

An analysis of australian and italian culture in melina marchetta's "looking for ...

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The character of Josephine in Melina Marchetta's 1992 debut novel *Looking For Alibrandi* is an interesting young girl who is struggling with her identity. She is shown to be a complex person, extremely imaginative yet possessive and a quick, fiery temper.

Some of this complexity stems from the fact that Josephine finds herself amidst two cultures, Australian and Italian, both cultures that can be very demanding and expecting of young women. The character experiences some difficulty in navigating the realities and prejudices of these cultures, and the added pressures of private school and middle class life do not help with her mental well being. Josephine's key problem is that her personal aspirations extend much further than the expectations her family has for her, and this is the main point of culture clash. As a result of this the character feels compelled to rebel against the classic stereotype of a 'good Italian woman', breaking away from the expectations to be a family woman and instead focusing on her education. This decision marks the first of the Alibrandi females to step in and take control of her own life.

There is also a large presence and message within the book of the way that patriarchy and female oppression is so prevalent throughout Italian culture, and how this is slightly combatted by the more modern Australian culture that the young female characters experience simultaneously. Due to the fact that Christina and her daughter were outcast for failing to meet the harsh standards of Italian culture, she developed a hatred for that part of herself and her family history that is completely ingrained in her personality. As the narrative progresses we see her continue to move away from her Italian culture and become more aligned to the Australian culture within her

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personality, forcing herself to be brave and come to terms with all of the terrible decisions that have been made within the family dynamic just because certain actions and life events did not align with traditional Italian values and culture. Josephine is particularly rebellious and antagonistic towards the supposedly expected Italian way of life, frequently referenced in the text by multiple mentions of her Nonna stating things like “ you break my heart” and “ I deserve respect”. Her actions are constantly reported to her grandmother by her elderly friends, and it feels very much like she cannot escape from the oppression of the Italian culture. Little events like not being allowed to sit in an air conditioned room that is only for guests and consistently criticising her clothing choices all add up to really put Josephine at odds with her culture, and her emotion finally tips over when she discovers the truth about Christina’s parentage and circumstance, revealing an entire lifetime of hypocrisy that fuels even more backlash at her Italian culture.

However, the enormity of the illegitimate revelation is the one plot even within the narrative that starts to change things, finally giving the different generations of Alibrandi women the time and the opportunity to begin to heal cultural divides and create new paths for themselves. The older generations begin to relax certain traditional attitudes and become more attuned to modern Australian culture, and the younger generation finds a new air of reverence and slight respect for some aspects of the historical Italian culture that their family is so unavoidably intertwined with. Overall, through the story of a multi-generational family, Melina Marchetta has

succeeded in creating a poignant exploration of the kinds of culture clashes that are so frequently occurring in today's multicultural societies.