Excuse me is our heritage showing? Representations of diasporic experiences across the generations

Rita Wilson

(Monash University)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the narration of diasporic experiences by writers of Italian descent. It investigates the ways in which relationships between ‘home’ and ‘destination’ cultures are negotiated across the generations. Narratives by three women writers, Rosa Cappiello, Anna Maria Dell’oso and Melina Marchetta are analysed to show how negotiating the tensions between nostalgia for the past and the needs of the present transforms and translates notions of ‘home’ for writers who are living ‘in between’ cultures. Through a reading of the narratives of these three authors, each representative of a different generation, the paper considers the ways in which space, place and identity interact in determining the politics of belonging. It is argued that the role of the hyphenate writer has changed over the decades and across generations, from that of a raconteur of what took place, a role that may lean more toward nostalgia than analysis, to that of cultural mediator and, more recently, cultural examiner. Further, the texts chosen for analysis reveal a distinctive strategy of representation – a rhetoric of location – in which spatiality functions as a symbolic conduit between the plotting of identity constructions and Italian/Australian realities.

In his collection of essays Imaginary Homelands, Salman Rushdie begins by quoting the opening sentence of L.P. Hartley’s The Go-Between: “The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there” but suggests that the idea should be inverted, as it is the present that is foreign while the “past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (1991: 9). While conceding that the past is a country from which we have all migrated, the experience of this loss is intensified for the migrant who is distant in space as well as time, out-of-country and even out-of-language. Rushdie goes on to argue that the diasporic subject becomes a hybrid, existing or encoded in modes of translation. It is through this hybridization that newness can emerge. Following Rushdie’s view that migrant writers like himself are translated people, who (as the etymology of the word
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suggests) have been borne across geographical and cultural spaces, this paper will consider how negotiating the tensions between nostalgia for the past and the needs of the present transforms and translates notions of ‘home’ for writers who are living ‘in between’ cultures.

Across genres and generations

Typically, Anglophone literary critics use the label “migrant” for writers whose names signal non Anglo-Celtic heritage (Gunew 1994:xii). In a recent study that examines the question of the relationship of migrant writing to the canon of the host nation, Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (2005) wonder how many generations will have to wait for a migrant to stop bearing the mark of otherness. The question serves to underline the importance of interrogating concepts such as ‘culture’ (that of origin and of the host country), ‘migrancy’ and ‘identity’ in order to dislocate inherited assumptions and ready conclusions. In order to avoid ghettoizing labels, it may be more useful to consider non Anglo-Australian writers within the discourse of the “hyphenate” writer. Daniel Aaron, one of the first scholars to present this notion in the context of North American literature, identifies three stages of “hyphenate” writers. Briefly, the first-stage writer is “the pioneer”, spokesperson for “the unspoken-for” ethnic group, a raconteur of what took place, a role that may lean more toward nostalgia than analysis. The second-stage writer attempts to demystify negative stereotypes and, unlike the first-stage writer, presents characters who have already sunk “roots into the native soil.” The third-stage writer travels from the margin (ethnic culture) to the mainstream (dominant culture), viewing the latter no less critically but more knowingly than the first- or second-stage writer (the “local colourist” and the “militant protestor” respectively). Having appropriated the tools necessary to succeed in the dominant culture – mainly the skill to manipulate its language – this third-stage writer feels entitled to participate in the intellectual and cultural heritage of the dominant group, without renouncing the cultural heritage of the ethnic group (Aaron 1984:11-13).

With regard to genre, the movement is from predominantly autobiographical writings (first-stage) to that of largely fictional works by successive generations. There are, as always, exceptions to this general classification: in the Italian Australian context, there are a few examples of first-stage fiction and several examples of second and third generations writing biographies and autobiographies (see Rando 2004, Chapter 3). In this essay, I will limit my discussion to works by three women writers (each representative of a different generation): namely, Rosa Cappiello, Anna Maria Dell’oso and Melina Marchetta.

Rosa Cappiello, born in Naples in 1942, migrated to Australia in the early 1970s, and worked and wrote in Sydney until she moved back to Italy in the early 1990s (Rando 2004:84) where she lived until her recent death on 4 September 2008 (Austlit n.d.). Her best-known novel, Paese fortunato (1981), achieved critical acclaim and commercial success in Italy, winning the Premio Calabria and selling 70,000 copies in its first month. The title of the novel recalls the title of Donald Horne’s famous book, The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties (1966). Although meant ironically by its author, the words from Horne’s title have been interpreted as an affirmation of the Australian way of
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life, and have been used in numerous ways to describe everything that is great about Australia. Cappiello’s parodic account of life in Australia from the point of view of an Italian migrant reinforces the original irony of Horne’s title, as is underscored by the use of the interjection in the English version of the novel’s title: Oh Lucky Country (1984). Cappiello’s work is interesting because, although she is a first generation migrant, her writing is more that of the second-stage “militant protester” rather than the first-stage “local colourist” as evidenced by her forceful criticism of the perceived restrictions imposed on the migrant by the societal norms of the dominant culture.

Anna Maria Dell’oso, born in Melbourne in 1956 of parents who migrated to Australia from Abruzzo, encapsulates the experience and attitudes of the so-called second-generation migrant writers. This contradictory term reflects a social reality that stems from Australia’s post-war immigration program, which has resulted in large numbers of Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds who, as the children of immigrants, are “living two cultures” as both second-generation Australians and second-generation migrants (Wilson 2007:149). Dell’oso, who describes herself as writing “invented autobiography” or “invented oral history” (in interview with Scarpato and Wilson 2005), narrates both her own stories and those of other hybrid subjects in the two volumes published almost a decade apart: Cats, Cradles and Chamomile Tea (1989) and Songs of the Suitcase (1998). In so doing, she becomes a third-stage “hyphenate” writer: able to travel from the margin to the mainstream, and sharing the intellectual and cultural heritage of both dominant and ethnic groups.

Born in 1965, Melina Marchetta is a third generation Italian Australian who grew up in Sydney. Her first novel, Looking for Alibrandi (1992) has enjoyed considerable success (published in 14 countries and translated into 11 languages, including into Italian with the title Terza generazione). Marchetta has since published Saving Francesca (2003, translated into Italian with the title Il mondo in briciole) and On the Jellicoe Road (2006), both of which have received popular and critical acclaim (cf. Marchetta n.d.). It could be argued that Marchetta’s writing is representative of the “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979) connected with the upward mobility of third and successive generations of migrant descent.

Dislocated subjects

When considering what preconditions are necessary for the acceptance of migrants, discursive spaces and the imaginary dimension are no less important than the material conditions of daily life. Using the concept of ‘space’ as a central theme, in what follows I discuss the way new spaces of self-representation are created in narratives by these three authors, focusing in particular on the narrator’s relationship to the spaces of their everyday life.

Migrant narratives are often hybrid texts that signify and explore cultural interaction and relations of power. The tensions arising from this process are vocalized in Rosa Cappiello’s Paese fortunato (1981), an autobiographical novel that recounts the narrator’s bilingual and bicultural migrant experiences. Cappiello, who writes in her native Italian, is one of the first non Anglo-Celtic ‘migrant’ writers to rewrite the ‘us and them’ dialectic (cf. Gunew, 1985). In Paese fortunato the subject position does not
correspond to the hitherto expected Anglo-Australian narratorial position: rather the ‘I’ is that of the ‘other’ who, speaking from “the bottom of the heap”, “sweeps away all clichés about being a migrant” (Gunew 1985:518). The migrant, usually placed in an inferior position in the social order, here acquires power through language and, more specifically, through an invective that is all the more unsettling because it is atypical of first-generation migrant writers. While Cappiello’s stated aim is to “integrate in my writing two cultures, two civilisations: Europe and a continent growing up – Australia” (in interview with Pertosi 1984:59), it is evident that she struggles to find an appropriate language into which to translate more than one culture and knowledge base. The result is a narrative, which, in crossing borders (of nations, cultures, ethnicities), exhibits the aesthetics of interruption and dissonance, and reflects the narrator Rosa’s contradictory and often ambiguous relationship with the spaces in her life.

In a most obvious sense, Rosa, the narrator of Paese fortunato, is caught between two spaces – Italy and Australia – and two ways of life. Rosa’s “ethnoscape”, “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (Appadurai 1990:7), is characterized by instability, short-lived and unsatisfying relationships, squalor and loneliness, all against the backdrop of a discordant mix of races and ethnicities: “un immenso immondezzaio”, in which migrants are “affraterniti e imparentati dal cordone ombelicale dello sputtanare, arraffare, calpestare, disonorare” (1981:40). While Rosa vigorously resists translation into the norms and values of her new home, it is clear that she also feels alienated from Italy, particularly from the Italians around her in Sydney, who are portrayed as ignorant, backward, chauvinist and “abbarbicati ai feticci” (1981:150). Appadurai has noted the tendency among the “deterritorialized” to create “invented homelands”, held together through memories and cultural events that can provide the contact people miss from home (1990:11-12). Rosa, however, distances herself from the Italian-Australian community: she finds the ethnic neighbourhoods inhibiting and stifling, permeated by “un fiuto petrificato” (1981:10) and refuses to share their absorption with “un passato che fa a calci col presente” (1981:150).

It is evident that Cappiello’s work, which, as already noted, does not fit neatly into the categories ascribed to first-generation migrant writers, opens up important cultural spaces. Her writing promotes the value of deconstructive, as opposed to merely descriptive, representations of experiences of displacement: it interrogates the social and cultural boundaries that inform both the production of meaning and also its relation to the social processes of (individual) subject formation. It draws attention to the fact that while place and displacement are crucial features of migrant writing, what is not always recognised is that, as in post-colonial discourse (Rushdie 1991), place does not necessarily equate to landscape. “Place” in the writing of hyphenate authors is “a complex intersection of language, history and environment. [...] in constant flux, a discourse in process” (Ashcroft et al.1995:391), as is vividly portrayed by Anna Maria Dell’oso in her reflections on what it means to scale “the Linguistic Wall of Indifference”:

Translating comes easily to me after a lifetime of crossing both sides of the language barrier, Australia’s Great Wall of Indifference which is protected by the barbed wire of custom and the watchdogs of a savage schoolyard education.
Since babyhood I have been crossing this Wall. Sometimes, however, I don’t duck quickly enough across the firing lines of English and Ethnic. Sometimes I get stuck on one side of the Wall, usually English [...]. At other times I am caught in the middle watching the bullets whistle past. The no-man’s land where migrants’ kids retreat continually changes its geography [...]. To be split between two cultures gives you a passport to both sides of the Wall. But during a war you’re either on one side or the other or in exile (1989:77).

Like Cappiello, Dell’oso finds it impossible to reconcile the two sides because she is an outsider in both the “Ethnic” and the “English” spaces. Unlike Cappiello, Dell’oso recognises that “[e]veryday stories can tell us what one can do [in a shifting geography]. They are treatments of space” (De Certeau 1984:122). The relationship between space and story-telling is brought home to Dell’oso on her “return” trip to the Abruzzi, described in “Once Upon a Country”, where she meets a third generation Italian-American who is obsessed by the need “to work out his place in the past” (1989:92). The I-narrator observes:

From adopted children to immigrants and refugees, all people need to know from where they come in order to be able to give something to the present. The past needs to be respected, the stories need to be told (1989: 100-1).

Not only does one’s place in the present depend upon the stories one tells about one’s past; the stories become the elective ‘place’ – especially for the atopos stranger – of relation and interaction with others.

**Houses and homes**

The fundamental, arguably intractable, problems that obstruct any attempt to understand the imaginative construction of place are perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the fraught representation of home/homeland, exemplified in Paese fortunato by Rosa’s contradictory attitude: at times she rhapsodizes about the beauty of Australia: “Pur pensando spesso a casa mia, all’altra casa mia, veramente mia [...] io desideravo crepare qua in bellezza e armonia” (1981:194), yet elsewhere in the text she bitterly declares: “Questa [l’Australia] non sarà mai una casa. Non sarà mai un rifugio per chi non è pecora” (1981:117). Cappiello finds comfort in the natural beauty of the Australian landscape, as evidence by the oft-quoted opening lines of the novel “Il cielo qui è una rivalsa contro la solitudine. Azzurro annuvolato. Annuvolato azzurro. Azzurro azzurro [...l]e spiagge meravigliose” (1981:7, 9). However, suburban Sydney is represented as dismal and lifeless: “le case tutte uguali, rassomigliano ancora più a cappelle mortuarie e, dentro, sempre un odore di gatti morti. Redfern [...] e tanti altri suburbs, paiono edificati con criterio cimiteriale” (1981:29-30). Rosa’s own homes in Sydney are without exception squalid and miserable, and she oscillates between longing to live alone so that she can write, and missing the communal life of shared lodgings. Throughout the novel,
she is unlucky enough to have to move from house to house: at times because she is unable to pay the rent, at others because her seedy lodgings become unbearable. Once again Cappiello’s narrative provides a contrast to traditional first-generation stories in which the house is a recurrent motif embodying the ever-present aspiration to security and belonging, to stability and affluence.

An aspiration which surfaces regularly in Dell’oso’s narratives: in several stories, the *topos* of the house is associated both with the material basis to escape the initial conditions of exclusion and poverty, and with the ways in which her family imagined the structural boundaries of “home”. In the story “Homeland”, whose title is an explicit revelation of intent, Dell’oso delineates how the notion of “homeland” becomes synonymous with that of “home” (that is, a domestic rather than a public space). The I-narrator is looking after her parents’ house while they take their first trip back to Italy after thirty-six years of hard labour, raising children and paying off mortgages in “blood and sweat” (1998:160). She recalls that, during all that time, all they had wanted was to sell up and return to Italy, “as if they were renting this country” (1998:160). The analogy between “rented country” and rented house (temporary accommodation) is clear: despite living in Australia for most of their adult lives, they did not feel that they ‘owned’ a home/land (‘national’ identity). The narrator, who does not know where her own “heart’s land” lies (1998:162), worries that if her parents decide not to return she will lose her link to her other home/land:

I belong to the masses outside, married to a man with no Italian, raising children who will never wear the Communion veil, tread the grapes, sing the old songs. Yet I am loyal to my parents’ house. […] Outside the gates, I stand as the last of my people. […] If my parents go, the Old Country inside me vanishes with them, leaving me wondering where I am, where I’ve been, where I’m going (1998:161–62)

When the letter arrives to tell her they are, in fact, coming back, the narrator/author, reflecting on her parent’s two “return journeys”, first to Italy and then back to Australia, realizes that returning “to a place where you understand that you cannot go home again, is part of the process of creating the inner and outer geographies of home” (2000:814).

As is evident from stories like “Homeland”, nation and family are intricately linked in Dell’oso’s writing. The family constitutes a direct link between the realms of the psychological and the social through its direct metaphorical link to nation: it’s a relationship that “can be deciphered from the ways in which language describes its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship […] or that of home” (Anderson 1983:143). An example of the latter is again provided by “Once upon a Country”, in which Dell’oso recalls the family’s first Australian home: “In the early days we lived on the main street of Collingwood, an industrial inner suburb of Melbourne” (1989:78). The interior of the “dark old house in Collingwood” is described in a later story, “Song of the Suitcase”: the house was equipped with “a Simpson’s wringer washing machine […] a crate of tomatoes from a paesano’s orchard at Greensborough” and a “green-enamelled Kooka gas stove” (1998:54–55). Cultural branding is usually communicated by reference to food and popular culture items, and the historical context of brands can alter rapidly. However,
there are also many brand names that have, over time, become recognised for their partnership with certain cultural practices. Nostalgia for these brands and the cultural practices associated with them implants them within the cultural ideology of a nation. This house and its appliances, a recurring motif in Dell’oso’s stories, typifies the representation of domestic space as a way of articulating a search that is simultaneously geographical, cultural, intellectual, emotional and creative: a search for a ‘place in the world’. The juxtaposition of household appliances with Australian brand names and the “tomatoes” stereotypically associated with Italian migrant culture (cf. Marchetta 1992:171) accentuates the juxtaposition of identities and the coexistence of divergent iconographies.

Dell’oso’s descriptions of the family homes also reflect the class mobility that is a distinct characteristic of the successive generations (Megalogenis 2003):

Our family lived in each of [Uncle] Alf’s houses when we were growing up, starting from when my father first brought my mother out from Italy in 1953; La casa di Collivud e La Casa di Chiu were stations of the cross on our journey through Australian life, a kind of circle through the Melbourne suburbs to finally arrive at the Italianate marble Franco Cozzo palazzo of our parents’ dreams (Dell’oso 1993:44).

The “marble-balustraded castello in the Melbourne suburbs” located “at the end of a street full of marble balustrades and crouching lions” is the house that her parents “wanted, worked for, built, the palace of their exile of fortune” (1998:161-62). The family home provides the structural boundaries of the Italianità that the parents enculture. The house displays physical traits associated with an Italian presence while enabling traditions to be shared across the generations. In Dell’oso’s writing, domestic spaces reflect the appropriation of materials to construct identities and ways of belonging within the political conditions of the present. In these terms the domestic spaces can be interpreted as a context in which the cultural preferences and practices of different generations are valued and legitimated.

The discourse of home/house is also linked to the changing class, social and occupational positions of Italians in Australia, and, in particular to intergenerational mobility (Vasta 1992:160-62; Megalogenis 2003:10-12). It is a discourse that circulates in many second- and third-generation narratives as exemplified in Looking for Alibrandi where social respectability is based primarily on the attainment of wealth. The socio-economic make-up of the exclusive Catholic girls’ school attended by the protagonist is “dominated by rich people” and “rich Europeans” (Marchetta 1992:6). The differentiation is one based on ethnic background: the former have been wealthy and part of the Anglo-Australian establishment for several generations, the latter are those migrants who have worked hard as unskilled labourers (for the most part) to fulfil their aspirations to move out of the inner city suburbs and provide their children with expensive educations in order to attain respectability and facilitate upward social mobility. Thus, in Alibrandi questions of identity (collective and personal identity) can be understood as relating to boundaries on the one hand (ethnicity, ‘race’, gender) and hierarchies on the other (class, social positions). This view acknowledges that identification is an enactment that does
not necessarily entail fixity or permanence as well as recognising the role of the local and contextual (location and position) in the processes involved.

The rhetoric of location

As several cultural theorists have noted, spatial rhetoric as a mode of thought suggests fluid and flexible ways of being that posit identity as relational, situational and interactive – the result of an ongoing process of becoming. The rhetoric of location thus assumes an agency that continually negotiates an identity and actions that constitute it within the limits of the social order, effectively corresponding to a rhetoric of multi-positionality (Friedman 1998). The rhetoric of migration – as a form of geopolitical rhetoric – relies on both the metaphors of nation and borders to reflect on the meanings of immigration, constant travel back and forth, and diaspora for spatial modes of thinking about identity. As the body moves through space, crossing borders of all kinds, identity acquires sedimented and palimpsestic layers each of which reflects the location through which the person has moved, each of which exerts some influence on the other layers and on identity as a whole. This is the case for the main characters in Looking for Alibrandi for whom “the personal is political, in the sense that [their] embracing of plurality, their questioning of social structures, values and prejudices, and their experiencing of alienation and isolation all have transcendental significance in terms of the Australian multicultural experience” (Fernàndez 2001:40).

Melina Marchetta weaves together the story of three generations of women, Katia the first generation migrant, her daughter Christina and her granddaughter Josephine Alibrandi (Josie). Each in her own way struggles against the double standards of their Italian community, while trying to find a sense of place within Australian society. Josie feels she “had it worst. My mother was born here so as far as the Italians were concerned we weren’t completely one of them. Yet because my grandparents were born in Italy we weren’t completely Australian” (1992:7). Josie’s reference to the limitations imposed upon her by “my society” (1992:40) is deliberately ambiguous: the reference could be either to the restrictions she feels placed upon her by her Italian family and community or to the stereotyping to which she is subjected by the Anglo-Australian mainstream due to that very same Italian background.

The binary opposition of Anglo-Australia as distinct from Italo-Australia is central to the narrative framework of Looking for Alibrandi (1992:250-251). Initially Josie feels that as she does not belong entirely to either of these worlds, she should learn to negotiate a balance between the two cultures in order to become a ‘cultural broker’. What is interesting here is that the experiences of Christina, the ‘second-generation migrant’ are not really explored in the narrative, while Josie, who belongs to the third generation (like the author) seems to embody all the feelings of “cultural ambivalence”, attributed to the children of migrants:

Many of the second generation grow up with the experience of ‘cultural ambivalence’ which, during the uncertainties of adolescence, can provide the basis for severe conflicts between parents and children. The second generation are also involved in the
process of developing identities which have to deal with racism. As adults, they become ‘cultural brokers’ who, in a variety of ways, represent their communities and negotiate Australian institutions as well as socio-political and cultural practices (Vasta 1992:155).

Burnley (2001) argues that there is a significant decline in ethnic identification and cultural practice with the third and subsequent generations, and an increasing tendency to identify as Australian, despite an awareness of ethnic heritage. However, Italian Australian narratives often depict cultural maintenance and negotiation into the third generation. This can be largely attributed to strong relationships between members of the first and third generations. In *Looking for Alibrandi*, Josie’s relationship with her grandmother is a source of conflict and tension, but Christina persistently stresses the importance of frequent contact between Josie and Nonna Katia, and by the narrative’s close there is a promise of the forging of a strong relationship based upon mutual cultural and personal understanding.

For migrant descendants, “[e]thnic symbols are frequently individual cultural practices that are taken from the older ethnic culture; they are ‘abstracted’ from that culture and pulled out of its original moorings […] to become stand-ins for it” (Gans, 1979:195). Typically, the place where ethnicity flourishes is in the family where it is nourished and sustained. In this sense, it could be argued that *Looking for Alibrandi* shows how, through generational change, Italian Australians have moved from “being” Italian to “feeling” Italian; that is, they have moved to a symbolic ethnicity. The demonstration of symbolic ethnicity in every-day life is a more elusive concept than the identity expressed by first-generation migrants. In Marchetta’s narrative, this complex relationship is examined through a rhetoric of location linked to a series of affective places. *Looking for Alibrandi* is played out in the sprawling urban Sydney of the 1990s. The named places range from those associated with particular communities - Glebe, to which Josie feels anchored (“I’m always going to be a little ethnic from Glebe”, 167) and Leichardt (Sydney’s Little Italy) where Christina is employed as a bilingual medical secretary for an Italian Australian doctor – to trendy meeting places, such as Darling Harbour, site of Harley’s where Josie and her friends “hang out” together with the “students from schools all around the inner-city area” (139).

The complex intersection of space with ethnic and cultural difference is further explored through Josie’s relationship with Jacob Coote. Jacob doesn’t conform to Josie’s binary worldview; although Anglo-Australian, he is from a working-class, single-parent background, attends the local state school and lives in Redfern, an inner-city suburb of Sydney, known for its socially disadvantaged community mostly consisting of Australian Aboriginal people. The Redfern ‘Block’ was one of the first pieces of land in urban Australia to be owned by Indigenous people when it was purchased for Indigenous housing in 1973 and is widely considered a symbol of the ability of Indigenous people to maintain their identity in an urban situation (Australian Heritage Database, n.d.). The location ‘Redfern’ is, therefore, much more than a mere geographical reference – it is a significant cultural referent within Australian society, politics and identity. When Josie finds out that Jacob lives there, she says: “Redfern. Do you know that I’ve been in this country all my life and I’ve never spoken to an Aboriginal person?” To which Jacob replies “Come to Redfern. I’ll introduce you to a few. I don’t know much about Italians.
either” (1992: 63). The cultural context embedded in this example is critical because it highlights, in just a few short sentences, both the existence and relative inaccessibility of (multi)culture in Australia, where one lives among individuals, families and communities of many diverse cultures yet contact with these (multi)cultures can be difficult, rejected or ignored. It is interesting to note here that Josie has had constant, deep and familiar contact with an ethnic culture (Italian) but has never met an Aboriginal person: an Indigenous person from the country in which lives. Conversely, Jacob lives among a large distribution of Aboriginal people but knows little about the Italians, one of the largest migrant groups present in Australia. This, then, is a clear instance of how places are always contingent upon the human actors who inhabit them. A space might be inhabited by multiple communities and be constituted as a series of very distinct places by each group. Places of local community, of national memory, exist only in the plural: they are consensually imagined, realised and maintained. Indeed, one might say that one of the functions of community is to instantiate places as places. And reciprocally, communities are themselves constituted by the places they come to inhabit.

With regard to personal identity, the role model in the novel is Michael Andretti, the father who has only recently come into Josie’s life, and who embodies the palimpsestic layers of identity of the mobile hybrid subject: a successful barrister he has achieved upward social mobility, while remaining an accepted member of the Italian Australian community. Not surprisingly the house he buys in Sydney is ideally located:

Balmain has the loveliest pubs, bookshops and inexpensive restaurants and there’s a strong sense of history attached to it. Michael’s house was a small sandstone terrace, even tinier than ours, with a room added to the top that Michael said would be mine when I stayed. It had the most enchanting garden and I pictured being able to do so much with it (1992: 245-246).

This home forms the locus of the new relationship between parent and child – one that is able to signify connectedness both to other times and places (“sense of history”) and to a promising future (the garden with which Josie hopes to “do so much”). It is an interesting example both of the way identities are territorialised and of how place and social/affective processes are complexly intertwined.

In the concluding chapter, Josie summarises the shifts that have occurred in her personal relationships and the effects these have had upon her personal and ethnic identity. Significantly, in the context of avoiding ghettoizing labels, Marchetta does not use the category Italian Australian to define Josie’s “emancipation”, but rather tries to show that Josie has acquired a more inclusive understanding of Australianness within the framework of multiculturalism:

Well, I’m not sure whether anyone in this country will ever understand multiculturalism and that saddens me because it’s as much a part of Australian life as football and meat-pies. But the important thing is that I know where my place in life is. […] If someone comes up and asks me what nationality I am, I’ll look at them and say that I’m an Australian with Italian blood flowing
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rapidly through my veins. I’ll say that with pride, because it’s pride
that I feel (258-259).

There is a conflation of inherited identity and acquired identity (a sense of place): Josie’s
*italianità* is internalised and ‘gives life’ to her Australian identity. Rather than feeling
‘split’ between her two cultures, she has successfully undergone a process of
“transculturation” (Ortiz 1996). Unlike acculturation, which generally implies the loss of
one’s language, culture, history, and tradition, transculturation seeks to overcome that
loss by mutual interchange of language and culture and instead represents a series of
complex processes of adjustment and re-creation – cultural, literary, linguistic, and
personal – that allow for new, vital configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures.

**Intergenerational, intertextual and intercultural dialogues**

The narratives discussed above represent the articulation of a politics of identity across
multiple spaces and places of identification and belonging. Broadly speaking, these
narratives “represent a conscious effort to transmit a [...] cultural heritage that is
articulated through acts of personal and collective memory” (Seyhan 2001:12). The
crucial difference between these kinds of texts and those representing earlier stages of
hyphenated writing is that in these texts non Anglo-Australian writers use their
transnationalist perspective to reveal that transculturation rather than ghettoization or
assimilation is the norm nowadays. Through the rhetoric of location, (the representation
of ‘home’, for example, as both a material space and a space of discourse) these writers
clearly articulate a cultural identity that is neither wholly Italian (however we define it)
nor wholly Australian. They express no absolute loyalty to either culture of origin or
receiving culture but embrace multiplicities of belonging – language, geographical,
complexities of dual/multiple ‘homes’. If these writers have something in common, it is
the representation of a cultural interchange that has the potential to re-invigorate both
society of origin and society of destination. For the second and third generations, the
point of comparison and reference has shifted from Italy, the society of origin for their
parents, to Australia, the society of destination. Nevertheless, because the role played by
collective memory is to transmit both the historical facts that led to the migration and a
cultural heritage, the writing of second (and third) generation ‘migrants’ articulates the
real or imagined past of a community in all its symbolic transformations, including that of
an imagined homeland.

The cultural interchange is perhaps most apparent in the case of Cappiello and
Marchetta. Cappiello’s novel, *Paese fortunato*, is one of the few stories on emigration to
be published by a major publishing house (Feltrinelli) and while it has not been reprinted
it is considered “un caso letterario” and still continues to feature in Italian cultural
contexts: most recently, it was included in the exhibition “Storie di migranti” held at the
Biblioteca Sala Borsa (Bologna) in September 2008 (cf. online catalogue). In Australia,
two editions of the English version, *Oh Lucky Country*, have been issued (1984:2003) and
the book has been included as one of the 25 works available online in the Classic
Australian Works project. Thus, despite her return to Italy in the 1990s, Cappiello’s
significant contribution to Australian literature continues to be recognised: she has been
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included in a group consisting of “many of Australia’s most influential writers” and her novel is considered “among the most important books for the study of Australian literature”.¹ The Italian translations of Melina Marchetta’s first two novels, the programmatically entitled Terza generazione (1999; reprinted 2002) and Il mondo in briciole (2004) were published by another major Italian publisher (Mondadori) and they have both been included in the “Bibliografia di base del libro per ragazzi”, which includes texts recommended for the libraries of Italian Secondary Schools. In the case of Anna Maria dell’oso, I would argue that, like many other bicultural/multicultural writers searching for an identity, she helps to redefine the relationship of the margin to the centre by “rewriting” national identities and moving them towards transnational ones.

In each case, because the narratives chosen for analysis are, as I have argued elsewhere, on the cusp of autobiography and fiction (Scarparo and Wilson 2004:8; Wilson 2007), they simultaneously challenge and encourage the reader to conflate author, narrator and protagonist, thereby providing more nuanced representations of Italian Australian identities and experiences than those works that can be clearly categorised either as (auto)biographies or fiction. A final interesting observation is that the three generations of women in Looking for Alibrandi are, arguably, a textual mirroring of the three writers chosen for discussion (the generational distinction being the obvious one of biological age but also of experiential difference). Thus, the dialogue within the works and between the works of the three writers could be said to reveal a principle of literary genealogy that emerges from direct references to domestic spaces and, more obliquely, from themes and experiences echoed and recast across generations of women. When juxtaposed, the stories speak to each other across generations and reveal a distinctive strategy of representation – the rhetoric of location – in which spatiality functions as a symbolic conduit between the plotting of identity constructions and Italian Australian realities.

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¹ See www.sup.usyd.edu.au/projects_cal_authors.html

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