

# QUESTIONS OF 'HOME' AND 'ORIGIN' IN VALERIO MASSIMO MANFREDI'S *CHIAMIRA AND THE ANCIENT CURSE*

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## **Sommario**

*Nel romanzo di Valerio Massimo Manfredi Chiamira (2001) / The Ancient Curse (2010) la nozione di casa è esplorata attraverso l'utilizzo di topoi narrativi tratti dal mito antico e dalla storia. Da un palazzo abbandonato in una città toscana alla comparsa, nei punti cruciali della narrazione, di un ragazzo coinvolto nel saccheggio di una tomba etrusca, gli spazi associati con il concetto di casa sono variamente impiegati nella creazione di un thriller che scava nelle profondità dell'animo umano. Particolare attenzione nel saggio è prestata al significato della tomba come 'spazio di riposo' e 'spazio di ritorno', così come al mito di Tages.*

**Key Words:** Eruscan – Ancient Myth – Thriller

Better known for his historical novels, the likes of *The Alexander Trilogy* (1998), Manfredi's popular novels are widely read and cover a range of *genres* from thrillers to adventure and detective novels. In these novels, rather than respect the classical text as a story to be retold, Manfredi uses the classical sources<sup>1</sup> as raw materials to tell a new story through which contemporary issues pertaining to our society are explored. The mystery surrounding the modern narrative of these novels progressively unravels as the reader 'discovers' and/or applies prior knowledge of the myths and history of the artefacts

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, a 'classical source' refers to a classical text as well as objects from the ancient and classical period seen as "current interpretations of ancient texts [...] in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been affected" (Martindale, 1993:7).

employed in the novels, thus allowing for a dynamic reading of the text(s).

In *The Ancient Curse*, the 'home' and its various significations is explored through the creation of narrative spaces that re-evaluate the shifting meanings of 'homes': homes past and homes present. The theme of 'home' is thus approached not only through the physical description of what may traditionally constitute 'home', but primarily through the notion of home which is explored through the narrative spaces formulated around the reception of ancient myth and history. This relationship between the physical abode, 'home' and the development of the narrative becomes symbiotic. It is through the exploration of these physical spaces – houses, palaces, tombs and farms – that the narrative takes shape and transforms into a tale of horror, honour and restitution.

Set in modern Volterra, the ancient Etruscan town known as Velatri, the narrative follows the discoveries of the young archaeologist and academic, Fabrizio Castellani, as he becomes involved in a complex decoding of an ancient curse as it plays out in the present after the desecration of an unmarked Etruscan tomb. The temporal duality of the narrative, marked by the overlapping of the fate of Turm Kaiknas, an Etruscan noble and his family at the hands of the ruthless Lars Thyrens, lord of Velatri, and Fabrizio's research into the origins of a seemingly unrelated statue dated to the same era enables the concept of 'home' to be argued as both physical space and abstraction of origin. Through Fabrizio's various physical investigations into the origins of the statue, *Ombra della sera*, the metaphysical, spectral spaces of the past become corporeal in the narrative of present.

The theme of 'home' is introduced in the opening paragraphs of the novel with the arrival in Volterra of the young archaeologist, Fabrizio Castellani and a description of his new lodgings:

Fabrizio Castellani arrivò a Volterra una sera di ottobre [...] Un amico di suo padre gli aveva trovato un alloggio a buon mercato in una fattoria della Val d'Era, a non molta distanza dalla città. Il colono se n'era andato qualche tempo prima, il podere era sfitto e lo sarebbe

rimasto ancora a lungo perché il padrone pensava di ristrutturare il fabbricato [...] La parte antica era fatta di sasso e coperta con vecchi coppi macchiati, a nord di licheni gialli e verdi, quella più recente di mattoni. Il terreno circostante, coltivato nel lato esposto a sud, allineava una decina di filari di grandi ulivi nodosi pieni di frutti e altrettanti di una vite bassa, carica di grappoli violacei con le foglie che cominciavano a variare dal verde verso il rossobrillante dell'autunno. Un muretto di pietra a secco correva tutto attorno ma appariva in più punti crollato e bisognoso di restauro [...] La casa gli piacque subito, soprattutto per il profumo di fieno, di mentastro e di salvia che riempiva l'aria della sera assieme ai voli delle ultime rondini, ancora riluttanti ad abbandonare i loro nidi vuoti. (Manfredi 2002:7-8)<sup>2</sup>

Fabrizio's new 'home' is comfortable, large and serene, however one cannot ignore the sense of isolation and abandonment that is created in the text. The description tells of a home that was inhabited, changed, vacated and now re-inhabited by a displaced individual.

Shelly Mallet (2004) in her paper titled, *Understanding home: a critical review of the literature*, describes the concept of 'home' as being more than just a place, as it is inhabited by family, people and things. It is a space of familiarity that even if not necessarily comfortable, within which one interacts, shares and lives activities and relationships. She continues to say that in her view, "home is a

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<sup>2</sup> "Fabrizio Castellani arrived in Volterra one October evening [...] A friend of his father's had found him cheap accommodation on a farm in Val d'Era, not far from the city. The farmhouse had been vacant since earlier that year, when the previous tenant had left, having given up on the owner's grand sketchy plans to restructure the building... The oldest part was of stone, covered with ancient handmade roof tiles lichen-stained yellow and green on the north side, while the newer part was brick [...] The land to the south hosted a dozen rows of bog gnarled olive trees laden with fruit, as well as low vines still hanging with clusters of violet grapes and leaves that had started to turn bright red [...] He liked the house instantly, especially the scent of hay, mint and sage that rose through the evening air to meet the flight of the last swallows of the season, still reluctant to abandon their empty nests." (Manfredi, 2010: 1-2)

virtual place<sup>3</sup>, a repository for memories of the lived spaces. It locates lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space” (Mallet, 2004:63). In the above extract from the novel, this sense of “lived time and space” is exemplified through the emptiness and faded dreams conveyed by the abandoned farmhouse and reinforced by the flight of the last swallows that are “ancora riluttanti ad abbandonare i loro nidi vuoti” (Manfredi, 2002:8). The sense of space being emptied is both juxtaposed and qualified by the season. It is autumn, the season of harvest, where the fruits of the fertile summer cluster and weigh down the changing branches, ready to be plucked, reaped, laying the land or ‘home’ bare. Through the setting of the introductory chapter of the novel in a season of natural abandonment, Manfredi opens up a space for a narrative that becomes a repository for, and the re-enactment of, memory through the exploration of abandoned ‘homes’. It transmits a sense of both past and present, where the present holds only echoes, shades of the past.

However, it is not only Fabrizio’s new abode that echoes of these shadows of past and present as he has relocated to Volterra to research an enigmatic Etruscan statue titled, *L’ombra della sera* (*The Shade of Twilight*), which is housed in the Volterra museum. The museum itself acts as a ‘home’ for ‘displaced’ objects in time. However, as Grimes points out in *Sacred objects in museum spaces*, “[t]his is not home; a museum in the biography of a stone goddess is the archetypal strange land where many trials must be endured” (Grimes 1992:422). Similarly to Grimes’ stone goddess, the statue in the novel is in a ‘strange land’; its provenance is unknown except for the fact that it dates to the Etruscan period. The question of displaced objects and people is a key trope used by Manfredi to develop the theme of ‘home’ in this novel and will be discussed further in this paper when interrogating central figures in the narrative, more specifically the image of the lost or home(less) child as manifest in the character of Angelo.

While at home in Florence, during a workshop on the restoration and preservation of ancient bronzes, Fabrizio chances upon a series of x-rays taken of a bronze Etruscan statue that are hidden in a drawer,

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<sup>3</sup> Within the novel, these ‘virtual spaces’ are created through the narrative as Fabrizio explores the physical spaces and homes in Volterra.

showing anomalies in the casting. This chance discovery will take him to Volterra, a Tuscan town where the physical statue is 'housed' in the museum. In the novel, the statue is named, *L'ombra della sera* and is an effigy of a young naked boy. The name of the statue in the novel refers to an actual Etruscan statue from Volterra by the same name which is, in fact, kept at the Volterra Museum, the origins of which are unknown<sup>4</sup>. It is believed that the Italian poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio bestowed upon this statue its enigmatic title of *L'ombra della sera* as it reminded him of the long shadows that fall at dusk. This observation is taken up again in 1988 and 2009 by the art historian and honorary inspector of the Soprintendenza alle Antichità of the Lombardy region, Piero Airaghi, who posits that the statue is in itself a representation of the shadow of a young boy.

True to Derridian form, the 'fictional sentence', in this case the fictional object, as represented by the statue, removes itself from its 'source', or 'home', to the point of no longer being a secret. The fictional object, the statue in being (re)homed in the museum is made visible to all. This double negation makes it accessible and arouses curiosity and is given a voice, albeit outside of its 'home'. The significance of this statue and how it relates to the narrative and the question of 'home' is by no means cursory, for it is through Manfredi's reception, not only of the D'Annunzian and Airaghian hypothesis, but also the use of a statue whose origins, or 'home' are unknown, that *l'ombra della sera* and what it represents in the narrative becomes a key to the exploration of the notion of 'home' and absence thereof.

[...] l'originalità del soggetto, la straordinaria qualità dell'esecuzione, l'intensa e la profonda suggestione che emanava lo facevano pensare a certe poetiche forme di scugnizzi realizzate da Vincenza Gemito, ma anche alla potenza espressiva di Picasso e, allo stesso tempo, al

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<sup>4</sup> The statue was discovered by Antonio Francesco Gori in 1737 in the residence of the Buonarrotti family. About ten years after its discovery the statue entered the possession of Mario Guarnacci who then donated it to the Volterra museum, where it can be viewed today.

senso di esasperata fragilità dei bronzi più ispirati di  
Giacometti. (Manfredi 2002:15)<sup>5</sup>

Through the use of the name of an actual statue in *Chimaira* (2001) / *The Ancient Curse* (2010), Manfredi creates a narrative space that rests both in the narrative of fact, as well as that of fiction, arousing the interest of the reader in the story behind the object. The statue starts off as a shadow, becomes corporeal through its description and fully formed in the appearance of a young boy that Fabrizio finds lurking in the shadows at Le Macine, a tavern-com-*agriturismo* run by a woman of dubious origins and nature. This metamorphosis from shadow to fixed notion to physical boy, plays out the myth of the Etruscan child-god, Tages and opens up discussion on the orphaned or 'home'-less child as well as the link between 'home' and 'family'.

Much of the traditional literature that deals with concepts of 'home', according to Mallett, would suggest an inextricable link between the idea of 'home' and 'family'. Authors such as Crow (1989), Oakley (1974) and Bernardes (1987) even go as far as suggesting that the two terms are interchangeable. As in Mallett (2004) referencing Gilman (1980), this would suggest that when these two terms, 'home' and 'family' are "conceived as inter-related or overlapping terms, home typically symbolizes the birth family dwelling and the birth family or family of origin"<sup>6</sup>.

Accounts of the myth of *Tages* come to us through the writings of Latin writers, such as Cicero, Ovid, Verrius Flaccus, and later through the Byzantine Joannes Laurentius Lydus. The overall consensus being that Tages emerges at plough-time<sup>7</sup> from a deep furrow made by a ploughman.

The tradition is that, once upon a time, in the district of  
Tarquinii, while a field was being ploughed, the

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<sup>5</sup> "The choice of the subject was incredibly original, the crafting extraordinary. The aura that emanated from the boy was intense and emotional, capturing all the poetry of Vincenzo Gemito's street urchins, the expressive punch of a Picasso, the exasperated fragility of Giacometti's most inspired bronzes" (Manfredi, 2010:9).

<sup>6</sup> Mallett, 2004:73.

<sup>7</sup> The link between the season in which Fabrizio arrives in Volterra and that of when Tages appears in the myth cannot be overlooked.

ploughshare went deeper than usual and a certain Tages suddenly sprang forth and spoke to the ploughman. Now this Tages, according to the Etruscan annals, is said to have had the appearance of a boy, but the wisdom of a seer. Astounded and much frightened at the sight, the rustic raised a great cry; a crowd gathered and, indeed, in a short time, the whole of Etruria assembled at the spot. Tages then spoke at length to his numerous hearers, who received with eagerness all that he had to say, and committed it to writing. His whole address was devoted to an exposition of the science of soothsaying. Later, as new facts were learned and tested by reference to the principles imparted by Tages, they were added to the original fund of knowledge [...] This is the story as we get it from the Etruscans themselves and as their records preserve it, and this, in their own opinion, is the origin of their art. (Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *On Divination* II.23. 50-51)

While Cicero confirms Tages as the origin of the *haruspic* discipline, it is in Lydus<sup>8</sup> that the myth of *Tages* more closely deals with elements of origin and ‘home’ where the name of the ploughman who, while ploughing his field, cuts a deep furrow from which springs the child Tages, is identified as Tarchon, founder of the city of Tarquinia.

Within the narrative of *Chimaira* (2001) / *The Ancient Curse* (2010), the father-son relationship and its connection to ‘home’ is stolen through the lie that Turn Lars Thyrrrens spreads, stating that Velies is his bastard son. The similarity in the names of Tarchon and Thyrrrens and their positions as founder of Tarquinia and lord of Velatri respectively link their roles as ‘fathers’. However, whereas Tarchon is considered the ‘legitimate’ father of Tages, at least through what the surviving literature tells us, Thyrrrens is the father of Velies only through vicious rumour, spread by him to bolster his ego and eventually violate the ‘home’. The novel, and how it explores notions of ‘home’ and ‘origin’ through the myth of Tages, is thus

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<sup>8</sup> Lydus. *De Ostentis* 2.6.B as cited in Nancy Thomson de Grummond and Erika Simon (2006) *The Religion of the Etruscans*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

related both to the sculpture, *L'ombra della sera / Shade of Twilight* (effigy of Velies) and the young boy that Fabrizio finds lurking at Le Macine, Angelo stolen from his 'home' by the deviant Ambra Reiter and thereafter given a 'home' and father that do not belong to him.

The 'ancient curse' referred to in the English title of the novel, and the manifestation of the 'chimaira' referred to in the novel's original Italian title, are set in motion manifesting when the approximately 2.400 year old tomb of Turm Kaiknas, a well-respected and loved Etruscan noble, known for his valour and deeds of heroism, is disturbed by the tomb raider, Armando Ronchetti, also the first victim in the novel. When Fabrizio is asked by the museum director, Balestra – who is secretly working on the translation of an Etruscan gold slab – to oversee and conduct the excavation, what the young archaeologist finds, is nothing that he had expected. The tomb is bare except for a roughly carved stone sarcophagus and a cenotaph in solid alabaster of a regal young woman.

This is most unusual for an Etruscan burial as the tomb in this ancient culture especially from this period is richly adorned, a replica of the architectural home, creating a sense of being 'home' in comfort and security<sup>9</sup>. Often depicted in these tombs are elaborate banquet scenes where the dead are seen feasting like the living. One need only look at the banquet scene in the tomb of the Leopards at Cerveteri, the Dancers in the tomb of the Lioness at Tarquinia, the banquet scene from the tomb of the Shields in Tarquinia. The images of the guests, usually representations of the family, reinforce the idea of the tomb as 'home' and space of return and origin. It is also important to note that there is a marked lack of offerings and libations outside the tomb, symbolic of the family connection and of honouring the ancestors. This 'absence' reflects the thematic exploration of the idea of the tomb as a 'home' where the deceased and his spirit continue to form part of the family unit. In this case, the family is absent and thus the 'home' becomes a desolate space.

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<sup>9</sup> J. Douglas Porteous (1976:383) in his discussion of territoriality and how it relates to the 'home' as 'territorial core' points out that the concept of security not only encompasses physical security but includes psychic security and protection.



The first description of the tomb in the novel comes to us through what Detective Reggiani sees through the opening made by the tomb raider Ronchetti when investigating his brutal death at the site:

Reggiani poté vedere che era un vano abbastanza grande, forse quattro per tre e quindi doveva appartenere a una famiglia aristocratica, ma lo sorprese la mancanza quasi assoluta di arredo, a parte un affresco sulla parete di fondo che rappresentava quasi certamente Charun, il demone etrusco traghettatore dei morti. (Manfredi 2002:24)<sup>10</sup>

A further description is then given to us by Fabrizio when he later opens the tomb. What is interesting to note is that Reggiani's observation focuses on treasure, the tangible, the real fixed object, whereas Fabrizio's is more focused on the aspect of the tomb as representation of 'home' and 'family':

[...] una struttura ricavata nel tufo a imitazione della facciata di una casa, con un portone a due ante – che recavano scolpite le maniglie a mo' di grandi anelli – e un fronte triangolare adorno con il simbolo della luna nuova, o almeno così gli sembrò di doverlo interpretare; non un segno, non un indizio che potesse portare all'identificazione dei defunti che risposavano all'interno della funeraria. Gli parve anche strano che sul piano di calpestio non si fosse trovato alcun resto, o reperto o prova anche minima di una frequentazione. Le tombe erano visitate molto spesso e nelle ricorrenze di varie cerimonie religiose e commemorative, e davanti al loro ingresso aveva quasi sempre trovato, in altre occasioni di

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<sup>10</sup> “Reggiani could see that the chamber was quite large, about four metres by three, and so must have belonged to an aristocratic family. What surprised him was the absence of any sort of treasure inside, except for a fresco on the back wall which almost certainly represented Charun, the Etruscan demon who ferried the dead to the other world” (Manfredi, 2010:17-18).

scavo, le tracce dei riti sacrificali e delle offerte in onore dei defunti. (Manfredi 2002:30)<sup>11</sup>

The uniqueness of the Etruscan tomb that seeks to replicate the 'home' thus rendering the deceased comfortable and at 'home', surrounded by loved ones in his/her travels to the underworld, and the absence of the imagery of 'home' in the tomb excavated by Fabrizio in the novel, are signs that something is 'absent'. It is precisely through this absence of 'home' that the theme of 'home' and its significance in the balance of events is explored.

Dovey (1985) explores the notions of 'home' in relation to migrants and travellers, establishing that journeys create "thresholds and boundaries of home, particularly boundaries associated with time and the experience of being at home" (Dovey 1985 in Mallett 2006:78). Within the Etruscan tomb, the deceased too is a migrant or traveller, travelling from the world of the living to that of the dead. However, the home is also the space where cultural, social and historical ideas are formed. The home therefore also becomes a space where ideas of who may or may not travel are formed. The spartan appearance of the tomb in the novel with the only fresco in it, that of Charun<sup>12</sup>, would thus be an impediment to the deceased, a way of obstructing his/her travel to the other side, rendering the wait eternal with no union or memory of 'home'.

The contents of the sarcophagus are equally disconcerting as they reveal a mixture of faunal and human remains. The lid and inside of the funerary vessel are gauged by scratch marks indicative of the victim and his/her assailant being buried alive. Although not initially

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<sup>11</sup> "The structure was carved directly into the tufa and imitated the façade of a house, featuring a double door with big sculpted ring-shaped handles and a triangular pediment with the symbol of the new moon, or so it seemed to Fabrizio. But there was no suggestion, no clue, as to who the bodies inside the burial cell might have been [...] What also seemed quite strange was the lack of debris or objects of any sort at the ground level; there were no signs of human activity outside the chamber. The Etruscans were known to have visited their tombs frequently, holding any number of religious and memorial ceremonies there, and the first thing you always found on a dig were the remains of rituals and sacrifices offered in honour of the dead" (Manfredi, 2010:24).

<sup>12</sup> Charun, Charu or Karun, contrary to what is thought is in fact the *psychopompoi* of the Etruscan underworld. He is often depicted with a hammer and is equated to the ferryman Charon in Greek mythology. The Etruscan god of the underworld is Aita.

evident to Fabrizio, this is the tomb of a *Phersu*. In the novel, Manfredi<sup>13</sup> picks up on Semerano's (2003) discussion of the etymology of the word *phersu* in *Il popolo che sconfisse la morte: gli etruschi e la loro lingua*, dating it back to Babylonian times, thus restoring its meaning of 'scission', 'division' or part. Within the context of the narrative and its exploration of the theme 'home', the re-definition of the word becomes significant as the unravelling of the mystery behind the tomb and the neutralisation of the curse relies on the separation of the 'man' from the 'beast'. Therefore, just as the 'man' is separated from his 'home'/family through the practice of the ritual of *phersu*, he becomes reunited by the unravelling of the mystery behind the practice. But what would have been the reason to enforce such a brutal and violent practice? And what links the brutal murder of Ronchetti and others in Volterra to the discovery? It is in the answering of these questions that the role of the 'home' and the destruction and absence thereof is illustrated through the chilling story of Turm Kaiknas and his fate, revealed to Fabrizio in the most *augural* of ways – a dream. Through the inclusion of 'dream' as a determining factor in the unravelling of the narrative mystery, Manfredi taps into the history of divination in Etruscan times, further unifying the narrative of past with that of present.

After a night filled with danger, horror and murder, Fabrizio is escorted back home by Lieutenant Reggiani. He is exhausted and drifts off. It is in this almost trance-like, adrenaline induced unconscious state that he dreams the vision of the events of the past and the violation of the 'home' that off-sets the events in the present:

*La sala era vasta, di forma rettangolare e adorna di affreschi che rappresentavano scene di simposio, illuminata da una doppia fila di candelabra da cui pendevano lampade di bronzo e di onice traslucido, abbastanza numerose da spandere una luce intensa e dorata, assai simile a quella del tramonto ormai spento. I convivanti, uomini e donne, giovani e fanciulle, erano adagiati sui letti triclinari davanti alle mense colme di*

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<sup>13</sup> As both an archaeologist and writer, Manfredi would be aware of the works by Semerano in the field of Etruscan linguistics.

*cibi e alle coppe piene di vino e conversavano  
amabilmente e in toni sommessi. (Manfredi, 2002:154)<sup>14</sup>*

In this opening scene of the dream, the reader is confronted with an image of 'home' that illustrates the social, convivial nature of the abode<sup>15</sup>. It is a space of light, comfort, merriment and safety – what one is led to believe is a typical Etruscan nobleman's home. It is the home of Lars Turm Kaiknas, celebrated hero of Velathri who fought off hordes of Celtic invaders thus safeguarding the city, his 'home' from the enemy. It is in his honour that the banquet is held. Also present at the banquet is the lord of Velathri, Lars Thyrrens. In the vision he is depicted as a large, imposing figure: “[...] *le larghe spalle e le braccia robuste erano quelle di un guerriero possente, di un uomo abituato a conquistare con la forza tutto ciò che suscitasse il suo desiderio*” (Manfredi, 2002:155)<sup>16</sup>. That evening, his desire is aroused by Lars Turm Kaiknas's wife, Anait. However, Anait has always ignored his advances, something that Lars Turm Thyrrens found infuriating to the point of spreading rumours that Anait's son, Velies was actually his, conceived during one of Lars Turm Kaiknas's long absences and hatching a plan to have his way with Anait that very night.

*Ma lei non ricambiava il suo sguardo, non si stancava  
invece di contemplare il suo sposo, Lars Turm Kaiknas,  
bello come un dio, forte e delicato come un fanciullo [...]*

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<sup>14</sup> “*The room was vast, rectangular in shape and adorned with frescoes that depicted scenes from a symposium, with guests laughing, drinking, leaning forward in conversation. A double row of candelabra with hanging lamps of bronze and translucent onyx lit up the room, so numerous that they filled the hall with an intense, golden light, like that of the sunset just passed. The dinner guests – men and women, young and old – were reclining on couches alongside tables filled with trays of food and cups brimming with wine, chatting amiably in low voices*” (Manfredi, 2010: 149). Italics in original text.

<sup>15</sup> The scene depicted in Fabrizio's dream is also in stark contrast to what he finds in the tomb. The description of the hall in the dream is similar to what one would expect to find painted on the walls of an Etruscan aristocrat's tomb. This juxtapositioning of the two abodes further develops the theme of 'home' and its significance in the narrative.

<sup>16</sup> “[...] wide shoulders and brawny arms of a mighty warrior [...] a man accustomed to conquering by force anything that aroused his desire” (Manfredi, 2010:150).

*Era in suo onore e nel suo palazzo la festa [...].*  
(Manfredi, 2002:155-156)<sup>17</sup>

The debate on home and gender cannot be ignored in this passage as the palace is defined as ‘his’ palace, that of Lars Turm Kaiknas. However, although this may seem significant from a modern perspective, research into the role and position of Etruscan women seems to suggest that women, especially noble women enjoyed equal status to that of their male counterparts in society. Larissa Bonfante (1981) in her article, *Etruscan couples and their aristocratic society* points out that:

[...] women in Etruria participated more fully in the public life of their society than Greek and Roman women. They had their own names, and apparently passed their rank on to their children – the frequent use of both patronymics and matronymics in Etruscan inscriptions attests to the mother’s importance. Their visibility, not only alone but together with their husbands, leads us to imagine that they played an important role in Etruscan society where the family counted for more than the single individual male citizen.  
(Bonfante, 1981:157)

What is significant however is the link between ‘home’ and ‘family’ and the role that the Etruscan woman represented in that society. It is this position of the woman as ‘home’/ family that Lars Turm Thyrens violates when he lures Anait away from Lars Turm Kaiknas, violating her, killing her innocent son and accusing Lars Turm Kaiknas of their murder when the horrified father and husband tries to save his son and removes the dagger from his fragile boy. The accusation is sustained by Lars Turm Thyrens he shouts:

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<sup>17</sup> “*But she never returned his looks. She never tired of contemplating her own husband, Lars Turm Kaiknas, a man as handsome as a god, strong, yet as gentle and sweet as a young lad [...]. The party was in his honour and in his palace [...].*” (Manfredi, 2010:150). Italics in original text.

*'Avete visto con i vostri occhi! Tutti sanno che Turm Kaiknas ha sempre odiato sua moglie perché la sapeva infedele, sapeva che aveva partorito un bastardo, figlio di una relazione illecita.'* (Manfredi, 2002:159)<sup>18</sup>

Only the lone voice of Aule Tarchna, Anait's brother, an augur that sees the truth and speaks out, attempting to restore the voice of 'family' and 'home' cries out:

*'Menti! Mia sorella non ha mai tradito suo marito. Lo amava più della sua vita. E Turm Kaiknas adorava suo figlio. Mai avrebbe alzato la mano su di lui se non per accarezzarlo.'* (Manfredi, 2002:159)<sup>19</sup>

However, the only witnesses to the crime are the victims, Velies and his mother, the core of the 'home'/family which has been destroyed. Thus Turm Lars Thyrrrens decrees that Turm Lars Kaiknas's supposed innocence will be tried by the trial of *Pherus* as 'null'altro che il giudizio degli dei può decidere di un crimine tanto orrendo da superare ogni immaginazione' (Manfredi, 2002:159)<sup>20</sup>. When Aule Tarchna requests that Turm Lars Thyrrrens at least let him have the bodies of his sister and nephew, he is refused being told that their bodies would burn with the house. The destruction of the physical home in this scene emphasises the destruction of the concept of 'home' as represented by the death of Anait and Velies. The fact that the mother and child will not receive a customary burial where they would be returned to 'home' further compounds this violation.

After returning the next day to gather whatever ashes he could of his sister and nephew, Aule Tarchna disappears, returning only on the day of the terrible ritual of *Phersu* when Turm Lars Kaiknas is to

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<sup>18</sup> "You've seen it with your own eyes! Everyone knows that Turm Kaiknas has always despised his wife because she was unfaithful to him, because she bore him a bastard, the fruit of an illicit relationship!" (Manfredi, 2010:154).

<sup>19</sup> "You lie! My sister never betrayed her husband! She loved him more than life itself. And Turm Kaiknas adored his son. He would never have raised a hand except to caress him" (Manfredi, 2010:154).

<sup>20</sup> "Only the gods can judge a crime so horrendous it goes beyond all imagining" (Manfredi, 2010:154).

battle a ferocious beast with one arm tied behind his back and a sack over his head<sup>21</sup>. If he manages to kill the beast his innocence will be proved, if not, as is the inevitable case, he will forever be marked by his ‘crime’.

*Lars Thyrrrens proclamò che quella era la prova della colpevolezza di Turm Kaiknas e ordinò di seppellire il Phersu con la belva ancora viva, nello stesso sarcofago, perchè continuasse a straziarlo per l’eternità. Alla sepoltura fu destinata una tomba isolata, costruita in un luogo solitario, e senza altra insegna che quella della luna nera. (Manfredi, 2002:161)<sup>22</sup>*

Aule Tarchna tries to symbolically reunite the family and restore a sense of ‘home’ in the tomb by placing an image of the ‘family’ through the introduction of an alabaster cenotaph of Anait<sup>23</sup> and a beautifully crafted statue of Velies, ‘the picture of melancholy and pain in a shape more similar to a shadow than to a living child’ with the blade that cut short his life forged in the bronze. He also places two gold slabs on which is inscribed an eternal curse:

*‘Che tu sia maledetto sette volte, Lars Thyrrrens, sia maledetto il tuo seme e siano maledetti tutti coloro che in*

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<sup>21</sup> The ritual described in Manfredi’s novel is reminiscent of the right wall of the ‘Tomb of the Augurs’ in Tarquinia. The panel depicts the practice of *phersu* or *persu* with two men, one of which has a sack / hood over his head, the other holding a rope / lead which is tied around the neck of an animal, presumed to be a dog. The hooded figure, probably a criminal is being punished for his action. When the figure holding the rope pulls on it, a spike is released in the collar of the animal, enraging it and causing it to attack the hooded man. It is worth noting that the reception of the image in the ‘Tomb of the Augurs’ within the narrative serves to reinforce the role played by Anait’s brother, Aule Tarchna, an augur, as restorer of the ‘home’.

<sup>22</sup> “*Lars Thyrrrens proclaimed that this was proof of Turm Kaiknas’s guilt and he ordered the Phersu buried with the live animal, in the same tomb, so that the beast could continue to torture him for all eternity. An isolated tomb was designated for his burial, built in a solitary place, with no markings other than that of the black moon*” (Manfredi, 2010: 155).

<sup>23</sup> Anait’s cenotaph is reminiscent of the famous sarcophagus from Cerveteri of the husband and wife. Manfredi again disrupts the idea of ‘home’, family and union, by depicting a solitary image of the woman, violently torn from her loving husband and family, not only in life, but also in death.

*questa città alimentano l'abominio del tuo potere, siano maledetti fino alla fine delle nove ere dei Rasna. Sia maledetta la bestia e siano maledetti coloro che la videro straziare un uomo innocente. Possano essi subire ciò che ha subito un eroe senza colpa e piangere lacrime di sangue [...].'* (Manfredi, 2002:161)<sup>24</sup>

With this, Aule Tarchna seals the tomb and reunites the family, restoring a sense of 'home'. However, when over time, the tomb is disturbed by tomb raiders, displacing those object that created a semblance of 'home' and balance, first by pillaging the statue, *l'ombra della sera*, then the gold slabs, the curse emerges as that balance and sense of 'home' which had been created in the past is disturbed. The 'home' is once again violated and the violence of the past re-enacts itself in the present until the 'home' and what it represents, has been eternally consolidated<sup>25</sup>.

Manfredi achieves this consolidation through the narrative spaces created within the novel's mystery/thriller genre. According to Allan Lloyd-Smith (2004) some of the key features, amongst others, of the thriller genre include: innocent victims; subterfuge and plots; ancient houses, castles, monasteries, dungeons, crypts and passages, monstrous and grotesque creatures; pain, terror, horror and sadism (Lloyd-Smith 2004:133); and although *Chimaira / The Ancient Curse* employs many of the above features, the element of the 'innocent victim', is key to the consolidation of the concept of 'home'.

As the plot unfolds, the gold slab, statue of the young boy and the tomb all become part of the unravelling of the mystery and the restoration of 'home' through the intercession of the 'orphaned' child Angelo, his link to *Le Macine* and the old Caretti-Riccardi palace in

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<sup>24</sup> “*May you be damned seven times, Lars Thyrrons, may your seed be damned and may all those who in this city sated your thirst for power be damned with you, may they be cursed until the end of the nine ages of Rasna. Damn the beast and damn all those who witnessed the cruel murder of an innocent man. May they experience the same end suffered by a blameless hero and may they weep tears of blood [...].*” (Manfredi, 2010:156).

<sup>25</sup> However, the violation and consolidation of the physical 'home' can also be read as the violation and consolidation of the pillaged ancient artefact, removed from its origins and displaced in both space and time. When these objects are then reclaimed by the relevant authorities, their story and 'origin' is dubious, they become (re)homed / 'consolidated' in an artificial space, the museum where they are subjected to a speculated 'dream' history.



the centre of town and the extinction of the 'inhuman'. Both spaces, the tavern and the palace tell stories of abandonment and resonate with echoes of 'home'. The palace, uninhabited for the past forty years except for a brief period when the current owner, Count Jacopo Ghirardini took up residence, employed a supposed cleaning lady, and then disappeared, is the 'home' of violence and terror, similar to the violence and terror found in the tomb.

If according to Lyotard (1993) in *The Inhuman*, one can only understand the inhuman in terms of its 'extinction' alongside 'the human', then the 'inhumanity' of Turm Lars Kaiknas's death can only be extinguished through the destruction of the human. Only once the link between the beast that is attacking the inhabitants of Volterra and the coming to fruition of the ancient curse placed upon Turm Lars Kaiknas is created can the 'home' as space of the 'human', be restored. It is thus through the violation of the notion of home that the 'home' as theme within the novel is explored.

While trying to locate the second piece of the gold slab, Fabrizio's leads take him out of the safety of his 'home' at Val d'Era to a tavern know as *Le Macine*. Here he meets Angelo hiding in the shadows. When Angelo follows Fabrizio home his link to *Le Macine* and the Caretti-Riccardi palace is revealed. For Angelo, both these places represent 'home'; *Le Macine* is the 'home' where he lives with his 'evil' stepmother Ambra Reiter and the Caretti-Riccardi palace his 'home' in as much as he is led to believe that his 'father' lives there. However, the home of his father is filled with horror, similar to the tomb, 'home' of Velies's father, Lars Turm Kaiknas thus linking the two children:

Aprì lentamente il battente della porta e proiettò all'interno il raggio di luce della pila. Al centro della camera c'era un animale del tutto simile a quello che aveva visto poche sere prima dilaniare il corpo di Pietro Montanari [...] era una specie di cane dal pelo ispido e irto, dalle grandi mascelle spalancate che mostravano zanne enormi. Aveva una coda grossa e piuttosto lunga

anch'essa coperta di un pelo fitto e arruffato. (Manfredi, 2002:185)<sup>26</sup>

Although the image of the tomb is central to the plot of *The Ancient Curse* what resonates throughout the narrative is the theme of the 'innocent victim'. The victims of *Lars Thyrrens'* are three: *Anait*, *Velies* and *Turm Kaiknas*, and although the plot revolves around the avengance of *Turm Kaiknas'* brutal death, it is the image of *Velies*, the child in the shadows that predominates and is key to the restoration of 'home'.

The manifestation of the ghost child *Velies* is present in the narrative of 'present' in the character of the orphaned child, Angelo, that Fabrizio encounters while trying to track down the second piece of the bronze tablet that contains the breaking of the curse. Like the Etruscan child-god *Tages*, Angelo reveals himself to Fabrizio in a rural setting, and like his narrative Etruscan counterpart *Velies* is revealed in shadow. His origins are unclear, and he seems to be, like *Tages*, parentless. All that is known is that he lives with his sinister step-mother in the derelict tavern, *Le Macine*, and according to him she abuses him. Kerényi (2002:32) in his *The Primordial Child in Primordial Times* notes that, "the child god is usually an abandoned foundling [...] Often [...] threatened by extraordinary dangers". Angelo is not a god, but then neither is *Velies*, yet their roles in the novel are 'god-like' for they become, past and present, the meters-out of justice and restorers of 'home' and metaphysical order. *Velies* as depicted by the image of the statue becomes a shadow of the concept of 'home', taken not only from his physical and metaphysical 'home' by the death of his parents and his murder but separated again over time by the removal of his statue from the representation of 'home' the tomb. He is in this sense, symbolically 'orphaned'. Within the narrative of present, he is physically represented by Angelo, the urchin that Fabrizio finds lurking at Le

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<sup>26</sup> "He slowly pulled the door open and shone the beam of light inside. At the centre of the room stood an animal which appeared to be identical to the beast he'd seen ripping out Piero Montanari's throat [...] It was a kind of dog, with dense, bristly coat. Its huge jaws gaping in a show of enormous fangs. Its long, thick tail was also covered with shaggy hair" (Manfredi, 2010:181).

Macine and who follows Fabrizio ‘home’ to reveal his identity. Like *Velies*, Angelo is taken from his ‘home’ by the woman who runs the tavern *Le Macine* and who is involved in the pillaging of the tomb. It is through Angelo that the second and crucial part of the gold slab that reveals that the horror can only cease when “[...] la belva è separate dall’uomo [...] e] il figlio è [restituito] al padre” (Manfredi, 2002:214)<sup>27</sup> and that Velies, Anait and Lars Turm Kaiknas can be reunited, restoring ‘home’ as in Mallett’s definition of it as a “repository for memories of the lived spaces [...] locating it] in lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space” (Mallett, 2004:63).

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<sup>27</sup> “The beast is separated from the man [...] and] the son is returned to the father” (Manfredi 2010:211).

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