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Expressions of the Calabrian diaspora in Calabrian Australian writing*

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Paolo Cinanni's (1968 and 1974) socio-historical studies of mass migration from Calabria between 1860 and 1970 have been augmented and enhanced by Pasquino Crupi's work (1979, 1993-1997, 2002a, 2002b) on the articulation of themes related to this phenomenon in modern and contemporary Calabrian literature. As Joseph Pivato's (2004) paper shows for Canada, Calabrians in the diaspora too have also given literary articulation to the migration experience and its consequences.

Calabrian Australians constitute the second largest Italian regional group (the largest being the Sicilians) and according to community estimates currently number approximately 70000 of which about 38000 are Calabrian born. They have distinguished themselves in Australia mainly in the economic sector such as the many small businesses and the few large ones established by Calabrians while many of the second generation have experienced upwards socioeconomic mobility by entering the professions (solicitors, certified practicing accountants, doctors). One outstanding collective example is the contribution of Calabrians, mainly from Platì, to the development of farming in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (a little less than half of the Italian population of Griffith is of Calabrian origin, the other half is mainly comprised of people from the Veneto region). A few have made their mark in other fields such as Giovanni Sgrò who has made a substantial contribution to the trade union movement in Victoria and over 1979-1992 was a senator in the Victorian state parliament, Morris Iemma who is currently premier of NSW, Joe Avati Sydney born internationally recognised comedian. Fewer still, together with migrants from other Italian regions such as novelists Rosa Cappiello (Campania) and Anthony Casella (Sicily) and poets Lino Concas (Sardinia) and Mariano Coreno (Lazio), have also produced poetry, fiction, memoirs, film and theatre on the migration experience. In the present state of research there are some 17 first generation and some 13 second and third generation known Calabrian Australian writers who between 1959 and 2002 have produced some 36 volumes of literary texts as well as a few hundred texts published in various anthologies. An in-depth systematic study (outside the scope of this paper) would probably reveal substantially larger numbers both of writers and texts.

This paper proposes to explore the extent to which texts produced by writers who are currently known to be of Calabrian origin demonstrate marked characteristics of what might be termed a Calabrian Australian migration experience. Its point of departure are the theoretical and cultural issues raised by Joseph Pivato and Snwja Gunew relating to the attendant cultural dislocations of writers whose geographical and/or cultural traditions are based in NESB contexts and proposing a return to questions of both origins and belonging given that interrogations of the national emerge from both local communities and global diasporas. The way ahead in terms of analyzing cultural texts of any kind seems to be to denaturalize the classificatory categories invoked to

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stabilize and legitimate all types of nation-building.

A number of general theoretical issues examined by Homi Bhabha (1990a and 1990b) can also be considered relevant to this topic. Bhabha discusses the ambivalent, nature of national culture which is “neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself” (Bhabha 1990a:4) and argues that minority discourse as a subaltern voice of the people can transcend time and space (Bhabha 1990b:309). It is in fact the possibility of cultural contestation posited by cultural difference that has the ability to shift the ground of knowledges (Bhabha 1990b:313).

Sneja Gunew’s position is based on both postcolonial and critical multiculturalist as well as feminist theoretical approaches. In her recent book *Haunted nations* (Gunew 2004) she argues that 'multiculturalism' is a term that acquires very different meanings depending on the local and national contexts and histories within which it circulates. With regard to the Australian cultural context Gunew has consistently argued (a recent example being Gunew 2003) for the need to re-examine the canon of Australian literature to include ‘minority’ literature (consistently excluded by the Australian literary canon) in order to obtain a full picture of the meaning of Australianness since there cannot be a full understanding of Australian culture and identity without the inclusion of ‘minority’ cultures. Minority cultures are seen as constituting a counter-public sphere that qualifies and irerrogates the authorisations represented by the “discursive formations of legitimizing and institutionally endorsed public statements” (Gunew 1990:100) that comprise the public sphere. What has happened and continues to happen in Australia is that “the emphasis on *cultural* pluralism has often functioned to obscure class differences and has pre-empted the possibilities for *structural* pluralism” (Gunew 1990:110). Non-Anclo-Celtic writing is consequently not usually received as literature (Gunew 1990:113) given its potention to disrupt established perceived concepts of cultural identity. Appling Ginew’s general considerations to Calabrian Australian writers it could be argued that these writers provide a one of the many non-centralist views of Australian culture and identity as also of Italian culture and identity. This later point is also widely discussed in (1993-1997, 2002a) work on Calabrian writers in Italy.

Pivato's theoretical approach is through polysystem theory and on this basis he proposes that Italian Canadian writing and the literatures of other minority groups should be read in the context of cultural difference, social change and political reform. Among the central questions that he explores in his writings are those relating to language, immigration, the ethnic writer and ethnic history. Pivato (1994) points out that minority writers write about what most concerns them, although their writing may also transcend the routine aspects of everyday living, and that these concerns are usually presented in a quite transparent way, hence the popularity of social realist narrative, and autobiographical narrative. An important function of this literature is to break the silence, the “oral void” (Bhabha 1990b:316), that has been imposed by the process of emigration, seen as the quintessential experience of our time that fragments families and identity, and creates dislocation. In this context Pivato develops a discourse proposed by Bernard Mouralis (1978:58) who argues that 'marginal' and 'mainstream' literatures are really two sides of the same coin. The fundamental distinction is not so much one of quality, form and readership but rather one determined by society: literary works are placed in the 'high' (or 'official') literature category because they are perceived as being in some way connected with the society's power structure; those not perceived as such are placed outside this category

becoming what Pivato has termed “other literatures, literatures of otherness.” However these 'other literatures' can in turn lead to a shift in the literary paradigm in that their basis is one of cultural difference which is a process of signification rather than comparison. In presenting this argument Pivato bridges a significant lacuna in literary theory by introducing a category of literary production that is multilingual and cross-cultural. Pivato (2004) takes this one step further by arguing that ethnic minority writers have changed Canada’s national literature into a pluralistic one and that Calabrian writers are part of this transformation. Despite an estimated 260,000 people of Calabrian background, little has been written about them or their cultural impact on Canadian society and while their influence has been largely economic Pivato (2004) points out that “economic success does not always help us to understand who we are. We must turn to the artist to explore questions of identity” as indeed some writers do by questioning not only the nature of identity for those who have migrated but also whether the experience of the diaspora should lead to a revaluation of Italian identity.

As with other ‘minority’ writing Calabrian Australian writing too represents a counter-discursive element to the extent that it functions to interrogate and destabilize hegemonic views of nation as well as the temporal and spatial dislocations resulting from the mapping of two overlapping cultural contexts.

The two most prolific Calabrian Australian writers are two cousins Luigi Strano, known mainly for his poetry, and Alfredo Strano who has produced memoirs, biographies and a novel.

Luigi Strano was born at Castellace di Oppido Mamertina (province of Reggio Calabria) in 1913 and migrated to Sydney in 1929 where, over the years, he achieved a secure and respected socio-economic position. However Luigi did not aspire to live by bread alone and through his literary activity has earned recognition as one of the leading Italian Australian first generation poets having published twenty volumes of poetry and two volumes of memoirs. He is one of four first generation Italian poets to be included in Niscioli’s (1996) thesis and has received a Master of Arts *honoris causa* from the University of Wollongong for his literary achievements.

Shortly after his arrival in Australia Luigi learned English, Latin, Greek and German and, using the pseudonym “Lino Gras(s)uti,” began to publish poetry in Italian Australian newspapers such as *Il Giornale italiano* and *The Italo-Australian.* Initially his texts (sonnets, *canzoni*, and ballads) were written in literary Italian are generically closely modeled on the Italian classical literary canon. Throughout the 1930s stylistic and thematic changes led him to progressively adopt a more “modern” approach and to write not only in Italian but also in English, Calabrian and Latin. This change can be noted in poems such as “Giardini bui” (in Rando 1983:124-125), written in 1934, in which the dark and desolate atmosphere of a nightly walk through the park next to Sydney’s central station evokes a series of existential reflections on the fears and uncertainties of life in those economically and personally troubled times.

Over the years Luigi Strano has developed as a poet without regrets or nostalgia who has been able to assimilate and adapt not only traditional and modern Italian poetry but also English and Anglo-Australian poetry to achieve his own brand of free and profound literary communication. His poetry explores a wide and varied range of

themes expressed with rare unembellished sincerity. These themes include the everyday realities as well as the existential aspects of the diaspora, the relationship with his native land and his adopted country, nature, Australian society, Italian migrants' reactions and attitudes towards Australians. But Strano's poetry also embraces more "universal" themes about life, love and philosophy. Life is seen as a rocky road that leads to a succession of painful and joyous experiences but that whatever happens needs to be lived to the full and at the highest level of one's humanity since "è tutto ciò che abbiamo" [it's all we have] ("La vita non è ombra" in Rando 1983:126).

Feelings and attitudes towards his native land are complex and not without contradiction. They range from the denunciation of the hate and violence endemic in his native Calabria to the realization that the place and its meaning can never be forgotten even though returning there can be a mixed experience of sadness and joy. The town of his birth Castellace is in an area traditionally notorious for *'ndrangheta* (the Calabrian version of the Mafia) activity where violence is a way of life and "i rancori qui si levano col sangue, / e il sangue / poi si vendica / col sangue" [here grudges are washed in blood / and blood / then is avenged / with blood] ("Castellace" (in Strano L 1959a:8). Despite this devastating appraisal of a situation that has forced many of its inhabitants to migrate elsewhere, the memory of his birthplace persists even after many years in Australia. The poem "La mia terra" (in Rando 1983:127) evokes a powerful image of the sights and sounds of the past still very much alive in the present ("Ancora ho negli orecchi / la nenia delle cornamuse / il campano delle capre / i limpidi orizzonti / vedo chiudendo gli occhi / col fumo dell'Etna e dello Stromboli / la madonnina al bivio / con le offerte di fiori appassiti" [The singsong of the pipes / the bell of the goats / still ring in my ears / when I close my eyes / I see the clear horizons / with the smoke of Etna and Stromboli / the little statue of the Madonna at the crossroads / with its offerings of dried-up flowers]). This daydream-like vision of his birthplace cannot be suppressed "anche quando non c'è alcuna / ragione di amarlo" [even when there is no / reason to love it] and the poet's love is focused on the new land that has accepted him. Return to the native land now depleted of its human resources by migration and negatively changed by "man with his machines" however disrupts the dream bringing the realisation of the hardships of the past that constituted another reason for leaving ("Ritorno al paese desolato / dei miei giovani anni, / ricordando ancor le punture / dei ricci di castagne / per le scarpe rotte" [I return to the desolate town / of my young years / still remembering the sting / of the chestnut spikes / through my broken shoes] ("Homecoming" in Rando 1986:79).

Equally complex are feelings and attitudes towards his adopted country. Initially Strano identifies with the urban environment. In "Sydney"(in Rando 1983:126), written in 1940, Sydney is perceived as the city of his dreams whose memory "will always be the nearest to my heart" taking precedence over the memory of his native land. Despite this, acceptance is never complete. Drawing on an image derived from the peasant culture of his native Calabria Strano writes in a later poem ("Il fico" in Rando 1986:81): "Pianto spesso nell'orto / il fico, / il dolce fico / della nostra terra, / ma simile / a molti di noi / poveri trapianti umani / vegeta bene / ma raramente dà frutto." [I often plant in my garden / the fig tree / the sweet fig / of our land, / but like many of us / poor human transplants / it grows well / but rarely gives fruit]

Over time it is rural rather than urban Australia that increasingly inspires Strano's poetry. Although the Australian natural setting can present cruel and tragic aspects

that render "dura / qui l'esistenza / anche per gli alberi" [existence /hard here / even for the trees] (“Bush fire” in Rando-Andreoni 1973:350), its wide open spaces, the welcoming landscape, the untainted sky and the primordial bush can often provide a setting for serene contemplation, a sense of peace and stability, a place for thought and philosophy: “To stay sane / I must feel / the rugged bushland / beneath my feet / see a wallaby or two, / the lyre-bird, / and quench my thirst / at Zircon Creek” (“Zircon Creek” in Strano L 1986b:6). In the majestic environment of Mount Wilson in the Blue Mountains, an area that has some similarity to the Aspromonte mountains of his native Calabria, where he has been living since the mid 1970s, Strano reflects that of his life in Australia “forse / non tutto è stato / invano” [perhaps / not everything has been / in vain] (“Forse non tutto è stato invano” in Rando 1983:128). It is in this setting that Strano finds a potential equilibrium to the dislocation caused by his personal diaspora in an ideal link between past and present and where he can also reach an understanding of the more radical diaspora experienced by indigenous Australians. The poem “To Kath Walker”[1] (in Strano L 1986b:7), expresses how the industrial society resulting from the white man’s occupation of the area that became Sydney has led to the destruction of

> miles and miles of bushland,
> once a paradise of wild flowers
> . . . and haunted by the sound
> of the didgeridoo,
> are now graveyards for old cars
> and garbage dumps!
> Poetry is life,
> and this land of yours is dying
> rubbished and raped by white men:
> how can I possibly wonder
> that you wish to move away?”

Less inviting and encouraging is Australia’s social landscape characterized by the degrading materialism of a Saturday afternoon spent on drinking beer and betting on the horses (“Sabato dopopranzo” in Rando 1986:76). It is a society that leaves little scope for the expression of difference and relegates to the fringe those (migrants, aborigines) who cannot or do not wish to assimilate. “U Pappu a l’Australia” (Strano L 1964: 9), significantly written in Calabrian dialect, is a strikingly realistic and emblematic depiction of the existential anguish of elderly parents brought out to Australia by their children for the sake of family reunion. Australia is an unaccepting and not very compassionate society characterized by the suspicion of difference and with ambivalent attitudes that do not allow the NESB migrant to be certain of his place:

> It all depends
> on what happened yesterday;
> it all depends
> on what the papers say;
> whether today
> you are a wog,
> a New Australian

[1] Strano’s poem is clearly inspired by “We are going” and is significantly prefaced by a quotation from Dante’s *Inferno,* VII, 121-123 where in the fifth circle of hell the hot-tempered and the sloyhful are punished by being immersed in smoking mud.

or an alien
("Australian alien" in Strano L 1986b:6).

Personal relationships, a less direct though related dimension of the diaspora experience, constitute another dominant and constant theme in Strano's work with poems such as "A Phyllis H." (in Strano L 1981:6), "A Fortunato La Rosa" (in Strano L 1984:11), "Eros"(in Rando 1983:129) and "Linda" (in Strano L 1959a:23). This theme predominates in the volume *Elvira* (Strano L 2002), published after the death of his sister, which expresses the memories, the feelings, the reflections, the places, the good and the bad times of a long life spent together.

Like Luigi Strano Pino Sollazzo, born in San Martino in 1953 and emigrated to Melbourne in 1977, looks back to his native land with little nostalgia and with a more critical appraisal of the endemic political and social conditions that have forced millions of its inhabitants to emigrate because of systemic violence, injustice and inept government. It is a land that like much of the Italian south has not benefited from Italy's post-war economic miracle to the extent that it has experienced a substantial exodus in the quarter century after the end of the second world war through migration to the industralised cities of northern Italy as well as to European and extra-European destinations. In his poetry Sollazzo articulates the existential anguish that this phenomenon has created . The South is a land where "Non si può passare più nei campi . . . terre / abbandonate come i nostri vecchi . . ." [You can no longer walk over the fields . . . land / abandoned like our old people] (Sollazzo 1983:7) and where " . . . la bandiera della speranza ha i / colori / delle vane promesse" [the banner of hope has the / colours / of empty promises] (Sollazzo 1983:49-50). Less pessimistic is his perception of Australia, seen as a land of hope its nature and people to a large extent welcoming although workplace relations can be discriminatory and exploitative to the point of causing existentialist anguish ("La mia tendosinovite" in Sollazzo 1983:32).

Less polemical but equally un-nostalgic is the vision of Calabria presented in Sofio (1999). Enza Sofio was born at Cittanova in the province of Reggio Calabria and migrated to Sydney in 1969. A section of her volume of poetry is dedicated to her native region seen as a land rich in culture and natural beauty but much maligned by the other regions of Italy ("Calabria amara" in Sofio 1999:70). While she acknowledges the reasons why many Calabrians including herself have had to leave their native land ("L'Emigrante" in Sofio:74) she nevertheless exhorts her fellow Calabrians not to abandon their region and to work for its social and economic progress ("Gente del sud" in Sofio 1999:72). Despite the long-term separation brought about by migration Enza Sofio still enunciates a deep appreciation of Calabrian cultural values and identification with traditional value systems ("Sono una donna del sud" in Sofio 1999:69).

The long distance in time and space that separates the migrant from his/her native land can create in some writers the desire to contemplate places, persons and things left behind, the memories of their youth, the impossibility of expressing family affection as in the old country. The poems of Giovanni Calabrò (born in Sant Alessio d'Aspromonte in 1922, emigrated to Sydney in 1934) and Domenico Marasco (born in Soveria Mannelli in 1913, emigrated to Melbourne in 1952), many written in Calabrian, contain marked elements of nostalgia. The separation from his Calabria creates in Giovanni Calabrò " . . . na piaga funda nta lu cori / e mai cchiù la pozzu

risanari. / Quandu partia i tia eru figghiolu / e pirdia lu to suli e u to splinduri" [such a wound in my heart / that it can never be healed. / When I left you I was a young lad / and I lost your sun and your splendour] ("Calabria mia," 1942, in Calabrò 1987:9) so much so that even after over forty years in Australia "Nel pensare a te un desio dolce m'apprende / e del verdeggiante bosco sento il richiamo" [When I think of you it is with sweet desire / and I feel the call of your verdant forests] ("Aspromonte," 1987, in Calabrò 1987:28). Domenico Marasco finds that he cannot accept the new land because of the pain and nostalgia he feels for his Calabria ("Ricordi" in Marasco 1980:10). But nostalgia and the pain of separation are not the only sentiments evoked by looking back on past lives in now distant places. Calabrò (1987:22) recalls family life as it was before migration while Domenico Marasco's collection contains a number of poems that describe daily life in his home town and his people, traditional family rituals ("Onomastico" Marasco 1980:39), the natural beauty of his native Calabria ("La Sila"in Marasco 1980:34) and the cultural glories of its ancient past that are in dramatic contrast with its current state of degradation brought about by exploitative "foreign" governments ("Calabria" in Marasco 1980:31).

Marasco's enthusiasm for the places, traditions and culture of his native land contrasts sharply with his negative perceptions of Australia and its society. While acknowledging the material advantages of life in Australia and appreciating its natural beauty, there are many aspects of the social landscape that he finds unacceptable to the point that he lives in the constant hope of returning to his native land. Christmas in Australia occurs in the wrong season and "porta a noi emigrati / poca pace, poco amore, / tempo caldo e feddro cuore" [brings us migrants / not much peace, not much love / hot weather and cold heart] ("Natale" in Marasco 1980:73). Even more so than Luigi Strano he finds Australian drinking practices highly uncivilized and pubs places where "vedi gente sborniata, / come luride canaglie, / con i pugni tesi in faccia / odi gridi di minaccia" [you see drunk people / like dirty dogs / with fists thrust in your face / you hear menacing shouts] ("Birra e ubriachi" in Marasco 1980:25) and the unemployed migrant who goes from factory to factory looking for work finds only "gente forsennata / che in faccia ti faceva una risata" [frantic people / who laughed in your face] ("Disoccupazione" in Marasco 1980:33).

Somewhat different are the perceptions of Rocco Petrolo (born in Gioiosa Marina in 1919, emigrated to Wollongong in 1950) who has published most of his poetry in English with many of his Italian and Calabrian poems remaining unpublished. Most of Petrolo's published poetry provides a series of reflections stemming from a traditional *contadino* culture philosophical base on the attitudes and customs of Australians. To some extent coinciding with Luigi Strano's views, Australian society is seen as one where its members have little if any concern for each other: "We call ourselves humans / but, are we? / Not according to what's heard, / everyday: 'As long as I'm alright / Jack, you may / live as you can or die, / but don't ask me!'" ("The Well Behaved Society" in Petrolo 1986:5) while its institutions are less than sympathetic to the NESB migrant. "Blow the bloody thing" (in Petrolo 1986:11) is a whimsical account of an encounter with a police breathalyser test where the officer becomes frustrated at the negative result and tells the NESB driver to repeat the test despite his protestations: "If you don't shut your beak, / you'll be getting something. / Blow! Blow it! Quick! / Blow the bloody thing." Petrolo looks back to his native Calabria with relatively little nostalgia although it represents the memory of the happier but now distant times of youth ("Chiantu silenziusu" in Cincotta 1989:113)

as well as consolation in his present situation where approaching old age brings thoughts of death:

> After thirty-four years
> of far away living
> I still think of you, Camoncelli,
> . . . the thought of you
> is my only shield against sadness;
> while your nightingales
> the chirping
> of thousands of other birds,
> the scent of orange in flower
> are my only consolation
> in this early anxiety of dying
> ("To Camoncelli" in Petrolo 1986:21).

Alberto Avolio was born in Fagnano Castello (province of Catanzaro) in 1949 and migrated to Australia with his family in 1955 where he subsequently chose to follow an academic calling. As well as his professional activities, a long-term interest in Italian-Australian connections and culture has led him take on roles such as secretary of ARIA-NSW, participate in the folk music group *Vento del sud* and the Italo-Australian Writers Association, write an account of the migration experience of the *Faganesi* who settled in Mareeba (North Queensland) and also to write literary texts. Whereas the production of 1B and second generation Italian Australian poets is almost exclusively in English, Avolio is one of the very few Italian Australian poets educated if not born in Australia to write predominantly in Italian and in some cases dialect. The themes of his poetry deal with individual and group identity, the pre-migration past, the transition from the old world to the new, the family members who are the protagonists of this transition. A number of Avolio's poems express the existential aspects of migration seen from the perspective of the 1B generation. "Atto di richiamo" (in Cincotta 1989:7) articulates the hopeful wait for the visa to migrate to Australia and the sense of relief when it arrives "chissà quale santo fu / ad intervenire / giusto in tempo / ci sarà qualcuno che ci vuole bene" [who knows what saint it was / to intercede / just in time / there must be someone who likes us]. "In Australia col monopattino" (in Cincotta 1989: 9) describes the attempt by the young child, temporarily left behind when his father leaves to spearhead the family's migration to a distant and unknown Australia, to accompany his father in fantasy and "I ricordi del passato" (in Cincotta 1989: 8) evokes the memory of the Calabrian dialect, the language of the past, and the consequences of the transition to the use of Italian. Avolio's poetry also reflects on personal experiences in and identification with aspects of Australia. The unpublished "Il pianto del Kookaburra," written in 1988 when the problem of Aboriginal deaths in custody had become a burning political and social issue, explores thoughts and perceptions of the time when the author, newly arrived in Australia, played with his Aboriginal peers in the rivers of the tobacco plantations of North Queensland.

The production of narrative texts seems to have had less appeal than poetry among first generation Calabrian Australians with only one known instance of oral dialect narrative (Salvatore Tripodi) and four known instances of novels: Giovanni Misale (nd), Pino Sollazzo (1988), Vincenzo Papandrea (1996) and Alfredo Strano (2003). Of these Misale does not deal with diaspora topics while the situation of Italian migrants in Australia abandoned to their own devices by an uncaring Italian political

elite constitutes a minor theme in Sollazzo's novel.

An unusual and probably unique case of recorded popular narration of the Calabrian Australian migration experience is provided by Salvatore Tripodi who migrated from Palmi to Melbourne in the 1950s but returned to his native land after a few years. During the 1960s a privately produced 45rpm record[2] was circulating in the Sydney and Melbourne Italian communities (particularly among Calabrian and Sicilian families) in which Tripodi recounted his Australian adventures related in the tradition of the *cantastorie* (oral story tellers). The language used is a mixture of Calabrian and Italian with the addition of Italian Australian linguistic elements and the story is accompanied by brief songs. Typification of language and content is intended to give a sense of commonality to the experiences narrated and hence moral conviction to the story's conclusion. The narrator tells how he decided to leave the rural environment of his native Calabria and emigrate to Australia in 1952 for economic reasons ("Tutti mi dicivano l'Australia è una terra ricca . . . E iu veramenti ch'avia una famiddia con figlioli picciriddi vuliva ir'a mi vidu . . . se li sordi li pozzu piddiari a palati" [Everyone was telling me that Australia is a rich land . . . And I who actually had a family with small children wanted to go and see . . . if I could get money by the shovelful]). He goes through the process of application, selection and departure (leaving his wife and two small children in the care of relatives), the long sea voyage (a biblical 40 days and 40 nights!), reception by his brother and *paesani* ("ognunu mi vuliva levari alla su casa pi rispettu di me frati . . . e allura accuntentammu 'na famiddia e iemmu e mangiammu" [everyone wanted to invite me to their place out of respect for my brother . . . and so we made one family happy and went and ate]). Salvatore has a strong incentive to find work quickly, make lots of money and return home to buy land but working in Australian factories is far different from the agricultural work he had done in Calabria (" . . . sta fabbrica di bicchieri era nu lavuru tintu . . . Li maniceddi l'avia incaiati, l'unnia mi stavavevano calendo. Nun ci la faciva cchiù. Era nu bisognu ca mi frati mi diciva Turi coraggio s'umporta quando iamu in Italia e n'accattamu nu pezzu ni terra e facimu li grandi signuri" [this glasses factory was a horrible job . . . my dainty hands got calluses, my fingernails were coming off. I couldn't take it any longer. But I had to stick to it because my brother kept telling me courage Turi what does it matter when we'll be able to return to Italy and buy a piece of land and live like lords]). Not only is the urban factory setting an alienating environment but there are considerable linguistic and social difficulties as well. After a year he decides to go back home. The economic disadvantages are more than compensated by family reunion and a friendlier social environment ("E' meddiu 'nta l'Italia cu lu pani e 'a cipudda" [It's better in Italy with bread and onions]). Australia can only offer material wellbeing (Ma altrimenti nun s'è nenti a chidda terra, è 'na terra di sacrifici, è 'na terra chi Dio minni libberi che terra. Luntana. Ma poi chi manch'i cani . . ." [But otherwise there's nothing in that land, it's a land of sacrifices, it's a land that God save me from that land. Far away. But then that not even dogs]). The moral of the story is an admonition to his listeners since what happened to him can easily happen to anyone ("Vi pregu a tutti vu autri no vi criditi ca mari e munti è l'Australia. Statevi a casa vostra e goditivi co'i vostri picciriddi . . . chiù ricca di la terra nostra non c'è nuddu" [I beg you all don't believe that Australia is the land of milk and honey. Stay in your own homes and enjoy life with your little ones . . . no other land is richer than ours]).

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[2] This was subsequently reissued as an audiotape "Le avventure di Salvatore Tripodi," Elica Sound, Reggio Calabria. Other Australian stories by Tripodi are found in "S. Tripodi dal medico australiano," Said Record, Palmi. Both were commercially available in Calabria in January 2003.

It is interesting to note that this folkloric negative interpretation of the migration experience was circulating at the same time that both Australian and Italian government agencies were circulating rosy propaganda about the great opportunities Australia could offer. Tripodi's oral folkloric narrative thus provides a counter-discursive perspective that both questions and undermines Australian and Italian propagandistic constructions of Australia as an earthly paradise and a promised land and implicitly contests dominant notions of history and nation. As such it provides some interesting similarities with the counter-discursive strategy applied by Carlo Levi in his exposition of the condition of the *contadini* of Lucania in the 1930s (Levi 1964: 99-104).

Counter-discursive tactics that question dominant notions of history and nation applied to both Italy and Australia also constitute an important element of Vincenzo Papandrea's *La Quercia grande*, the one novel that deals most directly with the Calabrian Australian diaspora. Papandrea was born in Careri (province of Reggio Calabria) in 1953 and migrated to Adelaide in 1981 where among his various activities he has been an active participant in the left-wing migrant organization FILEF. *La Quercia grande* is one of the very few Italian Australian narrative works that emphasise the political aspects of migration.[3] In Papandrea's novel emigration is proposed as an experience containing submerged values that need to be recognized, recovered and reassessed. These values are created by a blending of traditions and customs taken both from the place of origin and from the new land and include family relationships, solidarity among people from the same town, class solidarity, accepting the new country without forgetting the old, the concept of personal political commitment.

The novel is a detailed description of the thoughts, feelings and perceptions, hopes, doubts and disappointments of a group of *contadini* as they experience the transition from agricultural Careri in Calabria to industrial Adelaide in South Australia. After the end of the second world war, the *contadini* of Careri had, like their forefathers (see Crupi 2002a:151), actively participated in the struggle for land rights promoted by the political left. Because of this the local conservative power elite (the landowners, the priest the local government authorities) employ various stratagems to force the *contadini* to emigrate. They promote an unrealistic view of Australia as an ideal and trouble-free land for migrants (but withhold information about assisted passages so as to gain economic advantage by lending money to finance the migration of the *contadini*), they arrange for Gianni's police record to be cleansed of a few petty thefts (Australian immigration regulations favour a clean police record) while Paolo, who is an active member of the Italian Communist Party is suddenly made a member of the Christian Democrat Party (hence far more acceptable to the Australian immigration authorities who systematically refused Italian communists and socialists). Initially Paolo is completely opposed to the idea of migration which he considers to be a betrayal of the *contadini*'s cause but he is ultimately convinced by his friends who point out that if he were to remain the local potentates will ostracise him from all employment opportunities.

After much discussion most of the *contadini* decide to emigrate albeit some, like

[3] The narratives of Giuseppe Abiuso, Giovanni Andreoni, Rosa Cappiello, Charles D'Aprano and Pietro Tedeschi also touch on the political aspects of the migration experience.

Paolo, with great reluctance. Rosa Musolino, whose husband had gone to work in Italy's pre-war African colonies, is convinced that migration is a horrible thing. Mariuzza, Paolo's wife, is however much more enthusiastic than her husband and constantly repeats "women who can migrate are fortunate since they will leave this land without a future" (Papandrea 1996:20). As part of the process of coming to terms with the idea of migration the *contadini* talk about their perceptions and expectations of Australia. They are not only interested in its environment and the economic opportunities it can offer but also in its political and social aspects. Prestia speculates that Australia is not a country with a fascist government while Paolo hopes the there will be a strong union movement to protect workers against their bosses (Papandrea 1996:87).

Thus initiates a chain migration process that is to last ten years. The men leave first to be followed later by wives and children. The first group to leave — Paolo, Giacomo, Bruno, Rocco, Domenico, Vincenzo e Gianni — begins the journey with mixed feelings whereas their fellow-travelers from the nearby town of Platì seem to be much more enthusiastic since to them "Australia seemed like a great opportunity to escape poverty once and for all" (Papandrea 1996:97). As the ship sails further and further from Italy, however, all find that they are thinking of ". . . the things they had left behind. But they weren't sad thoughts, only confused. They had for the moment lost the dimension of their reality. They were unable to focus on events, memory, affections and especially the past that seemed ever more distant and blurred . . ." (Papandrea 1996:97).

Equally blurred and confused is the initial impact with Australia even though in Adelaide there is a *paesano* from Careri who had migrated previously and is able to assist them on arrival. As time goes by most of the members of the group gradually begin to find their niche in the new order. Rocco Musolino works hard in Adelaide's industrial belt to save money so as to bring out the rest of his family and to buy land in order to resume his true vocation as a *contadino*. His son Bruno attends school but also works outside school hours. Sergio and Paolo begin to take an active role in their trade union but when Sergio speaks Italian at a union meeting he is quickly told to shut up (Papandrea 1996:158). Later they join and become actively involved in the Australian Labor Party. No one considers returning home even when a few months later they receive a letter from one of their group who had remained in Careri informing them that land has been granted to the *contadini* (Papandrea 1996:124-125).

Although migration has tragic consequences for Giacomo who dies when he goes to North Queensland to work as a cane cutter, and negative consequences for Gianni who turns to a life of petty crime, for most of the group migration and settlement prove to be a positive experience and one where they manage to realize some of their dreams through sheer hard work. Rocco is able to buy and develop a farm where as well as commercial production he can carry on some of the old traditions – making his own wine and tomato sauce, the annual killing of the pig to make ham sausages and other smallgoods. Sergio and Piero become union delegates and power brokers at a local level. Bruno is the one who best manages to assimilate and to understand the new world as well as to gain an insight of its ancient mystique through his contact with an old Aboriginal elder. He obtains professional qualifications in agriculture which provide access to a career as well as allow him to help his father manage the farm. He also writes a book in English on migration, life and love that encompasses

the experiences of his fellow *paesani* giving voice to their culture, their courage, their philosophy of life and their humanity.

In the last chapter Rocco, now proud of his son's achievements, Paolo and Domenico return to visit Careri in 1977, their first visit since they departed twenty-five years ago. They find that things have changed: they no longer seem to fit in, the streets of Reggio Calabria seem too narrow, Italians seem rude. Careri has lost most of its population to death or emigration, the fields have been abandoned, the dialect they had taken to Australia has changed, emigration has opened a wound that will never close. Despite this their stay in Careri is a highly emotional experience and they wonder whether things would have been different had they remained. Rocco, who had been suffering from ill health for some years, dies serenely as Paolo is reading the last page of Bruno's book to the group. A cycle in their collective story is closing, a new one (consolidation in Australia, the second generation, ongoing links with Careri) is about to open.

Alfredo Strano's (2003) novel *Cristo se n'è andato* (the title closely calques Carlo Levi's *Christ stopped at Eboli*) presents migration as existential defeat caused in part by the social and economic problems of Calabria, in part by the ruinous colonial policy pursued by Italy's fascist government. It is the story of Cicillo, son of a small landowner of Acquasanta who had obtained trade qualifications as a mechanic because of his father's conviction that automobiles represented progress and economic well-being. But in the 1930s there was only one car in town (the Citroen of Don Ciccio Culu Lordu, a returned migrant) so rather than face unemployment Cicillo decides to leave his pregnant wife in Acquasanta and follow the fascist government's call for workers to emigrate to the newly conquered Italian territories in Abyssinia. In Abyssinia Cicillo comes into contact for the first time with people from other parts of Italy as well as with the natives. He establishes a relationship with Tatà who is of mixed parentage and with whom he has a child. He is also brought into extended contact with the fascist system as well as with the consequences of Italian intervention in north Africa that include instances of cruelty to the local inhabitants (including massacres). He is involved in the events of the second world war and is only able to return to Acquasanta in 1947, no longer young and with the realisation that the leprosy he had contracted in Africa has now become terminal. The colonial adventure has been disastrous for Cicillo as well as the Ethiopians. The negative (sometimes extreme) consequences of emigration can also be found in some of Alfredo Strano's other writings (for example "La spagnola" in *Lo sguardo e la memoria*, Strano A. 2001:194-195, which in some ways constitutes a source for the novel) although Strano often presents migration to Australia in a positive light.

Notwithstanding its conclusion Strano's novel presents the theme of hope in the possibility of brotherhood between people of different cultures and ethnicities as well as a message of universal peace through the condemnation of war seen as a punishment from God and a manifestation of the madness of humankind (Strano A 2003:191-192). This perspective derives from Strano's concept of the social dimensions of Christianity enunciated in his first book *Prigioniero in Germania* (Strano A 1973) and subsequently presented as a constant theme in his writings.

Prigioniero in Germania is a moving account of Strano's experiences as a prisoner of war in the German concentration camp of Gössnitz where he and hundreds of other members of the Italian military forces were sent after Italy capitulated to the allies on

8 September 1943. Despite forced labour, hunger, privations, desperation and the constant presence of death, life in the camp also reveals friendship, solidarity and mutual assistance. Release and the return to his native Delianuova after a long and laborious journey is a highly emotional experience. Although not directly linked to the diaspora the book relates traumatic wartime experiences that were later to constitute a determining factor for some Italians (though not for Strano) who decided to emigrate from Italy in the 1940s and 1950s.

Alfredo Strano's second book, *Luck without joy* (Strano A 1986), is the biography of Ezio Luisini who at the age of 16 emigrated from Umbria to Western Australia in 1908. Over the years Luisini achieved substantial economic success through sheer hard work albeit at the expense of other pleasures in life and became one of the recognised leaders of Perth's Italian community.

Luisini was one of the many people that Alfredo Strano (born in Delianuova in the province of Reggio Calabria in 1924) met and got to know when he migrated to Perth in 1948. It was in fact the diaspora experience that provided Strano with the impetus to write about his own vicissitudes and those of the people with whom he came in contact. His writing talents range from memoirs and (auto)biographies through to fiction and he is he is probably the most prolific first generation writer of non-fiction genres. He also founded and edited periodical publications such as *Il Canguro* (1955) and *La Rondine* (1970) with the objective of defending and taking care of the moral, material and cultural interests of the Calabrian Australian (and by extension the Italian Australian) community in Western Australia. The tension between "Italian" and "Calabrian" present in some of his writings tend to interrogate and destabilise to some extent the hegemonic view of the "Italian" nation although his reading of "Australia" tends to correspond generally to accepted hegemonic national views.

Forty years of personal experiences, observations and reflections on the multiple aspects of Western Australia's Italian community are channeled into the volume *Italiani senza patria* (Strano A 1991). The story of Strano's personal journey begins with memories of childhood at Delianuova, a materially poor environment where he lived with his mother and brother in a two roomed house furnished with the *intaglio* furniture his father had made before migrating to Australia. It was little Alfredo's task to go to the post office to see if there were any letters from his father. His mother who had learned to read and write instilled in her sons a love of literature and Alfredo went on to continue his studies which had been interrupted by the war and to qualify as a primary school teacher. Whatever plans Alfredo had for a teaching career were however quickly interrupted when at the end of 1947 he and his mother received their migration visas for Australia. The anticipated joy of seeing his father after many years of separation is countered by the sadness of having to leave Calabria so that when the time came for departure "I nurtured in my heart . . . the secret of all migrants who when leaving their native land do not say farewell to their mountains but only a sad *arrivederci*" (Strano A 1991:17).

Despite initial difficulties of having to learn English and of having to adapt to manual work in an environment where Italian migrants were often less than welcome to the point that Alfredo was called "Tony" by his foreman who found "Alfredo" too irksome, Strano quickly finds his niche in the new country. Within a few years he buys a house and realising that his fellow Italians, left to their own devices by an uncaring Italian government, are in need of assistance, he sets up a migration and

travel agency called significantly “Boomerang Travel Service.” He becomes the *factotum* of Perth’s Italian community, spends his evenings teaching English to NESB migrants and Italian to Australians, becomes president of ANFE in Western Australia, and works for the welfare of his community. His love life is less successful. What begins as a promising relationship with a German girl Teresa abruptly ends upon the discovery that during the war she had served with the SS in German concentration camps. The most enduring personal relationship is with his mother. Even after her death at the age of 83: “To resume my dialogue with my mother, some evenings I go into her room that has remained as it was on the day she died. Mamma is there reading . . . I sit by her bed as in the good old days” (Strano A 1991:205).

Family memories are however not the only theme developed in *Italiani senza patria*. Alfredo Strano also provides a series of pen pictures of Perth's Little Italy and of some of its leading personalities. Ezio Luisini, the protagonist of *Luck without joy* makes a brief appearance as the emblematic Italian worker whose contribution to Australia's development has not been fully appreciated by Australians. Another success story is represented in the figure of the Sicilian Vince Scurria who began his Australian working career as a labourer and became proprietor of the Kastelbets hotel — the name is an anglicised version of his hometown Castel Umberto. Francesco Vanzetti (born in Padova in 1878) who had to discontinue his architectural studies and emigrate to Western Australia on the death of his father, became the Perth Italian community's cultural voice and in 1929 was the first lecturer in Italian to be appointed at an Australian University, a post that he held until1963.

But the diaspora also presents experiences of a less positive nature. The tragic consequences of work in the Wittenoom asbestos mines also impacted on Italian migrant workers. Salvatore Gugliotta is presented as a simple migrant worker "as bitter as poison but as good as bread" (Strano A 1991:190) whose attempts to find work sometimes meet with hostile reactions such as the time when he approached a farmer to ask if there were any jobs going and the farmer ordered his dogs to "get the blooming dago out of here" (Strano A 1991:190). There is the amusing story of the Calabrian grandmother who migrates under the family reunion scheme and is stopped by customs because she had hidden under her ample skirts apples and hard-boiled eggs to give to her grandchildren. The proxy bride Maria is traumatized when on arrival she discovers that her husband is twenty years older than the photo he had sent her, breaks off the engagement and soon finds a more acceptable match. Another traumatic experience is that of the Calabrian couple who "had become old before their time" (Strano A 1991:18) when their only son was killed in Vietnam.

Australia also reveals little glimpses of Calabria on the farm where Strano's uncles have planted "the vegetables typical of our region, grapevines, fig, olive and fruit trees and *marmocchi*" (Strano A 1991:30), at meal times when the tables in the homes of Calabrian families groan under the weight of traditional food (a counter to the hunger and the hard times they had experienced in Calabria), the custom of wearing black for the prescribed time period when a family member dies. These snippets of a Calabrian presence accompany memories of the native region and the desire to see once more places and family members left behind. Alfredo Strano presents an evocative image of pure water, centuries old olive trees, the magnificent panorama of the sea, of Etna and Stromboli seen from the Aspromonte (a not entirely coincidental prose parallel of Luigi Strano's poem “La mia terra” – see above). The memories however also have a dark side. Alfredo Strano has not forgotten "the endemic crime,

the kidnappings, the wars between *'ndragheta* clans, the corruption and the lack of law and order" (Strano A 1991:171)

In the final analysis there is no regressive nostalgia. Migration has its tragic aspects but perhaps it is worth the price since in Alfredo Strano's idealisation Australia is perceived as "a benign and pious mother" (Strano A 1991:207), a young democratic country where corruption does not exist.

Lo sguardo e la memoria (Strano A 2001) presents continuity, elaboration and reflections on the themes presented in the three previous volumes. Memories of his childhood at Delianuova include his friend the fatherless Carlo, a brilliant student but unable to continue his education because of the family's difficult financial circumstances, the chestnut harvest, the itinerant traders, the evenings of family togetherness around the fire where "children leant to love their fellows whereas today television teaches them to use deadly weapons" (Strano A 2001:37). Despite its remoteness the fascist empire was present in Delianuova. Alfredo Strano recalls the activities of the local party officials but also the jokes and criticisms directed at Mussolini by the ordinary people. Perth's Italians however were somewhat more enthusiastic. Strano reports that they all supported the Italian fascist organisations in Australia as a way of expressing community solidarity: "Even those who weren't fascists supported the regime to spite the Australians who were antifascist and despised Italy and il Duce" (Strano A 2001:55).

Return to Delianuova is a new theme in this volume. On a return visit in 1966 everything seemed smaller that remembered. Economic progress had proceeded at a snail’s pace while cultural revival was striking. The return experience is different for Piero who while in Australia had always thought of Calabria as “an earthly paradise rich in history and natural beauty” (Strano A 2001:204). After dreaming of returning for 13 years “twelve hours were enough to make him decide to return to Australia” (Strano A 2001:205) because of the extreme difficulties he experienced in getting his aunt admitted into hospital at Reggio Calabria. In the final analysis Alfredo Strano pays homage to his adopted land, its wide-open spaces, its silence, its natural environment, its first class education and health systems. The rite of passage of return to Calabria is ever in the hearts of those who experience the diaspora — roots are never forgotten — but Australia is the place where he chooses to live.

Even more so than in *Italiani senza patria*, the mother cult constitutes the central theme of *From Scrub to Skyscrapers* (Scarano 2001b) which relates the migration experience of the Scarano and Lombardo families over a 50 year period. The author Luigi (Jim) Scarano was born in Martone (province of Reggio Calabria) in 1941 and migrated to Sydney with his mother and two brothers in 1956 to join his father and his elder brother. The memoir was written some forty-five years later, shortly after his mother’s death. Maria Immacolata Nunziata Scarano (née Lombardo) is depicted as a formidable matriarchal figure who is able to make use of the scarce agricultural resources to raise her children in Calabria while waiting for her husband earn enough money for the rest of the family to travel to Australia. Her courage and fortitude accompanies her to the new land where she continues to rule the family roost as teacher, housewife and counselor acting as both custodian of traditional culture and practices but also as promoter of the new norms and behaviours necessary to come to terms with life in the new country. This to the extent that unlike many other Italian *mamme* she established positive relationships with her Australian daughters in law

acting as a bridge between the two cultures and often managing to iron out differences. Even the author's Australian ex wife fondly remembers her as a strong figure, wise, self-assured, competent and practical who gave her a place in the family home and a participatory role in traditional family rituals from making soap and tomato sauce to family weddings and funerals (Scarano 2001a:180-181). But Maria's activity was not restricted to her family. Once child rearing was over she joined the Franciscan tertiary order and continued at home the work she had done in Sydney clothing factories to help the needy and to contribute funds to the missionary activities of the Catholic church, thus becoming a well known and respected figure in the Leichhardt Italian community.

More so than in Papandrea's novel political commitment occupies a central position in *Australia per forza e per amore* (Sgrò 1995), also published in English (Sgrò ca2000) with a title (*Mediterranean son. Memoirs of a Calabrian migrant*) that significantly highlights the author's origins (he was born at Seminara in the province of Reggio Calabria in 1931). Giovanni Sgrò had begun writing many years prior to the publication of his memoirs with articles on migration issues such as Sgrò (1979). His migration to Melbourne in 1952 was an unwilling acquiescence to his father's decision who saw the uncertainties of life in a new land as a better option than having to cope with the criminal environment and the harsh economic and social conditions of Calabria. His activity in the Australian trade union movement and in the ALP led to his election as a senator in the parliament of Victoria in 1979 making him one of a very small handful of first generation Italian migrants to have managed to overcome the complex hurdles to preselection placed in the path of NESB candidates for public office by the Australian political elite of both persuasions, a significant factor in the under-representation of NESB groups in the Australian political system. Sgrò's maiden speech was delivered to parliament in Italian and throughout his twelve-year parliamentary career he incessantly continued to promote and to fight for issues relating not only to Italian but also to all NESB migrants in Victoria. It is largely due to his efforts that these migrant communities have had some voice in the political system of Victoria. Sgrò's memoirs thus present an aspect of the diaspora experience absent in other (auto)biographical works written by first generation Calabrians and include a view of the Victorian political system as well as some of its personalities seen from the periphery.

A woman's voice is found in the brief memoirs of Maria Cosenza-Licastro (1989) who was born at Delianuova in 1939 and migrated to Brunswick Junction (Western Australia) in 1958. Maria relates how she left school at the age of 13 years and learnt the trade of seamstress and embroiderer. Shortly after her arrival in Australia she was engaged (but in line with Calabrian traditional practices was not allowed to go out alone with her fiancée) and after her marriage in 1959 she went to live at Burekup where she bore six children. In 1982 Maria and her husband opened a shop at Brunswick Junction. Maria's story is one of a life lived in isolation and the continual struggle to bring up six children rendered even more difficult by periods of illness. An additional burden was the disappointment of not being able to visit Italy because her husband did not want to go back. However she has had the satisfaction of seeing her children grow and develop good careers. She concludes her story with the words: "I have been through many hard and sad times and I still have not had the fortune of seeing my native land. However I thank the Lord for the strength he has given me in withstanding and facing all the difficulties of this life" (Cosenza-Licastro 1989:159).

In addition to his many volumes of poetry Luigi Strano has published his memoirs in Italian (Strano L 1999a) and French (Strano L 1999b). In the succinct clear style that is characteristic of his poetry the memoirs are the recount of a long and active life lived both in the diaspora but also in close contact with Australian society that has seen him work as a vegetable gardener, a travel and real estate agent and an interpreter in English, Italian and Sicilian recognised by the NSW courts. Luigi Strano's socio-economic activities include some striking but unsensationally related episodes such as when in the 1940s Tony Pangallo gave him a Berretta pistol so that he could defend himself from the threats of the local mafia, his wartime experience of being drafted into the Alien Workers Corps and sent to make charcoal in the Coffs Harbour hinterland for some months before his father managed to obtain his release (Strano L 1999a:61) and his work as court interpreter during the trials arising from the Griffith drug investigations in the early 1980s. The memoirs also relate a life dedicated to literary and cultural activities — the study of Italian, English, German and Latin languages and literatures, the writing of poetry — which for Luigi are the most positive outcomes of his migration experience. These activities led to friendships with a number of Australian writers, artists and intellectuals such as John Taylor, John Henshaw and Arthur Delbridge. For much of his life Luigi Strano has been a broker between the Italian Australian community and the wider Australian society not only at a social and linguistic level but also at a cultural one. This has been recognized by his appointment as a JP as well as by the conferment of an honorary Master of Arts by the University of Wollongong in 1985. The end of a long working life saw Luigi retire to Mt Wilson in the Blue Mountains, a place somewhat reminiscent of his native Aspromonte mountains in Calabria which provides him with poetic inspiration and philosophic contemplation where "having reached the age of 86, fairly well-known, in good health and without financial worries, I should be happy to live out in Mount Wilson these last remaining years; and happy I am, since I am philosopher enough to realize that there are no roses without thorns" (Strano L 1999a:94).

A highly appreciative account of the advantages Australia has to offer is provided in Gregorio Lucia's (2003) memoirs which are subtitled "the odyssey of a lover, a soldier, a prisoner of war, a migrant and a father of a family." Lucia was born in Serrastretta (province of Catanzaro) in 1914 and decided to join the Italian army as a volunteer in 1939 in order to escape a life which though not unhappy was marked by endemic poverty and economic uncertainty. He was taken prisoner during the North African campaign and was sent to Australia together with another 1000 or so of his comrades.[4] Like most other Italian prisoners of war he accepted the offer of working on Australian farms and worked for almost two years on a Dorrigo property owned by Billy Baine. Although he was sent back to Italy in December 1946 where he married Rosina who had waited for him in the long years of absence, he found that life was even more difficult than before so he eagerly accepted Billy Baine's offer of sponsorship for migration to Australia. Australia lived up to its promise as over time Lucia settled in Sydney at Hurlstone Park and found permanent employment with the Railways until his retirement in 1979. Retirement proved an active affair with Lucia growing prize tomatoes in his vegetable garden and undertaking many trips both

[4]Some 18000 Italian prisoners of war were sent to Australia — see Alan Fitzgerald, *The Italian Farming Soldiers 1941-1947*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981 — and although all were sent back to Italy after the end of the war many were to return to Australia as migrants.

within Australia and abroad. The four trips to Italy (the last in 1994) are marked by the joy of seeing again family members and the sadness of parting on returning to Australia but also by the conviction that Italy (or at any rate Calabria) has not experienced the same rate of socioeconomic progress as Australia and that consequently life in Calabria is still something of a struggle. Like Giuseppe Castellana (Rando 2004:56-57, 256) Lucia expresses himself in a language which mixes elements of dialect, popular Italian and Italo-australian and bases his narrative structure on oral narrative genres.

The reminiscences of eight second and third generation Calabrian Australians are included in the collection of brief memoirs presented in Italo-Australian Youth Association (2002). Michelle Gimellaro (pp. 3-5) relates how a brief unplanned visit to her father's relatives in Oppido Mamertina (province of Reggio Calabria) in July 1998 made her feel, despite communication difficulties due to her scarce proficiency in Italian, that "your family is your family and . . . my dad's relatives . . . [made us] feel as though they had been expecting us the whole time" (Italo-Australian Youth Association 2002:5). Well-known comedian Joe Avati, born in Sydney of Calabrian parents, writes that he feels more Italian than Australian while Adriano Dessanti writes of fond memories of his mother's Calabrian relatives and Stefania Lia, Anna Romano and Cathy Giannini vividly remember the very positive relationship they had established with their *nonni calabresi*, learning from them both gastronomic refinement and life values. Camilla Iannelli expresses appreciation of the sauce, sausages and *prosciutto* made by her Calabrian mother while her brother Francesco Iannelli finds that a two month visit to Italy in 1994 made him long to return to Australia.

Although first generation Sicilian writers, in particular Nino Randazzo, have made a significant contribution to the development of Italian Australian theatre, such activity seems to be the province of the second generation in the Calabrian Australian community through the work of John Bono and Teresa Crea.

John Bono was born in Melbourne in 1958 of Calabrian parents and obtained a Bachelor of Economics degree from Monash University. His work has been performed in Italian and English and he also speaks the Calabrian dialect. As well as writing for the stage, he has acted, coordinated, directed and written for the Broccoli Theatre Group in Melbourne during the 1980s and 1990s. The Broccoli Theatre Group was formed in 1978 and for many years presented to the Italian Australian community a form of popular theatre based on a farcically humorous interpretation of common migration experiences with a language mix of dialect, popular Italian, Italo-australian and a little English in a style very similar to the more successful *Wogs out of work*. Broccoli's repertoire has included *Ogni casa 'na croce* [Every house has a cross to bear] which is an exquisitely ironic representation of the generation gap between Italian parents and their Australian born children and the disruptions this causes to traditional family practices. *Porca miseria* [Good grief] consists of a series of sketches based on exaggerated interpretations of stereotypically perceived behaviour — the over-zealous Italian construction worker who claims he can do everything including throwing shovelfuls of concrete up to the top floor of a multistory building under construction which the pump cannot reach, the Italian Australian husband who complains to his wife that there is nothing to eat when the family goes on a picnic even though she has prepared a ten course lunch, the elderly Italian Australian men who watch beautiful bikini-clad girls pass by and nostalgically

reminisce with extreme exaggeration on past amorous adventures. Specifically drawn from John Bono's Calabrian origins is *Roots-Radici* (1979-80), a humorous interpretation of *Waltzing Matilda* in which the famous Calabrian bandit Musolino migrates to Australia where he steals sheep. The theme of inter-ethnic weddings is presented in *Lo sposalizio* [The Wedding]. The son of a an economically modest Italian Australian family is to marry the daughter of a very rich Greek Australian family and when the two families meet to discuss the wedding feast there are a series of problems and misunderstandings.

Also of Calabrian background is Teresa Crea, the main driving force of Adelaide's Doppio Teatro which produced bicultural and bilingual Italian/Australian theatre from 1984 to 1997 when it reformed as para//elo expanding its charter to a cross-cultural platform as an organic response to a more complex world although still drawing on the Italian heritage as needed and as one of many ingredients in a contemporary global perspective. Many of the performances written and produced by Teresa Crea for Doppio Teatro present dialect-speaking southern Italian characters and one production *La Madonna emigrante / The migrant madonna* (1987) has an explicitly Calabrian theme. The material for this performance was researched at Gioiosa Ionica, the town of origin of Crea's mother, and is based on the concept of the religious procession as a form of theatrical representation. In *La Madonna emigrante* the town's chief priest attempts to persuade Tonino and Rocco who are about to migrate to America to take with them the statue of the Madonna. The two migrants are however very much against the idea since the dream of the wealth they will obtain in America (a car, a big house) has replaced their belief in traditional religious values. One of the central themes of the play is the strong similarity between traditional religious processions and migration since both exploit especially those people who are at the margins of the social system. Teresa Crea's work has also led at times to the promotion of playwrights/actors of Calabrian origin. One example is the production *Ciao Mamma Ciao* by Frank Morello directed by Crea (Adelaide, April-May 2001) with Renato Musolino (whose parents are from the province of Reggio Calabria) in the leading role. The play is about the not always smooth relationship between Italian Australian mothers and their sons who are so well looked after that they are reluctant to marry and leave home. Mother provides for everything as long as their son does not establish relationships with girls who are not of Italian origin.

The complex relationship between Calabrian born parents and their Australian born children is also the theme of the television drama *A Hard bargain* (1984) by Christine Maddafferi (born in Melbourne of Calabrian parents) which was transmitted on SBSTV in the mid 1980s. The parents of Mario and Angela have migrated from the mountains of rural Calabria to the skyscrapers of Melbourne where after many years of hard work and sacrifices they have managed to become proprietors of a large furniture emporium but have remained firmly attached to their traditional cultural practices not realising that even back home things have changed. In keeping with these practices their son Mario, who very much an ocker, has complete freedom to do whatever he pleases while their daughter Angela, who is more respectful of her parent's traditions, is forced to live a very sheltered life to the extent that she is not allowed to go out unchaperoned. Again in keeping with traditional practices the parents want Mario to continue his studies and become a lawyer while Angela is to finish school at the end of compulsory education and enter into an arranged marriage with the not too handsome son of *paesani*. Angela, however, who is an excellent student, wishes to continue her studies and become a teacher while Mario, far from

being academically inclined, is much more interested in his role as leading guitar in the rock band (The Italian Stallions) he has formed with other Italo-Australian friends. When Angela realises there is no way she can change her parents' mind she runs away from home and goes to stay with an Australian school friend, a strategy which causes a deep sense of *vergogna* in her parents, particularly her mother who is extremely worried about what the *paesani* will think and adopts a number of desperate face-saving strategies. Ultimately it is Mario who manages to resolve the situation by proposing a compromise. He undertakes to go to university and study law (although it is very doubtful whether he will actually finish the degree) provided Angela will be allowed to finish school undertake teacher training. Family unity is thus restored in a situation where the parents make a concession to one aspect of the traditionally perceived role of the daughter although she is expected to adhere to other traditional practices. The piece is recited in a humourous and vivacious manner that blends quite well with the underlying seriousness of the situation and avoids excessive sentimentalism while managing to underscore the genuine attachment between the family members (something that seems absent in Australian families, according to the observations made by Angela's Australian peers) despite the considerable cultural and generation gap between parents and children and the seemingly irreconcilable perceptions relating to male and female roles.

The practice of creative writing is thus one of the many and varied cultural practices developed by Calabrians who have migrated to Australia and one that has followed both "high" Italian and popular Calabrian cultural traditions. Although it has a number of points in common with the general corpus of Italian Australian literature it also displays some differences through the themes related to the expression and critique of Calabrian cultural values and practices as well as the sometimes complex appraisal of the relationship with Calabria. Such expressions of regional differences can also be found in the creative writing of some of the other Italian regional groups present in Australia. Although the number of Calabrian Australian writers who have published in volume form are relatively small in terms of the size of the community there are others such as Anna Arquaro, Alberto Avolio, Vic Caruso, Mary Ceravolo, Domenico di Marte, Josephine Gargano-Carey, Domenico Morizzi, Aldo Cimino, Pina Molino, Concetta Rossitto, Rosa Schiavello whose work has appeared in anthologies.

In parallel (*mutatis mutandis*) with the poetry produced by other regional groups, the distinctive recurrent themes found in the corpus of Italian Calabrian poetry relate to the relationship with the region of origin, sometimes remembered with nostalgia, sometimes in unnostalgic terms and in some cases regarded with a critical appraisal of the centuries-old economic and social problems which have triggered the migration phenomenon. Calabrian traditions, especially those centered on the concept of family, constitute another set of themes which deal with husband-wife, mother-children relationships, affection within the family circle, the pre-migration experiences of daily life in the home town, the seasonal work of the *contadino*. The migration experience is expressed in both its material and existentialist dimensions. Few writers express an unreserved and complete acceptance of Australia, few others express complete rejection. Most have varying degrees of reservation about accepting the new country. In general they regard Australia's natural environment in a positive light and to some extent a solace for the anguish brought on by the diaspora. Australian society is perceived in a negative light and in some cases with a critical appraisal of the way in which the migrant is made to feel as though they do not quite belong as well as the

complex and not unproblematic relationship between migrants and Australians. The corpus of texts by Calabrian poets also presents a number of themes relating to human relationships, life, philosophical issues, self-searching that are not apparently linked to the migration experience (for example Spanò Papalia 1992).

Themes found in narrative are to some extent more selective and more focused. There is a critique of the Australian ruling elite and, more particularly, of the Italian ruling elite in many ways held responsible for the upheavals caused by the migration process and in the case of the Italian ruling class for having caused the conditions that triggered the exodus from Calabria. The results of the migration process are however perceived differently. For Alfredo Strano migration leads to defeat in both material and existential dimensions, a perception that is opposite to that presented in his non-fictional writing where migration is presented is a more positive light. For Vincenzo Papandrea migration presents a transition to a new environment that is free of the exploitation and oppression endemic in Calabrian society and that provides the potential for the achievement of personal economic and political objectives.

The memoirs and (auto)biographies present both similarities and differences to the perceptions provided by creative writing. They include recounts of life in and traditions of the *paese* before migration and evaluations of the dynamically changing relationship with the *paese* on return visits from Australia. Some writers also include their views on Calabrian history and culture as well as of Italian history and culture. The Italian Australian community also constitutes a common theme that embraces maintenance and adaptation of Calabrian cultural practices, the relationships formed with family members, fellow *paesani* and fellow Italians. A third set of themes is provided by Australia's natural, economic, social, political and workplace environments as well as by the relationship between Calabrians and Australians. In general, the memoirs and (auto)biographies tend to present the migration experience in a though sometimes not uncritical light that in some cases includes the expression of affection both for the writer's native region and for their adopted country and in other cases (e.g. Sgrò ca2000) the tendency towards the inclusion of victimological themes.

Theatre seems to be the province of second generation Calabrian Australians. It tends to focus on the humourous, farcical and ironic aspects of the migration experience of Southern Italians in general and occasionally of Calabrians in particular as well as on the often complex relationship between Italian born parents and their Australian born children. To a large extent, particularly so through the work of Doppio Teatro and its subsequent reincarnation as para//elo it also acts as a substantial cultural bridge between the Italian Australian and the wider Australian communities but not as a vehicle for cultural negotiation.

Despite the lack of cultural negotiation Calabrian Australian endeavours in these areas can be considered as providing an interesting example of Bhabha’s general observation regarding the potential presented by Australia’s pluricultural society to present views from the periphery: “ . . . the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia: the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to write the history and fiction of the metropolis” (Bhabha 1990a:6). To what extent Calabrian Australian writing, theatre and film contribute to this “rewriting” yet remains to be seen although the regional and localised differences articulated by some Calabrian Australian writers certainly contest dominant notions of history and nation

thus contributing to the interrogation of the national as emergent from both local communities and global diasporas.

It also remains to be seen the extent to which the expression of the diaspora in Calabrian Australian literature is similar to and different from the way in which it is expressed by Calabrian communities elsewhere, given the substantial and long-term nature of Calabrian migration to Europe and the Americas as well as to Australia. Joseph Pivato's (2004) paper on Calabrian Canadian literature and Pasquino Crupi's work on migration themes in Calabrian literature provide an interesting and vital basis for this comparison.

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A retrospective exhibition to celebrate 20 years of success … from its beginnings as Doppio Teatro to today's para//elo. '20 years on… and still gorgeous!" gives us the chance to re-live past performances via a compact exhibition of props, costumes and images of ground-breaking projects.

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OUR HISTORY
para//elo began in 1984 as Doppio Teatro. As Doppio Teatro we forged a distinguished history as Australia's first professional bicultural theatre company and creation house.

In 1997 we expanded our charter to a cross cultural platform under the para//elo banner. This was an organic response to a more complex world. Today, our work draws on the Italian heritage as needed and as one of many ingredients in a contemporary global perspective.

ACHIEVEMENTS

* We were the first stable professional cross cultural theatre company in the country and the first cross-cultural company to be invited overseas to represent Australia.
* We were awarded the Sidney Myer Award for our distinctive 'contribution' to the Australian Performing Arts and our works have toured nationally and internationally since 1991.
* We continue to showcase original works and Australian artists at national and international Arts Festivals on the invitation of festival directors who view our work as fresh, exciting and breaking new ground.
* We are the first key small/medium theatre company to forge a strategic partnership with a multinational company on the basis of mutual exchange; a business partnership that has been publicly acclaimed by the Australia Business Arts Foundation and The Prime Minister's Office.

International & National Awards

1995 Federal Government/National Bank Cultural Diversity in the Arts Award
1993 co-winner of Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award with Bangarra Dance Theatre
1993 New York Festival Finalist Award for radio adaptation of 'La Madonna Emigrante'

International & National Festival & Exchange Invitations

Argentina 2003 Italian Diaspora - Cultural Exchange Project Initiated
Singapore 2000 Singapore Arts Festival 1996 Singapore Arts Festival
UK 1998 new Images Exchange
UK 1989 Leeds International Youth Festival National Festival & Event Invitations

ORAL PRESENTATION

Ppt

Scan Book covers & photos

Strano
Cfr (1) OHP “La mia terra” & Zircon Creek/Forse non tutto
(2) OHP “To Kath Walker”
(2b) U Pappu

(3) Marasco on Melbourne

(4) OHP “Blow the bloody thing / The well behaved Society”

‘mmavissi 'rrumputu l'anchi
quandu partia di Jani!
lu 'mmorzu d'ortu
e lu pertusu i casa l'avia,
chi mi mancava u pani?
'cca simu comu bestii,
non si canusci nenti,
non sai mancu chi 'ttinnu,
lu patri non è patri,
non c'è 'chiu religioni;
ti manca di rispettu
chiddu chi s'avi e fari . . .
simu comu i nimali,
parlandu cu crianza,
peju di li maiali;
si campa pe la panza!...
li fiji miei, li viditi?
si sparanu pe lupi,
pari ca s'annu e spartiri
la fascia di lu duca
a mia ancora mi tennu
nommi parlanu i genti,
ma sapiti? mi tennu
comu 'ddoluri i panza!...
'mmavissi 'rrumputu l'anchi
quandu partia di Jani!...

La mia terra

Il paese natio non si scorda,
anche quando non c’è alcuna
ragione d’amarlo . . .

ma io porto con me,
la gioia e il dolore
della mia terra.

Ancora ho negli orecchi
la nenia delle cornamuse,
Il campano delle capre
Lungo il letto dei fiumi.
La sonagliera delle mule
Sulla strada incavata nei monti,
L'oscena facezia del mulettiere,
La bestemmia a denti stretti
Del manovale che maledice la terra . . .

I limpidi orizzonti
Vedo chiudendo gli occhi
Col funo dell'Etna e dello Stromboli
La madonnina al bivio
Con le offerte di fiori appassiti,
La pineta di Garibaldi,
Il mare d'Ulisse . . .

Amo il paese che m'ospita,
Ma chi può sopprimere
La visioni del dormi-veglia?

Zircon Creek

To stay sane
I must feel
the rugged bushland
beneath my feet
see a wallaby or two,
the lyre-bird,
and quench my thirst
at Zircon Creek . . .

To Kath Walker

Tristi fummo
nell'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra
portando dentro accidioso fummo
Dante *Inf.* VII, 122

On the Georges and Parramatta rivers
fish float downstream
with their bellies in the air;
on the rocks of Kurnell
shellfish are dead in their shells,

poisoned by oil and factory-waste;
at Maroubra and Clovelly,
discharges of raw sewage
keep even the sharks away . . .
on the outskirts of Syeney town
miles and miles of bushland,
once a paradise of wild flowers
teeming with wild life
and haunted by the sound
of the didgeridoo,
are now graveyards for old cars
and garbage dumps! . . .
Poetry is life,
and this land of yours is dying
rubbished and raped by white men;
how can I possibly wonder
that you wish to move away?

Australian Alien

It all depends
on what happened yesterday;
it all depends
on what the papers say;
whether today
you are a wog,
a New Australian
or an alien

A hard bargain - Input video clips???