

Chapter 3

Trauma and Grievance

Kinds of trauma

Internment as an alien – indeed, an enemy alien – was clearly a traumatic experience for many Italians who had made Australia their home; and, as we have seen also, even those who were not interned were affected. This is eloquently attested by Rino Baggio and is darkly alluded to in Maria Triaca's *Amelia, a Long Journey*. Some autobiographies and biographies of Australia's Italians have thus been prompted, at least in large part, by the desire to have that wrong morally righted and that hurt healed.

But internment is only the most prominent instance of discrimination, hostility and xenophobia with which Italian immigrants have often been received by some Australians at various levels and in various sectors of society: attitudes which are also well attested in the texts that address the experience of internment. And though overall, and in the long run, Australians have proved hospitable to the new arrivals, the mere fact of moving from one social culture and language environment somewhere in Italy to a very different one in Australia can itself prove traumatic, as is attested by the number of Italian migrants who have returned to Italy and of those who wish they had.

These lives do not get written or published and have not been much researched, but occasionally one comes across significant anecdotal evidence. One such instance is that with which I open this book, about the Italian worker in Canberra in the 1950s who, in his exasperation at being taunted and humiliated by the Australian-born, and at his inability to respond because of his lack of English, put his arm under a circular saw. Though that was an individual

instance, it was clearly not isolated, but a symptom of systematic societal discrimination amounting to persecution.

An even clearer instance of collective discrimination and resultant trauma appears incidentally in a 1996 Melbourne University PhD thesis on attitudes to home ownership by Italian immigrants in Victoria. The researcher, Mariastella Pulvirenti, encountered extreme difficulty in finding informants. Visiting a club in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick whose membership, typically, was composed of immigrants originating from one particular locality in Italy, Pulvirenti thought she had gained an entry thanks to the support of the club's president.

However, neither the women, playing tombola (bingo) in one room, nor the men, playing a card game in another room, were disposed to be interviewed, and all of them pointedly ignored the researcher. Eventually, one of the men expostulated, "You could write my story in one word – HELL! It was hell" [Pulvirenti 1996: 75]. Another man weighed in: "I'm sure if you asked everyone their story it'd be the same ..." and referred to the experience of the immigrant reception camp at Bonegilla (near Victoria's north-eastern border with New South Wales). The other men present confirmed this: "We all went through the same thing ... it was awful." At this point, the club's president also chimed in: "You didn't have to be at *Bonegilla* to suffer! We *all* suffered!"

Pulvirenti comments: "I wondered whether this wasn't an old argument, something used as a rebellion against his [the president's] authority or a class issue that separated him from the others." The treasurer, who had led the remonstrance, commented, "See, we all have the same story." Pulvirenti's final comment is: "Not only was I astounded at the response and the rowdy atmosphere that had been created, but also at the sense of defiance against him [the president]" [Pulvirenti 1996: 76].

These are first-generation Italian Australians who do not share their lives in print either with other Italians or with other Australians, but shut themselves off among their fellow *paesani*, people from the same locality or birthplace, in a virtual ghetto, leaving it to their children, the second generation of Italian Australians, to merge into

the broader Australian community. There is no knowing how many other Italian Australian micro-communities replicate the experience and attitude of this micro-community visited by Pulvirenti.

That the negative experience was quite widespread is evidenced on a collective scale, both as regards Bonegilla and as regards working and living conditions, discrimination and financial stringency, in Battiston's account of the Italian immigrant organisation, FILEF [Battiston 2012: 19-21, 29-34], while on an individual level Borghese's *Appunti di un emigrante* [1996] (discussed in a later chapter), presents a very circumstantial picture which is borne out by several other Italian Australian life histories.

Pulvirenti's final recollection of her visit to that Brunswick club graphically clinches the point: "... the grass clippings I inadvertently brought into the club rooms on the soles of my shoes were pointedly vacuumed from under my feet at the end of the meeting. As the vacuum cleaner nozzle pushed me out of the way, I recall thinking that every trace of me, my questions and the memories they evoked were being extinguished and made untraceable" [Pulvirenti, personal communication, 2011].

This anecdote encapsulates the attitude of a group or groups that actively resist telling their story or having it told, except possibly in a closed circle amongst themselves. It graphically pits the social or communal perspective of lived experience against the individual perspective.

There is a hidden converse to this. The often painful, and not always successful, effort at acculturation by Italians into Anglo-Celtic Australia masks the dispossession and quasi-genocidal marginalisation in their own homeland of Australian Aborigines, which has arguably resulted in their societal traumatising. This historical injustice receives virtually no attention in Italian Australian life writing. However, in 2012 there appeared the autobiography of Chris Sarra, *Good morning, Mr Sarra*, authored by an Aboriginal activist whose educational leadership had transformed the school of the Cherbourg district of south-west Queensland by emphasising Aboriginal self-esteem and capacity to achieve. Sarra was himself one of several children of an Aboriginal mother. Their father was an

Italian immigrant from Abruzzo who had come over in the 1950s, and who had supported their mother in instilling Aboriginal pride and self-reliance in her children. He had left behind in Italy three other children from a previous relationship, and encouraged contact and comradeship between his two families, to the extent that Chris visited his half-siblings in Italy in his twenties and took pride in his dual ethnicity.

A life story published as recently as 2012 may fittingly inaugurate this chapter's survey of narratives of trauma and grievance. Meticulously researched, it reconstructs the life of Francesco Sceusa, who was born in Trapani, near the westernmost tip of Sicily, in 1851, escaped political persecution by emigrating to Sydney in 1877, and returned to Trapani with his Australian wife, Louisa Swan, in 1908, a broken, disappointed and poverty-stricken man, after having devoted his whole life, first in Italy and then in New South Wales, to the cause of Socialism and internationalism, representing the Social Democratic Federation of Australasia at the Zürich Congress of the Socialist International in 1893. The title of Gianfranco Cresciani's biography of Sceusa pointedly avoids an individualistic perspective: "Socialismo per la generazione presente': Rifugiati politici italiani e movimento socialista australiano." [Socialism for the current generation: Italian political refugees and the Australian Socialist movement.] But, Socialist though he was, Sceusa stands out as an individual, sacrificing his middle-class privileges for the cause. Cresciani follows his political activities and choices with analytical finesse and with human sympathy, recording Sceusa's initial enthusiasm on finding Australian democracy and working-class rights more securely established and taken for granted than in Europe, and his subsequent dismay at the Australian labour movement's inward-looking and xenophobic discrimination against the few Italians and other non-British immigrants. Other Italian radicals in Australia discussed in Cresciani's account were far less consistent and steadfast than Sceusa in their political commitment.

Traumatic experience varies enormously in kind and degree, and its nature and symptoms are notoriously hard to define and classify. Clinical analysis cannot be the aim of my presentation. The

anecdotes I have cited are a clue to traumas untold and unwritten. Kinds of trauma emerge from the texts themselves.

The most extreme forms of trauma are rare: Italian emigrants to Australia have not faced anything as terrible as the Holocaust, but some have had experiences of war or have had family members who have had such experiences. None of the life histories discussed exhibit the psychopathology of post-traumatic stress disorder, with the probable exception of Cristina's *Secrets of a Broken Heart*, which will be examined shortly.

I canvas trauma and grievance as threats, varying in kind and intensity, to the existential project, or sense of self, perceived by the person concerned – the autobiographical or biographical subject – whether this is explicitly stated or implicitly conveyed by the text. The published life stories which I discuss in this book are undoubtedly selective as regards the painful experiences on which they dwell.

Broadly speaking, trauma and grievance are more openly addressed in the more straightforwardly autobiographical works. Of the biographies, Helen Garner's *Joe Cinque's Consolation*, discussed in chapter 1 above, is one that most closely addresses trauma and grievance, first in the parents' grief over the loss of their son and secondly in their indignation at what they perceive as the failure of justice; while another is Flavio Lucchesi's chronicle of the repeated persecution of Joe Maffina, culminating in his internment, discussed in the first two chapters of this book. However, all the books discussed in chapter 1, with the exceptions of B. A. Santamaria's autobiography, Judith Armstrong's biography of the De Pieri brothers and Piero Genovesi's biography of the Pitruzzellos, and possibly the life story of Carlo Zaccariotto, address major hardship, grievance or trauma.

A variety of other texts approach the trials of migration and a variety of other ordeals in a variety of ways. Marie Alafaci's *Savage Cows and Cabbage Leaves: An Italian life* [1999] is a minutely detailed – often minute-by-minute – recreation of the immigration experience of the Calabrian Carmela Barbaro, who arrives at Victoria Dock in Melbourne as a four-year-old with her mother in March 1927. The strangeness of the new environment, the struggle with a new language, the initial lostness in a new school system in which

no one knows Italian, let alone Calabrian, the only language which Carmela knows, are deftly conveyed as experienced by the little girl.

The language divide confronts the reader in frequent snatches of Calabrian intercalated in the lively English narrative, with footnoted English translations. Stressful experiences arising from the immigrants' lack of English and cultural differences between Calabria and Victoria are re-enacted in the writing. Carmela's mother, Maria, gives birth to her son in an impersonal hospital where she is denied visits by her family, and has to fight to avoid having her baby taken away from her by the obstetrician [Alafaci 1999: 40-8]. On her first day at school, Carmela, the only Italian pupil, has her gold earrings taken away from her by a fellow pupil, their cultural significance being lost on the school authorities [Alafaci 1999: 54-60]. The Barbaros' boarding house, which houses several Calabrian non-union wharf-side labourers, is bombed and gutted, though, miraculously, no one is seriously injured [Alafaci 1999: 62-75]. And, generally, the family have a life of hard toil trying to make ends meet during the Depression years, with a devoted father, though one who too readily resorts to the strap.

But this is not a whingeing narrative; stoicism is garnished with good humour and the will to live and to enjoy life, and projected within a broad socio-historical perspective, with numerous newspaper clippings of the period. The subtitle, *An Italian life*, accurately suggests that this is a fairly average and typical story and, being in English, that it is an Australian Italian story. Grievance, stress, trauma, in undefinable but manageable proportions, thus figure within a tale of survival and gradually improving security and prospects of social promotion for the younger generation.

Many Italians, of course, came to Australia in a spirit of adventure and in search of opportunity, and their life narratives may thus have a celebratory air. This is the case with Desmond O'Grady's finely crafted life of Raffaello Carboni, who spent a year in Victoria during the 1850s gold rush and left the most coherent eye-witness account of the Eureka Stockade uprising. It is also the case with Daniela Volpe's less intimate, more distant account of the achievements of three other well-educated nineteenth-century Italian immigrants,

the Tuscans, Pietro Baracchi, Carlo Catani and Ettore Checchi, who integrated seamlessly into the upper echelons of Victorian society. More recently, the Pitruzzellos' migratory enterprise has been described as an adventure, and immigrants as different from one another as Ivo Vellar and Franco Lugarini, among others, use the same word.

The surgeon Ivo Vellar, who arrived in Melbourne in 1938 at the age of four with his family from the Germanic Cimbri-speaking village of Camporovere near Asiago in the Dolomites in northern Italy, was the first Italian Australian in his field, and enjoyed an outstanding educational and professional career, so that his 2008 autobiography could be deemed to belong to the celebratory mode. To pigeon-hole it as such, however, would be altogether too simple, as its title, *Adventures in Two Worlds: My battles with the D word*, indicates. The adventures include dramatic or suspenseful episodes of various kinds – near-death experiences, professional achievements and vicissitudes and also four public confrontations involving the D word, *dago*, a term of vilification once widely used in Australia to taunt and humiliate immigrants from Mediterranean countries, most especially from Italy.

Given that the four instances of confrontation recounted in his autobiography do not acquire great prominence among the medley of other incidents narrated, Vellar justifies his choice of subtitle by devoting the fourteen pages of his final chapter to “Racism and the D word” [Vellar 2008a: 165-78]. With historical penetration and humane conviction, he points up the repeated recrudescence of racism directed by some – too many – Australians against the currently most recent wave of new immigrants, and passionately argues against such discrimination. “It was episodes such as this,” he comments on one occasion, “that made me feel apprehensive and on guard, so to speak, whenever I found myself in a large gathering of Australians” [Vellar 2008a: 134].

This grievance, however, does not dominate his main narrative, which constitutes a signal contribution to the autoethnography of Italian Australians, with an impressively numerous cast of individuals – members of an extremely extended family, boyhood friends and

schoolmates, teachers and mentors, and professional colleagues – and with a particularly detailed and concrete description of domestic life in the “Little Italy” that was the Melbourne suburb of Carlton in the 1950s, as well as of several hospitals in Melbourne and in England and of a multiplicity of technically detailed surgical operations – all with prolific photographic illustration. Vellar also published *From Campoverere to Carlton: The story of five families*, as well as the biographies of the eminent pioneering surgeons, Thomas Peel Dunhill and the remarkable and spectacularly adventurous half Italian and half English Thomas Henry Fiaschi (1853-1927), *Italo-Australian Patriot, Surgeon, Soldier and Pioneer Vigneron*.

As for the globetrotting Franco Lugarini, the title of his autobiography says it all: *Mio padre mi chiamava zingaro* (My father used to call me a gypsy). Lugarini spent some time in Brazil, before settling down in Melbourne as a fashionable women’s hair stylist. He was a left-wing activist and rose to prominence and official recognition as a spokesperson for Italian working people in Australia and, more broadly, for migrants of varied ethnic background. Lugarini also gives an interesting account of his adolescent experiences trying to survive in various small towns in the Roman region of Lazio during the 1940s under an increasingly obnoxious Fascist regime and through the frightful military conflict in that area between the Axis and the Allied forces. Lugarini attributes his restless wanderlust to this unsettling experience.

My next chapter will look at life narratives that are couched as success stories (though many of them also confront frustration, struggle and grief) and will discuss their features and implications. This chapter is devoted to examining life stories that foreground various kinds of traumatic experience, including some others that involve mixed identity as a factor in the experience of trauma.

Two such cases are autobiographical accounts by non-Italian wives of Italian Australian husbands. Zelda D’Aprano, of an East European Jewish immigrant family, describes, in her 1977 autobiography (republished in a revised edition in 1995 as *Zelda: The becoming of a woman*) how, when, at the age of sixteen, she married Tony D’Aprano in 1944 in Melbourne, both the bride’s and the

bridegroom's fathers refused to attend the wedding, as both objected to the transethnic match [Zelda D'Aprano 1995: 30]. Tony suddenly left, twenty-one years later, depriving Zelda of emotional security [Zelda D'Aprano 1995: 142], but her text makes no mention of her personal relations with Tony, either from an ethnic or any other point of view, except to report on the involvement of both of them in left-wing trade-unionism, before Zelda committed herself to militant feminism, of which her autobiography is a prime Australian document, at once illuminating and eloquent.

Vivien Stewart's account of her marriage to Eliseo Achia, *Marrying Italian: When love is not enough* [2013], is unique in being the only account by an Anglo-Australian woman of her marriage to an Italian husband, and thus presents a unique interest, shedding a strong light on both the attractions and the barriers of such a match. Deep love on both sides proves unable to overcome contrary forces. Is it on account of an incompatibility between the two partners' respective social cultures and behavioural codes? Or is it due to idiosyncratic characteristics of either or both of the individuals concerned? Or to traumatic life-experiences undergone by Eliseo as a youth in war-torn Italy?

Vivien's account gives much to ponder over. It presents a vivid chronicle of a 1950s Victorian country girlhood followed by a 1960s Melbourne young womanhood, at once individual and yet typically and recognisably Australian, which gives the reader a good idea of who the woman is who will fall in love with the much older Eliseo. Eliseo represents Italian style at its most dazzling. A bricklayer by profession, in company he dresses immaculately, and he provides excellent cuisine. We see Vivien drawn into his lifestyle and into his social group, to find, upon becoming his wife, that a lot more is expected of her than she bargained for, and that her best efforts are often treated with scorn. A prolonged visit to Eliseo's family of origin in the countryside outside Rome sees her enthusiastically plunging into the Italian way of life and becoming one of the family.

Nevertheless, mutual attachment does not save the relationship from becoming unsustainable, and this is aggravated by physical and financial setbacks, leading to Eliseo's gradual decline and eventual

death. Vivien's book is an attempt to make sense of this love-tragedy and is in itself a loving gesture towards Eliseo, ending with his final message of love for her. Her second visit to Eliseo's family in Italy, undertaken after his death, constitutes a pledge that the link between them will not be broken, and this extends to Vivien's renewed commitment to Victoria's Italian community and its heritage. She remains a bridge between Anglo-Celtic and Italian Australia.

Grievance and trauma may of course have causes unconnected with nationality or ethnic origin, cultural cleavage or the experience of immigration as such, and some Italian Australian life narratives do not particularly dwell on issues of sociocultural identity in facing trauma and aggrievement.

The author of the extraordinary *Secrets of a Broken Heart*, published in 2003 simultaneously with its Italian version, *Segreti di un cuore spezzato*, is named simply as Cristina.²¹ Unlike almost every other life narrative discussed in this volume, this has no illustrations except two miniature frontispiece photographs of a little girl and a crude drawing of a broken heart on the front cover with "Shame Guilt Grief Loss Tears Pain Hate Fear Incest" engraved on its shards, and on the back cover, "Love Truth Hope Joy Faith Grace Spirit Peace Love Of God". Substantial Biblical quotations fill every available space and abound throughout the text, taken prevalently from the exilic books (*Lamentations*, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea), but also from the *Psalms*, and from the New Testament, especially Paul. There are also some incantatory pieces of Cristina's own composition, one of which, almost a page long, opens: "If I had a dream to dream let it be real, so I can dream for evermore this dream" [*Secrets*: 87]. This torrent of quotations is itself a component of the book's own anguished, overwhelming, torrential discourse. A postscript by the publisher/editor, Luigi (Jim) Scarano, to the Italian version of Cristina's book reveals that the linguistically assured and idiomatic English version passed through at least three pairs of hands, and the more uneven

21 Cristina, *Secrets of a Broken Heart*, published simultaneously with its Italian version, *Segreti di un cuore spezzato*, Thornleigh, NSW: Bridge to Peace Publications. 2003.

Italian version through at least five [*Segreti* 202-3]. Presumably, Cristina, who says she was born in a South Italian village [*Secrets*: 13], was not fully proficient in either standard Italian or standard English. The complex language mediation process does not seem to have impaired the book's expressive power, especially in the English version.

Uniquely, among the several dozen texts discussed in this volume, Cristina's is a religious work. God is invoked emotionally in Olga D'Albero Giuliani's autobiography, discussed in chapter 1 above, but is not a prominent presence. Religion is a central concern in Fosco Antonio's *My Reality*, discussed in chapter 6 below, and death-of-God theology haunts the text. But, even in life narratives centred on practising Catholics, such as Angela Napolitano's *Liborio: My Great Love* (to be discussed shortly), religious belief and practice do not prominently enter the discourse of Italian Australian life writing. This remains a secular pursuit: religious experience, if any, appears to be kept a private matter. In *Secrets of a Broken Heart*, on the other hand, God figures centrally, and is on occasion directly addressed, in worship or in prayer, Cristina affirming her faith or imploring salvation. Religious faith (Christian, but of no identifiable denomination) is central to her struggle to exorcise her resurgent horrific memories of childhood sexual abuse.

Secrets of a Broken Heart is not a narrative autobiography, but a spiritual exercise, a writing therapy, and a testament. However, it depends on memory flashbacks recovered through counselling [*Secrets*: 14] and psychotherapy when Cristina is already in her forties. The flashbacks start when she is nursing her father until he dies of a brain tumour, aged 72. "How could anyone believe what I was seeing and saying?" She, and everyone around her, thinks she is going mad [*Secrets*: 11]. As a result of her resurgent memories, at the age of forty-three, she says: "I left my marriage of 27 years, which for many years had already been dead" [*Secrets*: 11]. It is implied that her own children, whom she dearly loved, abandoned her for the same reason [*Secrets*: 138].

Cristina's flashbacks are intermittently and disconnectedly mentioned in her text. She more than once reports a distinct memory

from the age of three of her father first lavishing on her affectionate love and endearments and then forcing himself sexually upon her [Secrets: 111]. She claims to have given birth before the age of nine:

I am Cristina, the nine year old who had a child, and I say that this is not good enough for me and I promised myself as that child, that one day I would tell the world what my father did to me. [Secrets: 139]

I never held my child. I never shared his love. I never saw him grow up, but I feel love for my son. [Secrets: 148]

One of her memories is of a shining statue of the Virgin holding out her hands to Cristina [Secrets: 16-17]. Her visionary memories link sexual abuse with “a city in the sky”:

I saw myself and my mother being abused from inside the womb and after my birth the abuse continued. At 10 days old the abuse was so horrific I had, what I now know and believe was a near death experience. I saw myself in a city in the sky where I could hear music. I saw harps and could feel what the other people there were feeling and thinking. [Secrets: 13]

This city in the sky is later explicitly identified as Heaven [Secrets: 83], and in turn identifies the entire universe with Cristina’s restored individual identity, an identity of the individual with the totality predicated on a love that is distinct from sexuality:

In my city in the sky I saw, felt and knew everyone else. It was like a single thought which everyone shared with one mind. With a thought I could be anywhere, see anything and hear all. The peace and love that I felt there, no words could describe ... It was a feeling of oneness with God, the creator of heaven and earth, to feel and see his love without seeing Him, to know He was there all around like breath itself, life itself. [Secrets: 84]

Isolated from her own family and from all but a handful of newfound supportive friends, Cristina finds in writing her book her “lifeline to God” [Secrets: 119] and says: “The writing of this book is a way to honour God, myself and my descendants” [Secrets: 122]. It

is a recovery of her self, with and through God, from the “self-made prison” of “co-dependency” (or, simply, dependency) on others: “We all live in a self-made prison and we don’t know how to open the jailer’s door” [*Secrets*: 125]. “All my life,” she writes, “I have been someone’s daughter, wife, mother, but I never became Me. ... My self-worth was only in what I did for others. I was of no value to myself and I don’t believe others thought I was of any value” [*Secrets*: 122]. She invokes the only non-Biblical authority mentioned in the book, Melody Beattie, a critic of “co-dependency” [*Secrets*: 123] and announces that her quest is a “search for *me*” [*Secrets*: 126-7].

Cristina’s text is thus an explicit assertion of individual agency and identity construction, fraught with doubt: “Many times I doubt that this is from God” [*Secrets*: 133]. “Am I giving my power away to someone else? Am I still doing that?” [*Secrets*: 134]. This is soon answered by a ringing affirmative: “I have found my identity. I know who *I* am” [*Secrets*: 149], but the book necessarily remains open-ended, an exemplar of what we may call conative autobiography, the striving to affirm selfhood. (This can be related to the *conatus* – the effort of each individual being to sustain itself, as posited in Spinoza’s *Ethics* and as applied to the maintenance of individual selfhood, in the face of the threat of effacement, by Antonio R. Damasio [see Damasio 2003: 36, 269]).

Cristina’s text neither constitutes forensic evidence of incestuous childhood abuse, nor admits rejection as a product of false memory syndrome, but has to be taken as an autobiographical self-portrait, expressing anguish really experienced. As such, it exceeds what Leigh Gilmore calls the “limits of autobiography”, that is, of canonical autobiography, limits which presume the possibility of objective verification.²² Trauma here produces testimony of a different kind, which could not improperly be called testament.

The conative character of Cristina’s *Secrets of a Broken Heart* – its explicit striving to achieve selfhood and autonomy – appears closely linked to its under-developed narrativity. A story which for over forty

22 Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and testimony*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001.

years could not be told struggles to emerge, revealing itself bit by bit amid a welter of agonised discourse and ardent invocation.

This is a striking instance of how self-identity and narrative are in reciprocal relationship with one another (an issue dealt with in depth in the volume *Narrative and Identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture*, edited by Jens Brockmeier and Donal Corbaugh [2001].) So we will see in Fosco Antonio's *My Reality* that where there is no coherent self there is no coherent story, but miscellaneous fragments of story. This applies in biography as well as in autobiography: the many biographies treated in this book that construct or reconstruct a coherent self do so by means of a coherent narrative, while Helen Garner's quest to reconstruct the personality of the murdered Joe Cinque remains fragmentary, as the narrative of her quest, itself coherent, does not result in a coherent narrative of Joe Cinque.

Giuliano Montagna's autobiography opens with an ending: "I've come back home in pursuit of a hope: that of becoming who I am." [My translation from Montagna's Italian: "Sono tornato a casa inseguendo una speranza: diventare la persona che sono." Montagna 2004: 5]. The explanation of this paradoxical sally starts with the book's title, *Mio padre Giovannino Guareschi: dal Po all'Australia inseguendo un sogno* [My father Giovanni Guareschi: from the Po to Australia in pursuit of a dream.] Home is Parma and its rural hinterland in the Po valley. The dream includes the author's wish to have his real name – Giuliano Guareschi – engraved on his tombstone [Montagna 6]. Like Cristina's book, the elderly Montagna's is also a coming-out text.

Giovanni Guareschi was world-famous during the third quarter of the last century for his Don Camillo stories which humorously defused the political strife between Catholics and Communists in Italy, with the figure of Christ gently showing the parish priest Don Camillo that his antagonist, the Communist local mayor, Peppone, was his brother beneath the skin. Within Italy, Giovanni (Giovannino, to his friends) was also prominent as a political journalist of Catholic populist hue. Fathering a son out of wedlock could cause someone in his position more than a little embarrassment if it were known [Montagna 54], so Giuliano was kept secret, not recognised as

his father's son, until this coming-out late in the son's own life. Limited throughout his life to relatively few, intermittent, brief and non-committal meetings with his father, the unacknowledged son nevertheless worshipped his "paper father" (as he came to think of him, since he came to know him through his writings and through what others wrote about him) and he took him as his role model. He dreamed of following his father in a journalistic career, though without any ambition to vie with him. An audio-cassette recording of his father addressing him, sent to Giuliano the year before his father's death in 1968, remains his constant companion through all the years after that event [Montagna 114-15]. As Montagna feels his own end approaching, the imperative to reveal the truth, to claim his legitimacy, to assert his identity, finds expression in this book.

Montagna's book is bifocal in more ways than one. The clandestine father-son relationship itself determines a double focus, the son's identity being constantly defined in relation to the father's, and modelled on it. Although the elder Guareschi appears here in the third person, the sustained pathos of frustrated longing in the narrative makes of him a virtual second person.

This is in turn translated into the book's double focus on Italy and Australia: the antipodean remove, placing an ocean between, paradoxically brings father and son closer together. The hurt of paternal non-recognition makes *Mio padre Giovannino Guareschi*, of all the Italian Australian life narratives which I have read, the one in which the identity of origin remains strongest, though attachment to Australia is not in question. Italian is the language of this autobiography not only because it remains Montagna's dominant language, the language in which he could but is too modest to claim literary proficiency, and the language of his journalism for the Sydney newspaper *La Fiamma*, but because his essential dialogue is with his father, who was an Italian writer of note, who had his own distinctive way with the Italian language, and, through his father, his dialogue is, arguably, with Italy itself, whose parental relationship to its offspring has not been straightforward or wholehearted.