural and culinary 'metonymic' remains of those civilisations.

Emilio's pessimistic and decadent conclusion – Sicily has "been *raped* for the last time; this time our poor island is going to die" (*Ibidem*; emphasis added) – has nothing to do with Don Fabrizio's perspective. His historical gendered image of Sicily as a woman, though as a mistress this time, is supported by Don Paolo de lo Santo's words. A local priest, first judging the Catalano family as hypocritical due to the arranged marriage of Desideria to Don Pietro – "a sale no different to the sale of a slave or a beast of burden" (*TV*, 238) – he then understands that their choice is determined by the toughness of their land which he identifies with "a harsh mistress" (*TV*, 237). Thus, if Don Fabrizio elaborates a pessimism of 'will' of which he himself takes advantage, in *The Volcano* the historical explanation seems to embrace a Gramscian approach to the Southern Question involving the possibility of change<sup>41</sup>.

History repeats, the spectre of submission, death, hopelessness, racial inferiority and rape 'comes back again' rendering the home *unhomely*, uncanny, and obliging those *unhomely* people to leave, "to escape the cycle of impoverishment they'd been born to by leaving the island behind as soon as they had the chance" (*TV*, 315). And

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to passive revolution.

<sup>40</sup> The myth of Hades and Persephone communicates both a personal story (Armanno's grandmother's kidnapping) and the collective story of an exploited island. It stands for Desideria, Sicily and the impossibility to attain a 'desire' of freedom and egalitarianism. Through the use of the classic myth for both collective and personal history, Armanno discusses how history affects one's personal life and, specifically, that the feudal system for the poor meant 'to suffer and emigrate'.

<sup>41</sup> Recall the positivist narration of the South given by the *meridionalisti* (CHAPTER ONE SECTION FIVE).



certainly, such feelings of pessimism and lack of trust, as old Emilio understands<sup>42</sup>, have affected the relationship of migrants with the host country:

This is my explanation, Mary. This is my defence for the way we were when we arrived in this country. For the way I was. Now it's only the self-justification of an old man, I know, but the truth lies in what we felt and this is as close as I can come to describing it (*Idem*, 412)<sup>43</sup>.

By pointing out the historical reasons for the Sicilian character, Armanno disrupts a positivist interpretation of the island fuelled by a sense of the exotic. Considering the different cultural influences that have shaped Sicilians and their history is a way of assimilating only those aspects which do not spook one's fantasy of a superior identity.

#### **4.3 Framing metaphors: “a *patruni*”**

The intertextuality of melancholy, between the past (the lost object) and the present, works as the ‘word’ in Bakhtin’s social intertextuality: it is “at once our own and the other”<sup>44</sup>. In this framework, metaphors as shown in CHAPTER TWO reveal the social background that causes such a feeling of melancholic non-belonging and double-displacement experienced by first and successive generation migrants who inhabit a place of ‘apartness’. While the *patruni* metaphor is analysed in this section, the ballroom, the mousetrap, ghosts, werewolves and vampires ones will be the focus of those which follow.

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<sup>42</sup> It is probable that this is Armanno’s view as a second generation migrant. Actually, Emilio is critically rethinking his past not only in Sicily but as a migrant as well. He is distancing himself from his two pasts, pre-war Sicily and the Australia of the 1950s, as if he were looking from a third space of ‘apartness’. A marginal space which certainly recalls Armanno’s apartness from which he sheds light on “the stupid things that they did” in order “to learn from the past” (M.V. Grau, C. Zamorano, *art. cit.*, p. 39).

<sup>43</sup> Emilio justifies his being “hopeful and scared, and optimistic and suspicious” with the explanation of an island raped by internal colonialism, the Mafia, and the “rapacious greed of invaders” (*TV*, 412). While positivist thinkers, such as Lombroso, ascribed an unchangeable nature to Sicilians, Emilio provides an historical explanation of their identity and behaviour in accordance with the aforementioned political scientist Sidney Tarrow.

<sup>44</sup> A.L. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 26 qtd in G. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

One of the first studies composing a picture of Sicilian migrant life back home is *The Sting of Change: Sicilians in Sicily and Australia* by C. Cronin, though most of the canvas is still blank. The book, divided from its very title into two parts, metaphorically sets out the two frames of reference paramount to shed light on an overlooked psychological landscape of frustration. As several interviewees tell, Sicily was the land of labour and ‘enslavement’ for which there was no reward, tangible or intangible:

‘You work to the death, every day is so long with hard work and suffering and then when you are finished you have a few lire in your hand and you know it’s not enough. The Australians can never understand us until they understand this’<sup>45</sup>.

Another interviewee says that, despite having a modest job, “this wasn’t interesting and it was making [him] mentally an old man”<sup>46</sup>. So he left because he wanted his children “to be able to choose work which is interesting to them and not being forced to take the only thing which is open to them”<sup>47</sup>. Such hardship was, most of the time, relived in Australia through discrimination in the workplace and for successive generations even on the school playground<sup>48</sup>. Venero Armanno invites his readers to take a metaphorical trip back to Sicily in order to give voice to that ‘historical’ absence and understand Emilio’s frustration in Australia<sup>49</sup>. In brief, to be active

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<sup>45</sup> Constance Cronin, *The Sting of Change: Sicilians in Sicily and Australia*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> Armanno himself suffered this sort of discrimination: “For the first fifteen years of my life my fellow ethnic brothers and I didn’t think our names were Venero and Antonio and Giuseppe, but in fact ‘dumb fucken wog’” (V. Armanno, “Two Little Worlds”, in C. Symes, R. Sheaban-Bright (eds.), *School’s Out! Learning to Be a Writer in Queensland: An Anthology in Six Lessons*, Kelvin Grove, Queensland University of Technology Publications, 1998, p. 80). This personal experience was included in the screenplay version of *The Volcano* in the figure of Vittorio, Emilio’s son (cf. V. Armanno, ‘Feature film screenplay drafts, *The Volcano*’, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 22). Both Vittorio and Emilio seem to remind of Armanno’s himself and of his grandfather since Armanno suffered the same racism at school and his grandfather, like Emilio, was one of the leaders of the “railway’s revolution” (M.V. Grau, C. Zamorano, *art. cit.*, p. 30).

<sup>49</sup> In his fax to Mary Meadowcroft, Matt Condon writes: “Armanno handles this clean ‘split’ in a life quite brilliantly, and delivers to an Australian-born Anglo Saxon reader such as myself the hardship and alienation of such a transplantation” (M. Condon, “Fax to Mary Meadowcroft from Matt Condon”, September 21, 1998, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31).

readers who make interpretations and connections<sup>50</sup>. A trip he made himself both physically and metaphorically: “[i]n the strange history works, sometimes nowadays Australia can be a sort of key to Sicily. And for me, vice versa”<sup>51</sup>.

Therefore, Sicily and Australia represent two conflating frames of reference giving rise to a *reversal metaphor* or “a transaction between contexts” conveyed “by a single word” and extended to wider networks as T. Cohen states<sup>52</sup>:

one must refer to a speaker (not necessarily the author), his beliefs about his readers and their beliefs. [...] If we do this, then we have much more than an individual sentence to look to for clues to the presence of metaphor<sup>53</sup>.

The importance of networks of beliefs, which can also be the result of misinterpretation and lack of knowledge, can be highlighted by drawing on Wheelwright’s theory of metaphor. After illustrating the different grammar of the *epiphoric* and *diaphoric* metaphor – which can be seen as *conventional* and *reversal metaphor*, respectively –, the American literary theorist complicates the previously offered difference by stating that *diaphors* might not “be entirely free from *epiphoric* admixture”<sup>54</sup>. What he means is that an image that presides over a *diaphor* can already be charged with partly understandable meanings and shared associations. Their combination fulfils two purposes: *epiphor* hints at significance, *diaphor* ‘creates presence’. The word/image *patrini* works *epiphorically* in relation to the Sicilian context being charged with a social and historical meaning of its own, shared by immigrants but not known to all readers; and *diaphorically* when juxtaposing the latter frame of reference to a new one in order to realise the emotional absence of migrants’ double displacement.

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<sup>50</sup> The reader is challenged also through “fragmented, or discontinuous method of storytelling” (V. Armanno, “Storytelling, and the Idea of Unconventional Narrative”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 41, Folder 11), such as continuous flashbacks like snapshots whose meaning needs to be interpreted by connecting the past with the present.

<sup>51</sup> V. Armanno, “Under the Volcano”, cit., p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> See CHAPTER TWO, SECTION EIGHT, SUBSECTION ‘Spectral metaphors: realising absences’.

<sup>53</sup> T. Cohen, “Notes on Metaphor”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34 (3) Spring 1976, p. 256.

The *epiphorical* function of the word *patruni*<sup>55</sup> brings to the fore, within the dream that opens the novel and in Gothic terms, the social, economic and psychological situation of Emilio's pre-war Sicily. The labour relation between the landowner Don Malgrò and the poor is epitomised in the carnivalesque ritual of blood-letting (the killing of animals) for the *patruni*'s party:

Too many times Emilio saw such killings performed with a conscious sense of pleasure, and his stomach churned at the way men and women with nothing in their lives took lives callously. Chickens scurried headless, spurting bright blood, little children laughing and screaming in the wake. With a punch to the base of the neck the rabbit you petted one day was the next left half-stunned, feet kicking feebly and eyes rolling even as the body was eviscerated. A pig to be bled for some weekend party of the *patruni*'s would more often than not be run through the mud of the pens so that a communal game was made of its desperate, squealing panic, and when this man-sized swine was hung up on hooks and cleaved in two, and the folds of its abdomen pinned back, children danced and screeched at the sea of tumbling-out intestines, at the weighty, crimson penis and balls, at the cutting out of the moving heart, and the removal of the dull coloured kidneys and shiny, slippery liver. Men, women and children gloried in the terror of dumb beasts while the master and his family discussed art and politics and slept the silk-encased sleep of the blessed. [...] The cruelty of his kin was their humour and the death of their beasts was their recreation (*TV*, 13).

The cruelty of the workers is a direct consequence of their own life of total 'deprivation' on which relies the happiness and richness of a social class that sleeps "the silk-encased sleep of the blessed". Their happiness was the product of the sufferings of others who were kept in their lacking state. In fact, although the days of

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<sup>54</sup> P. Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> Two points must be pointed up in the analyses of the word *patruni*. First, the term does not compensate for any lexical gap in the sense of a *substitution view* of metaphor or the lack of an English word, which does exist (i.e. "boss, master"). Translating the word into English would mean to dismiss part, if not the whole of its social and historical ramifications. By leaving it untranslated, Armano wishes the comparison to be active in the minds of his readers (Cf. M. Black, *art. cit.*, p. 278). Secondly, from a strictly rhetorical point of view, a *sine qua non* of metaphor is its literal falseness. According to this condition the following "Mr Sosa is a *patruni*" would not be considered a metaphor because its literal sense is far from being false. It would be, though with a different meaning, an expression as literal as "Mr Sosa is a man/foreigner". Yet, an illuminating example is provided by Cohen: the expression "Jesus was a carpenter", in spite of its lack of literal falseness, still maintains its metaphorical meaning (cf. T. Cohen, *art. cit.*, p. 254).

“feudal lords was supposedly over, [...] things were the same as they’d always been, only going by different names” (*TV*, 11) with rich families employing and keeping families “poor and so easily repressed by paying them nothing wages” (*TV*, 12). Along with the *patruni*, politicians, the police and priests were others leading “beautiful lives” (*TV*, 11). It is in this social ‘feudal’ framework that the carnivalesque interpretation of the above ritual seems the more appropriate<sup>56</sup>. The latter, a ‘low’ ritual as suggested by the topographical visualisation of the ‘high’ palace with its members’ social etiquette, conveys an atmosphere of liberty against forms of power and oppression. The ritual is also a way to exorcise peasants’ own inhumanity since “inside each of them there was nothing but the same entrails and organs of the pig” (*TV*, 14). The image of the abdomen, with its feeding grotesque organs<sup>57</sup>, is an image of death also conveyed by the ‘mouth’ of the volcano: an entrance into its entrails or “bodily underworld”<sup>58</sup>. And if the image of the underworld and of the volcano<sup>59</sup> are associated with the terror and sublime of oppression<sup>60</sup>, it also disrupts the latter feeling in a positive way since it is lowered and transformed in a grotesque monster<sup>61</sup>, as a return to the earth (its womb), as death and rebirth: a sort of baptism. Thus, in both cases, death and life are not separable, oppositions are blurred and at once it negates and regenerates, the ‘bottom’ being always the beginning.

Emilio’s reaction to all this cruelty, violence and inhumanity, to a life so bleak and ugly is one of refusal as his churning stomach and the expression “too many

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<sup>56</sup> Another telling examples of the carnivalesque, used with the same purpose, is the following: “Another night Emilio dreamed of making Don Malgrò’s wife and daughters crawl on all fours, not a stitch of clothing between them, through the pigpens and chicken yards until they were black with mud and animal shit caked their hair and plugged their throats” (*TV*, 16).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, p. 325.

<sup>59</sup> The volcano is traditionally a symbol of the sublime, creation and destruction, fear and fascination as Emilio experiences himself: he is both “drawn to the mountain” (*TV*, 14), but at the same time aware that “the law of fear [...] come[s] from this *thing*” (*TV*, 15), its powerful outbursts and unforeseen earthquakes.

<sup>60</sup> Bakhtin speaks of the fear of anything that is huge and powerful – such as mountains, the sea, etc. (cf. M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-36) – that in *The Volcano* can be associated to the lava and the underworld itself. However, these characteristics recall Burke’s theory of the sublime associated to terror, to the dismantling of one’s certainties; an idea embedded in the image of Emilio’s limbs (a body dismembered) moving to the death march (cf. *TV*, 21).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 336

times” prove. Even in this case, authority and its inhumane effects are toppled through the carnivalesque: faecal matter, urine and vomit.

When Emilio is hit by his donkey Ciccio, the latter is wounded by Don Pasquale with an axe handle – a symbol, throughout the novel, of the violence rooted in the feudal system. Yet, the animal survives thanks to Emilio’s “rituals of healing” (*TV*, 9):

he regularly doused the rips and tears with the natural remedy of his own urine [...]. Ciccio [...] smelling Emilio’s spray would start spraying too, haphazardly, and start to shit as well [...] as if that princess, Nature, had told the beast this was the only way for bad things to leave his body. [...] they both now watched men with suspicion (*TV*, 9-10).

These rituals of the lessening of the agony are the only way to purify oneself of the same violence characterising the feudal system. Thus, defecation and urine are ambivalent images linked to the death of the past and the dawn of a new future as those of the abdomen and the mouth of the volcano both exemplify. The same ‘renewal’ is expressed in Australia when Emilio starts vomiting after burying the corpses of the two policemen killed by Mr Sosa (cf. *TV*, 631). This also draws affinities between criminality in Sicily and Australia dismantling any ‘bottom’(there)-‘top’(here) opposition.

Although the ‘blood-ritual’ excerpt quoted above creates a distance between Emilio and his kin – he is a spectator of their violence – the following one not only illustrates workers’ enslavement leading them to death and passivity but also shows Emilio as a potential ‘slave’<sup>62</sup>:

he [Emilio] came to hate every single one of his fellow workers for their mute submission to slavery, this slavery, what was killing him. [...] He stopped having dreams such as those where he pitilessly murdered Don Malgrò and his family; instead he would see beneath his eyelids a picture of labourers trooping single file up the rocky slopes of Mt Etna and walking

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<sup>62</sup> Slavery is already coded in Gothic terms as many writings in American literature prove (for a brief but powerful introduction to this aspect see T.A. Goddu, “American Gothic”, in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 63-72).

into the flaming maw, where they were consumed by blood-red fires. He was always in the line, somewhere amongst all others his limbs would move to the death march [...] (*TV*, 21).

Emilio's experience, a sort of baptism ("barefoot over fire"; *Ibidem*), leads him to understand that, by remaining in Sicily, a life full of inhumanity – metaphorically mirrored by both the volcano and the monster living in its entrails – represents his doom. A fate already evident in his father's work as a *massaru* which he associated to those attitudes functional to the landowner's prosperity: "loyalty, cruelty, honesty" (*TV*, 10) and for which Don Pasquale had already started grooming him (cf. *TV*, 16, 18). The proof of his own surfacing inhumanity came one day when he broke his friend's hand, with an axe handle, for eating a peach he was supposed only to be picking as part of his work.

Given the social and historical meaning of the term it is now easier to understand its 'supplementary' *diaphoric* function in relation to Emilio's life in the host country.

The term *patruni* is used by Emilio to refer both to Mr Doyle<sup>63</sup>, when working at the Railway Station, and to Mr Sosa when in charge of part of his criminal business. As for the second, Emilio says:

*Dio*, but I hate this man. I have known it since our experiences inside his sex-house. I despise him the way all good workers should hate their *patruni*, even if they have sought out their patronage (*TV*, 592)<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. *TV*, 463. The link between Mr Doyle and Mr Sosa – politics and criminality – will be discussed in this chapter SECTION FOUR.

<sup>64</sup> Mr Sosa acts as a cruel *patruni* with all his workers treating them as objects, personal possessions: the prostitute Lucy, for instance, is saved by Emilio who offers her the chance to escape Mr Sosa's death threats. In the novel's manuscript, the way he treats women is addressed quite straightforwardly in a section elided during the editing process: "You are all uglier than the ugliest sin, and in our chorus line of flesh and fancy, put together like this for the first time, I must reflect that you look like the beasts and the asses and the snakes and the vermin, not to mention the skeletal monster with two heads and centipede legs, that populate the very darkest corners in Satan's house. I call that place Hell, and so should you, seeing it's your spiritual home. Really.

So should we throw in the towel right now, before we even start to undertake our enterprise? Let me consider the implications of this, the fors and the againts.

[...] All this took some work, believe me, and required the applications of things like the straight razor to a smooth cheek, and the odd broken little finger, or big toe, before each was happy to relinquish their fiscal worth down to the very last penny. [...] Consider this the least of what happens to those

The similarities between Mr Sosa and the Sicilian *patruni* are reinforced by his villa defined as a “mausoleum of dead things” (*TV*, 593) which recalls Don Malgrò’s “cobwebbed and ghostly” (*TV*, 539) *palazzu* turning into “a silent mausoleum” (*Ibidem*). In addition, as Mr Sosa’s villa is a place without life where money is the most – in fact, the only – important thing, so it is in Don Malgrò’s *palazzu* where “greed flourished where life should have” (*Ibidem*). The metaphor is extended by associating the dead with money, and Mr Sosa is all these things: a *patruni*, a capitalist, a dead person, a living corpse. No wonder Emilio, Rocco, Faith and all the others at his servitude are not only the “master’s dogs” (*TV*, 616) but more poignantly “leeches attached to a rotting corpse” (*TV*, 591). Mr Sosa’s identification as a *patruni* continues. To cruelly deal with the grudge between Emilio and Joe, another master’s dog, Mr Sosa orders them to clash over it. It is extremely important to have the picture of the situation: while Mr Sosa, like a Caesar, is on his half-completed terrace, the fighters are down on the lawn where the fight takes place following his instructions. This ritual recalls the one of blood-letting mentioned above: the cruelty of these dogs is the humour of the *patruni*. A humorous synonym of cruelty and inhumanity accentuated by his lack of empathy as Joe groans on the grass after being hit with a tree branch by Rocco who intervenes to save his friend Emilio.

Emilio’s feelings of fatigue, alienation and frustration in the host country are evoked by referring to the Sicilian social background implied in the *patruni* frame of reference which also speaks for its present. Those feelings are evoked through Emilio’s sensory (olfactory) memory:

The smell of cut grass is so much like the smell of fresh hay in Don Malgrò’s fields that I’m transported back to my old feelings of resentment and fatigue. The similarity to the old world is strong enough to make me imagine that the little donkey Ciccio could be tethered somewhere just around a corner, nibbling at grain I’ve scattered for him (*Ibidem*).

This sense of alienation becomes more powerful when comparing it to Emilio’s dreams of a promised and imagined egalitarian society, which is how Australia is

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who fail me. And they *had* failed me” (V. Armanno, ‘*The Volcano*, first page proofs 2001’, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 30, p. 489).



presented both through official policies of immigration and private letters sent back home by emigrants.

#### **4.4 Framing metaphors: the ‘Cloudland Ballroom’ and the ‘mousetrap’**

Emilio’s dreams of an egalitarian host country opposed to the Sicilian one are metaphorically conveyed both in the very act of his migration and in the Cloudland Ballroom. The latter is defined as a “palace of dreams” (*TV*, 369) and symbolises, to some extent, Brisbane’s Statue of Liberty. Going to the ballroom in the hope of meeting Mr Sosa signifies that Emilio’s ambition to succeed in the host country, despite the racism suffered, has not abandoned him. The Cloudland Ballroom was built on two levels: the ground level whose dance floor was open to everyone and the upper level “reserved for the dance hall’s most special people” (*TV*, 427). Thus, the architectural structure of the ballroom is a metaphor for a migration to a higher social class. Emilio’s burning desire to migrate from a south of poverty and slavery – which is a mental as well as a geographical space – to a north of richness, freedom and egalitarianism which is represented by the “shredded butt onto the floor with the champagne cork” (*TV*, 428).



**PLATE IV**

*Cloudland Ballroom*

In the scene at Mr Sosa's villa, 'The Mousetrap', the class struggle Emilio has been fighting also in Australia comes to an end. A resemblance between the ballroom and the villa is conveyed by their similar architecture. In fact, the villa is a two-level building with a huge hall and an inside open balcony from which one can look downstairs:

On a sea of polished floor, from which great squares of patterned Arabian rugs have been rolled and set aside, at least three score guests are dancing (*TV*, 639).

On upper floors there are just as many people as downstairs, but they're quieter, the types who like to drink and talk rather than drink and drink. Maybe, like me, they prefer simply to observe (*TV*, 643).

Such a similarity is also reinforced by the band that Emilio recognises "as one of the sixteen-piece orchestras" (*TV*, 639) playing at the Cloudland Ballroom. Recalling Emilio's hopes and dreams, the villa testifies despite his free access to the upstairs – which he did not have at the Cloudland Ballroom – that those dreams did not come true the way he had wished and that he hopelessly expects other people to hate Mr Sosa in the same way he does<sup>65</sup>. In fact, this is what Emilio 'does not hear' when he moves through the guests onto the open balcony:

trying to hear snippets of conversation, of voices saying what a shameless exercise in self-aggrandisement this is, saying how it's all a farce because no-one here cares a damn about Oscar Sosa, only his money and the things he can provide them with, but I don't hear anything. Not a thing. This is disappointing. I want them to be revulsed by him, to abhor *him* as much as I do (*TV*, 643)

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<sup>65</sup> Mr Sosa is well aware of Emilio's hate, as the scene of the cutting of the cake proves with a "knife wrapped in a blood-red ribbon" (*TV*, 641) that Mr Sosa jabs down as if it were directed to Emilio. However, he does not care because he considers Emilio a personal possession that can be treated as *bella pancia*, a policeman he killed with a fountain pen stubbed in the eye (cf. *TV*, 631).

Hopelessly, because the analogy between the two levels of the buildings and the two ways of life (the upstairs a superior and moral life against the downstairs an immoral life) is not valid. Emilio has not realised his dream of a better life, of freedom, of being a different person, of getting rid of his violent feelings brought about by his historical background. To get rid of these – because “*Australia-America* was to be better than this but most importantly so was I” (*TV*, 642) – he plans to escape with Faith away from Mr Sosa’s criminal world. Yet, as the ‘mousetrap’ metaphor suggests that desires are synonyms of traps, his plan is overturned since not only does Faith have a lover, Rocco, but when Mr Sosa finds them together a fight breaks out in which:

I [Emilio] start hitting our master. [...] *my own hands went around his throat*, and in a minute or was it two or it could have been three, like the one hundred and eighty seconds he was enamoured of, [...], I’d stopped him moving, the man exhaled his soul, and I was the one who did it, I was the one who stopped Senor Sosa moving forever (*TV*, 645; emphasis added).

His hands around Sosa’s throat recall the sign of the Sicilian “Taverna Leopoldo”, a picture by the socialist painter Vincenzo Santo depicting the struggle between social classes as “a muscular leopard tearing out the throat of a nobleman” (*TV*, 182). Whereas the animal imagery of the leopard in *Il Gattopardo* is a metaphor for the aristocrats’ ability to change along with history, in Santo’s picture it represents a form of *abrogation*. The subaltern has no voice apart from the violence of the leopard, a direct consequence of historical and social events.

However, following the *metaphoricity* of the mousetrap one has to wonder what its implications will be: Who is the mouse? Who gets trapped? What is the nature of this trapping? Is getting trapped synonymous with death? Despite the fact that Mr Sosa is the one who loses his life, Emilio is the real trapped one because his criminal past, his sense of guilt and his loss of innocence will haunt him thereafter, the nature of the trap being more, but not only, psychological than physical<sup>66</sup>. Melancholy or, in

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<sup>66</sup> Whereas Kathleen Brogan states that ghosts “externalize a character’s state of mind or inadequately

other words, loss and disintegration of values reflecting, on the one hand, the fragmentation of his identity and, on the other hand, a reason for the demise of the Sicilian ethnic community in Brisbane.

Another aspect connected to the previous one is the corruption of Brisbane society invited to the party:

[...] I start to recognise faces, which surprises me, that I should know any of these guests. These hound-dog features belong to that old fool of a boss Mr Brooks, and there beside a group of dowagers who eat his words is the politician-who-never-was, Mr Geoffrey Doyle. Then there's Jack Campbell and the union representative Oliver O'Brien (*TV*, 641).

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repressed feelings”, Jack Sullivan goes further by saying that ghosts “emerge from within as well as invade from without” (D. Erickson, *op. cit.*, p. 50) as secrets of the dead people or the community's past which create gaps within the living or future generations. If with the former interpretation, a relationship between psychological states and ghostly apparitions is established, the second one is useful to discern the two possible intertwined origins – not in the relationship between the psyche and the spectre as Erickson states in analysing *Beloved* revealing realising/de-realising possibilities – of the ghost as a state of melancholy and weakness and as the haunting *unheimlich* presence of personal and historical events (the object of melancholy). Comparable to a ghost story, the object kept alive through memories becomes, at the same time, the haunting object, the subject's obsession. Emilio is haunted by what Rocco's and Giuliano's ghosts represent though being good ones. The ghost of Salvatore Giuliano alongside Sicilian history brings back Emilio's criminal life in the Sicilian community in Brisbane. In the latter Emilio is considered as a returned Salvatore Giuliano: “Stories about him [Emilio] spread and grew as a sort of patchwork of mixed-up mythologies, and soon the Emilio Aquila everyone was talking about didn't seem the Emilio Aquila any of them knew at all, but instead someone of the proportions of their deceased bandit king, Salvatore Giuliano” (*TV*, 393). The Spoleto brothers believed that three factors were paramount for this equation: the romantic kidnapping of Desideria which reminded of Hades and Persephone – a story eventually coming true; the deep desire of any Sicilian in Brisbane to hospitalise an Aussie *cafuni* for the humiliation suffered; the joy to have another bandit who could stand up for you. Emilio's weakness (violence) is conveyed by the ghost of Rocco as well. Maybe, it is for this reason that Rocco and Salvatore are best friends in Emilio's mental projections. Actually, Rocco's appearances in the novel all have to do with violence. His interventions avoid Emilio performing acts of violence as if the same were projected onto Rocco in order to exorcise Sicilians' hot-blooded nature, their showing a 'flow' of strong feelings very easily like the volcano's violent 'outburst'. This reinforces the similitude between Emilio and Armanno, a second generation migrant reframing the ethnic past of his community. As a consequence, Little Sicily's demise is ensued by a disintegration of values as a consequence of ethnic closure: it is the incomprehension at the Exhibition Station which leads to violence (the “stupid things” of the past). His self-punishment is a consequence of his sense of guilt and is expressed in his relationship with women as synonymous with life: “His penance-act with himself has included the promise of total solitude from everyone, even beautiful creatures like this. But again he has *fallen*. [...] her sighs seem like the softest and the sweetest and, yes, the saddest Emilio has ever heard. He likes to hear her sigh like that. He likes to feel the pulsing of her flesh. He feels more of a man than he has felt since Oscar Sosa died. [...] he want to call out for life, for life. If only that criminal was walking again” (*TV*, 35). Thus his impossibility to call out for life is linked to his criminal past as it is proved by his desire of bringing Mr Sosa to life

Their “ancient faces” (*Ibidem*) stand for the railway station company, the trade unions, the police and the criminal world that work hand in glove with each other. In this ‘underworld’ network, Emilio, like other immigrants, is only a pawn in their hands, a “puppet” (*TV*, 346)<sup>67</sup>. Brisbane’s middle-higher social class is depicted as corrupted thus dismantling the stereotype of immigrants as only the scum of the earth.

As J.I. Martin points up, migrants have been marshalled by Trade Unions for the survival of their own organisations, whether this meant the fight against the communist menace in the wake of WWII, the fear of migrants’ takeover with their own associations or the fear of competition for jobs and wages in times of recession<sup>68</sup>. The ethnic vote, thus, has been the main concern of trade unions which have “developed an ideological pact” in conjunction with “the State, employers, Anglo-Australian workers [...] against migrant workers”<sup>69</sup>.

An example of the above ‘ideological pact’ comes from what Mr Johnny, a Queensland Department of Railways employee, tells Emilio: foreigners have never been employed by the Department notwithstanding their merits and good will – a fact that challenges the ‘fair-go’ value of Australian society. However, immigrants’ successful employment is no contradiction to the above: it arouses suspicion of Mr Doyle’s sympathy for immigrants and it is the spark that sets off the fight against these *thieves of jouissance*. In other words, while Mr Doyle exploits immigrants since they work overtime and for very low wages, employees see their union rights menaced (cf. *TV*, 468-470). In this framework, if something or someone had to be blamed, this was the system that exploited workers. As for the ‘ethnic vote’ issue, this is addressed in the screenplay draft, an early version of the novel. In this, the reader understands that like trade unionists, political parties do all in their power to marshal

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and, consequently, putting at bay his sense of guilt due to his lack of vigilance.

<sup>67</sup> Empathy with Aborigines is also evident. Through the Sicilian character of Mario Di Mauro, the reader has to face up to the fact that “this railway line runs over some black people’s ancient cemetery” (*TV*, 464), an erasure of memories and identities mirroring that of other ethnic minority groups. And, therefore, the “ancient faces” at the party all have responsibilities for the grounding of the nation’s wealth on moral bankruptcy.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. J.I. Martin, *The Migrant Presence. Australian Responses 1947-1977*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1978, pp. 186-206.

<sup>69</sup> S. Castles, G. Rando, E. Vasta, “Italo-Australians and Politics”, in S. Castles, C. Alcorso, G. Rando, E. Vasta (eds.), *Australia’s Italians. Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, St. Leonards

immigrants' votes. Mr Doyle, from "his *palazzo*, that great and ugly building in Rome Street" (*TV*, 463), prevents "wild accusations"<sup>70</sup> from showing him in a bad light which would have slowed down his political career. It is in this light that his role as a "benevolent hero of the underdog"<sup>71</sup> and his control over newspapers must be understood. The news of his Department recruiting immigrants was splashed in headlines: "RAILWAYS RAW RECRUITS!". This, as he himself says,

represented the start of my campaign for party nomination. If only I'd known then! I'll certainly be running for Lord Mayor next month, and I expect to win with a clear majority. And I'll serve notice right here and now to the Premier of this fine state – his job will be mine, soon enough! That's why I asked you here Jack, you're the first journo I'll let it on my plans. Just remember to make it clear in your article that Harry Bartholemew (*sic*) Doyle expects to have a full migrant vote sweeping him into office.

[...]

Jack

You think it'll have that much of an impact?

Doyle

Open your eyes to the new Australia, Jack. Even if you don't open your eyes, all you have to do is look at the model of your American cousins! The way of the future is through our immigration intake program. We're creating a new class of people and the country isn't even prepared for it! These people will have a voice – as has been demonstrated in the United States – and it will be soon. We'll have to start listening to the voice, believe me. That's the way forward.

Jack

So the Railway Department's eagerness to employ new migrants is a manoeuvre by you to attract the migrant vote – to be seen by them as a sort of benevolent hero of the underdog?

[...]

Jack

Yes, those men Emilio Aquila attracted for you. You'll be doing that again?

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(NSW), Allen & Unwin, 1992, p. 135.

<sup>70</sup> V. Armano, 'Feature film screenplay drafts, *The Volcano*', cit., p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, p. 106.

In the near future<sup>72</sup>.

The above two excerpts from the screenplay clarify condensed parts of the novel, such as:

Oh, *si*, curious journalists had ended up telling the pieces of Emilio's yarn that made him a hero and not the pieces that made him just like any other hungry and fed-up migrant out of a big group of Italian, Polish, Greek, Dutch and German migrants. Those newspaper writers had chosen not to make the point that out of all these he'd been the one most inclined to violence. They'd kept quiet about that because it wasn't part of the good tale they wanted to tell. In those days everyone hated the bosses, and the unions most especially, and Emilio and his men had been seen to be underdogs caught in a corrupt system and battling their way through it; journalists hadn't been able to restrain themselves from singing his praises. All for actions – he admitted to himself over and over again – he was ashamed of. [...] this is what people believed: this young man, he was a fighter, a handsome, strong, non-smoking, non-drinking, non-communist hero of his people (*TV*, 24).

Several days later we became aware of a new turn. It seemed the *kangarooni* were worried by a rumour that there were more Sicilians coming, or at least a hundred more migrants from the who-could-say-where (*TV*, 467).

#### 4.5 De-realising ('white') dreams

In *The Volcano*, Armanno points out how both the migrant and 'white' subject's dream of completeness, though with different aims, is disrupted. This section first focuses on the former's tainted dreams functional to the identitarian definition of the 'white' subject; then, disrupting the latter's dream of 'Whiteness' it highlights, through the *arrivant/revenant* presence, that there is no authentic representation of both subjects and, as a consequence, that stereotypes are false.

As for the dreams migrants nurtured:

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<sup>72</sup> *Idem*, pp. 106, 107.

‘Everyone here owns a motor car and [...] even if they don’t own one there is someone in their street who does and who will take them driving on a Sunday afternoon and so they themselves are saving up to buy one.’

‘The railways department has so many jobs to give away laying their lines around Australia all you have to do is find a sponsor to bring you over and your future is assured’ (*TV*, 317-318).

These letters sent by emigrants indulged those trapped in the cycle of hunger and death in dreams of a better life. The film director Emanuele Crialesi in *Nuovo mondo* (*Golden Door*, 2006) describes these hopes through what Bakhtin calls “hyperbolic grotesque”<sup>73</sup>. The main character Salvatore Mancuso metonymically imagines big fruits, vegetable and animals epitomising the American dream – usually conveyed by the image of streets paved with ‘gold’, a metaphor for richness and dreams recalled in the very English title. Yet, the function of the grotesque is to ironically disrupt those promises made by the new land. This is what Emilio’s dreams initially seem to confirm through:

[n]ames and this country. Words and this country. Names like Mr Johnny, Mr Doyle, Missa Wilson, these were names to like, Mary, names that carried the promise of good things to come. Words, too, words such as permanent employment, co-worker, brother, ‘My Eyetic friends’, home – these words spoke of kindness around you and better things just within your reach (*TV*, 336-37).

His hopes become synonymous with daydreaming and utopia, because emigrants will find no egalitarian society. Emilio’s daydreaming can be compared to Todorov’s *marvellous* which includes, though not exclusively, fairy tales<sup>74</sup>. Yet, while in fairy tales injustices are made up for and ‘good’ characters are rewarded, this is not Emilio’s case: there is no better life for him there, he loses his wife and lives in

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<sup>73</sup> M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. T. Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 56.



solitude and loneliness. One might say that his dreams were tainted from the very beginning. Ironically, those who had never left the island did not even distinguish between America and Australia. The latter was often perceived as *l'américa*, a term which, when standing for richness, fortune and a better life, had a metaphorical meaning rather than a geographical one. During his first working experience in Brisbane at its sewage system, Joe tells him:

'You better listen to me. You don't have a clue where you've landed. This is a country all by itself. They call it the "Great Southern Land". It's a whole country, not a province. It's in the south. Near Asia, Indonesia, where all the slant-eyes are. We've nothing to do with the United States but everything to do with *Inghilterra, gli Inglesi*. England, the English. We're in the country where they sent all their worst criminals, to the arsehole of the whole miserable planet!' [...] '*Zauddu* – you ignorant peasant! United States of America! Look at him. He doesn't believe me. The poor fool doesn't even know what country he's in – open your eyes, Emilio! This is an island. It's the biggest one. You sailed a month and a half to make a nice new toilet system for this race called "De Aussies". How could we be anywhere near America? *Hai capito o no?* Have you understood or not?' (*TV*, 325)

Sad with the news, Emilio realises the true nature of his dreams identifying them with a place that is 'no-where'. Dreams are displaced:

Through a veil of anger I stared back at the work site. Black heads against the sun, features and faces indistinguishable from the next, yet I sensed the pity in those men. Pity for me and so pity for themselves, because if a young man can go so wrong then what horrors and humiliations must be ahead for *them* in this indecipherable country? [...] How will I ever make anything worthwhile when I'm so ignorant I think a few fairy-tale books have made me smart? [...] I'd let dreams and fantasies lead me into a nowhere. *Australia* (*TV*, 326).

The country becomes 'indecipherable' to migrants, it is a 'nowhere', the space of identitarian displacement between *l'américa*, his dreams and fairy-tales and the sad reality of Australia.

However, the word ‘taint’ has among its many synonyms that of ‘trace’: a trace of something bad and of infection, contamination (as ‘wog’). In other words, a taint leaves a trace that marks, that spoils something by being spectrally there since its origins. Therefore, the tainted representation of *the other* of the White Australia policy also tainted their own dreams creating a haunting subject.

As seen in the first two chapters of this study, Bhabha states that stereotypes are a colonial strategy to affirm the Nation’s unity and maintain mutually-exclusive Manichean identities. The repetition of the statement hides and, at the same time, reveals the ambivalence and anxiety of the colonial/migrant discourse and, thus, its disunity<sup>75</sup>. ‘Delight and fear’, metaphor and metonymy, narcissism and aggressiveness, disavowal and recognition<sup>76</sup> are all aspects of the process of stereotyping which is itself a sublime experience of ‘death’ since it hides the awareness of the ‘lacking of the lack’. *The other* stands, like a veil, in the way of the Subject’s desired and phantasmatic completeness “allow[ing] us to think that our fantasy is possible”<sup>77</sup>. There is no hope without fear and vice versa, as the analysis of the market-scene in *The Volcano*, discussed below, proves.

The representation of Emilio at the market is ‘constructed’ by the greengrocer playing on stereotypes (its tone “measured to show that he was dealing with a thief or a dunce or both”; *TV*, 342) in order to represent him as a ‘fool’ (as confirmed by the grocer’s wink to his neighbour; cf. *Ibidem*) on a stage (the grocer’s commentary is “loud and for the benefit of everyone watching”; *Ibidem*). The greengrocer and the

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<sup>75</sup> Introducing Derrida’s theories, Nicholas Royle says: “Unity, coherence, univocality are effects produced out of division and divisibility. This is what gives rise to the elaboration of terms such as difference, iterability, the trace, the supplement” (N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 26)

<sup>76</sup> The two terms, disavowal and recognition, refer to Freud’s theory of the fetish which was important for Bhabha’s analysis of the representation of *the other* and, thus, the colonizer-colonised relationship. With disavowal, Derek Hook clarifies, Freud and Bhabha did not mean an act of repression but of refusal to acknowledge the reality of something (cf. D. Hook, *art. cit.*, pp. 17-18).

<sup>77</sup> G. Hage, “Hoping with the Beast”, 2007, Catalogue of the *Regarding Fear and Hope* exhibition, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia (Handouts provided at the Summer School on Cultural and Literary Studies, University of Calabria – in Rende – and AILAE, June 2009). The endless construction of the other (fear) is necessary to define ourselves (hope). An extreme case is that of Aborigines: “There is another reason why Aborigines cannot be completely effaced by the record. They still have a crucial role to play in the process of the foundation myth: to confer legitimacy on those who raped, pillaged, poisoned and dispossessed them. So [...], a voice that is labelled as theirs must have a place, legitimated as theirs yet not disrupting the fine balance of contradictions in the foundation myth” (B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

other Australians at the market are defining themselves by constructing mutually-exclusive identities: from among the crowd someone shouts ““They use shells where he comes from!”” (*Ibidem*) and the grocer, in his Australian slang, ““*Know all* about ya wogs. *Know all* about ya criminals”” (*TV*, 344; emphasis added) thus defining Emilio as a savage and a criminal and, conversely, the crowd (Australians) as part of a higher-civilised society. The need to verbally attack Emilio, who has no intention of cheating the grocer, comes from what Hage, after Appadurai, calls the ‘anxiety of uncertainty’ and the ‘anxiety of completeness’: ““They think they can face this uncertainty by crowding and becoming ‘complete’, meaning ethnically or racially homogenous””<sup>78</sup> as the crowd around Emilio symbolises. Moreover, Hage states that the other’s beast-acting is the result of being circled by the crowd, of a spiral of violence and blank incomprehension<sup>79</sup>. The crowd’s reaction does not ensue from the actual fear of a single person, rather from its symbolic one in line with Appadurai’s theory of the fear of small numbers. If, as Lacan has shown, the other represents the proof that the desire of completeness can be fulfilled, then, ““paradoxically, the less of the other there is, the more we are led to believe that completeness and the good time are possible ... just around the corner really””<sup>80</sup>.

Despite the fact that Emilio had an honest job and was a good migrant – so far –, he was discriminated on the grounds of stereotypes and prejudices. This creates a parallelism between multiculturalism and mimicry. Telling Mary about the racial experience at the market, he points out that among all discriminating words of the dominant’s ““tyranny language”” (*TV*, 343), ‘wog’ is the one he has never accepted for its true meaning is:

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<sup>78</sup> G. Hage, “Hoping with the Beast”, cit.

<sup>79</sup> Similarities can be drawn between Emilio and the main character of Kefala’s *The Boarding House*, Melina. Encircled like Hage’s ‘beast’ in a centre/margin, inside/outside opposition, the reader is given an estranging perspective from the margins: ““Then I realised that I stood alone in the middle of the room, a ring of emptiness and silence around me, as if they were pinning me there within a magic ring out of which I could not move, which they were weaving in silence, closing their ranks against me, pretending to be engrossed, punishing me. I stood there for what seemed an endless time, till the invisible net they were all tracing in the depths of their innermost beings, all in unison, their selves responding in a compact well regimented way, till the net became so powerful, in spite of their voices that rang loud and indifferent above the gramophone, that my feet would not move and I stood rooted at the floor”” (A. Kefala, *The Boarding House*, p. 104 qtd in E. Hatzimanolis, *art. cit.*, p. 125).

<sup>80</sup> G. Hage, “Hoping with the Beast”, cit.

‘I will never accept you’, [...]. ‘You, you bloody Italian, you will never be good enough to lick my shoes clean. But for the grace of God your wife is no better than a whore and your children dumb little piccaninnies, and you, without any question, are not a man’(TV, 341)<sup>81</sup>.

Immigration meant mimicry<sup>82</sup>: Emilio was the same (egalitarian propaganda), *but not quite*. As for Althusser’s theories of ‘non-interpellation’, ‘negative interpellation’ and ‘mis-interpellation’, the latter was experienced by Emilio, for whom “the proud equality of Australia meant that it was his home too” (TV, 346). Furthermore, this meant that he should not have suffered any racial ethnic victimisation, that he did not want to act as a puppet or, in other words, as one of those foreigners who “are acceptable as long as they are seen working and not heard arguing” (*Ibidem*)<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> By using the words ‘wog’ and ‘piccaninny’ or ‘pickaninny’ – derogatory terms referring to dark-skinned people (see <http://www.urbandictionary.com>) – the foreigner is directly compared to a minority group ranked low in society and to Southern Italians in particular as opposed to Northern Italians, fair-skinned and thus more European (see CHAPTER ONE).

<sup>82</sup> The term ‘mimicry’ is also used to express the desire to be absorbed into the hegemonic society and, as a consequence, the rejection of one’s origins (cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, cit., p. 4). A better term to express such an assimilationist attitude, in order to avoid confusion, would definitely be mimesis since, in Ashcroft’s analysis of English Studies as a form of neo-imperialism, it does not have Bhabha’s double meaning of mimicry/mockery on which this study draws.

<sup>83</sup> An example of ‘mis-interpellation’ is evident in Sydney’s cultural heritage. Although not directly referring to Brisbane it can give a general picture of how Sicilians are still considered in Australia. Joseph Pugliese focuses on the promotion of Italianness in Sydney both in the 1960 and more recently, in 2003, by analysing the exhibition of Michelangelo’s *David* (cf. J. Pugliese, “Le altre Italie: identità geopolitiche, genealogie razzializzate e storie interculturali”, in *Calabria e Sicilia. Sguardi Italoaustraliani*, special issue of *Studi Emigrazione*, 44 (168) October-December, 2007, pp. 837-54). Drawing on Ivan Karp, who states that “[e]xhibitions are privileged arenas to present images of self and other” (I. Vanni, “Way of seeing: the poetics and politics of exhibiting Italo-Australian cultures in Sydney”, in R. Wilson, S. Scarparo (eds.), *Representing Italian Diasporas in Australia: New Perspectives*, (special issue of *Italian Studies in Southern Africa*), 18 (1) 2005, p. 102), it can be argued that an *exhibition* is not merely a nostalgic but a *performative* discursive site creating identities. On the one hand, analysing the 1960s exhibition, Pugliese asserts that by using the *David* the Italian identity and culture promoted was that of ‘Whiteness’ with all its racial implications mentioned in this study. On the other hand, studying the poster for the exhibition *Italiani di Sydney* (held at the Museum of Sydney, 30 August-7 December 2003) from a geopolitical perspective, he states: “La figura dell’anonimo manovale è collocata in senso spaziale sull’asse meridionale, in cima alla scala e sta pulendo con lo straccio verso il nord. Vista in questo senso spaziale politicizzato, l’immagine presenta una vivida metafora della storia secolare dell’emigrazione dei meridionali verso il settentrione, dove vennero a costituire le schiere operaie alla base del miracolo economico. Quest’ultimo fu reso possibile dal costante flusso di forza-lavoro dalle regioni che certi storici hanno denominato ‘il terzo mondo entro i confini [dell’Italia]” (J. Pugliese, *art. cit.*, p. 844). A racial opposition which was meant to be objected through the first rejected title proposed for the exhibition by Ilaria Vanni (the curator), *Sydney, Italia*, but which was then conveyed by the opposition between the *David* of the poster and objects of domestic use testifying unofficial racial stories. Through the visual the Italian curator

The unpacking of stereotypes not only discloses the ambivalence and the deep anxiety beyond assimilation, as its reading through the concepts of mimicry and mis-interpellation emphasises, but it also reveals the non-fixity of the ‘white’ subject’s identity. If the subject’s identity is fluid (“almost the same but not white”<sup>84</sup>), making ‘origins’ problematic, so is that of the Subject: in Australia, Bhabha’s ‘but-not-white’ strategy takes a quite different twist since the ontological question of Anglo-Australians’ ‘Whiteness’ (authority, superiority, etc.) is de-realised. The market, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is a carnivalesque territory of ‘laughter’ – though, one might add, it is a ‘silent’ one which inverts any superior attitude. And though the carnival cannot topple the dominant order however the margins are made ‘visible’ notwithstanding their ‘invisibility’. When Fred and Emilio are ready to fight they ‘look at’<sup>85</sup> each other thinking, respectively:

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‘shows’ that life in Australia in the 1950s was not that ‘fairy’ as it is usually depicted when dealing with emigration to Australia – especially if compared with that to America. The different title given to the exhibition by its commission reveals the ‘assimilationist’ intent which, through the lenses of Pugliese’s analysis, speaks both an Anglo-Celtic monoculture and that of the ideal ‘Culotta’ immigrant.

<sup>84</sup> H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>85</sup> Of the Other’s anxiety, the subaltern subject takes advantage through mimicry/mockery: the ‘gaze’ defining the other is re-appropriated by the latter to produce a ‘partial vision’ of the Subject. Analysing the spectre of communism, Derrida points up the uncanny and deconstructionist effect of the ghost’s gaze in *Hamlet* or, in other words, what he calls the *visor effect* (Cf. J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, cit., pp. 3-9; N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 247). In fact, Marcellus and Horatio are unaware of the ghost’s gaze, of his looking back, while Bernardo does not even see ‘the thing’ (“MARCELLUS: What, has this thing appear’d again to-night? BERNARDO: I have seen nothing”). The ghost is visible and invisible at the same time; Horatio sees his armour but not his face, his gaze (“HORATIO: Such was the very armour he had on [...]”). Yet, as Derrida asserts, its invisibility does not forbid it to look back; instead, it becomes a spectral tool of recognition, of usurpation (“HORATIO: What art thou, that usurp’st this time of night, [...] This bodes some strange eruption to our state”). The ghost’s usurping presence is that of the *revenant* or *arrivant*, of the migrant subject even before landing ‘on the shore’. Horatio commands the ghost to speak (“by heaven I charge thee speak!”) positioning himself on the hierarchically superior level typical of the dominant subject interpreting, representing and silencing *the other*, a parallelism reinforced by his being a scholar, someone who has the power of language/knowledge (W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* [Act I.i.25-26, 62, 47, 72, 50 respectively], in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions, [1599-1600] 1996, pp. 670-71). The ‘gaze’ of the ghost is a cultural metonymic presence for it is through it that the absence/gap is ‘realised’. Bhabha’s metonymic presence is not that far from Ashcroft’s metonymic gap. Bhabha states that colonised subjects are “the figures of a doubling, the part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire which alienates the modality and normality of those dominant discourses in which they emerge as ‘inappropriate’ colonial subjects. A desire that, through the repetition of *partial presence*, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority. It is a desire that reverses ‘in part’ the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” (H.K. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 126). Bhabha’s difference creates a ‘gap’ in the narcissistic

The greengrocer, Fred: *Like we need these criminal cunts to come here and ruin the place. Stink of whatever shit it is they stink of. Reckon Bill's wife Enid even slept with one a them, way he's been hangen around, he knows something, that Eyetie moved in down the street with his yabberen mates.*

The immigrant, Emilio: *But look at this animal. Look at this so-called man, this descendant of the scum of England, of transported criminals and prostitutes full of disease and without a penny to their names. Look at this thing who eats for his dinner greasy 'fish 'n chips' and foul-smelling hamburgers and fried steak with vegetables broiled down into a grey sop, who loses his money at horse races and squanders his wages in pubs, whose wife smokes cigarettes and drinks beer cut with lemonade in public like a slut. Look at him with his box-shaped head and potato-shaped nose, and wispy-white hair and blue, blue eyes. Who is he to look at me? (TV, 344-45)*

Like the very ghost in *Hamlet* the immigrant is a usurper, someone who spoils the safety of the home making it *unhomely* with criminality, a strange language, stink, etc. The immigrant is the *arrivant* who, on the one hand, is the foreigner coming to the shore and, on the other hand, like the *revenant*, that which returns<sup>86</sup>. The *arrivant* is *revenant*, the foreigner already 'within' dramatising the return of disavowed aspects: Anglo-Australians' own foreigners, "transported criminals and prostitutes". In the studies of 'marginality', Bakhtin's 'top' and 'bottom' – suggested, psychoanalytically interpreting the order in which the characters' lines appear on the page, by Fred being on 'top' – conflate so as to highlight that power is anything but incoherent and based on contradictions, on the psychoanalytical fetishised other<sup>87</sup>. An aspect reinforced by common typologies of stereotypes between immigrants and Australians: the grocer can be defined as an animal, a 'so-called' man, women can be stereotyped as sluts, their hamburgers 'smell foul' and, why not, Australian-English, with its Australianisms, is not as 'white' as English: 'one a them', 'hangen', 'yabberen' ('a' stands for 'of', '-en' stands for the progressive form '-ing'). Besides, the Aussie's body is caricaturised by pointing out his "box-shaped head", "potato-

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authority of power as Ashcroft's metonymic gap which emphasises a cultural 'absence' between two cultures – though sometimes making it accessible to the reader. In brief, both create a 'partial vision' of the dominant subject.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 111.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. A. Stott, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

shaped nose” and, through repetition his “blue, blue eyes”. As for Australianisms and focusing on the third expression, ‘yabberen’, this comes from the Aboriginal word ‘yaba’; a fact that renders his English less pure and, in a way, going native<sup>88</sup> which leads to the questioning of his fixed identity.

In conclusion, Emilio looks back at Fred – and the narrator at the reader<sup>89</sup> – reminding him of his ‘low’ origins and thus giving Emilio the right to ask: “[w]ho is he to look at me?”<sup>90</sup>. Not aware of the immigrant’s gaze, the ‘white’ subject is ghostly looked back at by a strategy of doubling which serves as a re-appropriation of one’s identity: Emilio is neither ‘the other’ nor the ‘assimilated subject’ Australia wanted him to be. Besides, a carnivalesque lowering technique is adopted when Fred and Emilio meet outside the Cloudland Ballroom. Inviting Emilio, with “a courting dance that had its own silent language” (TV, 370), to follow him to an outlook where lovers meet, the two start fighting but Emilio gets the worst of it<sup>91</sup>. Lying down on the ground, his humiliation is vindicated by a stranger whose wolfish smile Emilio associates with cruelty. However what is important here is the way Fred’s body, and thus “his mad affections” (TV, 371), is ‘lowered’:

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Going native’ indicates the coloniser’s fear of being ‘contaminated’ by native customs (dress, food, entertainment) and interracial sex. The term used for Australia is ‘going troppo’ which besides the previous meanings includes the effect of moral and even physical degeneracy caused by a hot climate (cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, cit., p. 106). In fact, ‘going troppo’ is an Australian slang expression meaning ‘going crazy’ still used today although not with the same original meaning.

<sup>89</sup> In his project “The World of Missing Persons” – not to be confused with the homonymous short story – Armanno highlights such an opposition when using the first person narrator: “such a technique will draw the reader close to the material discussed and collapse the distance between the reader (structured as *normal*) and the narrator and the narrator’s world (structured as *other*)” (V. Armanno, “The World of Missing Persons”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 38).

<sup>90</sup> The disruptive meaning of Anglo-Celts’ ‘low’ origins is rooted back in the very beginning of their settling. For instance, many felt that Clarke’s *His Natural Life* was inappropriate material upon which to base a country’s mythology because of the stain of convictism (cf. G. Turcotte, *art. cit.*, p. 14). This is also suggested by Howard’s narration of the country based on the Gallipoli and mateship myths silencing any reference to the convict system.

<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting that as for the Cloudland Ballroom, the outlook is turned from a place of love and dreams into one of violence. The latter is the prime cause of Emilio’s solitude as the vegetation outside the ballroom suggests: the more Fred and Emilio went nearer to the place of fight the more it “opened into a natural grotto of solitude” (TV, 371).

he [the stranger] reached into his lower parts and loosed a large sable member, likely for the second time in that garden, and without delay directed a strong stream of urine that nitrogenated the tied-in-knots Fred Johnston from the tip of his skull to the toes of his shoes. The expert urinator moved carefully up and down the prone body without getting a drop on his own shoes or trousers [...] (*TV*, 373-74).

By lowering Fred, the scene can be interpreted as an upturning of Emilio's humiliation at the market – and of migrants' humiliation generally speaking. And this is suggested also by the carnivalesque and corporeal dismemberment of his body that the reader learns about through Roberta Vai who reports the newspaper clipping by heart:

a gang [...] beat him half to death. [...] This means many fractures, broken ribs, broken arms and broken hands. Even his fingers are broken. The thumbs. This here means he lost thirteen teeth. Thirteen! Can you imagine what these beasts did to him? This part here says he maybe won't walk any more except with crutches. Here. Part of his face, his cheekbone, caved in! (*TV*, 385-86)

Such dismemberment is to be read in the light of the blurring of oppositions: violence is not a characteristic of being Sicilian but such 'mad affections' characterise Australians as well.

In addition to the previous metonymic elements focusing on the 'visual', others rest on the 'telling' or, as Weber's focus on memory points out<sup>92</sup>, Emilio's inextricably intertwined personal and collective memories and life alike. These, through storytelling and imbued with melancholy and nostalgia, *realises* at the same time a feeling of belonging (*realised absences*) and one of displacement (*de-realised presences*).

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<sup>92</sup> Max Weber says that ethnic groups can be defined as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent – because of similarities of *physical type* or of customs or both, or because of *memories* of colonisation and migration – in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non-kinship communal relationships" (M. Weber, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1968, p. 389 qtd in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, cit., p. 77; emphasis added).



#### 4.6 Remembering semiotic spaces: demise and sense of belonging

The project of belonging to Brisbane follows a double time-path: it begins and continues with chain migration – spatially building an ethnic community neighbourhood, such as Spring Hill and New Farm – and after its demise it is virtually rebuilt in the memory of immigrants. Thus, a moment of ‘foundation’ and one of ‘rediscovery’ can be emphasised through memories. As for the latter moment, the melancholy remembering of the demise of Little Sicily entails its ‘realisation’ – at least in migrants’ *memoryscape* – as an integral part of the characters’ (semiotic) identitarian quest.

Belonging to Australia in Armanno’s novel is in line with Fortier’s and Hage’s home-building: the maintenance of ethnic identity is expressed by the trope of family(/community) combining solidarity, gatherings, sacrifice, alienation, business activities<sup>93</sup>, the spatial trope of the neighbourhood and positive encounters with a sound (e.g. Caruso’s songs), a smell and taste (food), soothing images (the ballroom, the stars, the smoke). As for spatial boundaries, these can be recognised as a ‘body buffer zone’ – separating the inside (safe place) from the outside<sup>94</sup> – forming an ‘in-

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<sup>93</sup> In *The Volcano*, Sicilian gatherings at Emilio’s boarding house in Spring Hill, weddings and christenings where immigrants “eat and talk machine-gun Sicilian” and call them *cumpari* and *cummari* testify such a family-based system. Examples of solidarity to each other in *The Volcano* are when Emilio obtains a job in the Railway department and, when asked to form a work-team, he involves his Sicilian immigrants, or when they fight against the Aussies. The hard work, both on the railways and the sewage digging scheme, expresses the trope of sacrifice and alienation – though there is no need to see them as crystallising definitions of ethnic authenticity.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. A-M. Fortier, *op. cit.*, p. 60. The memory of an ethnic community, spatially localisable, realises a sense of unity of the community itself as opposed to the space other beyond its boundaries (identity-cultural difference). The opposition inside-outside is not merely a metaphor but a realisation of the safety-non safety one as a way to spatially contest the ‘centre’. The more these undervalued suburbs are remembered the more the ethnic identity associated with them is recovered. The space inside the boundaries, reminding emigrants that they are the rulers, gives them confidence, while the outside space reminds them of their foreignness and fear of the host country. What happens outside must be solved out inside in order to avoid the involvement of ‘external’ authorities ‘inside’ the community. It is in this belief that the affairs of the community, like Emilio’s involvement in the fight at the market, must remain secret inside its boundaries. However, immigrants’ position in the host country is uncanny: between captives and rulers. Claiming authority over the inhabited neighbourhood means to give visibility to their identity within mainstream society – no matter whether negatively or positively. The experience of immigrants in the host society recalls that of the colonisers. As Robinson Crusoe – the coloniser *par excellence* in postcolonial studies – or the first Australian colonisers, immigrants’ first perception of the ‘host’ country is its unfamiliarity. Feeling nostalgia for the past, the colonisers try *reterritorialising* the foreign land. In the same way as Crusoe signalled the territory, his ‘country house’, in a visible way, so immigrants settle down together signalling the periphery of their ‘homeland’. Of course, comparing immigrants to colonisers is risky especially in terms of authority

group'. This is a feature of the family-based system also when it comes to marriages, with the adoption of an endogamic criterion<sup>95</sup>. In *Romeo of the Underworld* and *The Lonely Hunter* Romeo marries an Italian girl only because his parents wished so in order to keep up the family's ethnic identity. Although women in Armanno's novels are protean figures – symbolising settlement, absence, rejection and recovery – their role exemplifies the symbolical link between women and ethnic identity and their absence as a loss of innocence: Monica is killed by her father, Desideria abandons Emilio after his involvement with criminality and Gabriella disappears in the Brisbane underworld. Emilio, Romeo and Sam's quest for their lost identity, innocence and community overlaps with their 'desire' for Desideria, Monica and Gabriella – fetish objects which replace the denial of the 'signifier'<sup>96</sup>.

Among the reasons for such a demise, these include: on the one hand, invisibility which is not only due to multiculturalism/assimilation, but also to new migrants that have substituted Sicilians in the role of the 'other'<sup>97</sup> – a stage that fits Mishra's second-phase relationship with the host society while other immigrants – Asian and Lebanese who were going through a first phase. On the other hand, invisibility is related to the feeble roots of the community in Brisbane due to the already mentioned involvement of some members in the criminal underworld; to class mobility, and consequent migration to outer suburb areas<sup>98</sup>; to the urban development policy which

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which, ultimately, immigrants do not have: Crusoe is a foreigner with authority and considers himself superior; immigrants have no authority and are considered inferiors (colonised) with all its implied racial consequences. Thus, from this perspective, immigrants can be identified with the colonised due to its marginality, supposed inferiority, lack of authority. Yet, they are different from the colonised because they have no right on the land they inhabit. Immigrants cannot be identified with no pole of the binary opposition coloniser-colonised, though they take up some elements of both.

<sup>95</sup> The endogamic criterion was adopted by Australians too as the reader learns in *The Volcano* and as scholars have analysed (cf. S. Iuliano, "Donne e buoi dai paesi tuoi (Choose Women and Oxen From Your Home Village): Italian Proxy Marriages in Post-War Australia", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 34 (4) November 1999, pp. 319-35; G. Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 133). However, this brought about a more complex sociological framework: it represented a *status quo* reinforcing the hegemonic discourse which perceived minorities as static and trapped in the past (cf. S.M. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, cit., p. 17); a closure between the immigrant and the local community; and the final self-destruction of minority communities closed to change. Highlighting the 'stupid things of the past', see the following sections, Armanno paves a new way for the future, or at least reveals what he wishes that will happen so that successive generation migrants will not be trapped in a 'double message'.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. B. Hodge, V. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. J. Carniel, "Cloudland, Stronzoland, Brisbane: Urban and Ethnic Development in Little Italy",

stood for one of ‘erasure’ of the past; and, to the criminality which had implications also on those not involved in it. As for the latter, with the closure of some of the brothels situated in the city centre in 1957, the sex industry went underground, out of the city and into the industrial areas of Fortitude Valley. Consequently, many shops moved from this area after its decline also due to a lack of control by the police as the Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed by “uncovering corruption and misconduct at the highest level of the police force and the government”<sup>99</sup>. As the above highlights, Armanno contextualises migrants’ history within the wider one of Brisbane.

In *Firehead*, the melancholic link between the demise of Little Sicily (food, neighbourhoods, Italian gardens and building) and Gabriella is made explicit:

I thought too many of the families had moved out of ‘their’ suburb of New Farm. They’d left to show they’d done well in the new country. [...] There used to be energy, there used to be life; to my mind it had all gone too quickly and I blamed that on Gabriella’s disappearance – but who knows, it might just be the thing that happens to migrants in any country. They stay together as long as they can but then life intrudes and the old connections get lost (*F*, 134-36)<sup>100</sup>.

Fortier states that the settlement phase for Italians in London coincided with the time needed for women to settle down. Terri Colpi, in her *The Italian Factor*, states:

In the 1830s and 1840s the male-female ratio of the Italian presence in this country was very imbalanced and it was not until the middle of the second half of the century, the 1860s and 1870s, that women began to arrive in sufficient number to balance the sex-structure of the colony in London [...]. The community thus became more sedentary and stable [...]<sup>101</sup>.

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*Crossings*, 11 (2) October 2006, [http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/13231/20070203-0000/asc.uq.edu.au/crossings/11\\_2/index9be1.html?apply=carniel#1](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/13231/20070203-0000/asc.uq.edu.au/crossings/11_2/index9be1.html?apply=carniel#1)

<sup>99</sup> E. Whitton, “The Twilight State”, *The Australian*, in *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31.

<sup>100</sup> A link reinforced through language: “we might have had secret kisses and fumbings to share, but better than that was our own secret language – and vaffanculu the rest of the English-speaking world” (*F*, 16).

<sup>101</sup> T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor. The Italian Community in Great Britain*, London, Mainstream, 1991, p. 41 qtd in A-M. Fortier, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Their desire to feel at home in Australia is conveyed in gender terms:

I met m' missus there, m' brother met his missus there, I reckon m' two boys'll meet their wives there as well. That's the way it goes. Get to know the place and bring those single fellas a yours, but tell 'em not to be too cocky else there's the potential for trouble, always is. But that's where they can start puttin' down roots. Where else they gunna go, so many a them hot-blooded single fellas? (*TV*, 309)

From a sociological perspective, being defined within a patriarchal system, women were linked to ideas of the private, stable sphere of the house, maternity, wifehood, education, thus guaranteeing continuity and tradition. Yet Fortier does not see women as stationary figures since their circulation between London and Italy makes them forerunners of transition and change. When this paradigm is mapped on Armanno's novels one understands that women such as Desideria, Graziella, Monica and Mary (the latter only in *Romeo of The Underworld*) are stationary fetishised figures functional to the male plot – apart from Mary in the second part of *The Volcano* where she takes up the mythologies and history of the past. Yet, while their absence symbolically stands for the demise of the Sicilian ethnic community, being the objects of obsession (the lost objects of melancholy) they can be identified with a positive process of realisation of absences through memories. In Armanno's novels the equation 'no women, no ethnic continuity' acting as a castration fear<sup>102</sup> seems valid<sup>103</sup>. The consequence of the 'missing mother', as it will be discussed below, is

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<sup>102</sup> Women's function – the satisfaction of one's desires – seems to be suggested in the first pages of *The Volcano* when Emilio's voyeuristic behaviour brings him to be beaten for looking at Leonardo and Gisella during their intimate encounter (cf. *TV*, 6-7). The uncanny link between the view of a female genital and castration is underlined by Freud in his 1927 essay on "Fetishism": "Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 41). As in the Oedipal complex, Emilio is punished for seeing and desiring an object which only through the language of the Father (Sicily's social and political hierarchical system, full of traditions and superstitions) he might achieve. If to be part of society, which means to fulfil one's desire, means to accept its language, Emilio's exile on the volcano and his cruelty against a boy of his age eating a peach – a fruit he associates with Gisella's sex organ – maybe stand for his refusal of such a system and its implications.

<sup>103</sup> Women's absence, even when they are physically present, is also conveyed through their silence or their being silenced. As for Desideria, absence is also metaphorically suggested by her not being pregnant: "[...] I can't have what I want. Nothing will work for you and me in this country. Nothing that I want. You've made me empty,' she said, a hand now on her belly" (*TV*, 397). The lack of

the ‘abject’ child whose displacement takes up Gothic shapes. Yet, though shattered, the mother’s body is not completely effaced.

Emilio and Romeo both have fond memories of the Cloudland Ballroom – an intergenerational space of belonging – with its “silhouette of a volcano – the active Mt Etna, of course” (*R*, 12; cf. 128) and as a space where Romeo and Monica’s affair begins (*R*, 15-16). As such, the ballroom seems to be a gendered place expressing identity, like the volcano which it recalls<sup>104</sup>.

The Cloudland Ballroom, part of the social mythology of the city, is both a physical space of *re-membering* and a *re-membered* place whose red lights recall the volcano with its smoke and nights full of stars. Armanno’s says:

[T]hese nervous migrants came from a landscape that was dominated by their volcano and arrived in a new country and city that was dominated instead by a dance hall ballroom [...]. Every time they looked at the Brisbane sky they were reminded of what a different world they were in. They were delighted and they were confused – and all they could hang on to were memories of the past, hope for the future, their food, and old stories of home<sup>105</sup>.

In a foreign country, a space can become a metaphorical relational one of living memories, a communal body of postmodern belonging to the past of the homeland

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children denotes the lack of continuity since new generations are its living embodiment. And when the reader discovers, almost at the end of the novel, that Desideria bore five children to Paolo back in Sicily, it is clear that this is Emilio’s fault due to his unwillingness and lack of vigilance. This interpretation is reinforced when comparing Emilio to the Spoleto brothers (“the lonely professors of migrant fate”; *Idem*, 395), Pierucci (“our local guardian angel”; *F*, 25) and Desideria herself (cf. *TV*, 52). In *Firehead*, Pierucci’s role is well expressed by his very name as Sam explains: “The thing is, Pietro in Italian means Peter in English but more than that *pietro* is the word for rock and that was exactly what that young man was to the Sicilian families of those days, the rock upon which they understood the solid foundation of Australian law” (*F*, 29). His role is to prevent anything that could lead to the demise of the ethnic community in Brisbane caused by the involvement in the underworld criminality and unfair treatment by the host country, as well as any internal contrast. The Spoleto perform a similar function: they advise Emilio how to face the issue of the fight at the market in order to avoid the interference of the police who would repatriate immigrants whether fairly or not: “what happens to you, happens to all of us” (*TV*, 398). The latter aspect also entails that expulsion was one of the strategies adopted to deal with migrants whose inalienable rights were simply overlooked reducing them to non-person.

<sup>104</sup> “The Dark Side of the Volcano”, *Il Globo*, 31 March 2010, <http://italianmedia.com.au/w4/index.php/english-magazine/english-features/italian-profiles/5396-venero-armanno>

<sup>105</sup> V. Armanno, “Under the Volcano”, cit., p. 23.

through which immigrant subjects express their desire to feel at home in Australia. Analysing the relationship between *longing* for the homeland and *belonging* to the host land, Fortier departs from a simplistic ‘hegemonic’ opposition *there-here* by affirming a ‘longing to belong’. Drawing on Avtar Brah distinction between ‘homing desire’ and ‘desire for the homeland’ she states that within the Italian immigrant’s project of *reterritorialisation* in London, the practices of homing desire are not that far from those of the desire for a homeland – the desire to feel at home through habitual spaces and the importation of cultural artefacts or architectural replicas<sup>106</sup>. The first kind of *reterritorialisation*, in which the ‘there’ and ‘here’ are interconnected, is what happens to the first wave of immigrants living in Brisbane<sup>107</sup>. Memory is thus objectified, externalised nostalgically shaping physical spaces that reminded immigrants of what they were and risk not being anymore since there is always fear behind any hope. Their hope of feeling at home through an ‘architecture of reassurance’ hides the fear of fragmentation, of having no one to whom they can hand down their stories, their past, their identity<sup>108</sup>.

Due to the iconic and symbolic function of the ballroom, its erasure comes to symbolise the end of collective and personal identity: at once a space of belonging

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. A-M. Fortier, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>107</sup> However, the challenge does not dismiss a longing to belong directed only to the ‘there’ place/space (homeland) and a desire to return ‘there’ as probably the homesick migrant who commits suicide in *The Volcano* testifies; or vice versa, a migrant can see the host land as his/her home and reject any link with the past (assimilation).

<sup>108</sup> Landscape is another interesting trope for the creation of a terrain of belonging and, as seen with the example of the Cloudland Ballroom/Mt Etna, it is sometimes metaphorically intertwined with architecture. The absent familiar landscape of the homeland is realised, through the social practice of imagination, in the unfamiliar Australian landscape as Jawaharlal Nehru, in a letter to his daughter Indira Gandhi, writes about India: “The real journey is of the mind; [...] *It is because the mind is full of pictures and ideas and aspects of India* that even the bare stones – and so much more our mountains and great rivers, and old monuments and ruins, and snatches of old song and ballad, and the way people look and smile, and the queer and significant phrases and metaphors they use – whisper of the past and the present and of the unending thread that unites them and leads us into the future” (V. Agnew, “Language Matters”, in V. Agnew (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 30; emphasis added). The images one sees in the foreign landscape spark from the past, the places where one has been and lived and to which the subject is emotionally tied. The foreign landscape is domesticated so that, on the one hand, it mirrors the subject’s liminal identity within a present-past/presence-absence contrast and, on the other hand, it is rendered *unhomely* as a consequence of the subject’s displacement and loss of optimism projected on it. In Emilio’s case the remembrance of the homeland is the effect of a displacement both from the home country and the Sicilian community in Brisbane. On the roof of Mr Sosa’s villa, among broken-faced gargoyles and griffins, the smoke of wood fires (as well as the peasant food and the talks by candlelight) melancholically reminds him of his volcano and the old times up there with Rocco (cf. *TV*,

but also of its impossibility. On the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1982, at 4 a.m. the ballroom was razed to the ground by the Deen Brothers to build a block of terraced apartments. Its demolition represented “a sense of loss”, that “something of his [Emilio’s] history had vanished” (*TV*, 307), an obliteration of part of the community’s collective memories and sense of belonging<sup>109</sup>.



PLATE V

*Remains of the Cloudland  
Ballroom*  
(view from the air)

Emilio stares at one of the plaster ladies, symbolising the remains of a bygone past, with a melancholy poetically captured in the following excerpt:

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562-63).

<sup>109</sup> The erasure of the ballroom testifies that the *space* assigned to the other is circumscribed, delimited – not only metaphorically speaking. Thus, for instance, asylum seekers are brought into detention camps where they are kept for long periods, even up to four years; something which Italians experienced themselves at Bonegilla. This sense of inhospitality is deepened when put in relation to that ‘societal hope’ represented by the 1951 *Italo-Australian Assisted Migration Agreement*. Bonegilla was a formerly prisoner-of-war camp where more than 300.000 migrants passed in the 50s for periods up to ten years and from where they were dispersed across remote areas of Australia to take jobs shuffled off by Anglo-Australians (cf. R. Lampugnani, *art. cit.*, p. 206). What links both experience is the issue of belonging: those who are not citizens have no right to claim a place and, consequently, a past and memories. Australia is for immigrants a land of anti-memory. It means being dis/placed. The creation of national symbols through the Gallipoli event and values – as seen in the first chapter – is in sharp contrast with the forgetting of events, such as those taking place at Bonegilla, which could be interpreted as one of the many symbols of a network of signifiers constituting national identity.

[T]here was one of the plaster ladies, with her hands still cupped for the fairylight she would never hold again; once she had been wrapped in music as she looked down upon visiting royalty and debutantes in swirling dresses, on arrogant young blades full of the venom and fire of Friday and Saturday nights, on love affairs and stolen kisses, criminals, and children in good clothes sliding across the polished floors – now she had a broken nose and her pale eyes stared into the songless blue of another Brisbane sky (*TV*, 308).



**PLATE VI**

**[*Undeserved Fate for a Lady*]**  
Photograph  
*The Courier-Mail*, Monday 8  
November 1982

Caption reads: “The sad plaster lady, which once adorned a ballroom column, peeks out from the rubble that is left.”

Emilio would have brought home one of the plaster ladies as a souvenir if it had not been for the security guard, and put her “in the shade of his garden’s lemon trees so she could watch over the trestles where his metre-long string beans and fat Roma



tomatoes grew” (*TV*, 308) so as to keep alive the memories of the ballroom and everything it represented<sup>110</sup>.

In Armanno’s novels the garden is a metaphor for memory: it is in the garden that Emilio imagines Rocco, Mr Sosa and Faith will reappear and it is there that the smell of the cut grass recalls the far away homeland. Consequently, a well-kept garden stands for the ‘preservation’ of the past and those who peopled it and were once alive. However, this obsession with the past also works as a form of penitence for his non-vigilance:

Kneeling like a penitent under a lemon tree, Emilio was already picking and ripping out weeds by hand, [...]. He often imagined that if he didn’t keep the gardens under control then in the twinkling of an eye the property would turn into the type of Australian scrub he’d seen wild down here (*TV*, 50).

And Brisbane is depicted as both a place of apartness and memories<sup>111</sup>, a *half-life*. After awakening from his dream,

[h]e looked to see if he’d landed in Heaven or Hell [...]. Not Heaven, hot Hell, but Halfway. The city of Brisbane. [...] When he drew the curtains back he tried not to flinch from the full brightness of the morning light, and saw instead a film of crimson on the horizon, not so much from the sun as from Mt Etna, always glowing red and bright somewhere near at hand. No. He wasn’t there, he was here, [...] he liked these times in the morning, when he was just awake and still a little in his memories. That was the wonder of the Halfway world, how easy it was to dream (*TV*, 40-42).

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<sup>110</sup> The link between the garden and memory is reinforced by “[t]he thrill of *rediscovery*” (*TV*, 52; emphasis added) which is associated with the uncovering of the garden until “something like the old gardens emerged” (*Idem*, 51).

<sup>111</sup> As for the relationship between the setting and emotions, Armanno says: “The moods that come out of Brisbane for me stem from those early years. I’ve found that in my writing place really does take a pivotal role, being at least as important and sometimes even more so than the book or story’s characters – and in this way place is yet another character, the over-arching one that informs/influences or at least reflects the emotions of the characters I’m writing about. [...] it’s no surprise then that every book I’ve set here relies on this force” (V. Armanno, “The View From the Verandah”, *Papers of*

His apartness is spatially objectified in the city perceiving it as a 'here' different from its normal perception also recalling, through the landscape trope, the one he lived in Sicily which critically stands against a specific historical and social background:

Contrary to expectations I'm still here even though my 'here' isn't the normal 'here' of humans, Mary, but the place I christened Halfway a long time ago (*TV*, 491).

In a way the cavern was halfway. 'Halfway', properly named for the green wet world of trees, vegetation and fields that spread all the way to the distant sea, and for the dry, smoking land of Hades that extended above, to the roof of the world (*TV*, 135).

This feeling led to a life 'in' and 'of' memories as the dawn which blurs night and day in a third semiotic<sup>112</sup> space: *Halfway*. In the latter landscape of memory, an uncanny place of which one does not understand the rules according to which the object is made manifest, the erased world can survive. As mentioned before, Emilio tells Mary that she and the ghosts come out of his dreams in a 'here' that the reader can identify with the halfway and, thus, memory. Even through dreams, extensions of historical and cultural identities, there is a return to the origins (the aforementioned 'elsewhere' place of melancholy):

EMILIO AQUILA WAS on a tiny boat, and this tiny leaking boat encrusted with sea snails and dots of gnarled coral was drifting along a river. He could hear the slapping of the water yet the water was like crystal, and when he looked directly down over the sides of the narrow boat he could see beneath the water great silvery fish that darted to and fro. [...] He wondered if there were swordfish beneath him (*TV*, 117).

How can this be? His thoughts drifted easily, just as he drifted along the river, his knees beating lightly against the timber sides of the boat, to the rhythm of the current. [...] *Si, belle memorie*, and along the water now there came the softly rising song of the work-singing of his friends. Strange that he could feel so sweetly towards what used to be the many circles of his Hell. [...] This singing that wafted along like dreams was so reminiscent of the good parts of that old

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*Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 32, Folder 1).

<sup>112</sup> When Emilio escapes the violence of the feudal system he hides in a cavern and, earlier on in the novel, "he buried himself inside a womb of wildflowers" (*TV*, 17).

world; the last time he had heard its like was when all the friends and relatives had come to the old Sosa manor. [...] Yet – and he didn't know why this was so – he knew that the singing now reaching out to him came not at all from friends and relations and their families in Australia, but from the lost place, the lost days. His lost life. [...] this wonderful place called home [...] just ahead was his town at the feet of the great mountain, named of course for these feet, *Piedimonte* – and he saw the smoking towers and terrible canyons of his volcano, Mt Etna. The other very strange thing about all this was that there had never been a river flowing into this town [...] yet here he was upon one, upon a great shimmering river that bore him gently and, *si, si*, sweetly. [...] as he approached the ancient, crumbling town he used to call his own, the river's banks were filled with patiently waiting peasants and *paisani* who now called out to him, waved to him in that particularly Sicilian way, [...] None of them had changed, yet all of them were different. [...] *Ma chi cé?* [...] *What's the problem?* And his mother called her reply in a voice that sounded just like the blessed Virgin's when she whispers into a good boy's ear: *It's not your time, Emilio, you have to go back.*

Others who were not so kind shouted and laughed, *Go back, you idiot! Don't be so eager! Haven't you got all the time in the world to be dead?* (TV, 118-120)

His desire to go home (to his origins) is explicitly conveyed through the images of the *paisani* waiting for him, the homeland setting and his eager desire to be part of the liminal world of the dead. In Emilio's desire for the 'there'-world is embedded his death drive which comes to mean a search for his identitarian unity and works in silence throughout the novel as N. Royle's aforementioned quotation proves. However, Emilio's dream is not nostalgic since his desire is not for a lost past but for a future situation – for a world where people in *The Volcano* go after death – which resembles the former. In Emilio's dream the water and the boat are symbols of migration which, on the one hand, represent the 'break' moment of emigration, the physical and psychic separation from the homeland – it is by falling in the 'water' that Emilio returns to the world of the living; and, on the other hand, represents his return back home – it is on a boat that he returns to his homeland only through the 'flows' of his memories. Memories and dreams get quietly confused, both taking Emilio to an 'imagined', and thus 'constructed', postmodern landscape of memory or *memoryscape*.

It is in the light of such ethnic identitarian and spatial displacement<sup>113</sup> that the characters spectral descriptions – Emilio as a ghost and Romeo as both a zombie and a werewolf – must be understood. These Gothic *topoi* stand for the dehumanisation of alienated immigrants moving invisibly around the streets of unsafe cities and not belonging to this world. Yet, it is to the suburbs where immigrants lived such as Spring Hill in *The Volcano*, New Farm (Brunswick Street) and Fortitude Valley in *Romeo of the Underworld* symbolically representing Sicilian ethnic roots, that Armanno's characters return in their search for identity since these represent a social and psychological 'underworld'.

#### 4.7 De-realising presences: 'ghosting' identity

The uncertainty of space and place, or the physical reality of the house as a 'space' between two-worlds and the psychic meaning of the 'place', is conveyed in *The Volcano* by the presence of the ghosts that inhabit Emilio's house.

[T]he garden cottage Emilio shared with a pair of budgerigars and one fat black female Labrador named Lucy, Big Lucy, was crowded with such ghosts, the bad ones and the good ones, the ones he feared and the ones he missed (*TV*, 5).

The 'home', symbolically representing the space of the neighbourhood, has been seen by critics as an extremely important (metaphorical) space of gathering. However, the *half-life* space ('on the edge of', 'on the margins of') is an uncanny and ambivalent one because the interpretation as completely positive spaces is deconstructed from 'within' by alienation, exclusion and displacement. The house becomes a site of *unhomely* dislocation which is felt as a place of repetition, unsafe such as 124 in Toni

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<sup>113</sup> The suburbs of New Farm and Fortitude Valley have been 'represented', physically and metaphorically speaking, as abjected spaces in opposition to the centre since their very origin. The former was a land selected north of the river – known as 'the new farm' – where convicts were marched each morning to work on plantations in order to cope with the needs stemming from their increasing number; the latter was called after the Fortitude ship which had immigrants on board who were made to settle down outside the Crown land because their arrival was not mentioned to the Australian Government (cf. "The Name... Where You Live", 29<sup>th</sup> April and 8<sup>th</sup> June 1971, in *Papers of*

Morrison's *Beloved* due to the return of both the baby ghost and Beloved or the colonial house where Antoniette lived with her mother and the one where she lived with Mr Rochester in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This physical displacement mirrors psychological, social and historical ones. Sethe's and Antoniette's displacement is brought about by the social and historical conditions of slavery and/or colonialism. In the same way this is what happens in *The Volcano* as far as Emilio is concerned:

This was exactly what ghosts were, spectral things confused by the everyday circumstances that had caught them unawares. Nino searched Emilio's face for signs of life. There were none (*TV*, pp. 398-99).

If the home represents the origin of one's identity, the latter is undermined by the former's uncanniness or, in other words, "an uncanny space is thus first of all a space of a place of displacement"<sup>114</sup>. As for the Sicilian community of Brisbane, this is metaphorically conveyed through the image of the cemetery and the living dead that inhabit it. Being the Spoleto brothers both the guardians of the cemetery and those of the Sicilian community the parallelism between the cemetery and the community highlights its fate, namely its demise. Besides, the Spoletos' ghostly features, with turning-white hair, grey faces, sunken eyes and broken fingernails, ironically undermine their very role as guardians.

Whether good or bad, H. Cixous states that the return of the dead is "always a question of displacement"<sup>115</sup>, its aim being to carry you off. What haunts Emilio is his personal and collective past (Italy's internal colonialism and the criminal underworld

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*Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31).

<sup>114</sup> James Risser, "Siting Order at the Limits of Construction: Deconstructing Architectural Space", *Research in Phenomenology*, 22 (1) 1992, p. 70 qtd in N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., p. 207.

<sup>115</sup> H. Cixous, *art. cit.*, p. 543. As for the "good" ghosts, Virginia Woolf's essay on H. James's ghost stories may illuminate their nature. The modernist writer and critic claims that his "ghosts have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts [...]. They have their origin within us. They are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it, whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange" (V. Woolf, "Henry James's Ghost Stories" [1921], in A. McNeillie (ed.), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1919-1924, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, p. 324 qtd in A. Bennett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 163).

in Brisbane) which pinpoint his diasporic uncanniness from the very beginning of the novel. In fact, the threshold of the novel is that of a dreamy situation in early morning or, in other words, the halfway moment between two opposites (night and day) which is a metaphor for many other blurring spatial and temporal *liminal* opposites. Even the furniture is perceived uncannily as when the morning sun enters the room and the ghosts become “those crowding sticks of furniture in need of repair” (*TV*, 23).

Alongside all this, Emilio is now “about to lose another home” (*TV*, 61), obliged to move from his cottage to a new house because Dr Thach wants to hire a younger and stronger man as a guardian to protect his house and family. From the boarding house in Spring Hill to a house he buys, but where he lives all alone and that he loses, to the cottage in the Villa of the doctor, to Mary’s house, Emilio will always feel a foreigner until he returns to his volcano in Sicily, another halfway space<sup>116</sup>.

The uncanny metaphoricity of the house is extended to the city of Brisbane too, which is neither place nor space since there is no Little Sicily and no sense of belonging. The Gothic perception of the city is metaphorically symbolised through the description of the snake-like shape of the river that the narrator of *Romeo of The Underworld* perceives as the underworld river Styx; its bats being a metaphor for indifference; its insects; and its gardens, the boundaries of which symbolise the opposition between the city and wilderness, culture and nature, civilisation and its opposite, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Thus, pre-civilised wilderness has usually been associated with the Gothic, the exotic, the other, the demonised place/space; something to represent with the aim of repressing, dominating and domesticating it; as a mirror to define the ‘I’. But the invasion of the wilderness might represent the return of the repressed, which is there since the origin, like ‘strangers to ourselves’; it represents the ugliness of the city, for the ‘outside’ Gothic invades the space within

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<sup>116</sup> From the novel’s screenplay version various changes are made which stress the authorial intention to highlight Emilio’s displacement: while in the play Emilio and Angelina (Desideria) buy a new house and have a son, Vittorio (and in the initial project of *Romeo of the Underworld* also a daughter Monica), this is not the case in the novel (cf. V. Armanno, “The Volcano - screenplay: Handwritten notes” and “Romeo of the Underworld: Handwritten Notes”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 16). Besides, while in the screenplay events unfold chronologically in the present (from 1939 Sicily to 1951 Brisbane and 1967 Sicily/Brisbane), in the novel flashbacks develop a feeling of geographical/identitarian dislocation (for the screenplay of “The Volcano” see V. Armanno, “The Volcano – screenplay”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Boxes 21, 22).

the city's blurred boundaries. This aspect is proved by the horrors of criminality (Brisbane's underworld) in *The Volcano*, the sad reality of vagrants, the description of immigrants as werewolves, zombies and vampires – see next section –, the gloomy atmosphere of the city in *Romeo of the Underworld* spotlighted by the moon, unsafe<sup>117</sup>, inhabited by the “missing persons”<sup>118</sup> (marginalised subjects such as Romeo, Mary, Michele and Nigel) and “constantly mutilating me [Romeo]” (*R*, 113); the ambiguity of Graziella's kidnapping or disappearance in *Firehead*; and the eerie Italian woman in *The Lonely Hunter*. The *unhomeliness* of the city is symbolic of their uncanny (displaced) identity with its underworld comparable to Dante's circle of Hell interpreted by Armanno as a representation of “the soul's descent”<sup>119</sup>.

The uneasy feeling of displacement can be ‘expressed’ only in oblique terms or, in other words, it ‘appears’ only through metaphors: the ghost for Emilio. His identity is in-between, presence and absence, as when Emilio laying on his bed “like a wraith watched himself from above, floating amidst the cobwebs and cracked plaster of his ceiling” or when he

took his fists away his eyes were glassy. Far away. Motes of dust sprinkled themselves in thousands upon thousands through slivers of sunlight, like stars shining in the Milky Way, and he knew without a shadow of a doubt that he himself was the most minute grain of dust in those eternal rays.

A ghost (*TV*, 48).

Emilio sees himself as a grain of dust, having no ‘place’ of his own but only an effect of history. As the dust, in the above case, is visible only because of the rays of light so he is ontologically ephemeral. Defining Emilio as a ghost does not only refer to his

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<sup>117</sup> The attack against Romeo – see SECTION EIGHT of this chapter – is based on a real fact: a young boat builder is bashed and robbed by two young fellows, Stephen James Chapman and Kenneth Leigh Bailey, later sentenced to prison (V. Armanno, “Romeo of the Underworld: Handwritten Notes”, cit.).

<sup>118</sup> With the expression ‘missing persons’, Armanno refers to street kids (Nigel), the homeless (Michele), and those aspects that have to do with the criminal and semi-criminal underworld such as prostitution, strip clubs and drugs. Since he knows that storytelling is important in the ‘construction’ of culture, Armanno wants to give voice to this marginalised world suspending any moral judgement (cf. V. Armanno, “The World of Missing Persons”, cit.).

being a foreigner invading a space that does not belong to him, it also means a duality of one's own 'being'; it is the 'is' to be put into question. His ghostly presence is, actually, the de-realising of his presence – Emilio becomes 'Emilio' – which, paradoxically, expresses his feeling of displacement and liminality linguistically inexpressible and so, as an absence, perceivable only through a figure of speech: metaphor(/ghost). It reveals a state between life and death, physically alive but socially dead; a man

that no-one would either understand or care about what he had to say. In this country he wasn't really a man but an artefact from another time and place. Simple. A foreigner (*TV*, 30).

As Derrida's 'thing' he is visible and invisible, his diasporic identity is indefinable, indeterminate as the ghost<sup>120</sup>; or in Cixous' terms "you could be dead while living, you can be in a dubious state"<sup>121</sup>. What is intolerable is not the existence of death – which really does not bother Emilio – since the ghost proves nothing more than its return, but that "the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead"<sup>122</sup>. Ghosts can be identified as deconstructive metaphors which, at the same time, deconstruct Emilio's identity and mirror it (absence/presence). Moreover, as a ghost living out of time and being a never-dying 'thing', Emilio both sees no future – unless going where the ghosts of Rocco and Giuliano are, the Halfway space of memory – and has a feeling of temporal stagnation. It is the encounter with Mary – the opportunity to recount his memories – that arouses his 'burning' desire to go back

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>120</sup> In this sense all dichotomies are on the wane. The spectre is the paradoxical incorporation of the spirit: neither soul nor body, an ontological destabilisation of all reductionism. The ghost is the *différance*, the gap between signifier and signified, which is there and not there, between and not-between each colour of the rainbow. As with Plato's 'Third Man Argument', one would fall prey to an infinite regress. It is indefinable (cf. J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, cit., p. 13) because its nature is uncanny, indeterminate, said and unsaid (as the marginalised voice: at the same time, heard and not heard). It is a supplement and, as such, it changes every time the context changes; it is not saturated by the context (cf. N. Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., pp. 65-67).

<sup>121</sup> H. Cixous, *art. cit.*, p. 545.

<sup>122</sup> *Idem*, p. 543.



home to his ‘volcano’, to his Aetna which in Greek means ‘to burn’<sup>123</sup>. The interpretation of ‘Emilio’ as a ghost makes its ‘appearance’, again, at the end of the novel when he disappears without the reader neither knowing whether he is climbing the volcano as a ghost or not, nor the other characters in the novel knowing whether he is dead or not. The reader’s ultimate certainty is erased, full of doubt, de-realised and uncanny.

As portrayed, Emilio is an uncanny death-in-life figure, a (mental) ‘place’ where the erasure of the distinction between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* is reinforced by the presence of ghosts, that is of life-in-death ‘things’. Their liminality is due to two aspects: on the one hand, to their ontological nature. Emilio, talking to the ghosts, defines Nino Spoleto as “neither dead nor a ghost” (*TV*, 494) since he is in a rest home. What is interesting is the difference he makes between a ghost and a dead person blurring the opposition between the world of the living and that of the dead. In fact, while a dead person never returns, a ghost does not completely belong to the dead, though coming from that world, and it is still linked to life because of an unsolved question, such as the dispossessed and homeless ghosts in *Hamlet* or in *Beloved*. Their presence itself is an act of conflation, and is performative: as soon as the ghost appears it defamiliarises the space it occupies. In *Hamlet*, for instance, where the ghost returns to its world, after the truth comes out and vengeance is achieved, things are not the same anymore. On the other hand, to their ambiguous origin: they might be projections of Emilio’s mind – his dreams – or true spectres from the dead world, though not bad, with a body of their own. Referring to a classic example, *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, even after the end of the short novel the reader is in two minds whether the origins of the ghosts can be reduced to the governess’s mind or to the supernatural. The perception that the ghosts, in *The Volcano*, are projections of Emilio’s mind – which reinforces their ephemeral nature – comes when he tells Mary that he has

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<sup>123</sup> Even in Sicily, Emilio is perceived as a foreigner/ghost when Desideria’s kids take him for a dead person sent to collect their mother while he is waiting in vain near De lo Santo’s tomb in the hope of seeing Desideria (cf. *TV*, 549).

been dreaming about him [Salvatore Giuliano] very often. In the days and in the nights. He comes out of my dreams in the same way you do, and the way my good blood-brother Rocco Fuentes does (*TV*, 406).

And, at the very end of the novel such a feeling seems to be projected onto Emilio when Rocco tells him that if he had had a memory as strong as Emilio's it would have been the latter to be in Rocco's 'dreams' and not vice versa. The more the physicality of the ghosts is highlighted<sup>124</sup> the more they become similar to the living and, in turn, the living resembles their ghostly features – a process that mirrors the aforementioned interaction view of metaphor: "Man is a wolf".

The duality and indeterminacy of the ghost has to be interpreted as the epistemological foundation through which one gets to know what is usually called 'reality' while dismissing all the rest. The ghost, in fact, comes to defamiliarise the 'present' and make it epistemologically and ontologically *liminal*. The 'realisation of absences' (the ghosts) serves in *The Volcano* as the 'de-realisation of presences' (immigrants) and, thus, the 'realisation' of displacement which is an absence *par excellence*. The ghost is a metaphor for a fragmented postmodern identity.

#### **4.8 Lycanthropy and vampirism: hungering for hybridity**

As mentioned above, by disavowing the negation of castration, Armanno's characters enter a melancholy state as a form of narcissistic compensation for the lost object which is, at once, kept alive and absorbed. Such preservation, at the same time, comes at the cost of self-denial and guarantees a 'presence' of unity (in the Real) which is actually a Lacanian psychoanalytic *lack*. In her case study of Helen, Kristeva observes:

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<sup>124</sup> A physicality experienced not only through visually and auditory perceptions but also olfactory and haptic ones – the smell of cigarettes, Rocco's physical touch and his freedom to appear and disappear whenever he wants (Rocco "was keeping clear"; *TV*, 74) – which suggest to the reader that its appearances do not occur depending on Emilio's mental projections.

Omnipotence and disavowal of loss led Helen on a feverish quest for gratification: she could do everything, she was almightiness. A narcissistic and phallic triumph, such a maniacal attitude finally turned out to be exhausting, since it blocked all possibility of symbolisation for the negative effects – fear, sorrow, pain ...<sup>125</sup>.

As is clear the fear of loss cannot be symbolised or, in other words, cannot be expressed since this would mean to lessen one's sufferings and lose the object whose loss has been disavowed. In fact, although both Mary and Romeo are followed by a therapist, the former is invited by Emilio to speak about what she is hiding (cf. *TV*, 124) and the latter says that he has "never explained anything to anyone" (*R*, 35). Consequently, the melancholy ego is haunted by the object which feeds on it up to the point of impoverishment and self-denial. The latter is sometimes expressed as a total refusal of food (anorexia) or part of it, metaphorically associated with 'impurity' or a menace to one's present unity. To put it differently, refusing food is a way of exorcising the emptiness within, one's sense of alienation. The narratives in Armanno's novels concerning Mary in *The Volcano* and Romeo unfold around hunger, starvation, loss of and desire for the 'mother' (*R*, 49: "I was full of melancholy. *Oh Monica*")<sup>126</sup>. Mary is depicted as a "skinny ghost who smelled of death, [...] white and without meat" (*TV*, 123), "carry[ing] stink of the cemetery" (*TV*, 124)<sup>127</sup>. With Romeo, "the new me, a vegetarian of love" (*R*, 5), the vegetarian-meat/flesh opposition mirrors an identitarian one linked to negation and disavowal.

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<sup>125</sup> J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>126</sup> The lost object (here ethnicity) is unconsciously perceived as an 'abject' one: Romeo's ambivalent attitude towards Monica, who stands in the novel for the lost cherished idea, is well conveyed and summed up when he says that "it only seemed that I had gone such a long, long way from Monica – and then I cursed her for finding her way back into my thoughts" (*R*, 49). Actually, her way back represents the subject's need to keep her alive, the wish to have her support. Mapping all this on Romeo's relationship to his ethnic roots, it expresses the tension of his generational double message: between, on the one hand, Sicilianness and its traditions and superstitions and, on the other, his being born in Australia.

<sup>127</sup> Mary is already described as a vampire in the previous novel of the trilogy (cf. *R*, 113, 115). But while in *Romeo* her role is functional to Romeo's identitarian quest since she seems to suck away Romeo's 'new' (Australian) identity, in *The Volcano* her image of a vampire is taken up with a new twist: it is her who suffers from the loss of the old stories and identity associated with the absence of her mother, Monica.

As for Romeo, on the one hand, being vegetarian signifies to be a new ‘I’, an Aussie fellow, and not a donkey – an image associated with the inferior marginalised Sicilian<sup>128</sup>:

I’d grown sick of my stocky frame, I’d grown sick of a lifetime of being mistaken for a human version of a donkey. About a year earlier it occurred to me that if I could affect the pale and weedy aspect of an intellectual bookworm, maybe, just maybe, someone might actually take me seriously. Oh, I munched lettuce leaves and carrots and endives and radish sprouts until all I could shit was garden mulch, and it had the desired effect. It was a miracle of weight loss, a miracle of stupidity. I was no longer a donkey, I was a good head of broccoli (R, 5).

A new identity that comes from his rejection of Monica – and of whose ‘stupidity’ Romeo the narrator is now aware –, Sicilian food and love or in other words ‘desire’:

I haven’t seen Monica in weeks and I like it that way. I see clearly Monica was like a god with good thighs who wanted to make me in her own image. Music, books, dancing; Sicilian pasta sauce, Sicilian chianti and Sicilian basil. Give me a break. This is Australia. Our families left the old country far behind, long ago and forever. Why should kids like Monica and me perpetuate old-world myths, old-world romance? Old-world bullshits (R, 104)<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> Speaking to Nigel, an Aborigine, Mr Aquila says in his Broken English: “‘In the country where I come from, the Sicilian is the black man of Italy. They no like us, you know that, always we get the broken end of the stick. For hundreds of years is the same. We are the donkeys and the slaves who do the work. Until Benito Mussolini he come along, and even then was no so good. We the black men of our country, and we proud of it. That mean you, me, we are like the brothers’” (R, 229). C. Bourgault du Coudray points out that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature, werewolves were characterised as continental Europeans with, among the more traditional lupine features, strange speech or ‘dark olive’ complexion (cf. C. Bourgault du Coudray, *op. cit.*, p. 46).

<sup>129</sup> Monica and the past, being associated with food, return back through taste and smell as it happens with the recollection of lost things. Armano draws on Proust in order to make explicit the connection between food and identity in both his paper “Factional Food” and novels: “But when from a long distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more substantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and fear and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection” (M. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time. The Way by Swann’s Vol. 1*, qtd in V. Armano, “Factional Food”, *Papers of Venero Armano*, cit., Box 32, Folder 1, pp. 1-2).

On the other hand, and consequently, eating meat/flesh is perceived as a menace to his ‘new’ identity, namely of a ‘vegetarian’ of ‘love’:

Mary’s food and succour had just about turned me back into what I’d been. And this time I liked it. I was myself again, solid donkey, not a vegetarian of love but a true carnivore. It was hopeless to try and be anything else. A good night with Mary mightn’t have left me with a fairytale heart, but it helped me accept I wanted flesh. And if I was a kind of werewolf then maybe Mary was a kind of vampire (*R*, 113).

When he eats meat, an ‘impure’ food, he feels like a werewolf – an in-between state anticipated by his lack of shadow<sup>130</sup> and associated to solitude<sup>131</sup> – longing for flesh: a state that 16<sup>th</sup> century scholars already associated with melancholy<sup>132</sup>. Meat and flesh, food and love/sex, past and present conflate, through personal and collective memories, in an identitarian quest that ends up in hybridity. Food and sex conflate in a carnivalesque way, disrupting both any form of silencing and of forgetting migrants’ Sicilianness and Australianness. For instance, after Romeo is attacked, Mary asks him:

*Tell me, please, who are you?*

‘... My name is Romeo ...’ Trying to grin. ‘... Romeo of the Underworld ...’

Her gaze was intent. Her hair grazed my cheek. She said, *Romeo of the underwear?* And her sweet face went out of focus (*R*, 54).

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<sup>130</sup> “It struck me that I couldn’t hear my footsteps, it struck me that I didn’t cast a shadow. No matter how I searched, no shadow at all. The moon disappeared” (*R*, 76). Of course, Romeo’s lack of shadow could be explained as a short-lived feeling of the supernatural for the reader is immediately suggested to explain its absence with the moonless night. However, the fact that he seeks it foreshadows his double and split self. This recalls Otto Rank’s analyses of the relationship between men and their shadow which at first was a foreshadowing of immortality and then it became a harbinger of death, identified by Freud as the double in “The Uncanny”: “the lack of the shadow indicates approaching death, the absence of whose shadow is anticipated” (O. Rank, *op. cit.*, p. 61; for an overview of the double in anthropology see pp. 49-68; as for Freud see S. Freud, “The Uncanny”, *cit.*, p. 630).

<sup>131</sup> In an unpublished poem “Full Moon” (handwritten, 10 February 1987), in which the theme seems more important than its literary qualities, the planet is associated with loneliness (cf. V. Armano, “Full Moon”, *Papers of Venero Armano*, *cit.*, Box 17).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. C. Bourgault du Coudray, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Playing on the words underworld/underwear means conflating Romeo's past, semiotic, world of memory with the lower part of his body having both a personal and collective transgressive force. His own identity as a Sicilian-Australian and that of Anglo-Australians are affected; the latter because of the hybridity/mimicry of the former.

The "attempts to contain reality (or produce unity) through recourse to oppositions"<sup>133</sup> and categorisations is disrupted by lycanthropy itself – though differently from Michele Aquila's – as Žižek's theory of the 'surpluses' explains. This in-betweenness, excess or 'supplement', is caught in the "non-material but physical element"<sup>134</sup> of Romeo's body so that, at the disco-club 'The Underworld', the girl he approaches because "he wanted to taste her flesh" (*R*, 48) has on her face the expression "of a deer who has taken a wrong turn and has come across a wolf" (*Ibidem*). Yet Romeo's lycanthropy, although manifested through 'physical' elements, is to be understood as a monstrosity deriving from social marginalisation which has psychological implications on the subject<sup>135</sup>. The grotesque image of Romeo as a donkey and, thus, as an inferior subject manifests itself in the "psychological werewolf [which] would not necessarily undergo a literal transformation, but would certainly exhibit lupine behaviour, indicative of interior disturbance"<sup>136</sup>. While getting home from his first night out in what he believes to be a safe Brisbane, Romeo is attacked by strangers and reacts in the following way:

The wolf was back; by the hair I pulled that unseen face to my mouth, and as more blows and kicks numbed me I bore down hard on the exposed meat of a stubby cheek.

The man was screaming.

Juices flowed. I gripped his skull hard and he screamed louder but he wouldn't be going anywhere until they found a way to kill me (*R*, 52).

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<sup>133</sup> *Idem*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>134</sup> S. Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology" in S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London and New York, Verso, 1994, p. 20, qtd in *Idem*, p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> Armanno identifies the werewolf in his novel with Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* written in 1927 portraying the subject's split self between humanity, aggressiveness and homelessness. In brief, "the quintessential outsider" (V. Armanno, "Project: Romeo of The Underworld – Screenplay Adaptation", *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 25, p. 9).

The psychologised form of lycanthropy, with its interior disturbance, points out the split self which is spatially externalised as a carnivalesque low-high (depth-surface), conscious-unconscious, here-there construct<sup>137</sup>.

The shift of the image of the werewolf from a sociological to a more psychological emphasis mirrors that of the socially constructed identity of the other to a hybrid subjectivity. The outer grotesque is internalised:

A fundamental mechanism of identity formation *produces* the second hybrid grotesque [...] *by the very struggle to exclude the first grotesque*. [...] The point is that the exclusion necessary to the formation of social identity [...] is simultaneously a production [...] of a complex hybrid fantasy emerging out of the very attempt to demarcate boundaries, to unite and purify the social collectivity<sup>138</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> C. Bourgault du Coudray, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>137</sup> The split of the self is conveyed by other interesting images: the garden, the flight, the air overview and the river. The garden at the back of Johnny's house, "which sloped at a thirty and then a forty degree angle" (*R*, 26) and where Romeo becomes himself again (*R*, 113: a "donkey"), is a semiotic space of memory where he remembers his mother singing an Italian song (cf. *R*, 114). The contrast between the front garden and the back one, "disease-ridden" (*R*, 24) and "paradise" (*R*, 27) respectively, and the work he does on the front garden to make it look like the back one metaphorically signifies the surfacing of what had been rejected: from the lower back garden (unconscious) to the front higher garden (conscious). The violent flow of past memories is also metaphorically conveyed by his flight from Sydney ('there') to Brisbane ('here') and by the snake-like Brisbane river. The travel to Brisbane is the travel into Romeo's 'soul' with all its disrupting implications: "More storms were predicted, turbulence, the types of things we prepare ourselves for by entering that tiny yet well-visited room in the traveller's world and locking the door against the discord the traveller's world will throw up at us" (*R*, 3). The image of the traveller recalls the one developed in Graham Greene's *The Comedians* (1966), whose title is quoted in Armanno's novel, though here with an ethnic twist: Mr Brown's fatalism is a key to the reading of Romeo who refers to the "mutterings and misgivings amongst the passengers of impending doom" (*R*, 2-3) as "signs [...] for we Sicilians like to believe [...] – there are always signs" (*R*, 3). The flight, nearly ending in a disaster, becomes a narrative device for an air overview from the aircraft window onto the patchwork of 'underworld' snapshots, dislocated and unresolved, of his summer spent in Brisbane in 1976. These snapshots contribute to mutilate his Aussie identity as the only 'real' one (Armanno fictionalises a first-hand experience. He was a passenger of "a Sydney-bound Ansett 727 flight forced to abort its flight and land, because of an engine fire" – K. Dibben, "How Authorities Almost Turned an Emergency at Brisbane Airport into Disaster", *The Sunday Mail*, May 16 1993, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31, p. 59). And though Romeo underlines that the Cloudland Ballroom, where he first met Monica, has been demolished its complete 'erasure' is impossible as both the plot of the novel and the *text* itself prove. The brown snake-like river stands for the murky future: as the unresolved memories of the past render the future uncertain, so the river's dark waters forbid to see beyond the surface.

<sup>138</sup> P. Stallybrass, A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, Methuen, 1986, p. 193 qtd in C. Bourgault du Coudray, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Contextualising Bakhtin's grotesque as a social intertextual extension towards the world casts light, in the case of Romeo, to his mis-interpellation as a second generation migrant.

Mr Aquila, whose lycanthropy is marked by his bent body in the form of a question-mark and hand like a "claw" (*R*, 118), sees in Romeo his own "twin" (*R*, 138, see also 120) who "*can never be satisfied [...] always be hungry because you'll never understand what you're hungry for*" (*R*, 138). The lack of understanding is typical of the melancholy subject since to keep the desired object alive one must not 'articulate' it. Romeo's psychological lycanthropy mirrors Mr Aquila's who has a key role in the novel in that he is the link to both a past that Romeo needs to accept and one that he refuses. He believes neither in the mythical figures living in the volcano (cf. *R*, 129) nor the Angel of Forgetfulness (*destiny*)<sup>139</sup> and does not accept tradition *tout court* that could be expressed by the idiom 'choose women and oxen from your home village', but he is hot-blooded (cf. *R*, 133):

*'So who can blame us for being a little crazy? We're always rumbling too, eh? You and me. Always ready to explode, no warning, no nothing.'*

[...]

*'If you're a real Piedimontese you've got that blood. There's nothing you can do about it. I've got that blood. [...] Monica, you know my little girl Monica, she hasn't got that blood at all'* (*R*, 129)<sup>140</sup>.

Romeo's hybridity is thus a re-elaboration of what it means to be Sicilian in order to renew the present, an interpretation of the 'double message'. And this past is closely connected with love, desire and the semiotic, all symbolised by Monica<sup>141</sup>. In fact,

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<sup>139</sup> Romeo, erupting like the volcano against Mr Aquila, proves, on the one hand, his hot-bloodedness and, on the other hand, his refusal of the notion of destiny: "*You fucked your family up, not some 'angel'*" (*R*, 239). Thus, despite the fact that both are werewolves, the nature of their psychological lycanthropy is different. While Mr Aquila interprets his state as repetitive of his father's destiny (cf. *R*, 163), as for Romeo it is rather a metaphor for hybridity.

<sup>140</sup> However, Monica's shoving and whacking Romeo, reveals that "[t]his is the real Monica at last, a black angel with volcano blood. I want to laugh that Mr Aquila doesn't know his own daughter" (*R*, 134).

<sup>141</sup> This is also confirmed by other excerpts from the novel where the breeze, at the same time, 'is'



through Michele Aquila, Romeo at the same time as rediscovering the past of his Sicilian roots he discovers what happened to Monica to make her sometimes act as a victim and others as “a detective uncovering clues to Monica’s absence”<sup>142</sup>. As lost objects, they both haunt and return simultaneously. Ultimately, it is only when he accepts his hybrid nature that he can let Monica go at the very end of the novel (cf. *R*, 272).

As for Mary, while her role in *Romeo of the Underworld* is that of a surrogate ‘Monica’ to Romeo, her Gothic displacement is fully developed in *The Volcano*:

She tore herself to pieces and scattered her dregs into the wind. She smashed her teeth and buried them in the garden. She made her eyes go blind and so that she could walk into walls. She made clouds in her head that took away all her feeling. She picked off her finger-nails and put them in a jar. She tore out her hair and set it on fire. She peeled the skin from her flesh and nailed it to the walls. She looked into herself and where there should have been a soul there was nothing, nothing (*TV*, 114).

If the carnivalesque mutilation of her ‘dying’ malnourished body is a direct consequence of the lack of her (grand)mother’s stories, Mary’s starvation also ensues from the impossibility of articulating such a loss. This is suggested by the absence of a paternal figure (language), through which she could feel a sense of belonging (symbolic order):

*The most horrible thing is that even though I know you’re lying to me, I still yearn for you, Gloria. I yearn to be held on your lap as you caress my cheeks and brush my hair for me, and*

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Monica and is linked to water: “sea breeze comes through the hippy-salvaged porthole and the branches of some dying ghost gums rustle to the rhythm of the sea wind and in my semi-sleep I feel something crawl across my cheek. There was a bad dream but I have already forgotten what it was that was so bad and now all I can feel is the blustering gale outside this finger of death on my cheek. [...] it is Monica who is touching my cheek” (*R*, 243). Monica represents both life and death, Eros and Thanatos or, in other words, the sublime where Romeo’s identitarian quest finds a solution, though ‘partial’. The water imagery is explicitly linked to death in the following quotation: “to swim out to the breakers and die, under the waves and sky” (*R*, 223). In this light, Mary, like Ann in *The Lonely Hunter*, is a surrogate of Monica (cf. *R*, 245). They do not represent a ‘negation’ of the loss and thus a complete mourning process, but only failed attempts to substitute Monica.

<sup>142</sup> V. Armanno, “Project: Romeo of the Underworld – Screenplay Adaptation”, cit., p. 9.

*I yearn for you to tell me those stories about the old country you came from and the things you dreamed of when you were a girl. This is because you are my mother. I yearn to hear you tell me about my mother Monica – but you, you're all I ever had. So when you lie, I die. You take away the only truth I've ever had, your touch, and you replace it with something so untrue. It diminishes everything else for me. Why are you lying about one three-quarters-dead old man? (TV, 112)*

*You need your father's love, but you would never allow yourself to experience a sensual sensation in his presence, would you, Mary? (TV, 88)*

[S]he let him do what he wanted to do, at the bizarre hour that he wanted to do it. There was nothing about the way he so easily *possessed* her that gratified, even reassured her. [...] She often wondered: why was it that she needed that from this swift and covetous act of James Ray's?

The answer wasn't far away. Possession: for one to three minutes Mary *belonged* (TV, 86).

It is in this light that Mary's identitarian death is physically articulated through starvation as the only way she has of preserving the lost semiotic object, which she has never experienced first-hand<sup>143</sup>. And it goes without saying that the lost object is neither Gloria nor James Ray themselves, but the sense of belonging that the former denied to her and the latter gave unconsciously though momentarily and only in compensatory terms. As Kristeva puts it,

the denial of the signifier is shored up by a denial of the father's function, which is precisely to guarantee the establishment of the signifier. Maintained in his function of ideal father or imaginary father, the depressive's father is deprived of phallic power, now attributed to the mother<sup>144</sup>.

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<sup>143</sup> Mary's longing recalls a *displaced nostalgia* for times which, though she has never experienced first-hand, still have the power to shape a generation and collective identity. This is the case of the American Generation X born in the 1980s and longing for the 60s, a longing which is a commentary on their present life (cf. J.L. Wilson, *Nostalgia. A Sanctuary of Meaning*, Lewisburg (PA), Bucknell University Press, 2005, pp. 88-104).

<sup>144</sup> J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 45.

In this scheme, her desire to bring to life a man she does not love even if that meant to “let him saw her into pieces and eat her up finger by finger, bone by bone, muscle by muscle and rib by rib” (*TV*, 114) has a narcissistic meaning.

If starvation is a hunger for stories, “with stories and food he [Emilio] was making her live” (*TV*, 291), “her flesh grew stronger and her face more radiant” (*Ibidem*). And this overlapping of food and stories, healing rituals nurturing identities, is evident from the very onset of his storytelling: Emilio’s recipe is named “*Il Torre del Filosofo*” (*Ibidem*), a recipe Rocco taught him on the volcano.

Recalling the aforementioned distinction between a phase of ‘foundation’ and one of ‘rediscovery’ in which the past memories work differently<sup>145</sup>, it is during the latter that Armanno establishes an intergenerational network – at least in his novels for it can be found in the first phase as well. Emilio’s ‘pictures’, those memories in the symbolic *space* of mind, need an oral or written reification/repetition: “culture defines and gives itself meaning through its storytelling”<sup>146</sup>. Without their repetition (as books, oral histories) there would be no possibility for the ethnic subject to exist since they represent a kind of legitimation and recognition both for first and successive migrant generations<sup>147</sup>. Generations are, thus, “the living embodiment of continuity and change, mediating memories of the past with the present”<sup>148</sup>. What

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<sup>145</sup> In the phase of ‘settlement’, memories cling to a faraway past (that of the homeland) still present in the mind of migrants and objectified in physical places of belonging (neighbourhood, Cloudland Ballroom/Mt Etna, restaurants); in the phase of ‘rediscovery’, memories are rejected or totally absent in successive generations – at least in Armanno’s novels – while first generation migrants still cling to first-hand memories, though for both the only site of realisation is now the *landscape of memory* or, what might be referred to through the neologism ‘*memoryscape*’. In the latter case, Little Sicily is rather a symbolic than a physical ‘area’ for many Sicilians have moved and Chinatown is engulfing the past. As Carmelo Caruso testifies: “We had a cosmopolitan community. There were people from all ethnic groups – mainly Italian I would say, because it was more or less Little Italy in the Valley.” Little Italy is now becoming Chinatown. [...] One thing that surprised me was when the City Council changed the street signs and put them in Chinese. Before, with the Italian community, they never thought to put the street names in Italian. [...] It is a ghost town and before you could not even walk.” (Carmelo Caruso lived in Home Hill where he ran his own tailor shop, then in Ayr, both towns in North Queensland. Realising that there was not much work, he moved to Brisbane and imported ceramic and work of arts from Italy; “Shops no longer draw the crowds”, *Sun Features*, July 24, 1986, in *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31, Folder 9).

<sup>146</sup> V. Armanno, “The World of Missing Persons”, cit.

<sup>147</sup> Storytelling is not unidirectional, a story told to a listener or a reader, but it also represents the right to be listened to as a way of rejecting anonymity and silence: “using language [...] involves a ‘claim’ that one should be listened to. To speak at all makes this claim” (P. Sugiman, *art. cit.*, pp. 72-73).

<sup>148</sup> A-M. Fortier, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Armanno says of his novel *Firehead*, is valid for all his literary works in which there is a search for home:

‘One of the ways migrants will hold on to the past is to remember it, to tell their stories, over and over again, to each other and to the next generation. I’ve always loved stories so they had a ready audience in me.

I knew that this would be a book about love and loss, and the search for home. With things like that there are no easy answers, and if the story was told in a concentrated period of time perhaps some of the resolutions would seem too easy, too pat. Life-changes and life-understandings take a long time, there’s just no two ways about it’<sup>149</sup>.

It is in this light that the word comfortable, as previously mentioned in CHAPTER TWO with the metaphor for the party, has an interesting meaning:

‘Comfortable is such an interesting word,’ he says. ‘It’s one of those words I avoid. In a way I don’t think being an artist, being any type of artist, you ever get comfortable. Because you’re always slightly outside the mainstream. And in a way that’s where I want to be. I don’t want to be in the nice far centre of middle class life. Though sometimes it looks like I am’<sup>150</sup>.

Yet, the fragments and remains of the old community are spectral bodies since by existing only in the mind they are doomed to disintegrate if not handed down for successive generations to take up this responsibility:

I want you to tell me your stories that then become other people’s stories, that become all stories. I’m waiting for you to open the book that I will write (*TV*, 116)<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> “Venero Armanno in Conversation with Dr Philip Neilson”, cit.

<sup>150</sup> T. Sorensen, “Venero Armanno’s Sense Appeal”, *City Hub*, 26 August 1999, in *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 31.

<sup>151</sup> Melancholia can lead to asymbolia, when the subject is “no longer capable of translating or metaphorizing,” (J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 42) thus becoming silent and dying. The language of the Father loses its representational and referential power. As for Mary, she is unable to speak her melancholy feeling even through writing – the first story she hands in for her creative writing seminar is a complete failure. It is only thanks to Emilio’s ‘healing dishes’ and storytelling that she can write

And the importance of memory is made clear in the novel through the intertextual references to Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. The latter appears earlier in the novel and, though its quotation is put in the mouth of Emilio's Anglo-Australian lover, it redirects her romanticising or intellectualising of Italian culture which meant that she never truly understood it. Speaking to Anna Ivanova on her sickbed, Doctor Zhivago says:

'You in others, this is your soul. This is what you are. This is what your consciousness has breathed and lived on and enjoyed throughout your life. Your soul, your immortality, your life in others. And what now? You have always been in others and you will remain in others. And what does it matter to you if later on it is called your memory? This will be you – the you that enters the future and becomes part of it' (*TV*, 29).

All generations take the responsibility of handing down the memory of the good and bad things so that

[i]f soul is memory, it's up to us to remember our parents, not just for the sake of remembering because we love them, but also to learn from the past so we don't do some of the stupid things that they did<sup>152</sup>.

Among "the stupid things", the fight at the Exhibition Station represents a wall of incomprehension between migrants and locals due to ignorance of others' culture and fears, what Armanno calls "cross-cultural disconnect"<sup>153</sup>. Food is here<sup>154</sup>, again, a

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his story and, ultimately, her own.

<sup>152</sup> M.V. Grau, C. Zamorano, *art. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>153</sup> V. Armanno, "Under the Volcano", in *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 41, Folder 6, p. 21. For Armanno, a cross-cultural experience is to be found in the Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme which hired a considerable number of immigrants (cf. A. Tornari, "Il Vulcano incendia due mondi", *La Fiamma*, Martedì, 5 Novembre 2002, p. 29, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 34). However, the Snowy Mountains scheme, especially when taking into consideration the work of immigrants in dangerous occupations who were not guaranteed safety and health conditions in change of a higher salary, can also be seen as a form of discrimination (cf. S. Castles, C. Alcorso, G. Rando, E. Vasta (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-61).

<sup>154</sup> In other works by Armanno, food is a metaphor encapsulating an exploration of what it means to be

metaphor for self-definition and cross-cultural exchange, but this time in the workplace. While, at first, Emilio and his Australian co-workers swap sandwiches and biscuits, later, when Emilio has his own work gang of immigrant workers, this does not happen anymore, symbolising Anglo-Celts' fear that 'wogs' might take over. Thus, cross-cultural exchange betrays power relations, "cultural dominance and the fear of losing such dominance"<sup>155</sup>, and the ethnic feeder as simply an unwilling 'absent' subject within an eater-centred multicultural discourse<sup>156</sup>. The implications of this fear was a hostile workplace marked by verbal jokes, back-breaking work, sackings, and accusations of making neighbourhoods unsafe places. For this reasons many Italians preferred the safety of their Little Italies<sup>157</sup> which meant a form of enclosure. And Armanno is aware that things have not changed: not only does Emilio get upset when he hears "black words" still pronounced against immigrants fifty years after he has suffered discrimination, but Dr Thach Yen-Khe perceives ghosts as well which means that other immigrants, Vietnamese in this case, are going through the same experience (cf. *TV*, 60-62). In an interview for a newspaper article, Armanno compares the story of racism suffered from previous immigrants to that of refugees kept in detention camps, with a reference to Aborigines as well by means of the 'sorry' day story:

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Italian in contemporary Australia. In "Where Bread is Sweet", a first-person narrated short story, bread symbolises the different generational connection with Australia: cultural disconnection for Zia Angie and a cross-cultural exchange for Johnny, the homodiegetic narrator. In fact, while for Zia Angie the Australian bread "tastes like it's dirty and old", for Johnny "Zia Angie was all wrong. Taste, texture, smell – and sweet as well! That soggy bun had it all" (V. Armanno, "Where Bread is Sweet", in Krauth N., Sheenan R. (eds.), *Paradise to Paranoia. New Queensland Writing*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1995, pp. 216, 219; this short story was first included in an unpublished collection entitled 'Stories of Love and Dying' and then in *Jumping at the Moon*, 1992). In the play *Blood and Pasta*, financially supported by the Italian community group COASIT and performed by the Queensland Theatre Company in 1996, the encounter between Annie (who moves to Sydney to get away from her family like Romeo when he moves to Brisbane) and Umberto (a professional Italian restaurateur whose *sugo* sells like hot cakes) stands for their identitarian rediscovery of their being Italian-Australian "in a country where an established migrant culture is on the verge of losing its perspective of the past, and of the present" ("Information and Critical Assessments" on *Blood and Pasta*, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 20).

<sup>155</sup> G. Hage, "At Home in the Entrails of the West", cit., p. 116.

<sup>156</sup> Hage underlines that Chinese ethnic food started to be appreciated only when the number of Chinese was within 'safe' limits (cf. *Idem*, p. 141).

<sup>157</sup> Cf. A. Markus, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-03.

The good thing is that the stories of our time come from everywhere now. They're in the stories of migrants who came to this country hoping for a chance, they're in the past of our indigenous people and in their present voices. These are the stories our international friends, languishing in our fabulously civilised detention centres, will one day write. Imagine the day when those children we see on TV standing behind razor wire are at Australian universities doing creative writing courses and they win the Vogel, The NSW Premier's Literary Prize, and the Miles Franklin – and our future president of Australia stands on a podium and says 'sorry'. That will be writing multiculturalism in a meaningful way and one which will speak to us in the form of the novel<sup>158</sup>.



**PLATE VII**

*Authors Take Side*  
*The Courier-Mail*, Saturday, 3 July 2004.

This form of enclosure, of cross-cultural disconnection had as a direct consequence “for the subsequent generations, like mine [Armanno’s] – [that] there was a slight sense of otherness, as if we didn’t belong. [...] my generation weren’t a part of the Sicilian stories and we weren’t yet part of the new stories in Australia. These are the things that led me to write these [...] books”<sup>159</sup>. Multicultural writings have to take up untold stories and disrupt the monological narratives of personal and collective

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<sup>158</sup> J. Moorcroft, C. Woolf, “To Care or Not to Care”, *The Courier-Mail*, Saturday, July 3, 2004, in *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 41, Folder 2, p. 7.

<sup>159</sup> V. Armanno, “Under the Volcano”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 41, Folder 6, p. 21.

homogenised identities. Identity is the momentary positionality that the subject assumes in a continuous deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Armanno's ethnic characters are determined by their past of migration in Sicily and Australia, Brisbane's official and underworld history, their future prospective and have to be diachronically and synchronically contextualised. A multiplicity which, similarly to Casella, is conveyed through the 'form' of Armanno's novels as is underlined in the following section.

#### 4.9 Hybrid texts

As aforementioned, Hutcheon defines *historiographic metafiction* as a narrative genre which intertextually reworks the past from its "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs"<sup>160</sup>. This entails a distinction between fact and events and the assumption that 'truth' corresponds to *textuality* and thus the construction of the archaeology of documents of which memories, storytelling and ethnic novels are part. Its construction also means that in order not to fall into the trap of other monological discourses deconstruction has to make any discourse always 'on the edge' as it is evident in *The Volcano* with past-present intertextualities memories and dreams. Of course, since fact and fiction are not specific to *historiographic metafiction*, it is self-reflexivity to distinguish it from other genres. In *The Volcano*:

MARY PUT DOWN her pen. She'd come to find that for the first draft of her stories she preferred the feel of pen on paper, flowing, looping strokes making more sense than the staccato of a keyboard. Later she'd redraft this professionally enough [...], but for now, having laboured twenty-one days to compose Emilio's history into *story*, she was tired (*TV*, 289).

In rewriting Emilio's history into story, the problematic relationship between events and facts is posited. What Mary produces are only 'facts' as the reader understands when Emilio tells her:

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<sup>160</sup> L. Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



No, Mary, you're writing it all wrong. Well, half wrong. I'm telling it to you in a way that makes me better than I am. At the stage of life I'm in, hiding behind pretty words is of no use to me whatsoever (*TV*, 423-24).

The power of construction through a language that has no direct referent is attributed to Emilio himself who, lying in his hospital bed, has been “construct[ing] all the sentences of [his] story and colouring them [his] own way” (*TV*, 441). Such ‘colouring’ is part of both Mary’s ‘fiction’ and Emilio’s ‘memory’, and also of other forms such as the letters and the newspaper quoted above. So that while, on the one hand, Mary has “looked up records in libraries and newspapers on microfiche and so I know little of who you are, but only a little and I don’t call that life” (*TV*, 116), on the other, she seeks first-hand accounts for her book (cf. *Ibidem*) – a methodological approach adopted by Armano himself. Thus, as storytellers can “silence, exclude, and absent certain past events”<sup>161</sup>, or parts of them, the same has been done by historians which means that history and fiction work in the same way<sup>162</sup>. However, though direct reports (oral histories) are culturally mediated – such as those by second generation migrants – and thus provisional, this does not mean to dismiss the meaning of the past but, in line with Derrida’s *différance*, it is simply deferred and thus deconstructed through its own self-reflexivity which avoids any univocal signified<sup>163</sup>. Therefore the immigrant the reader gets to know is the referent as portrayed in records and newspapers – the referent Armano understood to be at least

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<sup>161</sup> *Idem*, p. 107.

<sup>162</sup> The blur between fiction and history is reinforced, on a structural level, by that between dreams and reality. The dream reinforces what is expressed in the novel through a postmodern relationship between *history* and *story*: there is a repressed part of history which awaits being realised, resurrected, taken to life. The *signifier* (the dream as a means) and the *signified* (the unsaid) mirror each other as part of a reality which can be expressed only in the form of dreams and memories. The connection between dreams and memories is well expressed in Armano’s review of *The Mambo King Play Songs of Love* by Oscar Hijuelos: “Yet again Oscar Hijuelos has shown how immersing yourself in his writing can be like entering the dream-like memories of someone else’s life” (V. Armano, “Seriously Sexy”, *The Courier-Mail*, Saturday, May 15, 1999 in *Papers of Venero Armano*, cit., Box 32). The fact that the novel opens and closes by referring to dreams, on the one hand, highlights its contents as an interpretative key to the entire novel and, on the other hand, creates a dreaming dimension in which ‘truth’ is displaced. Even the ghosts’ physical presence, as previously seen, blurs the boundary between reality and the dreaming state since Emilio perceives them both in his dreaming and waking states.

different from the one he knew first hand –, legends and myth. In brief, a postmodern ‘artefact’ or ghost: not only a metaphor for a displaced diasporic subject, but also for a subject who is simply ‘constructed’ by a polyphony of voices (Northern Italy, Fred the greengrocer, the unionists, the Australian workers, his friends). The point at issue here is both an epistemological and ontological uncertainty: how does one ‘know’ the referent and ‘what’ referent does one get in relation to the epistemology adopted<sup>164</sup>. Since ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ of grand narratives are ephemeral, what one gets of the referent is only the different discourses about it, as it is for the *textualised* ‘immigrant’, ‘Australia’, ‘Sicily’, and so on. These narratives are shaken up by small narratives which are based on a paralogical reasoning, indebted to a ‘make it new’ or uncanny way of looking at things.

As for memory, it has a deconstructive nature for it shakes narcissistic representations of the others, then it is self-reflexive and paralogical in line with postmodernism: it contradicts the idea of always being ‘on the edge’. Memory is part of ‘facts’. It is this memory that generations re-interpret as textual forms with differences, necessary for their identities but still never ‘events’, pure ‘representations’ of identity. Thus, storytelling is linked to difference in the sense that everyone, depending on *positionality*, tells the story according to his/her own generation, geographic origin, gender, social class. The storyteller is a sort of ‘conjurer’ for his stories, with the same subversive function as jokes have, are imaginative even when they stem from real events; as a consequence, the narratorial ‘I’ can be considered unstable. When the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced this can easily produce an uncanny effect<sup>165</sup> – at least in the Australian literary market which tends, when it comes to ‘migrant’ writings, to distinguish the two dimensions.

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. *Idem*, p. 149.

<sup>164</sup> The epistemology behind postmodernism seems to be reflected in the structure of the novel itself. As Hutcheon asserts: “the postmodern novel [...] begins by creating and centering a world [...] and then contesting it. [...] Historiographic metafiction [...] make their readers question their own interpretations” (*Idem*, p. 180). In the same way, after offering to the reader what seems raw historical material the same is given a key to reread everything in a new light. The reader makes a postmodern reading experience at his/her own expense.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, cit., pp. 12, 52.

The totalising representation of the subject is deconstructed, besides the aforementioned ways, through the shaking of the omniscient narrator's power whose religious connotation recalls an authoritarian attitude promoting a unified and closed perspective of narrative fiction<sup>166</sup>. In brief, the omniscient narrator has a normalising effect. In *The Volcano*, Emilio is interrupted by the narrator because he is unwillingly upsetting the temporal linearity of his story:

What man, what black word? No, that comes later. In his own history he is already too far ahead but from this ledge of pain and silence he can easily go further back and recall the new days in this new country [...] (*TV*, 302).

The above intrusion entails, on the one hand, the fictionality of Emilio's account and, on the other hand, the presence of an overtly controlling narrator. However, the latter's totalising role is rendered problematic through the presence of 'heterogeneous' elements, internal and external to narration: Emilio's and Mary's almost telepathic dialogue, references to historical (*The Courier-Mail*<sup>167</sup>) and literary texts and the use of different elements from Gothic, crime and memoir novels. The narrative relationship between Emilio and Mary when the first is hospitalised seems to further complicate their role as narrators. Even when he says that Mary visits him, actually there is no real dialogue going on between them and the reader has no confirmation that Mary is physically there – maybe she comes out of his dreams<sup>168</sup>. In this sense neither the third-person narrator nor the first-person narrator can guarantee objectivity and authenticity. Identity is deconstructed and the reader is left only with the speaking-subject always 'on trial'. One is projected towards subjectivity although having the awareness that it can never be achieved, otherwise it would represent a new fixation. Both extremes – the thought of an achieved subjectivity in the Real or

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. *Idem*, pp. 258-61.

<sup>167</sup> Recall the quotation included in CHAPTER TWO: "EAT while you SLIM. Don't starve to reduce: ..." (*The Courier-Mail*, 1951) ironically interpreted when compared to migrants' situation, and the "Undeserved fate for a lady" (*The Courier-Mail*, Monday 8 November 1982).

<sup>168</sup> The reader is given two contradictory possibilities: Mary is actually there (*TV*, 490) and she is the homodiegetic narrator of the third-person narrated excerpts, or she is just a projection of Emilio's desire to have her there (*TV*, 406) and, thus, there is an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator.

an identity not socially constructed – would lead to monological and controlling perspectives.

In conclusion, the narrative features of *The Volcano* can be interpreted as ‘grotesque’ elements that shake up the centre in order to objectify the unrepresentable or sublime moment of subjectivity which seems to be achievable only in a place outside of time and space, in the halfway of death Emilio longs for. A sublime space that simultaneously represents death and pleasure and that, as with postmodernism, embodies contradictions.

Such a dislocation of the characters and the readers alike characterises *Romeo of the Underworld* as well<sup>169</sup>. As mentioned in CHAPTER TWO drawing on Burke’s theory of the sublime in relation to the hearing sense, melancholic<sup>170</sup> intertextuality between present and past (conscious-unconscious)<sup>171</sup> has the same effect: the reader waiting for another sudden shift from the present to past and back again experiences a temporal and spatial dislocation<sup>172</sup> wandering – as Romeo in the city<sup>173</sup> – in the ‘darkness’ of his/her reading experience while asking what will happen next, where and whether in the past or present. This experience “replicate[s] the nonlinear narrative of contemporary life”<sup>174</sup>. The reader is terrified if one identifies such a state

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<sup>169</sup> In a personal conversation with Armanno, he agreed that such was his aim (Conversation with V. Armanno at The University of Queensland on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2010).

<sup>170</sup> J. Kristeva sees depressive speech as repetitive, with a flattening ‘rhythm’ (J. Kristeva, *Black Sun*, cit., p. 43). In the light of this, repetitive flashbacks can be interpreted as a rhythm expressing the character’s melancholy which is inexpressible through the use of signifiers.

<sup>171</sup> Such opposition is also conveyed by the first-person narrator through the dialogue between past and present: a period during which he enjoyed eating Sicilian food and one of starvation, respectively. Yet, the past invades the present, similarly to his memories of Monica, his underworld, his renewed love for meat/flesh/love (cf. *R*, 68-70), his Sicilianness.

<sup>172</sup> Recall that the unrepresentable (sublime) is an effect of a disturbance of temporality (cf. A. Bannett, N. Royle, *op. cit.*, p. 287). Even the linear temporality of the trilogy is disrupted: *The Lonely Hunter* is set between 1976 and the 1990s; *Romeo* before 1976 and in the year 1994 (the first novel is set between the two periods in *Romeo of the Underworld*); and *The Volcano* is set in the 1950s and the year 2000.

<sup>173</sup> Mapping Armanno’s literary analyses of the TV-show *Lost* on his novel, the city can be interpreted as a psychological space; an effect which “follows an unconventional method of telling its story. We are constantly in different timeframes. The present is the here and now of the island, but the past is all over the place” (V. Armanno, “Storytelling and the Idea of Unconventional Narrative”, *Papers of Venero Armanno*, cit., Box 41, Folder 11, p. 5). The continuous shifting of time objectifies the idea of being ‘lost’, psychologically rather than physically, but truer to one’s subjectivity. The city is an intertextual ‘liminal’ space where the past – to which the characters answer subjectively in their quest for identity – and the present come together.

<sup>174</sup> *Idem*, p. 10.

with that of suspension. Yet, the sublime has the effect of extending the reader's traditional abilities of understanding the self though such an awareness is more psychological than linguistic.

The anachronic and cinematographic<sup>175</sup> feature of the novel mirrors the dialogical relationship of the split subject, evident in both Romeo's last dream – a hybrid re-elaboration of what it means to be Sicilian-Australian – and in the distinction between the subject of utterance and that of enunciation. As for the latter, the 'I' of the text is differentiated early in the novel from the narratorial 'I' since Romeo writes referring to himself in the third person 'he'. Furthermore, the very title of the novel intertextually recalls Shakespeare's tragedy so that the pronominal signifier has no stable signified. The psychological image of the double is reinforced by the opposition between Romeo as an adult and as a young boy who meet each other in the dream working as a mirror. Falling asleep,

*sea breeze comes through the hippy-salvaged porthole and the branches of some dying ghost gums rustle to the rhythm of the sea wind and in my semi-sleep I feel something crawl across my cheek. There was a bad dream but I have already forgotten what it was that was so bad and now all I can feel is the blustering gale outside this finger of death on my cheek. [...] it is Monica who is touching my cheek [...]. I pull the insane asylum sheets over Monica and even this simple act, touching those sheets that once knew such agonies, is dreadful. It's like covering Monica with love and death, with good and evil, with the end of the world. I get out of the bed and go to the porthole. My knees creak and my spine cracks. The cabin's floor should be gritty with the dirt and sand our feet have carried back and forth from the beach, but no, it's warm carpet. [...] when I turn around and look at the bed I don't see a broken little cabin but a big bedroom, Monica like a glow-girl in the big bed, and a donkey of a man lying well apart from her, naked and sated and snoring. [...] I can't remember who I am at all. I'm just a lost teenager in a room of strangers, but I do know Monica, of course I do, even if her hair is now long and brown, and I do know she is the person I love [...]. Where there should be darkness there is Monica's incandescence. The floor careens. I crawl under the covers and crush myself to my glow-girl but the donkey of a man awakens and sits bolt*

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<sup>175</sup> In the screen adaptation of the novel Armanno speaks of juxtaposition by referring to the way Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo chose to tell their past and present stories in *The Godfather Part II* (cf. V. Armanno, "Project: Romeo of The Underworld – Screenplay Adaptation", cit., p. 5).

*upright and stares at me, his eyes full of hell and magic and pain, and we finally meet, across so many years, we are finally the one being, and I'm not afraid any more (R, 243-44).*

Besides the use of the present tense which, as with memories of the past, makes the dream actually happen in the here and now, two aspects should be underlined: the overlapping of the two settings of the past cabin on the beach and the present house which anticipates the other element, that is the encounter between Romeo the young and Romeo the adult. If Romeo was first afraid, after this encounter he is not anymore, which supports the interpretation that his feeling was connected to his identitarian displacement of what seemed a united self. The encounter between the past and the present results in a hybrid identity which is psychoanalytically linked to death as Monica's "finger of death" and "dying ghost gums" suggest and, yet, she is also love. Actually Monica is associated with oceanic images carrying, as previously mentioned, a semiotic and sublime meaning. It is no coincidence that the last scene is set on a beach where, after resolving the problematic of his past, Romeo experiences the "letting go" (R, 271) of both Monica and his melancholy.

From now on, past and present and their respective stories – Romeo and Monica's love story, and Romeo in Brisbane in the present – collide, when the underworld comes to the surface allowing the story to reach its climax and thus unfold to its final hybrid resolution.

## *Conclusions: the unhomely reader*

Both the reader's epistemology and ontology are dislocated. The reader's exotic reading, like the one analysed in the Demidenko case, is displaced through a polyphonic, carnivalesque and uncanny approach. Similarly, and consequentially, the metaphysic presence of a 'white' universal reader is lost in a postmodern labyrinth whether this is aesthetically, socially or psychologically perceived. This tension is experienced by the readers in their subjective realms of interpretation entailing that overlooking the Gothic elements, projections of liminality, present in the novels analysed means dismissing the effect these have on (implied) readers. It is no coincidence that Gothic novels are precursors to psychoanalytic theories and have always helped society to conceptualise, whether with the aim of exorcising them or not, social and repressed anxieties.

As discussed in the previous chapter, fetishism is the result of an incomplete mourning as Lacan's and Bhabha's ambivalence on the 'castration' issue proves. While, on the one hand, the fetish object supports the idea that once men and women, I-other were all the same and that all the second need to do is to regain the lost object (phallus/'Whiteness'), on the other hand, the incomplete mourning reveals a weird melancholy since the 'white' subject is in search of a social and psychoanalytic 'object' never possessed: completeness and unity.

The masking of difference, a discourse that takes place in the past of the 'I-other' relationship ('once we were all the same') thus exorcising 'white' anxieties, is doomed to crack the mirror in which *the other* is made to reflect him/herself. It is this cracking of the mirror that frees, similarly to the lady of Shalott, the subject from a socially constructed identity though for a short time. The fragmented pieces of the mirror unleash all those silenced differences disrupting the reader's universal values. From Snow-White to Nick, Romeo and Emilio the mirror and the gaze become counter-narrative strategies positioning Howard, Hanson and O'Grady as analysands. Only after disrupting one's sense of completeness and superiority, the statement

mapped on Lacan's infamous one can be embraced – namely that there is no ethnic relationship and that all subjects are different rather than lacking ones.

The unveiling of absence, the lack at the core of 'Whiteness' and multiculturalism, is a disruption conveyed through the characters' liminality. The reader's illusion of 'Whiteness' and Australian 'values' – associated to sameness rather than similarity – are 'laughed at'. This entails dislocating the multicultural reader from the centre and taking him/her nearer to the margins. After all multiculturalism works as long as an equidistance (social justice) is maintained from an absent centre (hegemony) by all subjects, whether 'white', 'black', 'yellow', etc. The uncanniness entailed in the margins also signifies a deconstruction of epistemological concepts such as 'authenticity', 'whiteness', 'ethnicity'.

It is in this framework, that the 'fabulous' aspects of the novels analysed are central to represent the reader's 'doubt' and indeterminacy. As Milbank underlines, when analysing Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, what permits her to read reality and free herself from "the ruinous patriarchal castle"<sup>1</sup> is *noumena* rather than phenomena. In a similar way, the uncanny – through *topoi* such as ghosts, vampire, werewolf, etc. – works in a 'supplementary' marginal way to hegemonic reality. This entails: first, that the (Western) 'gaze' is not synonymous with 'understanding'; secondly, the necessity of reading the social implications of Gothic aspects in the literature of the *arrivant* and of recognising them as central to the 'completeness' of social reality; thirdly, the recognition of a different and valid 'feminine' epistemological interpretation of reality; finally, that there is no 'centre' and in its place only an 'absence'. Such an absence seems to perfectly recall Manning Clark's "Australia, Whose Country is it?":

Sometimes when I stand in the Australian bush on a clear windless day I am visited with strange thoughts: am I living in a country where history has not begun, or where history is all over? I wonder whether I belong [...] I am ready, and so are others, to understand the Aboriginal view that no human being can ever know heart's ease in a foreign land, because in

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<sup>1</sup> A. Milbank, "Gothic Feminites", in C. Spooner, E. McEvoy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 162.



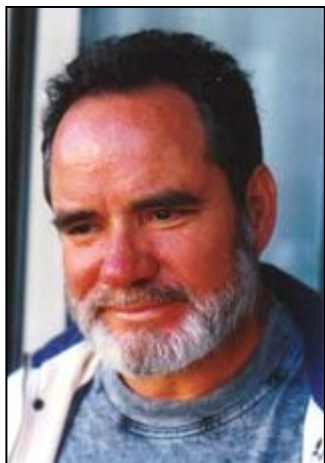
a foreign land there live foreign ancestral spirits. We white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien. We must either become assimilated or live the empty life of a people exiled from their source of spiritual strength<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Manning C., *Speaking Out of Turn: Lectures and Speeches 1940-1991*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1997, p. 144 qtd in Otto P., "Romantic Medievalism and Gothic Horror: Wordsworth, Tennyson, Kendall and the Dilemmas of Antipodean Gothic", in S. Trigg (ed.), *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 2005, p. 40.

## Appendix A

### *Antonio Casella's biography*



Antonio Casella's grandparents were the Casellas and the Pintabonas, the former having nine children and the latter seven, three of which married three Casellas, including the author's mother.

His family's first migration occurred when it moved, for reasons of work, from Sant'Angelo di Brolo to San Fratello (Messina), a town of five-thousand inhabitants, about fifteen/twenty years before migrating to Australia.

Antonio Casella, the youngest of five living kids, was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1944 in San Fratello where he felt an outsider. In fact, his family was regarded as foreigner by the San Fratellani, who spoke a language of their own, a sort of Gallo-Italic spoken by descendants of the Normans who did not escape Sicily during the Sicilian Vespers but retreated to an inaccessible place and founded San Fratello. Such a language Casella's parents could not understand when they moved there. Thus, when he migrated to Australia, through a system of so-called chain migration, the family was not sponsored by his uncle Pietro Casella, who had migrated in 1924 but by Costantino Casella, who migrated five years later. In effect Casella, as boy migrant was already accustomed to be a 'fly on the wall'. However, Casella thinks that his childhood experiences did not hinder but aided his literary vocation. As he puts it: "most fiction writing is done from a distance, both spatial and temporal. That is to say looking back, looking on or looking in, all of which suggest the writer as an outside observer"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Casella, *The Italian Diaspora in Australia*, cit., p. 197 note n. 92.

As for his roots, it is Sant'Angelo di Brolo with which he identifies, the place of origin his parents and grandparents where he spent many happy summers from the age of eight; occasions that let him escape from a “restrictive, austere”<sup>2</sup> father.

At age eleven, after listening to a talk given in his school by a Jesuit, he decided he wanted to be a priest and attended the Jesuit boarding school in Catania for two years, where he received a traditional humanist education. He entered the school on a sort of scholarship which he won for writing an essay about religion. There he started writing poems full of religious fervour and missionary zeal.

In 1959, at the age of fifteen, he migrated to Perth (Western Australia) where he had a difficult time, not knowing the language and viewing Australia as “desolate – it was just these boxes surrounded by sand...”<sup>3</sup>. Of the voyage on board of the *Oceania*, Casella recalls the crossing of the equator, class divisions evident on board the ship and the snobbish attitude of Northern Italians towards the Southern ones. He recalls that, while his family has to pay its own way, some Northern Italians he met were on an assisted passage provided by the Australian government, because, as a boy told him, “they were from Varese and they had some kind of skill”<sup>4</sup>. Arriving in Australia (26<sup>th</sup> of October 1959) his family stayed in a new brick house built by his brothers in Alexander Road (Rivervale - Perth). He decided to adapt to this new world, by making Australian friends, learning the language and staying away from ethnic functions. Starting at Belmont High School, where he “sat at the back of the class and tried not to sink”<sup>5</sup>.

Failing the exams after the first semester – as a result of which he was moved to the ‘vegie class’ – he dropped out and decided to go and work in an iron foundry with English-speaking people, rather than with his brothers who worked in the building trade with other Italians.

At school he also experienced racism. The Principal or Vice-Principal told him to drop school and go in the stonemasonry since he was not doing very well at school.

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<sup>2</sup> S. Iuliano, “Interview with Antonio Casella”, *cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> C. McLeod, *art. cit.*, p. 8.

Upon telling that that stonemasonry was hard work, the Principal simply agreed with him revealing that he did not deserve any better. The five years at the foundry were his darkest. Although the place, with its noise and dust, was Dickensian, there he picked up the English language and improved his imagination as a form of escapism. Upon finishing his apprenticeship he worked briefly at the now-infamous Wittenoom asbestos mine which closed about ten weeks later. Many people working there died of asbestosis, caused by dust in their lungs.

In 1966 he returned to Perth and continued his night school studies and was rewarded with a distinction in English when sitting for the mature-age leaving examinations.

In 1970, as 25 years old, he enrolled at University of Western Australia to do an Arts Degree focusing on English Literature and language which he completed in 1973. The same year he got married to Helen, an Australian colleague, of Anglo-Irish ancestry whom he met at University. From this first marriage three children were born. He then taught languages at a West Australian girls' school, Santa Maria College, for ten years. He and Helen got divorced in 1992.

The first longer piece of writing in English was his unpublished play "The Nun of Monza" and then the novel *Southfalia* published by Fremantle Arts Centre in 1980 – a satire heavily influenced by Voltaire's *Candide*. In 1982 he started working on *The Sensualist*, which he first conceived as a play. In 1989 he was granted a Writing Fellowship by the Literature Board which allowed him to write full time. In the meanwhile he wrote another unpublished play "The Ghost" of Rino Tassone (1988) and published a short story, "Tell 'm I'm dead" in *Hills 2* (1985). Since publishing his second novel, Casella's literary production included: "Lucifer's Revenge" (1992), "Boatphobia" (1993), "A Misfit in Heaven" and "The Flowering Broombush" (1994), "San Rocco comes to Visit" (1995).

In 1996 he was Writer in Residence at the Australia Council's Studio in Rome, the BR Whiting Studio. On that occasion he granted an interview to Stefania Greco for her graduating thesis.

Casella's unpublished novels are "Men and Father" and "An Olive Branch for Sante" (2006) a section from which was published on *Westerly* with the title *A Visitor Must Unwelcome* (2005) – and translated into Italian – and another extract from the same novel in *Diaspora: the Australasian Experience* (2005). The latter unpublished novel was included as part of his PhD in English and Comparative Literature (Murdoch University). His thesis was published in 2008 with the title *The Italian Diaspora in Australia. Representations of Italy and Italians in Australian Literature*.

In 2006 Casella was elected President of the Dante Alighieri Society of Western Australia. Also in 2006 he was invited to deliver a talk at the University of Bologna. The year after he published an essay titled "Literature of Nostalgia", included in G. Rando and G. Turcotte's *Literary and Social Diasporas: An Italian Australian Perspective*.

In 2008 he participated at the Fourth International ASAA Conference held in Sri Lanka, *Australasia-Asia: Change, Conflict, and Convergence*, while on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May he gave a talk on *The Sicilian Presence in Australian Literature* at the Faculty of Language, Catania, in Sicily where he travelled with all his family. He returns to on a regular basis, the last time being September 2011.

## Appendix B

### *Venero Armanno's biography*



Venero Gerardo Armanno is a Brisbane born writer (August 19, 1959) of Sicilian parents from Piedimonte Etneo, in the province of Catania, right at the foot of Mount Etna. In 1969 his parents took him to Sicily for the first time. What impressed him most of this experience was the volcano:

It's there smoking silently in the day, and at night from every street and every home, from any vantage point you care to name, you can see the fiery glow in the mouth of the *cratere centrale* – that fire which can never be put out.

In Australia, he first attended St James's Catholic School where he failed his exams, one "even after studiously cheating my every answer from the smartest boy in the class"<sup>1</sup>. Not being very keen on sports or television, he preferred to cultivate his imagination though "no one seemed to care about this particular gift"<sup>2</sup>. In the early seventies, the schoolyard for Armanno was the place where he experienced racism:

[R]acial stereotypes and bigotry [...] provided a strong source of comedy and humour in all of Australia at the time, and as such it was reflected in schools. [...] The thing is, what I believe now is that my school's teachers were complicit in propagating racial stereotypes. They played us off one another. [...] they had their fair-haired boys and came down hardest on we darkest<sup>3</sup>.

School became the discursive site of binary oppositions:

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<sup>1</sup> V. Armanno, "Two Little Worlds", cit., p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

We learned that we were out of place, that our parents' accents were things that humiliated us, that our food smelled strange and earned us schoolyard lunch-time pack-mugging. In effect: we were just plain 'wrong'.

The incredible shame of this already shameful situation was that the more successfully 'Australian' Italian boys picked on the less successfully 'Australian' boys. That made them even more Australian. In those days, this was what we knew of as 'assimilation'<sup>4</sup>.

Upon changing school, Armanno's grades improved immediately. He explains this turn of events on the basis of a different way of considering immigrants: from an anti-wog culture to a more multi-ethnic one.

After obtaining his Bachelor of Arts (1982), he worked for ten years in a computer company as an Account Manager (1980-82: FACOM Australia Pty Ltd; 1982-1990: ICL Australia Pty Ltd), writing in his spare time. He then decided to leave his work, graduated from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (1992) in Sydney and became a full-time writer. However, during those ten years, Armanno had written ten books among which a vampire novel dealing with an Italian migrant, Marcello Piedemonte, who kills everybody at the university Armanno attended. Later he refers to such writing activity in the following way: "the literary equivalent of reheating porridge over and over again and trying to serve it up as good home cooking"<sup>5</sup>. On the contrary, the span of time from 1991 to 1995, after ten years of full-time writing (pre-1991 phase) during which his works were not accepted, proved a very successful one. In 1991 his scripts were accepted for film productions (*Summerville Court*, *Obsesso*, *Old Magic*, *Roadsong*) and Armanno participated to a new four-week student exchange program with fellow writing students studying at the Tisch school of the Arts, Dramatic Writing Program at New York University. Among the publications marking his post-1991 period: a book of short stories published in 1992, *Jumping at the Moon*, and his novels, *The Lonely Hunter* (1993), *Romeo of the Underworld* (1994), *My Beautiful Friend* (1995). For these novels, Armanno was awarded and/or shortlisted for many literary prizes: the Australian Vogel National Literary Award (for an unpublished manuscript), 1992 – highly

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<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 81.

commended for *The Lonely Hunter*; Australia Council Grants, Awards and Fellowships, Literature Board Fellowship, Category B Fellowship, 1994 (\$24,000 for fiction writing and writing for performance; and 1997, 2005, 2008); Centenary Medal (for distinguished contribution and achievement in literature and Australian writing); the Warana Writers' Awards, Steele Rudd Award, 1993, running-up for *Jumping at the Moon*; Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction, Best Horror Novel, Horror, 1995, shortlisted for *My Beautiful Friend*; Australia Council Grants, Awards and Fellowships, Nancy Keesing Studio Writer's Residency, 1995 (and 1997); Arts Queensland writing Project grant, 1993 (and 1996, 1998).

In 1995, upon winning a Literature Board Fellowship, Armano travelled to Paris and moved into the famous retreat, the Cite International des Arts, where he lived in a tiny studio with a single saggy mattress and a table. Here, after working for three months on *The Volcano*, a Parisian encounter with a beggar changed his literary inspiration. The beggar, an American down on his luck and a writer, asked Armano for money who could not resist helping him. This encounter, of which the handwritten notes given below remain as proofs at the Fryer Library, was the starting point for his next novel, *Candle Life* (2006).

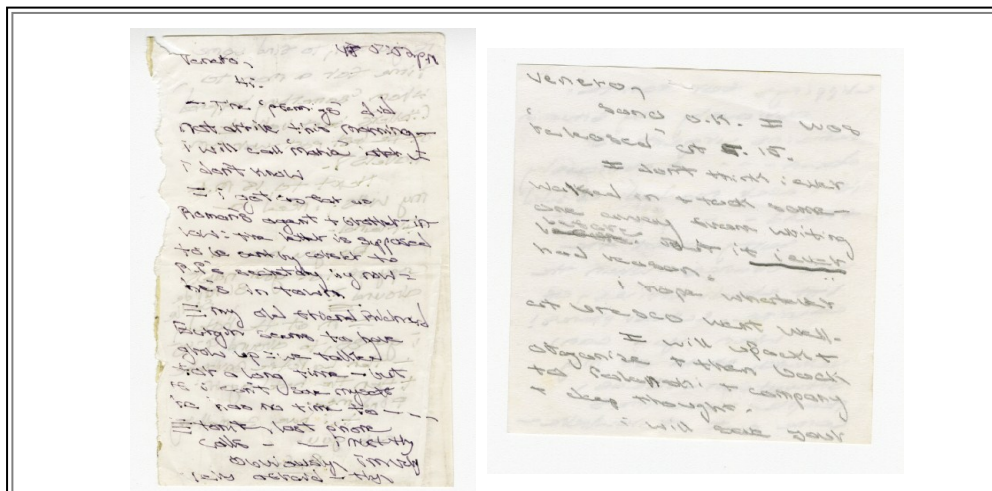


PLATE VIII

*American Street Beggar's Handwritten Notes*  
Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library

<sup>5</sup> V. Armano, "Using Family in Fiction", *Writing Queensland*, 104, February 2002, p. 17.



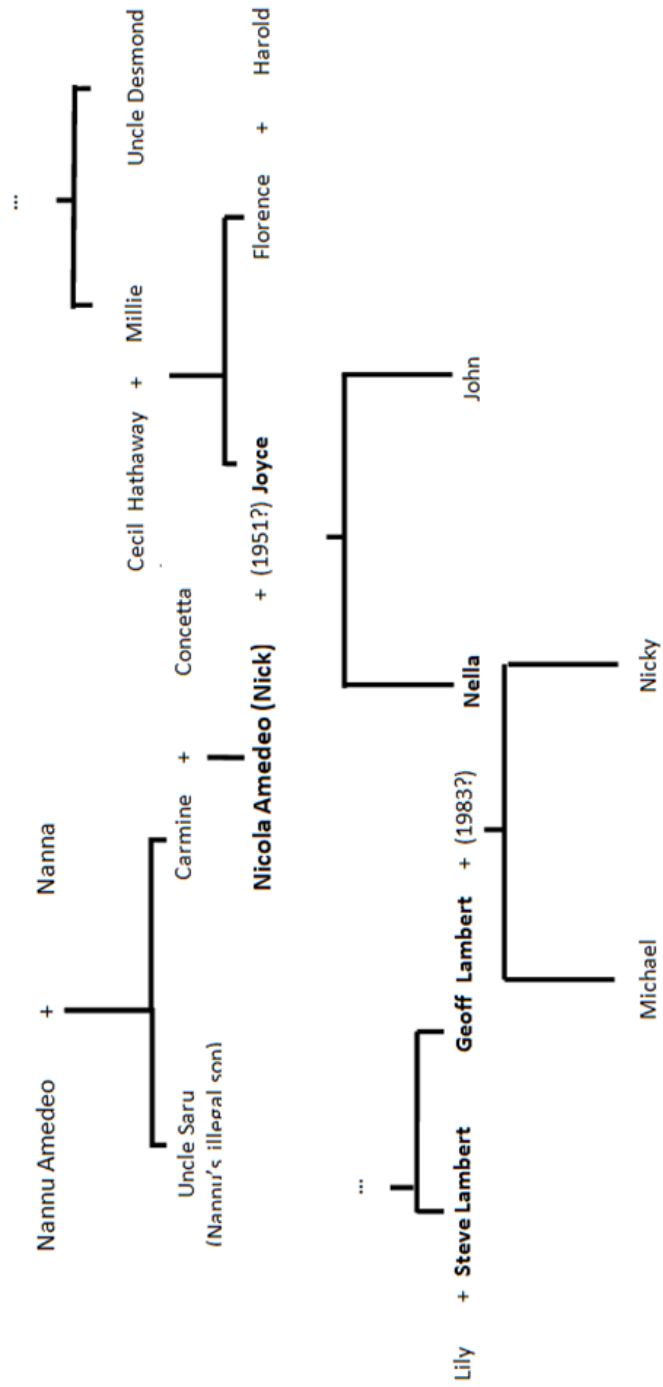
In 1998 Armanno completed a Master in Creative Writing at Queensland University of Technology.

Other recent publications are: *Firehead* (1996), *The Volcano* (2001; awarded the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, Best Fiction Book in 2002) and *Dirty Beat* (2007). His short story "The Sleeping Stranger" (written in 2005), written for Arnold Zable's anthology intended to debate the country's treatment of refugees, was reworked to be part of *One Book Many Brisbanes* (2006). In this new version, Armanno added the character of Graziella in order to present the treatment post-war migrants received in Australia and compare it to a less fair one reserved for refugees who have no voice, as it happens till the final lines of his short story. The forthcoming novel *Black Mountain* (February 2012), partly set in Sicily, contains uncanny elements intertwined with the quest for identity and androgynous issues that blur the difference between non-human and human beings in a context that seems to suggest that the former are more humane than the latter.

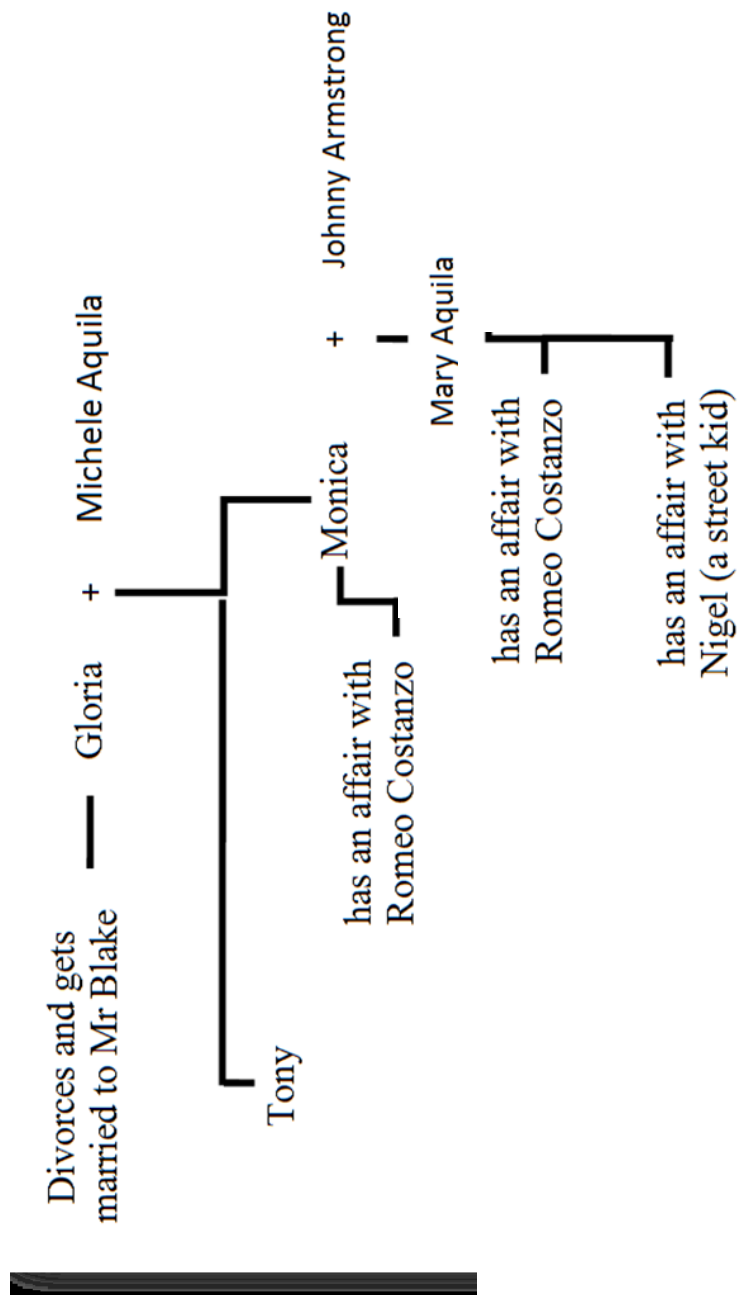
Armanno has been a lecturer holding creative writing courses at The University of Queensland since 2002.

Appendix C - *Character Charts*

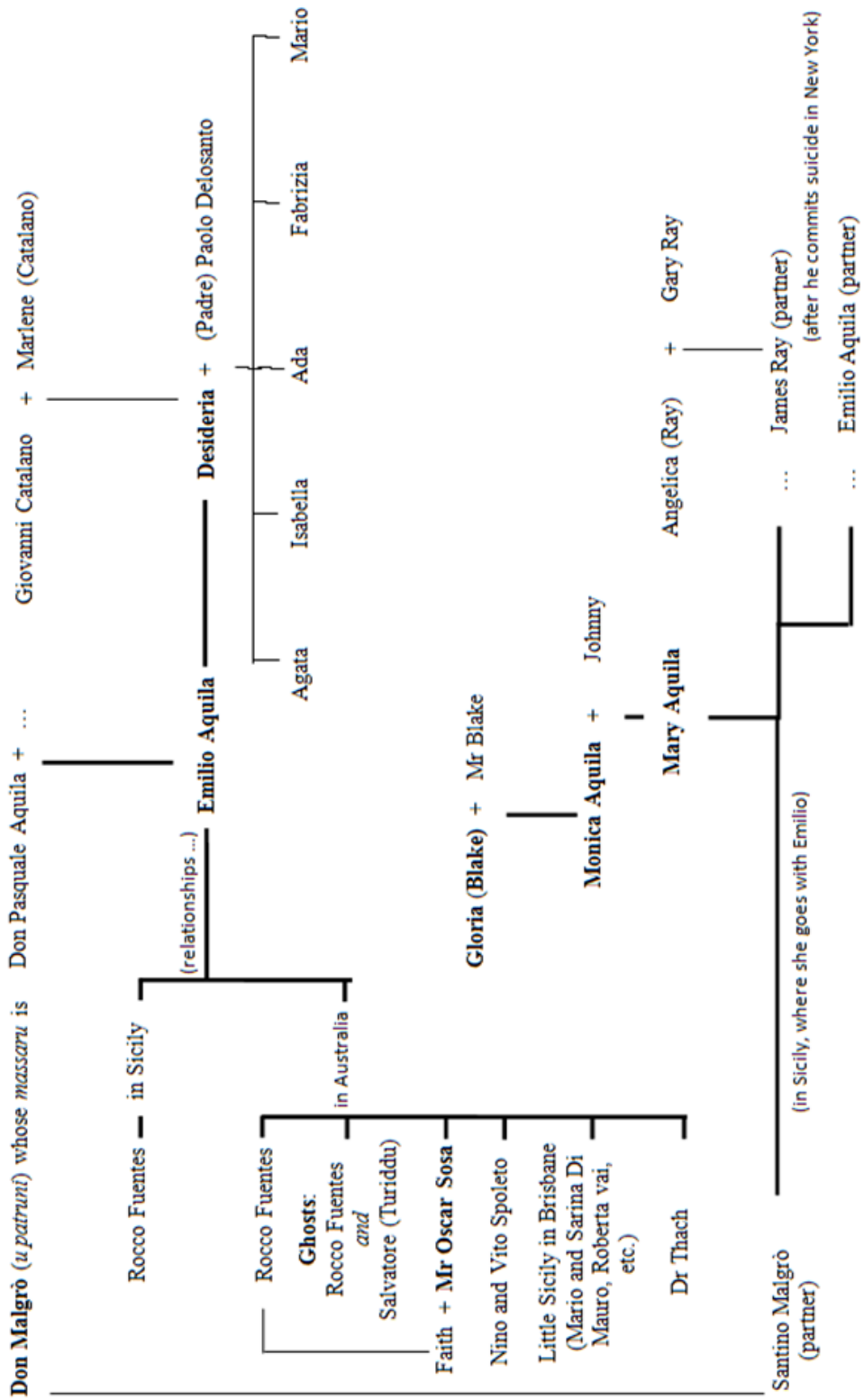
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