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Australia as an (in) hospitable home in Peter Carey's *A Long Way from Home* (2017)

Abstract. The concepts of "house" and "home" constitute two poles of experience which negotiate the space between economic and emotional safety. Associated with material well-being and personal relationships, they may serve as litmus-paper tests to probe the economic and personal situation of people living on a given territory. The last to-date novel by the Australian novelist Peter Carey, *A Long Way from Home* (2017), takes up the issue of Australia as a metaphorical home to diverse groups of people: the white descendants of British colonisers, post-WWII survivors and immigrants, and the indigenous Aboriginal inhabitants of the continent. Employing the plot of the all-around-the-country car race, the novel shows how the land, seemingly homely and open to everybody, may be read as a palimpsest of trauma and pain, and quite inhospitable to many of its inhabitants. Referring to the concepts of the picaresque and chronotope, this article will argue that both the metaphoric and the literal meaning of the concepts of house and home are employed in the novel to disclose and discuss the internal and immigration policy of the Australia of the 1950s.

Keywords: house and home, picaresque, chronotope, racial and ethnic policy, postcolonialism.

Peter Carey's Australian fiction

Peter Carey's fiction, well-known and widely read for forty years now, may be roughly divided into two groups of novels. One of them includes historical re-visitations and revisions of the earlier literary canon, historical past or politics, and may be illustrated by such novels as *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), *Jack Maggs* (1997) or *Parrot and Olivier in America* (2010). The other group comprises non-historical novels, often – though not always – set in Australia and presenting contemporary portraits – again, mostly, though not exclusively – of the Australian white middle class, and includes such novels as *Bliss* (1981), *My Life as a Fake* (2003), *Theft* (2006) and *The Chemistry of Tears* (2012). Apart from this rough thematic division, one may also notice

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that while Carey's historical novels tend to exhibit an intensive degree of experimentation and innovation (often connected with Postmodernist poetics), the non-historical ones steer towards relatively more traditional, sometimes satirical, social portraits of certain groups or ways of life, thus coming closer to contemporary comedies or novels of manners. Yet, both Carey's historical experiments and contemporary portraits share the tendency to be set in and to represent Australia with its culture, habits, myths and legends, which are probed and tested on their pages. One may also add that until the year 2017, it was chiefly southern Australia and white Australia, with such places as Sydney or Melbourne and the panorama of characters ranging from settlers, missionaries, outlaws or bushrangers to advertising agents, hippies or painters that constituted the interest of his fiction.

Seen against this background, Peter Carey's latest novel, *A Long Way from Home* (2017), may strike one as an interesting exception to the tendencies sketched above. With its action set in the year 1953, the novel is both contemporary and historical, representing the past which is – following Walter Scott's famous precept – located just "sixty years since", that is, both safely distant to be impersonally and objectively explored and yet vivid enough to stir emotions and evoke still fresh experience. Thus, the chosen time setting is a much more vulnerable and sensitive area of representation than, for instance, the previous choice of the 18th or 19th century, as in the collective memory of the people to whom it belongs this past is not yet entirely past and it is much less liable to be manoeuvred into the interplay of literary conventions or intertextual games. It is both past and present, still retaining its connections with the here and now, but not yet distant enough to become just a (his)story. Moreover, the spatial setting of the story, too, marks a departure from Carey's previous novels: this time the protagonists embark on a journey from southern Australia to literally tour the whole continent, including its less urbanised, less populated and less "civilised" remote parts. Activating the chronotope of the road, *A Long Way from Home* expands its spatial dimension to present not just a section of Australia but – if it is possible – the whole country with its various landscapes, climates, habitats, vegetation and people. It is also the first of Carey's novels to take up the issue of non-white Australia, as it introduces characters who represent not just the white middle class but also immigrants and First Nations; it is also the first of his works that refers to the history of the country's racism. In his review of the novel, Alex Preston observes that

> It seems strange at first that Carey – surely Australia's greatest living novelist, even if he hasn't dwelled there for decades – has taken so long to get around to the subject. In a recent interview in the *Australian*, he said that he'd always felt that it was not the place of a white writer to tell this tale. Then something changed: "You can't be a white Australian writer and spend your whole life ignoring the greatest, most important aspect of our history, and that is that we – I – have been the beneficiaries of a genocide." (Preston 2018)

By showing the encounters of the southern whites with "the other" Australia and Australians and their complex history of atrocities and violence, the novel posits the question of what kind of home Australia makes for other than its white Anglo-Saxon inhabitants and how (in)hospitable a place it is for its various other kinds of citizens.

In the following analysis I will argue that *A Long Way from Home* may be read as a critical portrayal of Australia and its then policies towards its people, especially to non-whites. The article will discuss how the novel represents indifference, intolerance and discrimination developed first at the political level, comprising the status and legal situation of non-white characters; then at the social level, shown in common and state-induced prejudice; and finally at the level of imagery, which metaphorically employs landscape and architecture to visualise the observed divisions between the two Australias. Referring to the concepts of house and home, treated both in a most literal and metaphoric way, the analysis will focus on how the fictional portrayal of plots and characters, along with the setting and the buildings and places the novel describes, reflects and represents complex relations within the portrayed Australian society. Following Marilyn R. Chandler, the analysis is based on the premise that "the houses in novels [...] reflect not only the psychological structure of the main character [but also] the social structure in which he or she is entrapped" (Chandler 1991: 3), and that the fictional houses, treated as metaphors, "construct complex analogies between house [...] and social environment" (Chandler 1991: 3). Thus, analysing plots, characters and settings, the following discussion aims to demonstrate that Carey's novel bitterly diagnoses the past of his country as unjust and shows Australia as a comfortable home (and house) to some but not to all of its inhabitants.

A long way (from) home

The plot of the novel involves the journey of the three main protagonists around the Australian continent. Wishing to improve their fortunes, business prospects, financial situation and family relations, they decide to take part in the car race called the Redex Race: a car reliability trial which takes standard-produced vehicles across country roads and all-terrain trails to check and prove their durability and reliability. The route takes the contestants over twenty days from the small city of Bachhus Marsh on the outskirts of Melbourne, through Sydney, up north to Brisbane and Townsville, then west to the Kimberley Plain, Darwin and Broome, all the way south to Perth and then through the Nullarbor Plain to Adelaide and back to Sydney. The race, then, is a genuine *tour de Australia*, bringing together both its urbanised and relatively densely populated southern areas with the barren and desert parts of the remote north and west. The thus sketched plot resembles the classical plot of the picaresque in which the characters travel across the land to experience unusual adventures and then return changed to their homes, and which presents at the same time "the actual structure of society" (Frye 2000: 310).

It may also be productively analysed through the lens of the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road where the space of the road becomes an area of encounters and transformations. Chronotope, as Bakhtin defines it, is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84) and a convenient analytical tool to investigate not just temporal and spatial relationships within a given text but also its generic classification or themes. True to form, Carey's novel may be said to employ the chronotope of the road, involving as it does the journey of the protagonists and the adventures they experience. It is thus one of the adventure stories in which "[o]f special importance is the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road ('the open road'), and of various types of meetings on the road" (Bakhtin 1981: 98). This chronotope, as Bakhtin points out, involves not just adventures but primarily chance encounters as the road is the place where "the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (Bakhtin 1981: 243). In keeping with this description, Carey's novel introduces numerous plot twists and revelations which result from life-changing encounters and coincidences.

The journey the three protagonists make does indeed change their lives. For the characters of Irene and Titch Bobs, debuting small-town car-sellers, it brings the end of their happy marriage based on mutual trust and understanding; at the end of the race they grow apart and lonely. For another character, Willem Bachhuber, their neighbour and navigator, the impact of the journey turns out even more cataclysmic: on the road, he is forced to gradually question and then completely redefine his identity, including his race, home and family. For all of them the journey brings the end of innocence and illusion: the knowledge they gain, both about the country, its past and present, and about themselves proves to be life-changing. Unknowingly and unintentionally, the characters embark on a journey of self-recognition, moving into the heart of the continent and into their own hearts. These recognitions turn out not necessarily pleasant. As one of the two alternating narrators, Irene Bobs states, "it was said that Australia was beautiful, but not by me" (part III, chpt. 2, loc. 2320), and she goes on to observe later that "if this was our country's heart, I never saw anything so stony, so empty, endless, devoid of life" (part III, chpt. 3, loc. 2421). Both hearts, then, that of the country and those of the protagonists, seem rather dark, as their true identities seem to be covered with lies and secrets, which come up only later in the story. This metaphorical darkness, together with the plot construction and the revelations experienced by the characters, may intertextually echo Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with its slow and painful discoveries of atrocities, horrors and evil hidden in the African jungle. Similar to Conrad's story, Carey's *Long Way from Home* gradually reveals to its protagonists both the horrendous past of the ordinary-looking spaces, palimpsestically complicating the seemingly innocent map of

the continent, and the country's present, similarly still marked by violence, discrimination and inequality. At the end of the journey, the protagonists split and return separately, disappointed, embittered yet more aware of the evil man is capable of. Their discoveries concern the history, present-day politics and social life of their country, and make them reconsider the supposed hospitality and homeliness of the state to which they so far unquestionably belonged.

White Australia policy

Willie Bachhuber observes on numerous occasions that the undeclared policy of post-WWII Australia was to prevent the Aboriginal population from claiming their rights to the land and to discourage other than non-white and non-British people from coming to Australia as immigrants. In effect, in the novel Australia seems to be a hospitable home for whites only, with the exclusion of other races and ethnicities.

As the character gradually discovers, this attitude has had a long tradition. Preparing for his job as the navigator in the race, he reads about the territories which in the past were idyllic green pastures for sheep, only to discover that they had been taken away forcefully by white settlers from their native nomadic inhabitants, with all the violence usually connected with such evictions. Bachhuber realises that the maps show former tribal lands – and that they are "maps of murder" (Part I, chpt. 17, loc. 1399); that the particular stretches of the route now called "Horror Stretches" owe their name not only to the driving difficulties but perhaps first of all to the "dispersal of the natives" and the ethnic cleansing that took place there in the past (Part I, chpt. 22, loc. 1801). The map of the land they enter upon leaving the civilised, urbanised south, which in the initial opinion of Irene Bobs was "the country that killed white men; the killer country" (Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 1975), turns out to be much more multi-layered and complicated, with the present state obliterating the past events which only residually come to the surface. One of such instances is provided by the characters' chance discovery of old human bones, uncovered, unburied and untended, which turn out to be the remains of a long-past massacre of the native black inhabitants of Australia. Equally horrendous in the discovery of the past genocide is the present-day reaction of the local police to whom the characters report their finding and who indifferently refuse to take any interest in it. The horrors of the past concerning the "blackfellahs" do not seem interesting to the present-day all-white administration, nor do the latter consider it necessary to treat the human remains and the place with any special respect.

The discriminatory policy towards the non-white native inhabitants is also visible in the practice of social care services taking away children of mixed race from their Aboriginal parents and giving them for adoption to white families in order to offer them a better life. The so-called "stolen generation" is now a well-known and much discussed traumatic episode in the Australian past (cf. Short 2008: 87-105) – in the novel

it is dramatised as the fate of Willie Bachhuber, who is confronted with the fact that, previously unaware of it, he himself happens to be such a child, pale-skinned and fair-haired, who was adopted and raised by white parents out of compassion and good intentions. One of the discoveries he makes on the road is that of his original Aboriginal family and the story of his own capture and their ensuing suffering and desperation. As Lochy Peterson, one of the Aboriginal characters of the novel sadly observes, "we done plenty crying in this camp" (Part V, chpt. 6, loc. 3455); violence, rape, child-taking, protest-quenching and unfair imprisonment seem to be the constant lot of the native population.

Finally, the whites-only policy is also visible in the case of the post-WWII immigration to Australia. Although in theory all immigrants are equal, in practice some turn out to be more equal than others, and the criteria seem to be race and ethnicity. Early in the novel Bachhuber, then still a teacher in a provincial southern school, thus meditates on the question asked by one of the pupils about the so-called "Balts", i.e. the refugees coming to Australia from post-war Europe:

> How could I possibly "teach" him that the Australian government had deliberately misnamed the displaced persons Balts? That was the path by which the word had entered his vocabulary. How many weeks might it take to have him understand that the Australian government were selecting light skinned "Nordic types" as future citizens and that they had, for the sake of obfuscation, named them Balts? (Part I, chpt. 4, loc. 410)

A similar policy is adopted towards people of African or Afro-American origin. The character of Madison Lee, a demobilised WWII African-American soldier allowed to settle down in Australia after the war, is one of the few exceptions to the rule which, unofficially yet efficiently, discourages such people from coming to Australia. As presented in the novel, the immigration policy clearly privileges white-skinned people over dark-skinned ones, making Australia a hospitable new home to the former but not to the latter.

The main characters, who gradually discover all of these facts and policies on the road, react differently to this new knowledge. The Bobs do not seem particularly interested at first: they are not educated people, nor do they care for education and knowledge; their neighbour who is an impressively educated man (a champion of radio quiz shows, too) becomes a sort of history teacher to them. Yet, they react differently to this teaching: for Titch Bobs, this is merely history. "What use is this to us?" (Part II, chpt. 7, loc. 1801), he asks, dismissing history for the sake of the present. At one point, exasperated, he demands: "you tell us what is happening *now*. I could not give a fuck about what happened a hundred years ago" (Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 2012). For his wife Irene the turning point comes with the finding of a baby's skull – one of the victims of the massacre of the

Aborigines, shot with a bullet a long time before. Moved, she takes the skull with her and thus begins her own journey towards empathy and understanding of people who are not like her. Bachhuber makes his discoveries first as a historian and archaeologist, a teacher and a scientist, unearthing poignant facts which – so he then believes – though terrible, have little to do personally with him. His attitude is concerned yet neutral. It is only when they travel north, where he is first recognised as a half-blood and thus discriminated against, and then when by a coincidence he finds his original Aboriginal family and learns his story, that he realises that the complex racial past and present of his home country is his own story, too. His further "adventures", after he quits the race and stays on his tribal land – involving the defence of his black family, a prison sentence, and then becoming a historian and anthropologist of his people – mark his transformation from a comfortable and unreflective white middle-class man into a much less privileged Australian citizen. His son, who is the narrator of the last section of the novel (again, in contrast to Carey's remaining novels, most of which usually employ just two alternating narrators, this text adds in the last section a third, extra one, who functions as a postscript voice of the next generations), is a black Aborigine who benefits from white education and claims to have the freedom unavailable to his forefathers. As he states, "impossible as this would prove to be, I did not wish myself to be known or restricted by the colour of my skin. For the longest time I was determined that this would have no effect on me at all and I was readily annoyed with anyone who suggested otherwise" (Part V, chpt. 21, loc. 4599). Yet, living in post-war Australia, he, too, is forced to acknowledge that this freedom is a dream rather than reality and he, too, has to face the burden of the past horrors and injustice. Concluding the novel, he states that "our mother country is a foreign land whose language we have not yet earned the right to speak" (Part V, chpt. 21, loc. 4655). The novel, then, presents a fictional sample of representative attitudes towards the complex Australian racial situation, ranging from indifference, through sympathy, to active involvement in pro-egalitarian activism. Triggered by coincidences and chance, the plot events reveal resentment and prejudice as latent in Australian society, deeply ingrained and hard to change, making Australia inhospitable to at least some of its inhabitants.

The ones hardly at home

As the novel makes clear, Australia treats its First Nations and immigrants as third- and second-class citizens. This attitude is expressed in the text not only by references to the official government policies but also shown by the everyday casual discrimination perpetrated by white Australians, who evidently treat their non-white and non-British fellow citizens as inferior, and seem to believe they are entitled to treat them so.

Many episodes show how the non-whites and even non-Australians are regarded as "naturally" worse. Bachhuber himself, in his "first life" as a white man, is discriminated

against as being a "Kraut" since his adoptive family is of German origin. In the freshly post-WWII Australia the anti-German sentiment may be perhaps explainable, yet it is also extended to war refugees and immigrants, who are seen as alien.[2] This is also the case of the Chinese population, both in the present and in the past, when riots against and the abuse of Chinese workers were frequent occurrences (e.g. the mid-19th century "Lambing Flat Riots" described in Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 1997). Despite the immigrant-friendly official rhetoric, the everyday practice positions these Australians as second-class citizens: tolerated, even needed, but far from equal and welcome. Their status may be compared to that of servants in hierarchically organised households: they have their place and role in them, yet they have neither prestige nor respect. The most drastic discrimination, however, concerns native Australians, whose situation is represented in the novel as the worst.

At the time of the novel's action native Aborigines are hardly Australian citizens: they have no voting or property rights; as the novel presents them, their social and legal position can be described as located somewhere between wild animals and slaves. Limited to a given territory, they have a restricted right to move, leave or settle (unless they have a special certificate of exemption); they are also subject to local restrictions such as the curfew hours. They live in structures called "a humpy" or "a gunyah" – a shelter constructed around a tree trunk, made of bark and tree branches, or of rusting corrugated iron and cardboard, with no access to running water, toilet or bath. There is no public medical service they could benefit from or any transportation system available to them. Aborigines are strictly forbidden to drink alcohol (again, unless exempted), and they are generally treated as if they were mentally retarded. This is seen in the attitude to education: they do not participate in the education offered to whites; they have one designed specially for them which involves low-quality local schools whose aim is to teach them little more than broken English for communication purposes; higher education or professional training is neither planned for them nor welcome by their employers or, more accurately, quasi-"owners." This scheme of education is further connected with linguistic discrimination: native languages are tolerated only as a means of inter-family communication; using them in official situations is forbidden. The episodes of the novel set in the Quamby Downs station – a huge cattle breeding establishment – most resemble episodes in the Conradian *Heart of Darkness,* with its treatment of the natives as a slave work force. "Allowed" to live on the territory of the farm and given the simplest supplies, in return the Aboriginal people have to work unpaid for the farm

2 The less-than-hospitable policy towards immigrants is by no means an Australian feature only: one may remember the internment camps for refugees from Nazi Germany in Europe during WWII, or the U.S. internment camps for people of Japanese descent at the same time. Carey's novel, just like historical research done on this subject, brings to light this less pleasant aspect of the allies' help, and the hardships and often humiliation the war and post-war immigration involved.

owner who indeed behaves as if he owned his "blacks". In scenes reminiscent of the colonial past the novel shows how violence, abuse, rapes and murder are still in the 1950s the reality of native Australians.[3]

As a reaction, native tribes develop various forms of resistance. Apart from the obvious and already well described degeneration due to alcohol abuse and crime on the one hand, and the heroic attempts to maintain ancient traditions on the other, they also create secret quasi-religious opposition cults whose aim is to counter the enslavement and preserve the knowledge of the native customs, lore and religion. Though politically and physically helpless in confrontation with far better organised and equipped whites, Aborigines are represented in Carey's novel as actively trying to rescue their complex oral culture and to preserve their dignity despite the enslavement and brutalities inflicted upon them. The character of Bachhuber becomes the chronicler and historian of this resistance and an amateur anthropologist who records shards and pieces of the culture which was designed to be demolished by the white colonisers.

On the pages of *A Long Way from Home*, then, Australia emerges as hardly homely or hospitable to many of its inhabitants. Pursuing the metaphor of a country as a home to its people, one may easily observe that in Carey's novel the Australia of the 1950s is represented as comfortable and generous to whites, quite harsh and uninviting to immigrants, while to the First Nations it is openly hostile and oppressive; it guards its doors and segregates insiders. These discriminatory politics and social practices, which in the story are dramatised at the level of the plot construction and characterisation, are additionally expressed and reinforced by a further element of the novel's architecture, i.e. by a clear visual contrast that determines the construction of space and setting in the novel.

Spatial metaphors

The spatial imagery employed in the novel may be interpreted as clearly organised in contrastive ways. The contrast metaphorically emphasises the division into two Australias and is visible in the descriptions of landscape and of architecture. The novel, constructed around the plot of a journey, describes many places and landscapes, yet one may clearly notice that they may be conveniently analysed as representing two types:

3 In this context it is perhaps worth mentioning that, again, Australia represents here a larger group of countries which have to deal with their colonial past and the atrocities committed then. The fate of the Australian "stolen generation" reminds one of the present-day discussions surrounding Canadian residential schools for First Nations' children, which in a violent and traumatic way deprived them of their families, languages, culture and not infrequently even lives (cf. the reportage by Joanna Gierak-Onoszko, *27 śmierci Tony'ego Obeda* (*27 Deaths of Toby Obeda*) (2019)). Carey's novel, then, inscribes itself in a much broader revisionist trend of recovering the dark pages of colonial history and its still less recognised aspects (e.g. educational policy).

spaces connected with white culture and those which belong to the non-British and non-whites. The former are located mostly in the South of Australia (e.g. Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth or Bachhus Marsh) and are settlements of white people whose inhabitants have never even had a chance to see an Aboriginal person. They are described as spacious, ordered and well arranged, with avenues, squares and monuments. They have public services such as transportation, medical centres, schools, libraries or regular shops. They are planted with green vegetation, flowers and trees; the climate is warm but not hot, and there are no shortages of water. They are also places of peace and quiet, sometimes perhaps a little boring but safe and comfortable. The following fragment may illustrate how Irene Bobs describes the provincial town she lives in:

> No-one ever came to the Marsh without thinking, what a pretty town. [...] If there was a prettier war memorial than our Avenue of Honour, I never heard of it. Every tree in the avenue was planted for a local boy who died. Every trunk had its own name. The dead boys are now huge elms and they join together above the road and give a very calm impression. This is how you enter the town. You drive beneath them, up the aisle, beside the apple orchards, the shire offices, the lawn bowls games in progress. You can dawdle through the wide streets and get some glimpse of our boring life. (Part I, chpt. 20, loc. 1650)

Serene and peaceful, with well-designed public spaces and town facilities, the provincial southern Australian town of Bacchus Marsh may seem perhaps boring with its small-town slowness and quiet but it is certainly comfortable to and caring for its inhabitants. Functionality and aesthetics seem to govern its organisation and contribute to the well-being of the citizens. This is an area of risk-free existence, stability and more than decent living standards which are provided by the state.

In contrast, the native territories located in the north and west, near Broome, Darwin, or in the Kimberley, are almost empty due to climate conditions: they are hot and dry, mostly covered by deserts, and home to little vegetation or animal life. They are represented as hostile to life – areas of survival rather than flourishing. Yet, despite this aridity, the landscape turns out to be covered with a surprisingly dense network of secret trails and paths known only to the natives, sacred rocks and caves of ritual significance, and places which offer both shelter and respite. Hostile to the whites, these territories are shown as familiar and safe to the Aborigines, who know how to live in them and for whom they are their home. The contrast, then, which conditions the construction of space in this novel, may be said as that running between white comfort and native hardship, privilege and dispossession, culture and nature.

A similar contrast may be detected in the representation of housing in the novel. Interpreting the term "house" in its most literal sense, i.e. as a place of shelter and protection from the hardships of climate and weather, and a structure tending to the physiological and psychological needs of people, one may notice once again the ideological axis structuring the representation of Australian racial and ethnic policy employed in Carey's novel. As described on the pages of *A Long Way from Home*, the white population lives in proper houses, usually quite nice and comfortable, cosy, furnished and well equipped. Even the characters that are not rich live decently: either in rented houses or in city housing blocks, which nevertheless are comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. Bachhuber thus describes the Melbourne establishment his girlfriend lives in:

> We were entering a Queens Road apartment building. Perhaps you know the type, always divided by a long thin garden path punctuated by blind white statues and melancholy topiary, one of those "Spanish style" blocks which had previously seemed so lost and loveless to me. (Part I, chpt. 17, loc. 1382)

Even apartments blocks, usually focused solely on the function of providing the greatest number of apartments to the greatest number of people, are visibly designed with aesthetic qualities in mind, accompanied by art (statues) and greenery (garden paths, topiary). This description shows the average standard of living as not just basic or comfortable but even pleasing and aesthetically designed. Both urban establishments and the suburban or small-town houses, then, seem homely and friendly. In contrast, the descriptions of houses inhabited by immigrants show them as simple, dilapidated or ruined, lacking ornamentation or design, and poor, as in Broome, where the houses are described as "one-and-two-storey timber shanties" and the pavement as just "red earth" (Part IV, chpt. 3, loc. 2879). These are still houses but sub-standard ones, and the degree of difference between them and the "normal" Australian houses of those times reflects the lower status of the immigrants who inhabit them. Thus, the shape and condition of the houses described in the novel become an index measuring the distance between the different racial and ethnic populations of the post-WWII Australian continent. Finally, the dwellings inhabited by Aborigines could hardly be called houses at all. As already pointed out in previous paragraphs, they are merely provisional shelters: barracks, tents and huts made of corrugated iron, cardboard, tree branches, grass and mud. They serve the most basic and primitive needs, i.e. they protect their inhabitants from weather and wild animals but offer no comfort or conveniences. As Bachhuber describes it, an Aboriginal dwelling is

> a small temporary shelter made from bark and tree branches, with a standing tree usually used as the main support. In Quamby Downs a gynyah is called a *humpy* and was not

> made of bark but of rusting corrugated iron and cardboard. You could not stand up in a humpy. You could not wash inside. You had no bathroom, nothing but a single standpipe in the camp. [...] In the wet season humpies leaked but then there would be a creek and a swimming hole to wash in. (Part V, chpt. 6, loc. 3358)

As the description shows, the "houses" of Aboriginal characters hardly meet the definition of the term and should rather be referred to as shelters since they do not provide many of the functions traditionally associated with the structure called a "house".

The descriptions of both landscapes and buildings provided in the novel are detailed, accurate and precise, well reflecting the shapes, colours and design of the described spaces. On the one hand, one may believe that they quite realistically show the Australia of the 1950s with its topography and atmosphere, offering a sociological record of a certain stage of its history. On the other hand, however, the construction of these spaces has clearly metaphoric functions and draws attention to other than merely descriptive values of the presented sights and buildings. Spatial relations in a literary work, following Yuri Lotman, may be treated as reflections of a wider outside world which is their model (cf. Lotman 1977). In Carey's novel, due to their contrastive structure, textual houses clearly draw attention to the contrast between white and Anglo-Saxon and non-white and non-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of the seemingly common Australian "home". Again, this contrast is sharp and significant: landscape, architecture and the standard of housing reflect the status of the population inhabiting them – high in the case of white colonisers, poor in the case of immigrants, and next to none in the case of the native people. In their study *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*, David Madden and Peter Marcuse observe that "[h]ousing is always more than just housing" (Madden and Marcuse 2016: 85), pointing to its relation-building role within the community and the establishing of power relations among inhabitants. Similarly, one may treat the novelistic representation of space and houses as a fictional reflection of the actually existing power relations within the community this fiction represents, and analyse these relations with the help of the concept of house and home. Thus analysed, the metaphorical reading of the landscape and housing represented in the novel indicates that Australia is neither a comfortable house (in the most literal sense) nor a hospitable home (in a metaphorical one) to its other than non-white inhabitants.

Conclusions

The analysis of the plot, characterisation and spatial relations in the novel help interpret *A Long Way from Home* as a comment on and criticism of the attitude of Australia as a state and of its citizens towards its non-white and non-Australian inhabitants. True to its generic convention of the picaresque novel, Carey's text, while tracing the

adventurous plots of its fictitious characters, presents the structure of the society and the social relations in which they are situated. Likewise, analysed with the help of the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road, the novel illustrates the revelatory potential of the plot which, introducing chance encounters and surprising meetings, exposes the structure of the society seen at a particular intersection of time and space, portrayed with its various classes and ethnic groups. Writing about postcolonial literatures, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point to the "powerful metonymic force" of the theme of housing, observing that "the construction or demolition of houses is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of post-colonial identity in works from very different societies" (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 27). Set in a former colony, in a country whose colonial past is only thinly palimpsestically covered with the post-war present, Carey's novel represents Australia as an heir to the history of colonial violence and atrocity. The text recollects, describes and dramatises systemic discrimination, official and casual racism, and ingrained and inherited prejudice which are exhibited both by state officials and by average white Australians. It also refers to many horrors of the past revealed bitterly as practices which today can only be classified as ethnic cleansing. In so doing, it presents a critical diagnosis of the racial relations in the post-WWII Australia which it exposes as based on inequality and injustice.

Read with the help of the concepts of house and home, the title of the novel may be thus seen as nothing short of metaphoric: thinking of the racial relations presented in it, it seems quite clear that while the Australia of the 1950s (just as in the previous decades and centuries) may seem a hospitable and comfortable space to some, to others it is at that time a place still very far from home, and the distance is not only that of space but rather of time and attitude. The novel is historical as it presents the situation of the 1950s with flashbacks going back to the 19th century, yet one may only wonder how historical, i.e. outdated, this picture has become by now.

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