

*A Tavola!* \_\_\_\_\_

Orality in *The Sopranos*

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Master's Thesis in English Literature

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May 2015

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## Chapter One: A Reading of the *Regaleali* Dinner

A man and a woman entering a restaurant are greeted by the white-clad *maitre'd* with the words: "Mr. Soprano, *buona sera*. Months we don't see you, where you been? *Signora Carmela*. *Da questa parte*." He kisses the woman's hand and leads her into the restaurant. Seated at their table and each sipping at a glass of red *Regaleali* wine, the elegantly dressed couple starts talking:

Soprano: You know, sometimes life is good.

Carmela: Life is often good.

Soprano: *Regaleali*, for example.

Carmela: You've been in good spirits the last couple days.

Soprano: Carmela, there's somethin' I gotta confess. What are you doin'?

Carmela: Getting my wine in position to throw in your damn face.

Soprano: You, always with the drama, you.

Carmela: Go ahead and confess already, please, get it over with!

Soprano: I'm on Prozac.

Carmela: Oh. Oh, my God.

Soprano: I been seein' a therapist.

Carmela: Oh, my God. I think that's great. I think that's so wonderful. I think that's so gutsy.

Soprano: Right, take it easy.

Carmela: But I just think that's very, very wonderful.

Soprano: What, did you think I was Hannibal Lecture [*sic*] before, or somethin'?

Carmela: I just think it's great. Psychology doesn't address the soul but something else, but this is, this is a start. This is something. Oh, I'm gonna shut up now. I'll shut up now.

Soprano: You're the only person who knows. And the only reason I'm tellin' you this is 'cause you're my wife, and you're the only person on this planet that I'm completely and totally honest with.

Carmela: Oh, please!

Soprano: Hey, God damn it, I'm serious. The wrong person finds out about this, and I get a steel-jacketed anti-depressant right in the back of the head.

Carmela: I didn't realize you were so unhappy.

Soprano: I don't know. My mother...

Carmela: You told him about your father, right?

Soprano: Who?

Carmela: Your therapist.

Soprano: Yeah. Yeah, I told him.

Carmela: Good. But your mother is the one.

Soprano: I don't know, I just feel that lately, my life's out of balance.

Carmela: Our existence on this Earth is a puzzle. My own daughter hates me.

Soprano: She doesn't hate you, Carm.

Carmela: We were best friends.

Soprano: Mothers and their daughters. She'll come back to you.

This scene (at 44:43 – 47:13) in the pilot episode (named "The Sopranos") is one example of how scenes involving food contribute towards the characterization of Anthony 'Tony' Soprano, a main protagonist of *The Sopranos*. The above conversation happens within the context of a dinner at a restaurant, a location away from the Soprano home. Soprano is paying for the dinner, a treat for his wife Carmela. A man taking a woman out to dinner is such a common convention of social interaction that many TV viewers would not begin to speculate that this act in itself could harbor any extra meaning relevant to the interpretation of this popular TV series<sup>1</sup>.

The dinner in itself is not shown on-screen this time, so it is not a part of the *plot*. However, it can be safely assumed that Soprano and his wife have not dressed up and gone out to a high-end restaurant for desserts only, so dinner can safely be assumed to have taken place, which means it is still a part of the *story*<sup>2</sup>. This distinction is important to note in the following, since dinners and other meals are examples of *mimesis*, where the creator and various directors try to capture the real, everyday situations of the Soprano family<sup>3</sup>. As such, they function well as the basis for a body of research, such as this thesis. One part of this particular *mimesis* is *ecphrasis*, the translation of art from one medium into another (from the silver screen, where Mafia films started as social events, to more individualized experiences emanating from screens in people's homes); or from one medium into the same medium (translating an expression found in for example Mafia films into a TV series); or describing how literature can mimic or describe

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Martin, Brett, *The Sopranos: The Book*, p.17; or Edgerton, Gary R. *The Sopranos As Tipping Point*, in *The Sopranos Reader*, pp.7-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Film Art*, p.81: "story" and "plot".

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Abrams, p.174: Imitation has two applications in literature: "(1) to define the nature of literature and the other arts, and (2) to indicate the relationship of one literary work to another literary work which served as its model". In the first instance, in *Poetics*, "Aristotle defines poetry as an imitation (Greek: *mimesis*) of human actions". Cf. *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*, p.34, *family*: "two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together." Diegesis: See footnote 217, p.53

other media (a meta-level view to how non-verbal art can be turned into verbal art through mimetic principles). In this instance, *The Sopranos* seems like a Mafia genre TV series built around standard conventions for films in the Mafia genre but borrowing elements from the *melodrama*, which, according to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is characterized by excessive sentiment, exaggerated emotion, sensational and thrilling action, and an artificially happy ending. Naturally, the *mimesis* cannot be complete, since no film or TV series can show everything that goes on at all times, so a selection must be made. Such editing results in *ellipsis*: the exclusion of elements of the story<sup>4</sup>. This literary device is an important part of *The Sopranos*.

Details from the *story*, of which Mr. Soprano is one of the protagonists, are revealed even before the married couple get to their table. For example, earlier in this episode, the same restaurant owner, wearing black, has welcomed Mr. Soprano and another woman, Irina Peltsin, into the same restaurant, after which the two have ended up in an intimate situation on a boat just before the above described scene. Hence, the audience at this point knows that the restaurant owner is lying when he says "months we don't see you". The audience cannot at this point know whether Mrs. Soprano is aware of this lie. Mr. Soprano has arranged the dinner but does not correct the restaurant owner and shows no outward signs that he reacts to what both men know to be a lie. The non-inclusion of this part of the story into the plot is an example of ellipsis on Soprano's part, but not on the TV audience's<sup>5</sup>. This ellipsis suggests the restaurant owner's understanding that a statement of certain sort is now suitable, since he could have shown an equal amount of discretion towards his guests by simply greeting them and seeing them to their table, not commenting on how long it has been since Soprano's last visit. Perhaps even complete silence might have been preferable. Instead, he makes a point of stating that Soprano has not been there for months. Carmela Soprano smiles and allows herself to be led by the hand into the restaurant.

At their table, the elegantly dressed couple is shown in a medium range wide shot, where the camera is positioned at the same height as their eyes (this is called *alignment*). There is no food on the table in this scene, only some table ornaments and flowers. Soprano is sitting opposite his wife, and both are holding a glass of wine. Then follows a series of shots showing alternating close-ups of Soprano and his wife, both staring at a point off-screen. Comments by

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<sup>4</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, *Film Art*, pp. 109, 240, 254.

<sup>5</sup> This implies that Soprano is telling a story from his own, subjective perspective. Cf. Abrams, pp. 122, 187, 304: *Fallible narrator*.

one of them are standardly shown to cause a reaction in the other (which is called reverse-angle editing, or a shot –reverse shot sequence). The details in the background become blurred, and this serves to emphasize the foregrounded Soprano who says that life is good, and who mentions the red wine as an example. Such material concerns fade, however, after Mrs. Soprano remarks on her husband's recent good spirits. The pitch of her voice ascends towards the end of the sentence, which indicates that she asks a question. Soprano's use of the word "confess" then wipes the smile off Mrs. Soprano's face, as she leans forward and gets her wine ready to throw in his face. Mrs. Soprano's reaction may have seemed unexpectedly crass to audiences watching the pilot episode when it premiered on 10 January 1999. The combination of Soprano's wish to "confess" and his wife's reaction is designed to grab the audience's attention. Of course, this exchange happens within a context. It could for example refer to a scene in a hospital (at 20:01-21:56), where they accuse each other of unsuitable intimacy with a third party, and where Soprano says he is not seeing "*her*" anymore, a reference to his *comare* Irina Peltsin<sup>6</sup>. Mrs. Soprano says he is going to hell when he dies. Is this the *story* behind her urge to throw wine? Is it the *whole story*?

Something is being left out. Already, *ellipsis* seems to be a device which is used deliberately in *The Sopranos*, and being aware of it is relevant to this thesis, since there seems to be signs in the plot indicating that trouble has been brewing for some time. In light of this, Mrs. Soprano's eagerness for her husband to "confess" in the restaurant seems more understandable.

Soprano lowers his head, shields his face with one hand, and says he is on Prozac. A slightly downward-looking *angle* on him is accomplished. The reverse-angle editing suggests that this is Mrs. Soprano's point of view (*POV*), but it simultaneously mimics the TV viewer's *POV*. This is a standard filmmaking device for inviting audiences to respond to weakness, suggesting pity towards the character in the frame<sup>7</sup>. Importantly, the angle is manipulated by the way

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Martin, p.90: A co-mother is denoted: "The term goomara comes from the Italian *comare*, or godmother". In the hospital scene, Soprano's wife accuses him of having a *comare*. He says he is no longer seeing "*her*", but he has been seen on a date with Irina Peltsin. Soprano is obscuring the truth. Either Peltsin is "*her*" whom he has stopped seeing, which means he is lying; or, he really has stopped seeing "*her*", "*her*" being a woman unknown to the audience – but in this case, he is telling a partial lie, since he hides that he has started seeing Peltsin after ending it with "*her*". This scene connects to an earlier breakfast scene, when Mrs. Soprano asks Soprano whether he will be home in time for their son's party. Soprano is distracted by a book and says he will get home early from work. Mrs. Soprano turns away from her husband, answering, "I'm not talking about work." As the camera moves in on Soprano, Mrs. Soprano disappears out of the frame. The scene ends abruptly when, back in his therapist's office, Soprano explains that, "This isn't working. I can't talk about my personal life". It is suggested that Mrs. Soprano knows about Soprano's infidelity, that she is using it for leverage, and that Soprano shields his home from his therapist. Compare Conti, p.199: In the Roman community, if a man was "too faithful" to his wife, he was regarded suspiciously for not being virile enough. In 6-1/7, it is revealed that Vito Spatafore has a "goomah". Spatafore lives out a homosexual fantasy with "Johnny Cakes" but keeps a *comare* as a way to mask his sexual orientation before he can be said to switch sides. This raises the question as to whether any other *comares* function as masks.

<sup>7</sup> Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, p. 40.

Soprano lowers his head and *not* through any camera movement, which suggests ambiguity. This scene happens in the first episode of the series, and the 1999 audience did not have many reference points for comparing and understanding the shooting style. Hence, the audience may not yet be aware that the difference between a character's act and the director's choice could have profound implications. Awareness to this fact – as in the case with ellipsis – may heighten the viewers' experience. And Mr. Soprano's act of bowing his head does lead to a change in Mrs. Soprano's attitude. Many times over she expresses how wonderful she thinks it is, and Soprano asks whether she had thought he was "Hannibal Lecture" [sic], a mythical, psychopathic killer from the movie *Silence of the Lambs*<sup>8</sup>. Mrs. Soprano does not answer this question, but instead simply reiterates her strong positive feelings about his going into therapy. Perhaps surprisingly, she then downplays the importance of the very same therapy, stating "psychology doesn't address the soul but something else", without elaborating. It seems that Soprano is expected to understand what his wife means. Something is being left out, again. At this point, Mrs. Soprano's statement seems to refer to an element in the story which has not yet been made a part of the plot (seen on-screen). It suggests a link to the hospital-scene (see p. 5), where Soprano denies that he is seeing "*her*" – thus admitting to at least having had a *comare* – and immediately counters by asking his wife how she thinks he feels about "havin' that priest around all the time". The religious role of a priest links to the soul that Mrs. Soprano refers to in the restaurant scene. Soprano's character traits are suggested: Not only is he being unfaithful to his wife, but he himself feels betrayed. Associations to betrayal, confessions, and possible absolution underpin the dinner scene<sup>9</sup>.

"That priest" is Father Phil Intintola, whom Mrs. Soprano defends in the hospital scene<sup>10</sup> as her "spiritual mentor", causing Soprano's response: "Yeah, well, we all got different needs". Soprano equates his need for a *comare* to his wife's need for a spiritual mentor. As his comment implies that the *comare* and the spiritual mentor occupy the same role, that of a third member of

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<sup>8</sup> The theme of silence is reiterated, as commented by Stephen Peacock, on pp. 277-285 in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*. Cf. Blum-Kulka, p. 11: "Talk is the unmarked state, silence the marked one".

<sup>9</sup> Canon 1247 of the Catholic Canon Law states that, on Sundays and other holy days, the faithful must participate in Mass, abstaining from work and any activities that hinder "the suitable relaxation of mind and body". "Mass" refers to the "Lord's Supper", "Eucharist", "Breaking of Bread". This ceremony surrounds the sharing of the sacraments in memory of Christ. According to Jewish law, one day ends at nightfall, when the next day begins. The *Shabbat* is counted as a holy day occurring with a regular seven day interval. Soprano is thus seen to date his *comare* Peltsin on Friday, the eve of the *Shabbat*, before taking his wife to dinner at its close, when he ritually confesses and receives his wife's absolution. Mrs. Soprano's tone ("Just get it over with) suggests that she has been in this situation before, suggesting that it has developed into a ritual which Soprano needs to perform, and of which he forces his wife to partake.

<sup>10</sup> See 1/1, "The Sopranos", at 20:01-21:56.

the Soprano marriage <sup>11</sup>, this could mean that Soprano in the hospital scene accuses his wife back for carrying on with the priest <sup>12</sup>. In the scene transcribed above, however, Soprano does not have an answer when his wife reiterates her definition of how his situation differs from hers. In this restaurant scene, by stating that "psychology doesn't address the soul", Mrs. Soprano reasserts her moral superiority with the priest, a representative of God, on her side, placed hierarchically above Soprano and his therapist. With her position secured, she defines her husband's actions as abominable, since they are in violation of the seventh and tenth Commandments. Soprano in fact invites his wife into this moral superiority by his use of the word "confess". Linguistically, the word signifies a concept which puts the penitent (Soprano, a patriarch) in a position subordinated to the confessor (the priest, represented by Mrs. Soprano). Thus, Soprano's own words put his otherwise subordinated wife in control. She eagerly pursues her advantage and presses him to "confess already, please, get it over with" <sup>13</sup>.

Since the situation now revolves around a confession, the *Regaleali* wine at once becomes metonymic of the Sacraments, its red color a signifier of blood, and a reminder that Soprano has initiated a holy ceremony and must complete it by confessing, or be revealed as a hypocrite <sup>14</sup>. This would put his wife in an overtly superior position, which he wants to avoid, being the patriarch of not just his biological family. The outcome of the hierarchical battle seems clear: Soprano has no good options. He is trapped, and he shields his face partly out of shame, and partly in expectation of an unwelcome splash of *Regaleali* from his wife's wine glass.

This dinner talk involves Soprano's therapy. His uneasiness about the whole situation is laid out during his first session. He denies his need for therapy, and he tries various ways of telling his therapist as little as possible. In the restaurant scene, Soprano seems to have projected his own bad feelings about the therapy onto his wife, suspecting her disapproval: This possibility is suggested by his hand coming up to shield his face from his wife's gaze and the expected splash of red wine. This notion is strengthened through his partially truthful response to Mrs. Soprano's question, "You told him about your father, right?" Soprano finally answers, "Yeah.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1/ 6: "Pax Soprana", at 15:19-18:36, Mrs. Soprano reminds her husband of this at an away dinner and upon returning to the Soprano home.

<sup>12</sup> In 1/ 4: "College", Mrs. Soprano shares intimacy with Intontola alone in the Soprano home, which later causes an argument with her husband.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Conti, p. 198, the power of *patria potestas*: In Ancient Rome, a woman was first under the power of her father, then under the power of her spouse. Cf. Abrams, pp. 134, 224: A metonym is a metaphor signifying a whole of which it is itself a part. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Douglas and Faccioli, p. 56: "In the Eucharist (Communion) bread and wine are transformed to the flesh and blood of Christ with the repetition of Jesus' words to the disciples at the Last Supper". Betrayal is thematized by referencing Judas Iscariot. He broke the code of silence.

"Yeah, I told him". The audience has witnessed Soprano's first session with Dr. Melfi, which is integrated into the plot at the start of the pilot episode. Dr. Jennifer Melfi is a woman, so "*him*" is wrong. Mr. Soprano leaves it unexplained for now, fearing that a reference to another "*her*" at this point could only make the situation worse. Hence, Soprano hides his face out of real uneasiness about the topic. If his face-saving gesture is only an act, an attempt to manipulate his wife's sympathy (a possibility arising from the fact that the downward-looking *POV* on Soprano shielding his face results from *his* manipulation, *not* the camera's), her praise of his confession makes him abandon his plan: "Right, take it easy" precedes the more irritable, "What, did you think I was Hannibal Lecture [*sic*] before, or somethin'?" In addition to the blood-thirsty movie cannibal Hannibal Lecter, Soprano is invoking Rome's old enemy, Carthage, and its leader, Hannibal, suggesting that his wife is portraying himself as an anti-Roman talking her to death<sup>15</sup>.

Dinners at fancy restaurants often meet high standards of quality. Soprano can reasonably expect a clean locale, well-dressed and good-mannered staff, and tasty food. In contrast, talks can be hard to predict, as Soprano learns. It can be difficult to tell whether the food and drink impacts the above conversation at all. However, Soprano delays his confession until he and his wife have finished dinner. With full stomachs, the feeling of satisfaction coursing through their bodies, and waiting for dessert, he says that "life is good", then comments on the wine. Mrs. Soprano seems not to respond, unless she offers a pun: "You've been in good spirits the last couple days". Then, she suddenly wants to throw wine in his face. It is difficult to say whether this particular talk produces less sparks if Soprano chooses a different red wine. Significant information hides between his comments, "You know, sometimes life is good" and, "This *Regaleali*, for example".

*Regaleali* is a red wine based on the grape Nero d'Avula ("Black of Avula"), produced in the area of Regaleali in Sicily, east of Palermo. Generally, grapes differ in flavor as a result of different types of soil and growing conditions<sup>16</sup>. So, the Regaleali area in Southern Italy has its own distinctive qualities, recognizable to a sensitive palate<sup>17</sup>. The word 'regaleali' denotes a manor, the main house on a large estate, which is often understood to have servants. The Soprano

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Conti, p. 128: "Carthage", "Hannibal". See also pp. 96-97, *oratory*: The art of speaking well originated in Sicily. "Cannibal": Cf. note on p.28.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wilk, p.94: "*terroir*". See also Conti, p.189: "The wines produced on the slopes of Vesuvius were particularly renowned; the fertile volcanic soil there was cultivated almost up to the edges of the crater until the eruption in 79 A.D."

<sup>17</sup> Southern Italians' identity as rooted in "*terroir*", linking geography and history, is marked by the 1699 Avellino earthquake, cf. McGuire, et.al.: Vesuvius, pp.179, 190, 332, 341; the Avellino eruption, pp. 81, 133, 159-174. Avola, the *terroir* of the Nero grape, was rebuilt, "re-born", cf. Gutscher, et.al. "Nero" refers to Claudius' successor, the Julio-Claudian dynasty's last emperor. He supposedly burned down Rome in 64 AD to clear space for his palace. He may have committed suicide, according to Suetonius, p. 49. The grape Nero d'Avola may be dripping with *terroir*. Its essence fills the Regaleali wine with significance. Cf. Schlosser, p. 146: "The land that has been lost is not just a commodity".

home would qualify as a manor<sup>18</sup>. The word 'regaleali' is connected to Latin *rex* ('king'), hence, associated with rule, royalty and riches<sup>19</sup>. Wine is a common signifier of wealth<sup>20</sup>. In *Mythologies* (1973), in the section called "Wine and Milk", Roland Barthes labels wine as a "totem drink", since it supports a specific mythology in particular cultural contexts, such as the Ancient Roman Italian<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, *Regaleali* seems a particularly suitable wine for Soprano, whose lifestyle is that of an affluent king, or even an emperor, living in a manor<sup>22</sup>.

In choosing an Italian wine, Soprano makes a specific reference to his heritage, presenting the drink as a signifier of his identity. Sicily, a part of Italy, metonymically represents Italy as a country and also a culture which involves the production of wine<sup>23</sup>. A peasant or wine farmer would traditionally have been responsible for tending and picking the grapes, extracting the juice from them by repeatedly stepping bare-foot on them, then securing a good fermentation and treatment of the juice which results in the drink called wine. The nature of the physical work required to produce it accomplishes the signification of status conveyed by wine. A hierarchy in the workforce, and therefore a difference in status, is also implied. Would Soprano like to be associated with the peasant workers dirtying their hands in the fields or with the owner of the manor, some distance away from the laborers? Would he want to be associated with both?

Harper and Faccioli (2009) find that Southern regions of the emerging, unified Italy developed less rapidly than other regions, partly due to differences in agricultural systems: There was the Northern sharecropping, *mezzadria*, and the South's large estates, *latifondia*. Also, there were more natural resources in the North<sup>24</sup>. Solidarity resulted from the culture of helping each other in times of need in the North, but another trait was also prominent: "the *mezzadria* system, though promoting peasant interests and culture to a certain extent, sanctified the power of the

<sup>18</sup> Soprano might wish his *domus*, a *palatium*, to appear as a *manor*. Cf. Conti, pp. 152, 153, 170, 171 : "domus", "palatium". Cf. Robinson, p.642: "Solar": "Portuguese term meaning a 'manor house', which (like Chateau in France) may also be a wine-producing property".

<sup>19</sup> See <http://tascadalmerita.it/en/tenute/regaleali/>.

<sup>20</sup> Conti, p.13: Greek architecture influenced Etruscan, and also took on Roman and Italic forms. Owning Greek ceramics was a status symbol. Wine became a status symbol for being contained in the ceramics: It was a signifier of the wealth which was thus signified.

<sup>21</sup> Barthes (1973), p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> No fields envelop Soprano's mansion, so *manor* may be less accurate than Latin *villa* - a country house as well as a farm, from which is derived *villanus*, farmhand, associated with *villain*. If these fields were burned down to make a clearing for Soprano's mansion, he seems a lighter, more modern version of Emperor Nero. Cf. Smith, p.141: "Urban-owned settlement in the countryside was (...) as characteristic of the Roman period as of later times. By the second century B.C., it had become a measure of a rising standard of living to have a dual style of life, and "to have an estate near the city which even the busy man may easily visit every day after his business in the forum is over" (*Columella*, I.1.19)". Cf. Appendix A in Bell, pp.227-229, "What is a peasant?" Bell lists a peasant (*contadino*) near the bottom of a table with land owners on top. The only title beneath *contadino* is *villano*, described on p.229 as "rustic; more pejorative than *contadino* except possibly in Sicily, where it was generic".

<sup>23</sup> However, the fact that Sicily has belonged to various nations, including both Rome and Carthage, creates uncertainty about what it signifies.

<sup>24</sup> Supporting such a sense of local identity, Bell (1979) sees Italy as being segmented by olive trees: "rural Italian culture, at least to the line of the olive trees, should be viewed as Mediterranean". This highlights the significance of the hardy olive tree as a border, or line of demarcation.

landlord. At best the landlord was fair within the definitions of the system; at worst he was a *tyrant*"<sup>25</sup>. Labor division is a part of an evolving Italian culture. The hierarchical difference between the manual laborers and the overall administrator results as a natural part of the identity reference Soprano makes<sup>26</sup>. This division extends into Italian households, a part of Italian family life. The word *labor* associates to birth, hence, to women. Some traditions define manual work as the women's domain. In the Soprano home, Mrs. Soprano is associated with such labor as cleaning and cooking<sup>27</sup>. Eating out gives her a break from work. Soprano might be hoping that his confession is made easier. But this wine served at a restaurant fuels his wife's smoldering anger by highlighting her traditional, subordinated position as a laborer in the hierarchy associated with the *Regaleali*.

Sicily is at times identified with another part of Italy's culture; the organized crime Family<sup>28</sup>. *The Sopranos* references this subculture by quoting scenes and dialogue from (and by casting actors who have starred in) gangster genre films, notably *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather*. Harper and Faccioli offer background on this trait of the Italian culture: The *Mezzogiorno* areas south of Rome (down to and including Sicily) have been colonies under Spain and France<sup>29</sup>. In the South,

"Peasants were landless laborers, living in towns adjoining the estates. Whole families shared a dank room, or they lived in shacks or even caves; the men gathered in village squares each day to compete for work. Unlike the peasants in the *mezzadria*, they had no stake in the land they worked, no plots for small gardens, no common lands to graze a few animals, and no security. When they rented land, they borrowed at high rates of interest from the landlord, and when land was sharecropped, peasants received only a quarter of the produce rather than the half share that was customary in the north. These conditions promoted intense commitment to family (the only support system), mistrust between peasants, and hatred for those with land, power, and money.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. The title of *padrone* is explained in Harper and Faccioli, p. 50: "The absence of a numerically significant middle class was caused by the general lack of medium-sized properties; there were either large estates (*latifundi*) or small landholdings, often not large enough to yield a livelihood for a single family. (...) The gentry, especially the large landowners and *padrone*, dealt with members of the lower class as they would with servants and, by custom, expected all the outward displays of subservience, including in some religions kissing the hand of the *padrone* by way of greeting. If he did not kiss the hand, he certainly had to pronounce the greeting, "*Vosia, sa benadica* (Bless Me, Your Honor)". The line of demarcation between classes was maintained as if time had passed by these towns and villages; the spirit and nature of Feudal times lingered in hollows and valleys of the countryside and in the minds of men and women (...) The largest of the estates were in the *Mezzogiorno*".

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ward, see esp. pp. 2-12.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Martin, p. 29: *Hyperelecticism* is a style of furnishing and decoration, to which Mrs. Soprano aspires, and which is the result of generations of people bringing their styles with them up Bloomfield Avenue in pursuit of The American Dream. When Soprano mumbles his price for peace into Junior's ear in 1/4, Soprano turns the very American Dream into a commodity. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 61, *celibacy*.

<sup>28</sup> A relevant discussion of the *Mafia* is found in Harper and Faccioli, pp.73-74: "It was in this period, too, that the image of the Mafia was created in order to justify the Government's policies in the South. Crime was attributed to the Mafia and exaggerated. Later statistics would show that crime was not high in Sicily." Cf. *Ibid.*, p.74: "Irrked by the resistance of the southerners to their legislation, successive government leaders denounced them as "barbarians" and "savages"". See also p.242: "There was no common mafia image in the 1920s or 1930s, there were "gangsters" like Al Capone. The mafia image of the 1890s was resurrected by the politicians after World War II." The Mafia concept is associated with the postwar times which Soprano romanticizes, cf. p.260: "The image of Italian mafia crime families, *capo regime*, *capo di tutti capi*, was repopularized by the U.S. Senate investigations on organized crime led by Senator Estes Kefauver in 1950-1951". Although this came after J. Edgar Hoover had insisted for a long time that the Mafia did not exist, this is not sufficient to claim that Hoover was in the Mafia.

<sup>29</sup> "Mezzogiorno": Cf. Mangione & Morreale, pp. 46, 53, 67, 173, 177, 233. See also note 23, p. 9.

(..) Eighty percent of Sicilian farmland was run under the *latifondo* system. (..) Other factors retarded southern development. (..) malaria was common, and the swamps were not drained until the twentieth century, in some of the most successful fascist public works projects. Local secret societies that evolved into organized crime families protected peasants from larger political units (colonial governments or the central state after 1861), and these traditions were one source of Italian organized crime" (Ibid, 36-37).

Conti offers further relevant insights into Soprano's background, suggested by Soprano's choice of a distinctly Italian red wine. After defining *gentes* as patrician families, and *patres* as members of the Senate, Conti explains that, during the early monarchy, the

"principal exponents of these *gentes* probably were *patres* (...). These were influential figures who controlled and could easily mobilize a great number of citizens who were tied to them by business relationships. It is likely that one reason behind their rebellion against royal power was the growing propensity of the king to reduce their influence in favor of the nascent commercial and artisan classes" (Ibid, 16).

Essentially, Conti describes gangs controlled by a few powerful families, which is important background knowledge for understanding *The Sopranos*. An example of the impact that this part of Italian traditions has on the plot in *The Sopranos* is seen in episode 6-1 / 1: "Members Only", at 28:45-30:31, after Soprano's negotiation with Phil Leotardo acting on behalf of New York boss John 'Johnny Sac' Sacrimoni. Moltisanti, a Soprano associate, voices his concerns: "Why you always cave to this prick?" Soprano answers: "I'm not cavin'. It's a strategy. Johnny's in jail. You keep him happy, he'll keep a lid on Phil. (..) Got 200 soldiers in his family". "Soldiers" rank under a leader and are associated with force, domination, violence, and death.

If Soprano is referencing this heritage through his choice of wine, then Mrs. Soprano's threat of throwing the wine back in his "damn face" (a potential act of mild violence) could serve as a sobering reminder that the same culture which Soprano wishes to possess and embody can bring unpleasant consequences for himself. It also seems to link to the earlier communication made by Mrs. Soprano in choosing to steer the topic away from the wine that Soprano mentions.

Soprano is being serious. He risks execution ("a steel-jacketed anti-depressant right in the back of the head") for choosing to see a therapist. Thus, Soprano describes the stereotypical stigma conferred upon a person in therapy. In addition to strengthening the discourse which has put Mrs. Soprano in a morally superior position, this admission represent a sufficient sacrifice to balance Mrs. Soprano's claims for a penance. The alternating close-ups of the two is interrupted

by a wider establishing shot<sup>30</sup> as the *maitre'd* brings them coffee and a piece of cake: The talk of death is thus followed by the sharing of bread, making them companions (Latin, *cum panis*: 'Bread-sharer')<sup>31</sup>. This implies that the couple has had dinner and is moving on to dessert. Then, since Mr. and Mrs. Soprano are Catholics, the breaking of bread carries with it the expectation that one shows solidarity and a communal sense of *conviviality*<sup>32</sup>. Bread reinforces the sense of hierarchy through its historical significance as a food give by benign rulers to humble servants. The Lord's Prayer includes the words "give us this day our daily bread". A gift of bread is good. Soprano's use of the word "good" reflects his familiarity with this concept of a Lord. However, to Soprano as a "waste management consultant", it contains a conflict between discourses<sup>33</sup>: It justifies how he puts food on the table but makes it harder to confront his parents, since they also put food on the table<sup>34</sup>. As dictated by his identity as a *pater familias*, Soprano references an Egyptian heritage by often appearing beside water in *The Sopranos*<sup>35</sup>. Above all, one does not betray a companion. The breaking of bread carries with it the symbolic meaning that they are eating the body of Christ. In practice, this accomplishes a reminder of the life and teachings of Jesus (who was betrayed by a bread-sharer). It also adds irony to Soprano's reference to the movie cannibal Hannibal Lecter: The Sopranos are performing a virtual cannibalistic ritual. A literal interpretation of the liturgy of the Eucharist is perhaps less common among Western than among Eastern Christians, who are more likely to eat the wafer for the purpose of becoming one with the "body of Christ" (the Church) to achieve a union. A universal expectation is that one does not betray a bread-sharer (companion). There is a natural pause in their dinner conversation.

Mrs. Soprano retains control by initiating the second part of the dinner talk, offering that she had no idea her husband was so unhappy. This superficially sympathetic reference to her ignorance clears her of suspicion that she could have done anything willfully hurtful. It cements her position and reinforces the discourse that it is *he* who is having trouble, *he* who needs to talk, while she is offering her husband understanding, counsel, and a needed way to atone for his sins.

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<sup>30</sup> Messaris, *Visual Literacy*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Anderson, E.N., p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas and Faccioli, p.87: "We use the word conviviality to describe how we spend time together. We will eat together, sharing good moments together, having fun together, while having food together". Compare Konig, p.23: The institution of the convivium was the Roman equivalent of the Symposium. See also *Ibid.*, p.7: "Sympotic talk and sympotic song, as they are represented in the literature of archaic and classical Greece, were thought of as shared, community-forming activities" Thus, talking creates communities.

<sup>33</sup> In 1/ 1: "The Sopranos", at 02:05-04:00, Soprano tells his therapist he is a "waste management consultant".

<sup>34</sup> In 1/ 1: "The Sopranos", at 35:40-35:50, Christopher Moltisanti comments: "Hey, garbage is out bread and butter".

<sup>35</sup> Jacob, in *Six Thousand Years of Bread*, p.18: "The Egyptian Nile personified the sensible *pater familias* who fed and clothed his children". Cf. Conti, pp. 82, 186: A Roman *pater familias* functioned as priest and herbal healer for a local cult. Soprano and Intontola are competing priests.

Soprano seems to waver a bit, looks down to avoid his wife's head-on gaze, before starting to say "My mother...". Mrs. Soprano interrupts even before he has completed the sentence. If her aim were truly to strengthen their relationship, she might achieve it sooner by listening to the confession she has pressured Soprano into giving, and which Soprano actually seems to have gone to some lengths in order to accomplish. Her interruption indicates that she wants to prevent a presentation of his version and that, at least this time, she wants to make him uncomfortable, to see him do penance. Her question, "You told him about your father, right?" switches the focus from Soprano's mother, whom *Soprano* mentions, to his father, whom *Mrs. Soprano* mentions. This illustrates how Mrs. Soprano takes control of the situation by defining what should be talked about and in what order<sup>36</sup>. Soprano invites a discussion about mother issues ("My mother..."). Mrs. Soprano decides not to talk about his mother, but about her own mother issues with Meadow, thereby not acknowledging his unhappiness, which is thus suppressed. She again links her position in life – her trouble with her daughter – with the discourse of the Catholic Church, when she uses the words "Our existence on this Earth is a puzzle", invoking the religious concept of the mystery of faith<sup>37</sup>. The discourse joined – and manipulated – by Mrs. Soprano allows her husband to appear as the comforting father figure who tells his wife her daughter does not hate her, but it also denies him an outlet for his unhappiness. Mrs. Soprano seems to force her unwilling husband to conform to the archetype of "the strong, silent type" which he hails in his therapist's session<sup>38</sup>. It is uncertain how much of Soprano's praise for this archetype results from his own thoughts and how much results from what Mrs. Soprano expects and demands of him. Mrs. Soprano's way of pressing her husband also leads to the opposite of him "confessing" to her, in the sense of him talking freely, opening up about his troubles and allowing her to support him. A contrast to this is his therapist's basic, Freudian approach, which should adhere to the standards of the APA<sup>39</sup>. Hence, Salvaging their marriage seems to be Mr. and Mrs. Soprano's aim on the

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<sup>36</sup> The depth of this character trait of Mrs. Soprano is suggested in 6-1/3: "Mayham", at 10:33-13:47. She similarly alters the focus of Soprano's otherworldly question, from his, "[w]ho am I? Where am I going?" to her, "[w]e're right here with you. Tony, who am I, who am I?"

<sup>37</sup> Since 1969, the *mysterium fidei* is a part of Catholic Mass, cf. note on p.6. Soprano mentions the concept to Melfi, in 1/3, at 38:30-40:27.

<sup>38</sup> Abrams, pp. 18-20: An archetype describes "narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images that recur in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are often claimed to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author". In accordance with the aim of this thesis, a dinner scene is defined as one such "social ritual". The critical acclaim of *The Sopranos* suggests that a profound response has been evoked. One possible reason for this response is that the audience recognizes and shares the view of the food scenes presented in the TV series with their laborious preparations, late arrivals, gossip, and more than occasional squabbles.

<sup>39</sup> The American Psychiatric Association (APA) provides guidelines for professional psychiatrists. Cf. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, footnote 2 to Chapter 2: No one but the dreamer must be the interpreter.

surface only – even though they are bread-sharers. The dinner rather reveals a struggle for power. Mrs. Soprano successfully links her cause to the ultimate paternalistic institution of the Catholic Church. Soprano's strategy is to limit access to information, and he relies on his own devices and not yet his therapist's. This exemplifies how characters like Mr. and Mrs. Soprano are revealed in food scenes – and how efficiently; this scene takes only two minutes and thirty seconds.

This dinner is one of many scenes involving food. Aspects change in *The Sopranos*, but food remains a constant: Everyone must eat. The sheer number of food-related scenes in this TV-series becomes a marker for important content. Many scenes show people eating, drinking or talking about food. Meta-level jokes point this out, for example in 6.5, "Mr. & Mrs. John Sacrimoni Request..." (at 12:08-13:13), when New York boss John Sacrimoni's daughter Catherine exclaims: "Jesus, can we ever talk about anything in this family besides food?"

Many food-related scenes also happen outside the Soprano home, like the one quoted above. Eating out may or may not be considered a part of the McWorld which Eric Schlosser describes in *Fast Food Nation*, but a significant part of the discourse about identity in *The Sopranos* lies hidden inside this mundane aspect<sup>40</sup>. If Soprano expects his wife's disapproval ("You, always with the drama, you"), their dinner talk contains insight into why he has opted to confess at a dinner away from home: It is an attempt to maintain peace, at least in the household. Possibly, he is hoping that the restaurant setting controls his wife's fiery anger, thus reasserting him as patriarch. Also, keeping in mind that the couple are Catholics, and remembering that there is red wine and bread (in the cake) on the table, Soprano's confession takes place after two of the foremost religious symbols in Christendom have been placed on the dinner table. If this is a reference to the sacraments, the restaurant owner's comments signify more than a reassurance of Mrs. Soprano (perhaps on prior instruction) that Soprano has not dated other women there: When the *maitre'd* asks where Soprano has been, adding, "months we don't see you", this denial amounts to a blatant lie. It also resembles a confessor welcoming a penitent man, setting the tone for the dinner. Mrs. Soprano would be able to register this. If so, the dinner talk suggests that Soprano knows his wife well, and that keeping information from his children (and others), thus presenting the semblance of a peaceful family and home, is important to Soprano.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Schlosser, p.6: "A hamburger and french fries became the quintessential American meal in the 1950s (...)" See *Ibid.*, p.238: Robert Nugent, head of Jack-in-the-Box, once said that the ritual of enjoying a meal at a restaurant is "the very essence of freedom" – a part of "our way of life". Eating out represents freedom of choice. In 4/13: "Whitecaps", at a8:54-21:19, Soprano is identified with the "quintessential American": A.J. comes home and goes straight to the refrigerator. Leaving its door open, he answers the phone: "Home of the burger, what's your beef?"

The reason for having the conversation at a restaurant may be very simple: At this point in the pilot episode, the audience has seen an example of the noise involved in Soprano's job as a "waste management consultant": During his first session with Dr. Melfi there are what could be interpreted as *analepsis* (flashbacks), one of which shows Soprano in Technicolor deliberately running a man over, then beating him up over what Soprano calls an outstanding loan<sup>41</sup>. Juxtaposition reveals a discrepancy between Soprano's words and what the pictures show. This is a narrative device which proposes that Soprano is manipulating the truth. His therapist is partly to blame for this discrepancy: Suspecting Soprano's background, Melfi effectively warns him against revealing too much when she says that if she were to learn of a murder, she is supposed to go to the authorities. "Technically", she adds, dissipating her warning and inviting Soprano to share his story<sup>42</sup>. Soprano says they had coffee. This leads to an example of how the pictures differ from what he is saying: From Soprano relating his story in Melfi's office, there is a cut in the plot to a shot which shows a close-up of the legs of the female companion of the indebted Mahaffey. The shot starts, and the woman is heard screaming as Soprano attacks in his car. In agitation, she drops a tray of take-away coffee cups, which enters the top of the frame, falling rapidly, and then splatters onto the tarmac as Soprano takes off after Mahaffey. In the plot, the coffee that Soprano presents both in his voiceover and on-screen thus serves as a match on action, a transitional device between the shots<sup>43</sup>. It is not, as Melfi might believe, the social main event of Soprano's meeting with Mahaffey<sup>44</sup>. In the *Regaleali Dinner* scene, Soprano fails to point out that Melfi is a woman, thus letting his wife falsely believe that Melfi is a man. Two scenes now show Soprano economizing with the truth: Soprano seems to be manipulative. Hereafter, TV audiences are conditioned to find evidence which strengthens or weakens this hypothesis. The examples also show violence and death linked to food-scenes in *The Sopranos*.

Such talks, where participants struggle instead of co-operate, are a typical ingredient of *The Sopranos*. The *Regaleali Dinner* scene shows, for example: Soprano's relationship to one of his servants; the link from food and orality to violence and death; and its impact on Soprano's characterization. Hence, the *Regaleali Dinner* is a useful reference for later scenes.

<sup>41</sup> See 1/ 1: "The Sopranos", at 08:31-09:37. Cf. Abrams, pp. 138, 296: "flashback, which is what "analepsis" denotes in a literary context. In medical terms, "analepsis" or "analepsy" may denote both an epileptic attack caused by a gastric disorder, as well as the recovery of one's strength. Furthermore, "analepsis" has associations to religion, as it denotes the Ascension of Christ and the simultaneous descent of the devil.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Five for a full transcript. Melfi's morally debatable choice is noted by others, for example Dana Polan in *The Sopranos*, p.131.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Bordwell & Thompson, *Film Art*, p. 226: "Match on action". See also Messaris, *Visual Literacy*, pp. 15-16: "Voiceover".

<sup>44</sup> In 1/ 6, at 18:36-21:33, Soprano brings take-away coffee to a session as a socializing element. Melfi wants to "address the coffee situation".

## Chapter Two: Thesis Aim: Orality and Identity

This thesis takes a psycho-social perspective on *The Sopranos*, notably the table talks<sup>45</sup>. The *Regaleali Dinner* exemplifies the food-scenes as practical devices for the series creator and his crew, since dinners usually involve several people. Food is a basic human need, and in *The Sopranos*, people congregate daily around tables to eat, talk and interact in ways which suggest or reveal sides to the characters. This creates an opportunity to present such aspects as the characters' relationships, status, and the tensions and conflicts which underpin the series. Philip K. Wion's essay on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* shows one analysis of food and oral imagery in relation to the psychological aspects of literary characters – the aim of this thesis<sup>46</sup>.

For example, Wion refers to teeth, eating, and drinking, commenting that Heathcliff's reunion with Catherine is "described in terms which derive psychologically from the symbiotic phase of the mother-child relationship. This phase coincides with the oral stage of libidinal development". He adds: "Nearly every social encounter involves food or drink", and notes that Nelly Dean (one of the characters beside Heathcliff, Isabella and others who serve as a surrogate mother) "provides the food and drink"<sup>47</sup>. Food scenes reveal intimacy, complexity, or hidden personal depths in ways which resemble a novel's narration<sup>48</sup>. A novel cannot offer the explicit pictures of a TV series, where the action and dialogue are staged before the audience's eyes<sup>49</sup>. Michael M. Grynbaum writes in "Mangia Mafia!"<sup>50</sup>: "Food and dining play an important role in underscoring the show's themes, fleshing out characters, foreshadowing events, and developing narrative"<sup>51</sup>. He adds: "For the Sopranos' Italian Americans, food is identity, and it can represent norms of masculinity, memory, family, and cultural heritage"<sup>52</sup>. *The Soprano Family Cookbook* quotes Arthur Bucco on p. 1 as saying that a *paesano* (Italian American) without food is as

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Konig, p.6: "The literature of the symposium generated some modern descendants, for example in the Renaissance table-talk genre, much of which imitates classical precedents". These precedents are echoed in Soprano's sit-downs outside *Satriale's*. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 125: Christian table fellowships seems linked to identity. See also *Ibid.*, p. 132: The apostle Luke shows Jesus engaging in table-talks. Cf. William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, which, according to Bondanella, p. 212, "offers a basically compassionate explanation for Italian American crime".

<sup>46</sup> Wion, in Murfin, pp. 364-378; cf. Mahler, pp. 44-48. See also Kaplan, p.30.

<sup>47</sup> Wion, in Murfin, p. 368.

<sup>48</sup> Braudy & Cohen, p.53: "Today we can say that at last the director writes in film. (...) The film maker is (...) the equal of the novelist".

<sup>49</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, p. 118: "*mise en scène* (...) means "putting into the scene" (...). In controlling the *mise en scène*, the director stages the event for the camera." Messaris, in *Visual Persuasion*, p. 142ff, warns of five categories of visual deception controlled by the director: staging; alteration of photo; editing; selection; and mislabeling. All of these are misrepresentations. Cf. Abrams, pp.226, 363. Generally, in the TV format, there will be many close-ups because the image is smaller on the TV screens at home than on the big silver screen in the movie theaters. But whenever this thesis specifies that a scene has a close-up, that scene may carry more significance than just a closer look at character's faces.

<sup>50</sup> Grynbaum, in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, pp. 183-196.

<sup>51</sup> Grynbaum, in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, p. 184.

<sup>52</sup> Grynbaum, in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, p. 185.

pointless as Cecilia Bartoli without her song. If food *is* identity, *The Sopranos* characters are revealed in food scenes. This suggests the significance of gender roles in a traditional Italian-American society, notably the mother-child relationship.

A birth from a mother is a physical process, growing up, a psychological one. Mahler sees three distinct phases <sup>53</sup>: the "normal autistic" phase of an infant regarding the surroundings as a normal extension of the infant, like the mother's womb; the "normal symbiotic phase", where the infant regards the infant – mother symbiosis as an "omnipotent system"; and the "separation/individuation" phase, where the split between "self" and "other" is clearer. The third phase is a "second birth" with arising awareness to the surroundings and is subdivided into four parts: differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, and "consolidation of individuality and emotional object constancy". Rapprochement involves a challenge to the infant's identity at the realization of its separateness from the rest of the world, followed by attempts to re-establish the *status quo*. This is impossible. A crisis arises: "Ambitendency, which develops into ambivalence, is often intense; the toddler wants to be united with, and at the same time separate from, mother. Temper tantrums, sad moods, and intense separation reactions are at their height" <sup>54</sup>. Kaplan says "good enough" mothering results in an adult with sufficient self-esteem and balanced values to handle anxieties realized during the individuation process <sup>55</sup>. The second birth might be insufficiently fulfilled and serious problems arise in adulthood. The first support often comes from the family.

Food creates communities, says Margaret Visser in *Much Depends On Dinner*, noting that when we can take food for granted – no sooner – "we start to civilize ourselves. (...) Food (...) is one of the means by which a society creates itself and acts out its aims and fantasies" <sup>56</sup>. Visser relies on DeQuincy's "*The Casuistry of Roman Meals*" and dubs dinner "the principal meal; *i.e.*, the meal on which the day's support is thrown", stressing "[t]hat it is *therefore* the meal of hospitality", and "[t]hat it is the meal (...) in which animal food predominates" <sup>57</sup>. Shoshana Blum-Kulka finds that dinnertime is a both sociable and socializing "we" event <sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Mahler, pp. 44-48.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 292.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Kaplan, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Visser, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Humans eat animals, so, humans rank above animals in the hierarchical food chain. This is a metaphor for crime families. Chase names a character "Dante" and creates a link to Dante's *Inferno*, which describes "denizens doomed to eternal hunger", cf. Martin, p. 78.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Blum-Kulka, pp. 11, 36.

In *The Sopranos*, the number of food-related scenes equals the total number of scenes<sup>59</sup>. A narrowed-down focus may be accomplished by limiting the scrutinized food scenes to those which qualify as dinners ("the principal meal"), or suppers, which have also been recognized as formal meals where rules apply to seating, speaking order, appropriate talk topics, and so on<sup>60</sup>.

The dinners are the main focal area of this thesis. Other food scenes, such as breakfasts, luncheons, teas, suppers, and snacks, carry significance in spite of being less formal than the dinners and may take place anywhere at random hours between the formal meal times<sup>61</sup>. Such scenes will be referenced to a certain degree. Food accompanies beverages like wine, water, milk, orange juice, coffee, and soft drinks. Soprano's expressed attitude is that alcoholic beverages such as wine is also food<sup>62</sup>. Food influences characters' talk about everyday issues: By using food-related words, they take food in their mouths. Though immaterial, this is not inconsequential<sup>63</sup>.

Though different, the dinners are often elaborate and big. This emphasizes their significance as the main meal of the day and signifies the wealth and generosity of the host<sup>64</sup>. The people gathered at the tables play various roles but all contribute towards the characterization of Soprano – it results from a juxtaposition between him and his surroundings<sup>65</sup>. This seven-season running comparison employs the dinner scene as a narrative device. The resulting significance is rooted in cultural history and socio-anthropological factors like ethnic identity. The relevance is apparent, as *The Sopranos* is mainly about identity.

There are many examples which suggest the size, volume and importance of the dinners: Soprano's dinner in 1/ 4 with his captains; the big feast in honor of A.J.'s confirmation in 2/ 7; his dinners in 2/ 13; his fainting at the sight of Livia's and Johnny's sexuality around food in 3/ 3; a roast dinner in the Soprano home in 3/ 6; a Sunday dinner and an everyday dinner in 3/ 7; in 3/ 8 (which first aired in America on Easter Sunday), a Thanksgiving Day dinner in the Soprano home

<sup>59</sup> Food is consumed, transformed by, and becomes one with, people. So, people are signifiers of food. Cf. Konig, Jason, p.13: *The Sopranos* may be an example of "*deipnon*" or 'dinner' literature, dedicated to describing specific dinner occasions not by their conversation but by their food".

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Konig, p. 4: The institutions for eating and drinking are "vehicles of social definition". See also Brett, *Dinner is served*, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Brett, pp. 96, 107, 108, 122: Between 1660 and 1900, not three, but four daily meals became customary: breakfast, luncheon or dinner, afternoon tea, and dinner or supper. Note that Brett classes dinner and supper together. There were two types of teas. A change in meal times ensued. Cf. Schlosser, p. 3: Small, rectangular, hand-held meals have later become an American social custom – the hand-held meal is current.

<sup>62</sup> In 6-1/ 9: "The Ride", at 11:47-13:15, Soprano shares stolen red wine from a recent heist with Moltisanti (and even pours his glass). See also *Harper and Faccioli*, p. 33: "Wine was the daily drink for breakfast, lunch and dinner, of varying strength (often watered) and quality".

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Polan, p. 50: "Food is everywhere".

<sup>64</sup> Cf. p. 127 in Anderson, E.N.: "a reputation for generosity was life, and the opposite was death". Hosting feasts accomplishes this, of which an early version was the potlatch of the Northwest coast, a tradition which Janice references as a pretext for avoiding responsibility for Junior.

<sup>65</sup> Considering Visser's definition (p. 12), people gathered around a dinner table may be called a dinner community.

and the juxtaposed dinner in the Aprile home; in 4/ 1, "Danielle from Whippanny" is brought into the Soprano home by LaCerva<sup>66</sup>; in 4/ 4, after Carmine Sr. has ordered a hit, the Sopranos dine at *Vesuvio* with two other couples and Soprano tells the story of how he met his wife; in 4/ 11, the Baccalieris come to Sunday dinner, and Soprano smacks A.J. on the head. Also, Soprano, Gaeta, and Carmine Jr. dine in Florida; in 4/ 12, at a Thursday dinner at Meadow's apartment, Soprano gets to "meet the crew", and Gualtieri hears about Minnie Matrone's mattress money in a dinner scene which links to death. In an audio commentary to Season 4, David Chase says Season 1 is about Soprano as a child (the child of Livia), Season 2 is about Soprano as a brother and as a sibling, Season 3 is about Soprano and his wife as parents, and Season 4 is about their marriage.

Season 5 can therefore be said to mark the beginning of a separate part of the story, built like an abode on the four pillars that are the first four seasons, and with the last two seasons forming the apex of the abode, which is made up of a union where Season 6, Part 1 consists of 12 parts and Season 6, Part 2 consists of 9 parts<sup>67</sup>. Dinner scenes continue to carry significance: In 5/ 1, Moltisanti is "low man" (not *Lo Mein*) and has to pay \$1184 (a reference to the creation of the Inquisition) for a dinner, and then a waiter dies; in 5/ 2, Blundetto is welcomed back with a big *Vesuvio* dinner. Soprano's speech mentions "Tony Uncle Johnny", "Tony Uncle Al", and also a "Tony Uncle Philly" who simply "went away", a possible reference to a family member who was ostracised according to the rules surrounding *onore*<sup>68</sup>; in 5/ 3, Janice serves *Macaroni bolognese* as well as *marinara* – but it has all been prepared by Bucco. Junior repeats a Varsity comment, and there is no reunion dinner for Soprano and his sisters; in 5/ 7, Soprano tells Melfi about Livia's "change-of-life baby". He talks about the fact that Johnny stayed with his *comare* (who was preparing lamb chops) instead of supporting Livia, before forcing Young Tony to lie in front of Livia – who knew that he was lying; in 5/ 8, Mrs. Soprano serves Chinese take-away and suggests Hugh's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday take place at *Vesuvio*. Hugh DeAngelis overrules her and Mary DeAngelis. So, "the man of the house" twirls strings of sausages<sup>69</sup>; In 5/ 12, from 11:30, the Sopranos reconcile over dinner in *Vesuvio* (agreeing on a price), and from 20:53, Soprano breaks

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Martin, pp. 40, 41, 132: Unique access to information is the reward for a seat at the Soprano dinner table. Cf. 4/ 5, from 24:40, when Moltisanti says about the Soprano dinner table, that "[t]his is the inner sanctum here. I'm not just a relative anymore".

<sup>67</sup> In this thesis, the episodes of Season 6 are therefore annotated 6-1/ ep.no., and 6-2/ ep.no.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Bell, pp.1-3.

<sup>69</sup> The *OED* traces the meaning of *husband* via Middle English, its parts consisting of *hus*, 'house' and *band* as 'occupier of the house or tiller of the land', to Old Norse, where the word means 'master of the house'. In Old Norse this denoted the male head of the family. Mrs. Soprano later separates from Soprano, attempting to make herself the master of the Soprano household, a modern, *female* husband, whose male lover might possibly be termed a *compadre*, the male equivalent of *comare*. Or, she could take a wife. This could be Mrs. Soprano's secret American Dream.

bread in the Soprano home; at Curto's birthday dinner in 5/ 13, Soprano makes a speech about "circling the wagons", his gift being a bottle of red wine labeled *Acuto* (a municipality in the Lazio region). At 13:09, as several dinner guests may have been "wired", Soprano comes home early from Curto's dinner and is offered re-heated chicken *parmesean*.

In 6-1/ 1, from 22:26, Soprano and his wife eat out at an Asian restaurant<sup>70</sup>; in 6-1/ 2, Soprano dreams about dinner; In 6-1/ 7, Soprano dines big at *Vesuvio* as Gerry Torciano and Burt Gervasi have been "made". From 09:12, the Sopranos dine at *Da Giovanni*, another restaurant, and Soprano abstains from his wife's offer of *gnocchi*: "It's, uh, a little rich for my stomach"<sup>71</sup>. He thus shows restraint<sup>72</sup>; in 6-1/ 8, from 11:47, Soprano and Moltisanti dine at a restaurant and drink wine from a recent heist. At a Soprano Sunday dinner, Kelli Moltisanti (pregnant) drinks of this wine<sup>73</sup>; in 6-1/ 8, Soprano comes home to eat a late dinner. But instead of making dinner, his wife has ordered sandwiches from *Italianissimo*. Soprano proceeds to eat alone (an act which is frowned upon in Mafia circles, after an historical reference to Octavian becoming Emperor only after not eating alone). Then, before the family dinner, Soprano tends wine bottles in the cellar while Janice talks to his back, weeping and thanking him for the house he has given her<sup>74</sup>; in 6-1/ 11, from 32:35, at a restaurant dinner, Spatafore tells his children and wife Marie he is a CIA spy and must go undercover<sup>75</sup>; in 6-1/ 12, Carlo asks Dante: "So the barbecue over in Sheepshead Bay, that's still a go?" This "barbecue" turns out to be code talk for a bomb blast. Benny Fazio calls to report it. Soprano is in a hotel room with a dark-haired woman with recognizable features, but the audience sees only a blurred shape of her. From 05:56, Mrs. Soprano brings home food from the live poultry shop for Thanksgiving and reminds her husband about LaCerva's disappearance. He breathes faster, which he usually does when he is feeling tense about something.

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<sup>70</sup> From 32:12, Soprano reveals he has already dined – alone – at *Nori Sushi*. His wife calls IT their "special place". Camerawork creates the effect of the Sopranos as seen on TV, or inside a framed picture of the couple on the same side of the counter. This supports a sense of reconciliation.

<sup>71</sup> Soprano shows restraint and generosity in 6-2/ 6, by ignoring a moaning woman who says to "[p]ress it all" at a casino. At 45:47, he takes his own advice (in 1/ 6, from 40:34; cf. footnote 161, p.40) and shares his winnings with the *croupier*, who says it is "[m]uch appreciated".

<sup>72</sup> Soprano's wife urges him to taste "just one bite". She appears as his enabler. But he may have problems with "rich" food, cf. Conti, p.187: "Illnesses were not equal for all. The wealthy often had problems tied to dietary excesses". Selfishness may have had incidental positive effects.

<sup>73</sup> By enjoying a French wine *Chateau Pichon-Longueville*, 1986, Soprano approaches his wife's taste for all things French. Cf. footnote 18.

<sup>74</sup> He has pleased Janice. Janice serves as a mother substitute ever since she and Young Tony were young. Because of his culture-based view on mothers, Young Tony was duped, according to Janice in 6-2/ 1, into eating one of the family dog's milk bones. Soprano tells Melfi in a session in 6-1/ 8, from 16:45, that he used to "play house" with Janice in *Satriale's*, which thus became "home" while Johnny collected debts. In bringing Janice to tears after she receives their mother's house, Soprano thus appears to have pleased "Mother", which means Janice and, finally, Livia.

<sup>75</sup> The most readily available interpretation is that Spatafore is lying to his children. But his claim may certainly be true, in which case Soprano later vouches for a government agent, calling him a "good earner" (an acceptable argument to his crew). If Spatafore tells the truth about being an agent on legitimate business, he is a foil for Soprano who tells Meadow and A.J. that he is conducting legitimate business while he is not.

Episode 6-2/ 1 then begins with captions (a rare occurrence on *The Sopranos*) and an arrest. After this, from 14:34, Mrs. Soprano and Janice are preparing dinner in the Baccalieri lakeside cabin. The dinner precedes an evening party and a drunken fist fight, which has further consequences. An intercut sequence shows Anthony Jereboam Soprano clearly enjoying the luxurious life style while his parents are away<sup>76</sup>; episode 6-2/ 2 is named "Stage 5" and could refer to the movie premiere of Moltisanti's *Cleaver*. Also, a "Stage 5 clinger" is a needy person, which in this episode seems to describe A.J., who turns to mother figures to re-establish a "status quo" before Blanca leaves. A "stage 5" would also come after a "stage 4", and Sacrimoni now has a stage 4 lung cancer and is given 3 months to live, after which would come death – stage 5<sup>77</sup>. The orality in this episode also connects to Sacrimoni's stubborn smoking and relaying of large tales after being given a glimmer of hope by Warren Feldman, the orderly<sup>78</sup>. There is a dinner in the Soprano home and Blanca seems irritated at A.J. Soprano gets dizzy after his wife makes a reference to the Blundetto twins not knowing about who their father is, since Blundetto's sperm was allegedly smuggled out of jail to impregnate his wife, Nancy<sup>79</sup>; in 6-2/ 3, 'Doc' Santoro at a lunch date with Leotardo receives an envelope. Leotardo says, "[y]our taste", but because of a food-related insult, Santoro is later killed (food links to death). Soprano calls Rabkin to obtain a \$200,000 bridge loan. In the aftermath of the loan, Rabkin's *comare* dies<sup>80</sup>. Also in this episode, Soprano has sex with his blonde dinner date. On the audio commentary, actor Dominic Chianese says Soprano has sex as a way to relieve himself of pain, and that it is not really about love at all. This supports an understanding that Soprano, as *paterfamilias*, expresses his traditional beliefs through the union of man and woman. Chianese says Junior really loved his comare Roberta, and that it hurt Junior that she betrayed his confidence after their 16-year-old relationship (after which

<sup>76</sup> In an audio commentary, actor Robert Iler talks about how using a person's full name may indicate that person's guilt.

<sup>77</sup> Sacrimoni's diagnosis echoes Soprano's fear expressed in his thematic dream in 2/ 13: "Funhouse".

<sup>78</sup> Feldman, a convicted murderer, has a motive for reducing his sentence, hence, for helping the FBI. Sacrimoni's terminal illness makes him cling to Feldman's assertions that the diagnosis is inaccurate. After Sacrimoni becomes a "singing" mobster, Feldman goes back on his word, which amounts to a betrayal. Sacrimoni dies, thereby not getting what he was clinging on to. He is juxtaposed to A.J., who gets what he wants.

<sup>79</sup> Soprano's breathing often gets heavier when he feels stressed out about something which affects him personally.

<sup>80</sup> From 31:14, it is revealed that Carlo waits in the car while Soprano and Bacalieri talk to Rabkin. From 44:56, Rabkin's "fire boat" comment suggests he really did go with Soprano to a boat show, hence leaving Renata, Rabkin's comare, alone. She suddenly lies dead in Rabkin's bed, with no marks of a struggle. It is plausible that Carlo scouts the place before suffocating Renata with Rabkin away. Soprano has plenty of money in his Slava-controlled accounts, so he gets indebted to Rabkin on purpose to create a pretext for ordering this murder, as a way of subduing Rabkin, one of Soprano's last remaining male role models whom he seeks to challenge in order to complete his individuation process. Rabkin might otherwise have exerted more power. Soprano is no longer indebted to Rabkin but takes the life of Rabkin's *comare*. Rabkin tries to keep her hidden, because she is African-American. Her death would not be enough to justify a vendetta, but since Rabkin seems to really love Renata, her death hurts him. This was Soprano's purpose: To exert power, take a life, and get away with it. Other important scenes on *The Sopranos* are associated to bridges, so it is appropriate that Renata's death follows Soprano's bridge loan. Since Rabkin is in a fast-food restaurant when he agrees to the loan, Renata's death is associated with food, which reiterated the food-death link.

Junior is teased by Soprano for giving a woman oral sex, an activity Soprano refers to by singing "South of the border where the tuna fish play" (in 1/ 9: "Boca" – "mouth" in Spanish). Chianese says he thinks Soprano is searching his heart and trying to be a nicer, more lovable person, but he is in a rough place where he sometimes has to hurt people. From 34:01, Soprano sips a beverage which resembles whiskey (*uisge beatha*, "water of life") along with Gaeta near a pool at night. Actor Chianese says on the audio commentary that Soprano is Oedipus Rex, that one must learn to love oneself before one can love others – and that this is in order to be able to forgive oneself.

In 6-2/ 3: "Remember When", from 34:01 and after a dinner served by Gia Gaeta, the phrase "Gary Cooper" gets associated with "stand-up guy", "role model" and "Paulie". In 6-2/ 3, Gualtieri is briefly perceived as Soprano's father, and Gualtieri's "*Oh, ho-ho-ho*, thank God, that's fuckin' beautiful" makes for a Santa Claus reference which further emphasizes his importance in Soprano's life. Gualtieri goes with Soprano on a ride in a rented boat (the "*Sea Vous Play*" – a plea to spare a life) and is put to the test about having told a joke. Because Gualtieri denies his involvement ("*Grapevine*, Tone, I don't know"), and because he serves Soprano *rigatoni*, he gets to live. In the retirement home, Junior sings "Country Roads, Take Me Home", an example of orality linked to death (a singing mobster on his way "home"). Seated by a table, he accepts his medication (orality). This frustrates his institutional protégé Carter. Carter's mouth twists before he attacks, hitting Junior in the mouth (orality), knocking Junior's glasses off his face.

Ample material underlies this thesis' search for the role of orality in *The Sopranos*. This is done by examining how some of the main characters – not only Anthony "Tony" Soprano – are revealed in scenes with people that are eating or talking, or both at the same time (as Soprano does). All the analyzed scenes will tend to proceed from a Soprano-centric approach, but scenes where other people talk or gather around tables will also be included. This accomplishes a psychosocial look at how the identities of characters such as Soprano (James Gandolfini) are revealed in connection with scenes involving orality, of which food scenes and therapy sessions are two categories<sup>81</sup>. Such scenes are situated in or outside the Soprano home, may include a varying number of people, various foods, drinks, and other substances passing into bodies via the

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Abrams, pp. 124, 319, 320: *psychoanalytic criticism*.

oral cavity, and often happen near tables. If they play pivotal roles in the narrative, they are called *beats*<sup>82</sup>. Scenes such as the *Regaleali Dinner* offer possibilities for subplots.

The methodology of this thesis, some of the technical terms from areas such as literature, psychology, and media studies, as well as key terms underlying this thesis are presented along with examples from the TV series. Scenes are indexed with regard to season and episode number, and often to the scenes' time slot. Footnotes often provide a running commentary. As this thesis revolves around Soprano's search for identity as it emerges in scenes associated with orality, it can be analyzed by utilizing theoretical tools such as Abrams's *Glossary of Literary Terms*, works by film theorist Messaris, various social anthropology studies, and by considering the many intertextual meta-references found in HBO's series, as well as the intratextual relationships between characters, events, symbology, and devices in *The Sopranos*.

### **Chapter Three: Fire and The Barbecue**

The dinner scene described in Chapter One exemplifies characterization, the description of characters in a literary work, a process whose role Abrams describes (pp. 48-49) as "establishing the distinctive characters of the persons in a narrative; showing and telling". Characterization may happen through juxtaposition, the comparison of differing characters. One variant of this is the literary foil<sup>83</sup>. The *Regaleali Dinner* in Chapter One juxtaposes Soprano with his wife, but the friction between them is too high for them to be counted as foils. Friction generates heat in relationships, but the home fires are out of control in the pilot episode<sup>84</sup>.

The explosion in *Bucco's Vesuvio* and the eruption from the grill at Soprano's garden barbecue are foils<sup>85</sup>. Both eruptions are associated with Soprano, both localities are associated with food, and both situations can be said to have associations to death<sup>86</sup>. This exemplifies the recurring food-death theme. Food, as a basic premise for survival and community, is connected to

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Martin, p. 146: *Beats* are "[i]mportant narrative plot points or bits of dialogue that carry the story in a new direction in the scenes".

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Abrams, p. 294, "foil": "A character in a work who, by sharp contrast, serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist". Hence, a foil for Soprano has the same characteristics as Soprano, except for one. This brings out Soprano's character more clearly.

<sup>84</sup> Considering the *Regaleali Dinner*, both Soprano and Mrs. Soprano seem to partly inhabit stereotypically aggressive male roles.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Brett, p.23: "The Garden State functions as a *Sopranos* character in its own right". Also, on p. 23: "New Jersey may be a state, but Jersey is a state of mind. The *Sopranos takes place in Jersey*". If a location in the TV series is treated as a character and a state of mind, the plot of *The Sopranos* becomes the result of the actions of that state of mind. Hence, scenes in the plot can be foils.

<sup>86</sup> *Bucco's Vesuvio* is destroyed, so dies. And fainting may be viewed as a kind of death, the death of the consciousness.

Mrs. Soprano. Inhabiting a female role, she is expected to serve Soprano, so a juxtaposition of the two is reasonable. Hence, analyzing food-related scenes where she appears seems like a way of fleshing out his character, too. In the *Regaleali Dinner*, she appears in one such scene where she and her husband act exclusively off each other. She is a dinner partner, wailing wall, and a contrast to Soprano in that both struggle for influence, but their means differ. She often fulfills such functions, but she generally labors and provides food. Thus, she enables people like Soprano to meet, eat, and talk. Mrs. Soprano seems feisty, associated with heat, like Soprano<sup>87</sup>.

She and her husband appear in many food scenes, including the last scene of the series – a dinner scene – where she sits at a restaurant table (which, together with the *Regaleali Dinner*, suggests that she is *not always* the provider) with her husband and her son Anthony Jr., waiting for daughter Meadow. Mrs. Soprano's first scene, in 1/ 1, is in the kitchen. She offers re-heated food and small talk to her daughter and her daughter's friend while looking through the window at Soprano in the pool. Generally, she does the food preparations to her husband's satisfaction while he does the ceremonial parts, appearing as what she dubs the "Grillmeister", whose role it is to put on a show for the guests, for example at their barbecue parties where he jokes and twirls strings of sausages<sup>88</sup>. She contributes (as do other characters) to the characterization of Soprano.

Mrs. Soprano appears in an archetypal food scene in 1/ 1, the first garden barbecue<sup>89</sup>. Etymologically, the word "barbecue" has several interpretations, the obvious one being related to food cooked on a platform raised over a fire<sup>90</sup>. One significant moment in 1/ 1 is the most memorable incident in the episode and the initial motivation for series, Soprano's panic attack. The garden barbecue is counted as a dinner scene, since a lot of labor goes into such a meal in *The Sopranos*, and rules apply<sup>91</sup>. Mrs. Soprano serves and pleases her husband. He is described thus by Lorraine Bracco (who plays Dr. Jennifer Melfi): "He's an eater. He'll devour everything in front of him"<sup>92</sup>. Mrs. Soprano adheres to the role of the traditional Italian homemaker. She provides the labor which produces this dinner, and people gather around tables with her food, including "that priest", Intontola.

<sup>87</sup> The term *mafia* was originally not associated with a criminal activity, but, rather, with a certain temperament.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. episode 5/ 8, "Marco Polo", at 38:54-40:26. The "Grillmeister" is an act which speaks to Soprano's description of himself as a "sad clown".

<sup>89</sup> In episode 1/ 1: "The Sopranos", at 18:37-20:02.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion on the term "barbecue", cf. O'Connell. See also Suddath.

<sup>91</sup> For whichever reason, no separate, big dinner is shown on the day of Soprano's first panic attack. His Execute Card Game, though lasting a whole night, also counts as a dinner experience, since rules apply for seating and proper conduct, as young Matt Bevilaqua finds out in 2/ 6.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Brett, p.76.

Before the attack, another interesting incident occurs at a table of food produced by Mrs. Soprano. At 18:37, the garden scene at A.J.'s party begins. His married parents are seen outside their home, by a brick wall and a closed set of large glass doors facing the backyard. They are standing mid-frame, face-to-face on the near side of a table with food and decorations on it. As the scene starts, Mrs. Soprano holds one hand in front of her mouth and nose while recoiling slowly away from Soprano, her other hand letting go of his, and turning away from the camera so the audience cannot see her expression. She looks across the table towards the brick wall and the glass doors. Soprano seems to have a slightly disappointed facial expression as he watches his wife turn away from him. Simultaneously, Soprano is heard on the voiceover, telling Melfi in their first session that: "My wife invites the priest. He's always at the house." No priest is shown at the start of the shot, but the camera is moved sideways to gradually offer a different angle on the couple. Through this camera movement which literally approaches Soprano's point of view (*POV*), the priest is revealed on the other side of the table, having first been hidden from view behind Carmela – a possible metaphor to be explored by the attentive viewer<sup>93</sup>. As the camera movement stops, the priest stands between Soprano and his wife, separating them, and the look of resignation on Soprano's face is reinterpreted: His wife turns from him – to look at the priest. The priest asks whether Soprano likes *crème anglaise*<sup>94</sup>. Soprano answers: "Hey, you bless it, I'll eat it". Any remaining potential for a real conversation is put on hold when A.J. brings the message that his grandmother Livia is not coming, and utterly suppressed after his remark: "So, what, no fuckin' *ziti* now?" Following this, Soprano has his first on-screen panic attack by the grill.

His attack begins when he smilingly smokes his cigar while poking the meat on the grill. At the sight of ducks lifting from the pool, he clutches at his chest, rolls his eyes, falls forward, and spills lighter fluid onto the grill, whence a fireball erupts. Daughter Meadow cries out first: "Dad!" All approach the fallen Soprano. After this eruption, Soprano is due for an MRI scan at 06:30 the next morning. The Sopranos appear in a food-scene, then in a hospital scene. This proposes the seriousness of the situation and expresses the food-death link<sup>95</sup>. Soprano is the sole narrator, so, despite his lies, the audience must accept his narrative. His therapy sessions become

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<sup>93</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, pp.95-96: "perceptual subjectivity" and "point-of-view shot". See also p. 114: "omniscient asides".

<sup>94</sup> *Crème anglaise* is the French term for Worcestershire sauce. Intintola chooses to use a French term – Mrs. Soprano is a Francophile.

<sup>95</sup> Messaris, *Visual "Literacy"*, p. 116: "propositional editing: "editing in which two or more images are brought together for the purpose of making a comment (for example, to suggest an analogy or contrast between two objects or situations)".

a device which Chase and his crew employ to reveal Soprano's character<sup>96</sup>. But fainting is a prevalent literary device. Something extra makes this panic attack stand out as a singular classic.

First, the build-up is effective: Soprano is pressured from every angle. Even the proposed solution of therapy adds to the stress, as seen in the *Regaleali Dinner*. Soprano's relatives and associates gather for a feast in his garden to celebrate A.J.'s rite of passage (becoming a teenager). Suddenly, the sunny day, smiles, food, and conviviality shielded by the pines all fade<sup>97</sup>: The outside world penetrates into and impinges on the idyll planned by Soprano. The ducklings that give Soprano joy at the beginning of the episode have matured enough to fly. The ascent of the birds is now followed by a descent of the cigar in Soprano's mouth as his strength wanes.

The second aspect which heightens this scene blends in as Soprano is about to collapse by the grill: A soprano begins singing an aria from Puccini's opera *La Rondine* – "The Swallow"<sup>98</sup>. Puccini's opera touches on the bird theme in its title, *La Rondine*. Also, linguistically, the English name for Puccini's bird, *swallow*, denotes an activity connected to the consumption of food, the topic of this thesis. Food is identity, and a link exists between food and death – and now, birds<sup>99</sup>.

Further evidencing the appropriate suggestions presented by director Chase, the title of the aria chosen to score the first panic attack, translates as "Doretta's beautiful dream"<sup>100</sup>. Fittingly, as music for the scene where Soprano faints at the sight of flying birds linked to a dream, Chase has chosen a soprano's aria about a dream in an opera named for a bird. This particular piece of music is taken from an early scene from the first act, where the poet Prunier sings about Doretta, a woman who defies the patriarchic hegemony by choosing true love and

<sup>96</sup> Melfi's sessions consist of orality – story telling. Soprano's scenes with Melfi may include food, such as when he meets her and Nils Borglund in a restaurant in 1/1, or when Soprano meets her in a diner in 6-2/1. Uniquely, in 1/1, his voice provides a running voiceover commentary.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Conti, p.86: "Divinity of Passage: The Arch of Janus in Rome (...) was erected in the fourth century A.D. in honor of the divinity of "transitions". In fact, house doors, streets, and certain obligatory passages that opened onto public thoroughfares were sacred to Janus." A.J.'s transition into adulthood is therefore seen as divine. Soprano's Esplanade project is another manifestation of transition. The Melfi therapy sessions are certainly intended to be a transition for Soprano, but the work is long and arduous. Janus was a deity with no Greek equivalent. Hence, an exclusively Roman deity is a strong signifier of Roman identity, which Soprano adheres to and honors by hosting this garden feast.

<sup>98</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, p. 330: "In the melodrama, an emotional twist may be underscored by a sudden burst of poignant music".

<sup>99</sup> At 50:53:33, in a session, Soprano fears impending doom. He is unable to define *what* he fears. Perhaps the worst kind of fear, it is compared to water in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, VI, 8. Soprano relates a dream: A bird flies off with his penis. Dr. Melfi interrupts his free association and leads him to her interpretation (against APA standards). Conti, p.84, defines *divination*: "There were various systems through which signs sent by the gods could be interpreted. The most ancient was that chosen by the two twins, the founders of the city: observation of the flight and cries of birds". Soprano follows tradition in taking the ducks' flight as auspicious. So, Melfi appears as augur. Adding birds to the food-death link completes the reference to The Last Supper which Martin, pp. 20, 25, sees as evidence of the importance of the dinner table. In the Ghirlandaio (1449-1494) fresco of The Last Supper in San Marco in Florence, Italy, behind where The Last Supper is taking place, birds are circling. Betrayal and death are suggested. See also *Ibid.*, p. 23: The Feast of the Marriage at Cana, by Hieronymus Bosch (1460-1518). Rotterdam, Boymans Museum: A swan-like bird sits on a serving plate (cf. note 169, p. 48). Food links to birds. Cf. Konig, p.126: The Last Supper is a Passover meal.

<sup>100</sup> Dreaming can also be seen as a description of what is represented by *The Sopranos*.

rejecting a king. In Freudian terms, a king in a dream is taken to symbolize the child's father<sup>101</sup>. As Prunier (man, father) has not been capable of finishing the song, Magda de Civry, a courtesan (prostitute, whore – woman, mother) takes charge of the final verse<sup>102</sup>. At Soprano's oncoming panic attack, the audience hears Magda's song: "Ah, mio sogno! Ah, mia vita!" This translates as "Ah, I dreamed it! Ah, I lived it!" This thematizes a blurring of boundaries between dream and reality which later takes on added significance. The song suggests Soprano's troubles, and the Magda reference is later echoed by the spirit and capability of females like his wife, who defies the patriarchic hegemony in the *Regaleali Dinner Scene*. To the music of *La Rondine*, the ducks lift from Soprano's pool and fly away, leaving Soprano alone by a pond which is abandoned<sup>103</sup>.

One common characteristic of the barbecue scenes – the flames bursting forth from *Bucco's Vesuvio* and Soprano's grill – is heat<sup>104</sup>. Being one of the four elements of Greek natural philosophy, fire associates to both destructive and restorative powers: It is "sacred, purifying, and renewing", a "means to rebirth at a higher level", and associated with "the sun, the light (or lightning), the color red (or blood), and the heart", and also with "destruction, war, evil, the demonic, hell, or divine wrath"<sup>105</sup>. Fire is "movable, active, and masculine, in contrast to the feminine, passive elements of water and earth"<sup>106</sup>. Fire associates to alchemy, "a high point in symbolic thinking" and the "theoretical and experimental approach to chemical substances" which probably originated in Egypt, and which was practiced from the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century. Alchemy "stood in close association with the astrology and medicine of its time. The alchemists aimed at an ennobling of substances, a mystical union of microcosm and macrocosm, and a purification of the soul"<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> Freud, 6.E: "Since 'bed and board' (*mensa et thorus*) constitute marriage, in dreams the latter is often substituted for the former, and as far as practicable the sexual representation-complex is transposed to the eating-complex." Food replaces and symbolizes sex.

<sup>102</sup> Oxford Learner's Dictionary, "courtesan" denotes attachment to a court: "mid 16th cent.: from French *courtisane*, from obsolete Italian *cortigiana*, feminine of *cortigiano* 'courtier', from *corte*, from Latin *cohors*, *cohort-* 'yard or retinue'". Also, "cohors" makes up one tenth of a legion. In 4/ 8, at 28:28-29:39, Mrs. Soprano reads in *The Mists of Avalon* about courtesans and is angered.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Herder, pp. 211-212: Water associates to the "primordial soup" described in Darwinian evolutionary theory. Bodies of water signify femininity and the life-giving womb, a metonym for Mother. Freud, *Dreams*, in "Chapter 5. The material and sources of dreams. D. Typical dreams. b. Dreams of the death of beloved persons", displays the *only occurrence* in Freud's text of an explanation of a dream of birds and butterflies: Children have little or no knowledge about decay and death, so death means being gone "and ceasing to annoy the survivors". In a dream, "[t]hat the children romp about a meadow, from which they fly away, points almost certainly to butterflies – it is as though the child had been influenced by the same association of ideas which led the ancients to imagine Psyche, the soul, with the wings of a butterfly".

<sup>104</sup> See p.20: In 6-1/ 12, a rigged bomb causing a fire (like the one in *Centanni's/ Vesuvio* in 1/ 1) is referred to in code talk as a "barbecue".

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Herder, pp. 75-76. In 6-1/ 12, a rigged explosion in a building in Sheepshead Bay is referred to in code talk as a "barbecue".

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Herder, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Herder, p. 4.

Soprano's *consigliere* Dante is involved in the fire in *Bucco's Vesuvio*<sup>108</sup>. In a flashback in 1/ 1, Dante mentions the planned murder on Malanga to Soprano, who is sitting by a table outside the meat market on a sunny day<sup>109</sup>. Soprano shrugs indifferently until Dante mentions "your friend Artie Bucco's restaurant". Then, outside the *Sit-Tite* lounette, Soprano tells his Uncle Junior to kill Malanga someplace else<sup>110</sup>. Junior will not take orders from Soprano. Next, Bucco receives cruise tickets which would mean closing the restaurant on the day of the murder. His wife, Charmaine, refuses this gift from a known criminal. In a crowd of spectators at a game where their daughters are playing, Soprano talks to Dante, who confirms, "I think I can get a party like that together". A public business talk under the pretense of supporting their daughters precedes Dante waling away from *Bucco's Vesuvio* at night before the explosion. Soprano admits his involvement to Moltisanti at the episode's end, as A.J.'s postponed birthday barbecue begins. Bucco blames a "[f]uckin' faulty stove". Dante has called Bucco a friend of Soprano's, yet Soprano lies to Bucco and destroys his property. Dante supports the misconception that it was an accidental fire. Due to fire's associations to both demonic and divine powers, this fire seems like the act of gods whose favor Bucco has lost<sup>111</sup>. He weeps into a barbecue mitt. The *pater familias* (the representative of gods) quotes Melfi: "Talkin' helps. Hope comes in many forms"<sup>112</sup>.

Fire follows the nondiegetic music from *The Swallow* blending in with the diegetic sounds from the barbecue, and Soprano is the "Grillmeister". He is by the grill at the episode's end<sup>113</sup>. Just before this, Junior drives Livia to the party, and the two have a talk in the car. Livia says her Johnny "was a saint". Junior is frustrated at not being free to run his business, saying something may have to be done about Livia's son. The clear suggestion of a murder leads to Livia turning away from Junior. He cannot see her ambiguous expression, interpreted by some to be a smile<sup>114</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> "Consigliere" denotes the boss' councilor on *The Sopranos*. The character Dante beside a fire associates to the author Dante's *Inferno*.

<sup>109</sup> Soprano lays down the law for his own street corner society during these table talks, see note 44, p. 16.

<sup>110</sup> In 6-1/ 1, Soprano implies that Malanga dies around 1/ 2. A Freudian reading suggests he is not dead, just "gone". See footnote 199, p.51

<sup>111</sup> In 6-1/ 2: "Mr. & Mrs. John Sacrimoni Request...", at 36:27-37:18 , Soprano compares his influence to Hurricane Katrina, the natural disaster.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Emily Dickinson's poetic description that "Hope" is the thing with feathers. Soprano's panic attacks seem connected to his high hopes.

<sup>113</sup> In 5/ 8, at 33:57-35:22, "Grillmeister" Soprano jokes that he would love to stay and talk to the barbecue guests, "but I got a fire to start".

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Bondanella, p. 315. If she smiles, she is a monstrous mother out for revenge after being moved to Green Grove. Cf. Cohen, pp. vii-xiii. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-140: In his *Frankenstein* text, Hirsch mentions "modern Prometheus" on p. 116. A note on "fraternite" and Foucault's "deployment of alliance" – a kinship system – follows on p.117. Frankstein's Monster as a reaction to the "confidence of Enlightenment utopianism" is noted on p.119. On pp. 121-122: "Nepotism" is called an "overevaluation of particular people" which means "the worth of an individual is measured only in the context of the state". On p. 123, a note is made on "the family's responsibility in the creation of monstrosity". On p.124: The monster is a symbol of Victor's displaced libidinal object, which makes the monster a signification of the scientist's homosexual attachment. On p.125: "Ovid's Narcissus does not suffer from an illness intrinsic to himself, but is instead cursed to death by others whose own self-love is threatened by Narcissus' lack of interest ". Cf. Willis, pp.34-35: "Gossip" derives from "godparent" and associates to the stereotypical "ideal mother" as opposed to a gossip/ "witch". See also Francus for an account of 18<sup>th</sup>-century domesticity.

Arriving at the barbecue, Livia does not warn Soprano. Instead, she berates his cooking skills, especially his use of *mesquite*, a foreign element which "makes the sausages taste peculiar"<sup>115</sup>. The episode ends after Mrs. Soprano calls out: "Everybody, let's eat!" The camera tracks the guests converging on the tables with food, but then veers off to point to the pool with the clear, blue water and the rustling pines. Within a short space of time, the camera has shown the masculine fire burning under the earthen mesquite sticks, and then the wind in the trees beside the feminine water. The four elements are represented on-screen and also in Soprano's cooking: The meat signifies the nutrients from water and earth transformed by the animal which ingested them. Heat transforms the meat and sends smoke towards the heavenly sky, uniting the elements<sup>116</sup>.

## Chapter Four: Heat

Heated unions on *The Sopranos* are seen again in 1/ 5: "College". Two parallel situations are intercut and thus juxtaposed to make them foils which further demonstrate the link between sex, food, and death. The juxtaposed scenes take on added significance due to a reference to a 300 year old Italian myth. In one set of circumstances, Soprano tours prospective colleges with his daughter Meadow. In a scene interpreted as an example of their seductive relationship, he treats Meadow to dinner<sup>117</sup>. Soprano ponders how he got "in it" (organized crime): It may have been because he was too lazy to think for himself or wanted to be a rebel. He explains that there was a time when Italian people did not have a lot of options<sup>118</sup>. He adds: "Maybe bein' a rebel in my family would have been sellin' patio furniture on Route 22"<sup>119</sup>. Meadow asks whether nothing interested him in college. He says he barely got in but "kind of liked history. Napoleon,

<sup>115</sup> "Peculiar" describes a familiar situation which, to Livia, includes unfamiliar elements, an "uncanny" experience. Livia expresses fear of the Other, a philosophical concept which results from the definition of a Self, which is what this thesis explores. Soprano inherits his mother's fear.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Crumpacker, pp.196-197: "Barbecue" may derive from Spanish, "barbacoa": native peoples slow-cooking food over a platform. Cf. Suddath. So, the activity originated in North America – but not with European immigrants. Caribbean, or "Carib" Indians, supplied an identity-forming word via the cognate, "canib", hence, "cannibals". Cf. *Ibid.*, p.197: "in among the bare bones of deer and otter and all the other animals he was able to catch are the humerus and femur of his fellowman, split, as a soup bone might be, to reach the marrow". The "red lead" (1/ 7) is based on pork bones. In 4/ 1 and 4/ 6, Janice shows her fondness for bone marrow. Cf. 4/ 3, from 27:27: Columbus, Soprano's hero, used the stigmatizing word "cannibals" about New World peoples. Cf. Probyn for a note of Foucault's (1973) proposed food hierarchy. Cf. Probyn, p.79: Sydney Morning Herald (10 August 1999) uses "cannibal" to describe restaurants eating into each other (competition). Cf. Probyn., p.95: "Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902(1983)) establishes the figure of the cannibal as a privileged threshold term of modernity".

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Carroll, pp. 81-89, in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, see esp. p.84: "the romantic elements of the scene are impossible to ignore".

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Mangione & Morreale for more on the Italian-American immigrant narrative (a paradigmatic or master narrative with its own stereotypes).

<sup>119</sup> This is one of the original East-West roads. In 1/ 7, from 27:13, Soprano suggests that selling patio furniture in San Diego would be an alternative life. In 6-1/ 2, from 08:15, he appears in a Freudian wish-fulfilment dream as Kevin Finnerty, a patio furniture salesman who makes the switch to precision optics. In 6-1/ 1, Pontecorvo receives an inheritance and asks Soprano for a way out. In 3/ 10:, from 02:23, Bonpensiero says Junior is looking for a "way out". In *Ibid.*, from 48:39, Soprano suggests to Melfi he is looking for a "way out", not speaking only about his marriage, which is Melfi's interpretation as she calls him a "conventional man". In later seasons, discreet images hint at a way out – "exit" signs.

The Roman Empire, The Potsdam Conference, that kind of thing. (..) Potsdamned if I know now". Meadow confesses about taking speed. It seems to worry Soprano that it could happen "right under my nose". Yet, he seems to accept that Meadow does not reveal where she got the drugs <sup>120</sup>. At 18:49, mulling this news, Soprano's tongue comes out briefly. Meadow is glad they have this kind of relationship, possibly being smug about avoiding his questions. She is then told to party with two girls from Colby, to "learn about the college", not to drink alcohol, but stick to Cokes <sup>121</sup>. The next day, he uses her underage drinking, enabled by him, against her to avoid her questions – a *quid pro quo* <sup>122</sup>. The drunken Meadow is in bed at the Odenoki Motel around 11 p.m. Soprano calls Moltisanti about Petrulio, an ex-associate turned FBI informant who entered the Witness Protection program. Soprano tries to locate Petrulio in Maine and happens on a family idyll where a scared girl wants her mother to tuck her in. The family is living the American Dream, but he cannot have it, for various reasons <sup>123</sup>. Angered, he waits to displace his rage onto the FBI "rat", perhaps not understanding why, as he describes in therapy <sup>124</sup>.

The heat from Soprano's dinner with Meadow finds its foil in an inter-cut father-daughter scene in the Soprano home. Mrs. Soprano meets "that priest", Father Intintola. This meeting has conspicuous timing. Her husband and daughter are in Maine. A.J. is visiting a friend. Her flu vanishes when Intintola arrives <sup>125</sup>. This juxtaposed night seems like an opportune moment <sup>126</sup>.

As the camera tracks conventionally behind Mrs. Soprano, the doorbell sound lingers <sup>127</sup>. Intintola's voice rises above thunder and lightning <sup>128</sup>. She lets him wait, runs to the bathroom, combs her hair, sprays on perfume to mask unwanted odors, then lets the priest inside <sup>129</sup>. He

<sup>120</sup> In 1/ 3: "Denial, Anger, Acceptance", Moltisanti provides the drugs after LaCerva convinces him that Meadow might otherwise buy it on the street. In 1/ 5, Soprano seems satisfied that Meadow can stay quiet. Later, Gualtieri stays quiet despite Soprano's questions – and also serves him rigatoni, gravy, and bread on board the rented *Sea Vous Play* – and is allowed to go on living, in 6-2/ 3, at 44:24-48:59.

<sup>121</sup> Soprano lets Meadow party and makes time for a murder. Similarly, Mrs. Soprano lets A.J. visit a friend and gets an evening with Intintola.

<sup>122</sup> Soprano enables Scatino's gambling in 2/ 10: "Bust-Out" and Moltisanti's drug habit in 5/ 10: "Cold Cuts"; and in 6-1/ 9: "The Ride".

<sup>123</sup> One reason is the way his crimes transcend boundaries by involving long-time arrangements with partners outside the Mafia. An example of this is seen in 2/ 6: In Teitelman's hotel, Soprano gives Macanudo ("naked apple") cigars to penile implants expert Dr. Freid, who helps Soprano in a HUD scam in 4/ 7: "Watching Too Much Television", at 13:13-13:25. The scam is agreed in the morning-at a breakfast in 4/ 7, from 05:42.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. 2/ 6: "The Happy Wanderer", at 04:30-07:00. On *The Sopranos*, a "rat" is a snitch – and possibly a squeaking little gerbil, the desert rat.

<sup>125</sup> At 12:41-13:29, the sniffing Mrs. Soprano receives breakfast in bed, prepared by A.J. From 15:07, she receives Intintola.

<sup>126</sup> From the Ancient Greeks come two concepts of time: *Chronos* is the total amount of time, and *Kairos* is the opportune moment in that time.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, p. xi: "inter-cut" and "juxtaposition". See also Bordwell & Thompson, p. 59: "convention"

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Herder, p. 198: Thunder and lightning are associated with divine powers, sometimes angry, and also with flying creatures: "In Siberia and North America there is an idea of a mythic bird that produces thunder with the beating of its wings". On *The Sopranos*, birds associate to death.

<sup>129</sup> Hair is a source of pride and an Italian-American ethnic marker. Gualtieri's mane with Roman Bald Eagle silver wings is one example. Cf. Brett Martin, p. 44: Mrs. Soprano's Roman-style hair-do, "The Sophisticate". Cf. 3/ 13, at 10:28-11:26, Deborah Ciccerone, a female undercover agent, masks herself as "Danielle from Whippany", an Italian stereotype, and is asked by FBI boss Cubitoso: "How big can you make your hair?"

returns from a charity: "Jean Cusamano said you were ill". Before his pretext is heard, she takes his coat and blames "the flu that was goin' around". Circled by the camera, she circles Intintola – motions suggestive of a swirling, dizzying feeling, or a dance<sup>130</sup>. He mentions a clothes drive<sup>131</sup>. He adds: "I also have a confession to make, Carm. Uh, I-I have a *jones* for your baked *ziti*"<sup>132</sup>. She giggles: "Oh! Sure, any time! I have some in the freezer right now, I can re-heat it"<sup>133</sup>. Intintola is pleased: "The mozzarell' gets so nice and chewy"<sup>134</sup>.

Mrs. Soprano supplies Intintola with Fernet<sup>135</sup>. As he finds Cajun stuffed olives in the Soprano fridge, Intintola asks if Mrs. Soprano thinks he is a "*schnorrer*" – a Yiddish word denoting someone who turns up just in time for food. Then, the mood changes as the phone rings. Mrs. Soprano learns that Melfi, calling to cancel because of a flu, is a "she". Mrs. Soprano ends the call, tells Intintola the news, and asks: "Why does he have to lie? (...) Why wouldn't he tell me his therapist is a woman? Unless he is screwing her". Intintola says: "Therapy is a start, it's a *good* start. But, yes, it doesn't fix the soul." These were Mrs. Soprano's words about Soprano's soul in episode 1/ 1. The "yes" joins this talk to the priest's earlier talks with her – seemingly an established discourse. It proposes their level of intimacy. Intintola says: "He must be a very unhappy man." She restrains her initial outburst which signals her own unhappiness.

Intintola then suggests that red pepper flakes on food "really make all the difference"<sup>136</sup>. Mrs. Soprano says she does not understand all that Christ said, such as, "[t]he sun rises on the just and the unjust alike". She wonders if "whores will go to Heaven before a lot of the righteous?" The priest hesitates, then: "Uh-huh. (...) It's about love." She says her question is really about her asking for forgiveness in advance, in case she is tempted into an indiscretion. After discovering

<sup>130</sup> In 4/ 4: "The Weight", at 44:47-48:50, Giunta's house warming party shows Mrs. Soprano in swirling dances and dizzying heat.

<sup>131</sup> Mrs. Soprano has contributed to the clothes drive her Moschino pedal pushers – calf-length trousers of a kind popular in the 1950s.

<sup>132</sup> A "*jones*" refers to a craving, or sometimes an erection. This creates a food-sex link to Mrs. Soprano's *ziti*. Cf. footnote 144, p.37. Intintola's use of the word "confession" is like the restaurant owner's and Soprano's comments in the *Regaleali Dinner* scene: It sets the tone.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs. Soprano seems to serve quite a lot of re-heated food, not only freshly produced meals.

<sup>134</sup> *Mozarella*, a Southern Italian cheese traditionally made from Mediterranean water buffalo milk, is sold as *Mozzarella di Bufala Campana*.

<sup>135</sup> This red wine, a Chianti, can function as a *digestif*. The Fernet is known from the oldest, pre-Etruscan region which saw the Avellino eruption.

<sup>136</sup> In 1/ 13, at 37:00 – 37:55, Intintola eats Rosalie Aprile's *ziti*, also sprinkled with red pepper. Mrs. Soprano sees it, tips her own food into the trash and later scolds Intintola for preying on "spiritually hungry women". The two women are close friends, seen when Rosalie tells Mrs. Soprano to be discreet about her indiscretions, in 5/ 6, at 29:21-31:03: The women share *ziti* and white wine. In light of this, they seem to be preying on the priest but projecting their thoughts onto him. Intintola suggests this at a dinner with Mrs. Soprano in 5/ 6, at 10:01-12:06: She asks for his blessing before seeing Mr. Wegler. Intintola refuses to give his blessing. When she asks whether God did not put her feelings for Wegler there, he answers: "Maybe that's your sin talking". He lets the waiter put a lot of spices on his food – a reference to his food-sharing experiences with Mrs. Soprano. Pepper associates to exotic Southern lands, cf. Gerard Brett, 46: "Pepper is in a different case. It is first known to have been imported into Alexandria and so to the Mediterranean during the Roman Empire, from southern India. (...) regarded as extremely precious". In 6-2/ 8, one of Melfi's magazines has a story about Columbus and the spice trade. Strong spices can mask undesirable tastes.

her husband's lie, Mrs. Soprano mentions "screwing", asks about whores in Heaven, and suggests that there exists an actual possibility of her being tempted into an indiscretion. She has direction.

They share food – thereby becoming companions – and then watch a film which seems to make Mrs. Soprano emotional: In *Remains Of The Day*, Ms. Kenton presses Mr. Stevens for a glimpse into his diary. He feels this is an invasion of privacy<sup>137</sup>. The diary scene reveals that these characters have long had intimate feelings for each other, which Stevens will not allow to surface. Being butler and former housemaid, both are tidy, but Kenton dares to show feelings and makes her own choices, so she has a higher level of integrity than Stevens. At seeing the scene where Kenton is about to open Stevens' diary (a foil for the scene in the Soprano house), Mrs. Soprano says: "Father, turn it off, I can't handle it. (...) Oh, Father, I'm a terrible person". Intintola touches her hand: "Oh, no, you're a wonderful woman". Intintola wants to help Mrs Soprano, who asks: "How?" Intintola asks how long it has been since she last confessed. She is oddly surprised by this question, as if she had expected an offer of a different form of help: "Oh, ah, I, uh...". Intintola adds: "If you'd like, I can do this with you". She asks: "You mean, right *here*, Father? Now?" Intintola says: "The whole world is God's house. He hears and sees everything". Intintola sits back-to-back with her on the couch and hears *Carmela's confession*<sup>138</sup>:

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been four weeks since my last confes...what am I talking about? That's a lie! I haven't truly confessed in t-twenty years. (...) I have forsaken... what is right... for what is easy... allowing what I know is evil in my house... allowing my children – oh, my God, my sweet children – to be a part of it, because I wanted things for them... wanted a better life, good schools... I wanted this house, wanted money in my hands, money to buy anything I ever wanted. I'm so ashamed. My husband... I think he has committed... h-horrible acts. I think he has... you, oh, you know all about him, Father Phil. I'm the same, I've said nothing. I've done nothing about it. I got a bad feeling. It's just a matter of time before God compensates me with outrage for my sins"

The ceremony continues in the privacy of the Soprano home. Intintola tells Mrs. Soprano to truly repent and renounce "all these actions, and then God will absolve you". Her ideas then again differ from the priest's: "Oh, I don't know, Father, *I'll try*. But I still love him. I still believe he can be a good man". Intintola suggests that she can do good by helping to change Soprano into a better man. Then he says: "I think you should take Communion". She sighs, "[y]eah", almost *resigning* to continue, as if having hoped for something else to happen. In the morning, after an intimate night, she suggests that she has had poor luck to find the one priest who is "straight".

<sup>137</sup> Ms. Kenton is played by Emma Thompson, a favorite of Intintola's. Mr. Stevens is played by Anthony Hopkins, who is also famous for his portrayal of the cannibal Hannibal Lecter, who is referenced in the *Regaleali Dinner* scene.

<sup>138</sup> It is thus revealed that 20 years is the length of her marriage to Soprano, to whom she does not confess until he is unconscious.

At 34:57-37:20, Intintola brings sacramental wine and biscuits, since he had to say Mass to "someone in intensive care". This is an example of the food-death link, and it also reiterates the cannibal theme from the *Regaleali Dinner* scene: Mrs. Soprano eats "the body of Christ" and drinks "the blood of Christ". Intintola sprinkles holy water in the wine. In addition to endowing the wine with blessings, this fits well with old Italian traditions of citizens of the upper classes, who diluted wine with water<sup>139</sup>. Mrs. Soprano takes a little sip, while the priest seems to drain the cup in greedy gulps<sup>140</sup>. He kneels beside Mrs. Soprano, and they embrace. From this scene, there is a cut to Meadow in the Odenoki Motel. Her father is missing. She finds him talking on the phone but does not know that he is planning the murder of Petrus. Nonetheless, the link between food and death is reiterated, this time by the director's propositional editing.

Before her confession, Mrs. Soprano and Intintola share her *ziti*, an Italian specialty<sup>141</sup>. The dish consists of strings of tube-shaped pasta together with crushed meatballs, tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, and a selection of spices and herbs. The name is short for *maccheroni di zita*, "the bride's macaroni", derived from the Italian custom of serving ziti at weddings. Hence, the dish is sometimes just referred to as *ziti*, "the bride". Ziti patrol after someone dies involves friends of the deceased making ziti for the surviving family, who is often a grieving widow or widower (seen later on *The Sopranos*). The mozzarella melts when the ziti is baked. The cheese can be pulled into strings resembling telephone wires, hence the eponym *al Telefono*<sup>142</sup>.

From having initially commented that Mrs. Soprano's tray of re-heated pasta has a "chewy" quality which he says he likes, Intintola's addition of red pepper flakes signifies heat. At 41:20-43:57, after the intimate evening, Intintola gets nauseous in the stormy night, while Mrs. Soprano is not worried. In the morning, she insists, "[w]e didn't do anything *wrong*, we didn't do anything *wrong*", as if instructing Intintola on how to correctly interpret what has happened.

Intintola approaches while Mrs. Soprano stands at the kitchen counter. She does not turn around to face him when she says, "[y]ou should have some coffee". Coffee has a slightly bitter

<sup>139</sup> Konig, p. 21: Romans like to mix hot water with their wine. Robinson, p.4: Wine can even be made better by adding water.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Robinson, p.260: "Eucharist": In the Jewish Passover, wine could be sacrificed to God. Plus: "Drinking from a cup and especially drinking it to the dregs was an expression indicating deep suffering rather than rejoicing".

<sup>141</sup> Courses may be given personal touches, such as in 4/ 5, from 37:58, when Baccalieri lauds a lasagna with sweet sausage along with beef he has eaten earlier. Junior asks: "Sweet sausage? In little pieces? And a layer of basil leaves underneath the cheese? That's Carmela's lasagna".

<sup>142</sup> This thematizes the occurrence of a "telephone game", a.k.a. "the grapevine", uncontrollable talk or gossip, as thematized in 1/ 9: "Boca" and further exemplified in 5/ 5, at 31:01-31:26. Generally, Mrs. Soprano, Meadow, A.J., and others seem to talk and use the phone a lot, perhaps in honor of Antonio Meucci, referenced as a Soprano household hero at the family dinner table in 1/ 8, at 38:11 – 40:51.

taste which masks any undesirable tastes from the night, so she is being helpful. Intintola begins: "Last night...". Mrs. Soprano asks: "Yeah?" Intintola continues: "W-we didn't do anythin' out of line", but the priest's voice reveals his doubts. Mrs. Soprano, reading the newspaper (as if this is all normal for her): "There's nothing to apologize about". Intintola, puzzled, hesitates: "Right". Mrs. Soprano reassures him: "That's right". Intintola is unsure: "Uh, I... should get dressed. Get goin'". Mrs. Soprano reminds him: "Anthony Jr. will be home soon". Intintola understands: "Oh, my God, my car's been out there in plain sight". Mrs. Soprano, still with her back to Intintola: "We didn't do anything *wrong*, we didn't do anything *wrong*. Is there a commandment against eating ziti? It's okay. Take a shower, get dressed...don't forget your... sacrament kit, whatever".

Off-screen, the sound of the front door opening and closing is heard, then A.J.'s voice: "I'm home!" Then, the sound of feet running is heard as A.J. goes upstairs. Intintola is worried: "Carmela...". Mrs. Soprano turns around to face the priest, who goes on to say: "I don't know where to begin. Eh, it's-it's not that I don't have a desire for you in my heart". This now sounds like the beginning of an excuse for a trespass which has undoubtedly been committed, and also, it is an excuse which is formulated in a way which seems designed to let Mrs. Soprano off easy. Yet, Intintola's understanding of the situation does not match Mrs. Soprano's. She is unmoved: "*Madonn'*, Father, please". This echoes her reply to Soprano in the *Regaleali Dinner* scene, after he says the she is the only one he really trusts. Intintola now needs to get something off his chest: "Last night was one of the most difficult tests from God ever for me". Mrs. Soprano shrugs and smiles: "What are you talkin' about? We're *friends*". Intintola hesitates: "W-what's that look about?" Mrs. Soprano deflects the priest's question: "What, I look some way?" The birds are heard chirping and Mrs. Soprano smiles and looks away briefly, then she looks back at the priest: "I was just thinkin' about when we watched *Casablanca* last week". Intintola is easily distracted: "That new print is great, huh?" Mrs. Soprano adds: "You know when Bogey says, "Of all the lousy gin joints in the world, why'd you have to pick mine?" Of all the *finocchio* priests in the world, why did I have to get the one who's straight? <sup>143</sup>" Intintola gets worried again: "Carmela...". She smiles: "Come on, it's a joke". Not having succeeded in easing the priest's mind by referring to their friendship, this brief talk still highlights her knowledge that Intintola is "straight". She must then have had the opportunity to find out about his sexual preferences. Without any more comments, Intintola touches Mrs. Soprano's chin, then he turns and walks

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<sup>143</sup> On *The Sopranos*, "*finocchio*" denotes a male homosexual person, but the word literally refers to the spicey fennel.

towards the bathroom. It may well seem likely that Mrs. Soprano "and her symbolic father, Father Phil, come dangerously close to violating his vow of celibacy and hers of marriage" <sup>144</sup>.

Although Mrs. Soprano's father – daughter subplot with Intintola has been given a seductive mood, just like the Soprano – Meadow subplot, the two subplots must differ in one crucial way if they are foils. Mrs. Soprano and Intintola share an interesting nightly scene where they are woken up by the telephone when A.J. calls to ask to stay the night at the Pucillos. His overnight stay has evidently not been agreed beforehand. And when the phone rings, the priest is also still in the Soprano home, even if his stay seems not to have been agreed beforehand, either. The situation in 1/ 5: "College" emphasizes the significance of visits, since there are at least four of them: Meadow visits Colby college, Soprano visits Petrulio, A.J. visits his friend Jason, and Intintola visits Mrs. Soprano. Hence, a closer look at one of the visits is merited.

It has long been a convention to bypass nightly activities by cutting from scenes of intimacy in the evening and straight to the morning after. The audience expects this movie convention and understands that what is not shown may include sexual intercourse <sup>145</sup>. So, by including an intercut scene which shows Mrs. Soprano and Intintola sitting on the floor in the middle of the night. The director interrupts the expected flow from the evening to the morning. This represents a breach of the established convention, and such breaches may carry significance. If nothing happens during the night, there is no need to include any scenes between the evening and the morning after. What is included in the intercut scenes (A.J.'s call, Mrs. Soprano's crawling on all four, Intintola's vomiting) must therefore be the significant contents, hence, the motivation for including this intermediate, nightly scene at all. It basically reveals another of Intintola's intimate moment with Mrs. Soprano. In the evening, they are smiling companions taking Communion and sharing intimacy. Mere hours later, their relationship has changed.

Earlier, when Intintola and Mrs. Soprano are preparing to eat dinner, Dr. Melfi calls to cancel Soprano's next appointment, since she has the flu. Melfi seems to have no reason to lie about having the flu. At this point, she becomes a foil for Mrs. Soprano, who claims to have the flu before sending A.J. away, but who seems to get suddenly better when Intintola arrives. Mrs. Soprano does not cancel an evening with Intintola in the way that Melfi cancels her appointment.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Carroll, Marissa, "When It Comes To Daughters" in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, p. 84.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, pp. viii, x, xvii: "what is left unspoken by resorting to images is often some assumption or expectation that the ad's audience itself may not want to confront directly." This often happens with themes of sex and social status, according to Messaris.

This suggests that her repeated reassurance the morning after, "we didn't do anything *wrong*", may reasonably be questioned. Mrs. Soprano learns that Dr. Melfi is a "she" and asks Intintola, "why does he have to lie? (...) Why wouldn't he tell me his therapist is a woman? Unless he is screwing her". Her own indiscretions aside, she might have chosen to keep the revelation from Intintola, but she chooses to tell him. By doing this, she signals her intimacy with him, and she also suggests a motive for revenge. At the end of the episode, she gets the last word in a quarrel with her husband by revealing that she now knows that Melfi is a "she". This seems like revenge.

However, having established with Intintola her status as victim, she suggests the activity of "screwing" and the possibility that she might be "tempted into an indiscretion" herself. Since they have the evening to themselves already – by arrangement – there seems to be nothing to prevent her from having further intercourse with Intintola – as revenge for what she believes at this point to be her husband's infidelity with Melfi. Mrs. Soprano cannot assume that no-one will interrupt her evening with the priest. If anything is to happen, it must happen quickly. Whatever happens, it will have already happened off-screen when the director chooses to break with expectations and show A.J.'s call home in the evening, which takes place not long after Intintola and Mrs. Soprano were embracing each other. In contrast to Soprano in the intercut parallel subplot, they are no longer wearing regular clothes. Also, Intintola wipes sweat from his brow, a movie convention which may suggest sexual activity<sup>146</sup>. In this context, the extra scene with Intintola and Mrs. Soprano, at 37:20-39:49 (with an in-cut anonymous phone call to Soprano, awake and fully dressed), takes on the added significance that they are resting after intercourse.

Employing a classic film quote from *Casablanca*, Mrs. Soprano asks Intintola the next morning why she had to meet the only priest who was not gay. Intintola is uncomfortable with this suggestion – because it is a reminder of the night before. Upon waking up, the first thing Intintola says, is: "What happened between us...". This suggests that, in fact, something *did* happen which is the probable cause of the changed mood in the morning. While not denying that anything happened at all, Mrs. Soprano still interrupts his line of thought, insisting, "[w]e didn't

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Messaris, *Visual "Literacy"*, p. 14ff: Three categories for conventions or devices are coherence, juxtaposition, and modulation. Cf. *Film Art*, p. 59: "A tradition, a dominant style, a popular form – some such elements will be common to several different artworks. These common traits are usually called *conventions*". Cf. Messaris, *Visual Persuasion*, p. x: As in commercials, film directors have developed "conventions for indicating spatial or temporal relationships among two or more images". Cf. *Ibid.*: xvii: "what is left unspoken by resorting to images is often some assumption or expectation that the ad's audience itself may not want to confront directly." This is especially likely to happen with themes of sex and social status, writes Messaris. One typical convention is to hint at sexual activities by way of darker lighting, lighter clothing, and sweaty brows. An example occurs in 5/6, from 43:54: Mrs. Soprano is near a sweaty Robert Wegler – as she was near a sweaty Intintola.

do anything *wrong*", and that "[w]e're *friends*". She is suggesting that what happened, whatever it was (and she accepts the premise that *something* happened), she thinks it is within the limits of what can be shared between friends. Intintola clearly does not share her view, since he not only vomits in the night but takes his time in returning. The time lapse is suggested by the way the picture of Mrs. Soprano waiting for his return is dissolved into another picture of her waiting for him to return, a device which clearly proposes the passage of time. Also, he seems acutely aware of the awkwardness the morning after. Mrs. Soprano appears as a stoic – or as more practiced.

Intintola's conscience is not triggered instantly after A.J.'s call. He looks at Mrs. Soprano's mouth as she edges closer, an indication of their mutual interest in each other. Then, he covers part of his face, almost as if he senses some foul smell. Thus, he expresses his realization of two opposite significations of the symbolism of the mouth<sup>147</sup>. This proposes a link between the hint of sex (Intintola wipes sweat off his brow) and Mrs. Soprano's mouth (orality). This suggests hidden contents in her question about whether there is a commandment against "eating *ziti*"<sup>148</sup>.

That this way of blurring the boundaries between sex and food might carry significance is corroborated by a scene when Soprano talks to his *comare* Valentina in a hotel, in 5/ 1: "Two Tonys", at 08:16-08:38<sup>149</sup>. The significance of the food-sex link is suggested by Soprano's talk with his wife in a dinner scene in episode 6-1/ 1: "Members Only", at 10:58-12:34, when she says she catches herself fantasizing about this particular Oriental food (eel) served at the Oriental restaurant. Soprano replies: "Me, too. Sometimes durin' sex". Although his wife stops smiling, she rejoins the conversation, seemingly unaffected, which suggests that she is not seriously offended – perhaps because Soprano uses a language which is familiar to her<sup>150</sup>. By talking like this, Soprano seeks common ground with her. Her reaction is mellow because this linguistic

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<sup>147</sup> Herder, p. 135: The mouth symbolizes the "power of the spirit and of creativity". In eating and devouring "it also symbolizes destruction".

<sup>148</sup> The Italian dish *ziti* is called "the bride's pasta", or sometimes just "the bride". Substitute the word "ziti" in Mrs. Soprano's question with "the bride" to uncover her intimate discourse with the priest, who is taken aback by her forwardness: "Carmela...". She smiles and replies: "Come on, it's a joke". Compare 1/ 9: "Boca", at 18:25 – 20:39 and at 23:55-24:55: Roberta Sanfilippo tells Junior not to worry about a little "lecca fica". He fears being made into breakfast if anyone finds out he has been pleasing her with his mouth. She says her lips are sealed, he asks, "[n]ot too sealed, right?" While dancing, he creates a parallelism for "lips" which is also in effect in the foil scenes, Mrs. Soprano's scenes with Intintola in 1/ 5 (the difference being that Junior accepts the situation as long as SanFilippo does not say anything, while Intintola does not). While in bed, Junior asks for red peppers, as if to mask the taste of what he thinks of as a sin. Cf. the first barbecue scene in 1/ 1 for an elucidation of why a sharp reaction from both Soprano and Intintola follows A.J.'s words, "[s]o, what, no fuckin' *ziti* now?"

<sup>149</sup> Soprano gets out of a hotel bed and puts a shirt on when Valentina asks how the olive loaf was. He likes the Gulden's brown mustard. Having climbed into bed, she says Soprano must at least finish his sandwich before answering the incoming overseas call he is expecting.

<sup>150</sup> Mrs. Soprano talks about her spec house and the missing LaCerva. Soprano stuffs his mouth with food, breathes more heavily, and evidently tries to change the subject. He succeeds when he makes the sexual allusion that "the bone fish are back in season", which makes his wife smile.

incident follows up her husband's re-heating gift of the Cayenne Turbo. She seems to like that her husband is reaching out to her – or, more generally, that someone wants her.

In Maine, at 34:47-34:57, Soprano tucks in his daughter Meadow. He is aware of his daughter's curiosity from the same afternoon, at 13:29-15:07, when she surprises him using the pay phone to talk to Moltisanti. Perhaps Soprano plans to murder Petrulio at night. If so, Soprano risks his alibi on Meadow being too drunk to wake up while he is away on murder. However, at 39:16-39:38, during the night and framed by the Intintola – Mrs. Soprano subplot, the phone rings in his motel room, and no-one talks at the other end. This sets Soprano's mind to carefulness. In the morning, he takes Meadow to Colby college, lies to her about having left his watch in the motel, seeks out and murders Petrulio at 43:56-49:30, and hurries back in order to avoid suspicion. Clearly, Soprano is trying to get away with murder. Hence, he focuses exclusively on how to commit the murder and get away with a secure alibi. He has been lying awake to plan the details of the assassination. Because of the anonymous phone call, Soprano must think he is being watched<sup>151</sup>. Soprano chooses not to act during the night, perhaps not daring to go outside in the dark, but remaining on the guard<sup>152</sup>. Therefore, despite the romantic mood at the dinner table, the Borgia incest myth is perhaps not manifested during Soprano's evening with Meadow<sup>153</sup>. Another reason nothing happens between Soprano and Meadow, is that their situation is juxtaposed to another situation where *something* happens, and the two are foils.

The powerful master narrative of the Borgia myth is related to slander on *The Sopranos* which surfaces in Season 6, when Soprano pistol-whips and curb-stomps a made man for insinuating indecency. This may be interpreted as the actions of a seductive father<sup>154</sup>. Another interpretation is possible where the violence erupts after Coco the mobster frightens Soprano by relaying details only *very few people* have access to, and which Soprano may have thought he

<sup>151</sup> Soprano is really being watched, although he cannot know it for sure. Petrulio stays outside the motel the whole night, not daring to enter.

<sup>152</sup> This comments on Livia's refusal to answer the phone after dark in 1/1. Soprano then says he will never understand that, but that he can understand not going outside after dark for fear of being "jumped in the shadows, or whatever". In the Odenoki Motel, this is what he fears.

<sup>153</sup> In *Hollywood Italians*, p. 193, Bondanella mentions hearsay discussed by Francesco Guicciardini in *History of Italy*, 1537-1540: "It was equally rumored (if however it is possible to believe so great an enormity) that not only the two brothers, but the father himself competed for the love of Madonna Lucrezia". In a footnote on p.329, Bondanella stresses that, "[m]odern scholars are all in agreement that this rumor has absolutely no truth in fact". He mentions Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) as another example which strengthens the impression of Italian family incest. He notes (p.193) that Mario Puzo's *The Family* "presents a fictionalized account of the Borgia family in such a way that it obviously suggests the Mafia *famiglia* of Don Corleone or Tony Soprano". Rudolph M. Bell mentions an agricultural study which refers to incest in the South of Italy. There exists the possibility of something happening without being reported in cases where one activity is perceived differently from person to person. This may be what is happening in the talk between Intintola and Mrs. Soprano, who agree that something has happened, but not on whether what has happened is "wrong" – a moral judgement. To Intintola, sex outside of wedlock qualifies as "wrong", as he repeats in 5/6, from 10:01. In 1999, Sanders & Reinisch conducted a study where some participants indicated that they did not consider oral sex to be sex. Cf. note 145.

<sup>154</sup> Carroll, Marissa: "When It Comes To Daughters", in *The Sopranos Reader*, p.87.

controls. He fears that his old crimes will land him in prison or the electric chair. It is an interesting question who has found interest in weakening Soprano's authority by spreading the rumor that Soprano has had sex with his daughter. Petrulio stays outside the motel during the night but dares not act and just waits. In the morning, at 39:49-41:00, he chooses not to act in broad daylight – and, as he tells Soprano just before dying, he thinks it is merely co-incidental that Soprano is taking Meadow to a college near Petrulio's new home, at 41:00-41:20. Petrulio returns to his office and tries to recruit a couple of drug addicts to do the misdeed. In the short time frame, it is unlikely that details about Soprano's relationship to his daughter would have made the drug addicts accept a contract, considering that they reject threats. The couple leaves. Petrulio tries to call "Dougy" but goes outside at the sound of a snapped twig – and is murdered.

The only other person who knows where Soprano and Meadow are, and who is even seen to check on him anonymously, is Mrs. Soprano, at 39:16-41:20, with Intintola in the bathroom vomiting after realizing something has happened which changes his relationship to Mrs. Soprano. Her call increases the pressure on Soprano and strengthens his resolve, but it also suggests that she only *now* learns that Soprano is in fact with Meadow and not with Melfi. Intintola's vomiting indicates his consciousness about his unsuitable liaison, and Mrs. Soprano realizes during this call that she was wrong to suspect her husband of infidelity – a preconception which enabled her to engage in unsuitable activities. Mrs. Soprano has cheated on her husband, while he has not cheated on her. This imbalance puts her in a morally inferior position. She wants to avoid it and can therefore be expected to look for ways to post-rationalize her trespasses. And she needs a good explanation – A.J. sees Intintola's car. Among other motives, she has selfish reasons to gossip about Soprano's trip to improve her own image. She, like him, wants to escape guilt<sup>155</sup>.

In this scene, the bird motif again associates to death and the flight of the soul, since two bird-shaped wind gauges are seen before Petrulio's death. At 48:12-48:55, two lines of differently colored triangular flags running between Petrulio's and another house are seen behind Soprano against the sky, as the camera shoots up at Petrulio (closest) and Soprano during the final seconds of Petrulio's life. Soprano hears Petrulio's last words and looks around as the bird noises, muted earlier, are heard again, more clearly and crisply than before. Soprano's tongue comes out briefly

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<sup>155</sup> A comment possibly masquerading as a Freudian slip occurs in 6/ 1: 3, at 24:43-25:31, as Soprano is lying on a gurney and a hospital nurse tells Mrs. Soprano not to get into bed with her husband again: "You dislodged his drains". Mrs. Soprano replies: "That was my daughter". Then she hurries to add, "[a]nd I can't help but think that physical affection means something".

as he is garroting Petrulio<sup>156</sup>. After his death, Petrulio's cell rings – probably "Dougy" returning the call<sup>157</sup>. The murder can thus be pinpointed in time. Soprano looks up and sees a flying V of birds in the skies above<sup>158</sup>. Judging by their sounds, they could be Canada geese. Canada serves as an American symbol of freedom on *The Sopranos*, here used in connection with the kind of freedom associated with death<sup>159</sup>. The high-angle camera moves upwards and away from Soprano, who thus seems ever smaller and more pitiful. Replicating the angle used at his first panic attack in his back garden, this is suggestive of a higher place whence someone is looking down on Soprano and Earth, thus viewed as the "underworld". This similarity in theme and camera angles adds a layer of significance to his first panic attack: The lifting ducks symbolize a kind of death, so the food-sex-death link is reiterated. Also, as Petrulio's soul takes flight, its foils are both Soprano's and Mrs. Soprano's attempts to flee from their responsibilities – they fail.

In episode 6-1/ 1, at 22:33-23:10, after some marital trouble, Soprano acts as "the other" of the "two Tony Sopranos", seeking restored balance, as he avoids heavy "red lead" and instead takes his wife to dinner at *Nori Sushi*, consisting of Spanish Mackerel and eel eaten with chop sticks, and *sake*<sup>160</sup>. After dinner, he gives her a powerful, new car (which may or may not run on unleaded fuel). On the bonnet is the recognizable icon for the brand: the prancing, black stallion, an animal which Soprano associates with freedom, "no hundred questions, no guilt"<sup>161</sup>. The Porsche symbol is based on the coat-of-arms of the Free State of Wurttemberg of the former Weimar Republic – before the German state was formed. Mrs. Soprano desires independence, which any car symbolizes. This particular car carries extra significance, being possibly the first to be named after an ingredient – Cayenne. Soprano is re-introducing heat in the relationship to his

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Martin, *Difficult Men*, p. 91: Martin notes how the deed of garroting Petrulio is not what remains shocking. Instead, he emphasizes that, "it's Tony's unmitigated relish in doing the deed. (...) The scene lasts an unwavering minute and sixteen seconds". Relish would link to tongue.

<sup>157</sup> This also happens after Mikey Palmice has been shot dead in a ditch: Someone calls back, which serves to pinpoint the time of the murder.

<sup>158</sup> This reiterates the themes of femininity and masculinity combined (through camera editing) in the statue in Melfi's anteroom.

<sup>159</sup> In 6-1/ 2, Baccalieri says his ancestors came in through Canada. He and Soprano trade with Canadian associates for drugs.

<sup>160</sup> In 5/ 1: "Two Tonys", at 33:23-37:06, in one of three attempts in this episode to get closer to Melfi, Soprano tells her, "there's two Tony Sopranos. You've never seen the other one. That's the one I want to show to you". She remains professional. This irritates him. Denied by Melfi, he practices his "other" side on Valentina, then brings his experience to bear with his wife at *Nori Sushi*. Others, such as Bonpensiero and LaCerva, manage a double life. Because Soprano is unable to, he appears as less of a sociopath and more of an ordinary man.

<sup>161</sup> In 1/ 6, at 42:51-44:44, at Herman "Hesh" Rabkin's horse farm. Rabkin says Junior has done well to spread profits among his underbosses. This is really due to Soprano having just told Junior at a baseball game that "Octavian became Augustus (...) because he never ate alone. *Capisce?*" At 43:30-43:38, Soprano is shown in a close-up listening to the wind rustling in the trees and the whinnying of horses, which are seen in slow-motion. Possibly referring to Melfi's recent rejection, he says, "It's nice here. (...) I envy them. They got no- no bills, no headaches, no family *cazzis* runnin' around. One horse likes another horse, they go up to each other, they fuck, that's it. No problems, no hundred questions, no guilt". After this scene, until 46:43, a poolside scene with Soprano and his wife follows. Intontola has told her, "[y]ou are not without sin in this, Carmela". She now kisses Soprano on the mouth, possibly out of guilt, then says she was jealous of Melfi's ability to "be a kind of salvation to you. I want to be that woman in your life". Soprano replies: "Carm, you're not just *in* my life, you *are* my life". Soprano expresses trust.

wife: "Cayenne Turbo. I got the 4.5-litre V8. Wasn't sure about the color, so I took a shot" <sup>162</sup>. Mrs. Soprano is very pleased, but something makes her restrain her joy and stress that this gift does not satisfy her completely, mentioning a spec house she wants. At their recent dinner, Soprano orders "another *sake*", consciously numbing his feelings before giving away the expensive car <sup>163</sup>. The *sake* also adds desired heat, but Mrs. Soprano is still not satisfied. Soprano is made to do penance a little longer.

## Chapter Five: Early Birds At Breakfast

The examples of an archetypal dinner scene in Chapter One and an archetypal barbecue feast in Chapter Three precede the following archetypal breakfasts in *The Sopranos* <sup>164</sup>. Soprano is presented in 1/ 1 as the co-owner of a gentlemen's club, the *Bada Bing!* This is one obvious reason behind the tardiness of his arrival for many breakfasts. Another reason is that his business sometimes involves working late hours, both inside and away from his initial base of operations in the back office of the *Bing!* The expected informality of a breakfast means that Soprano, with impunity, not only arrives late, but that he often has not had a wash or a shave <sup>165</sup>.

An archetypal breakfast occurs in the pilot episode, when Mrs. Soprano, her son A.J., her daughter Meadow and Meadow's friend, Hunter Scangarello, are all gathered in the kitchen. Only Soprano is missing. He strolls down the driveway in his signature white robes to get his daily *Star-Ledger*, then detours to the back garden where he decides to join the ducks in the pool <sup>166</sup>. Not waiting for him, the others talk and eat. Mrs. Soprano offers the girls some *sfogliatelle* <sup>167</sup>, but Meadow answers, "Ugh, get out of here with that fat". This prompts Scangarello to ask how Mrs. Soprano manages to stay so skinny <sup>168</sup>. Later in the episode, Mrs. Soprano offers Meadow

<sup>162</sup> In 5/ 8: "Marco Polo", at 06:23-08:17, Soprano talks to Sacrimoni about a Maserati which Sacrimoni has bought in "the guinea grey", the same color as Soprano also chooses for his wife's car. "Guinea" may be a disreputable word, see note on p.50. A red Cayenne might be better.

<sup>163</sup> "Sake" is an alcoholic Japanese rice wine, usually heated before being served. Heat and Soprano's attraction to the East are suggested.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. *Dinner is Served*, p. 36: Breakfast consisted first of "bread, beer or ale, and wine, and we may draw the conclusion that breakfast began literally as a matter of breaking the fast of the night by a very light meal".

<sup>165</sup> By working past midnight, Soprano utilizes the time when others are sleeping to transgress the division between one day and the next.

<sup>166</sup> Soprano sometimes wear dark robes in scenes close to sad events, like Giunta's disappearance.

<sup>167</sup> *Sfogliatelle* is a ricotta cheese-filled pastry, where "ricotta" means "cooked again" in relation to food based on milk from sheep, cow, goat, or sometimes Italian water buffalo. The "again" part seems to carry significance, as Mrs. Soprano serves *re-heated* food on several occasions.

<sup>168</sup> The dream of staying skinny is a part of these girls' American Dream, also thematized by Robert Baccalieri in *The Sopranos Cookbook*, p.177. The Ancient Greeks advocated a regime where staying skinny was not the ideal. Rather, in a "diet", balanced meals resulted in a balanced life. Soprano tells Melfi he is "workin' on the weight" in an attempt to persuade her to go on a dinner date.

*primavera* as a consolation gift for a curfew<sup>169</sup>. Meadow also rejects that offer of food, in favor of cereal. A conflict is established when Meadow rejects her mother's annual invitation to tea and scones under Eloise's picture at the Plaza Hotel<sup>170</sup>. Instead of hurrying inside, Soprano shouts for the others to join him outside to see the ducklings that are trying to fly. When he eventually goes inside, he unsocially immerses himself in an encyclopedia about birds.

A breakfast is also seen in 1/ 2: "42 Long". A.J. talks about his teacher, Mr. Miller, whose maroon Saturn has been stolen. Soprano seems uninterested until A.J.'s grades are mentioned. Then he will see what he can do. The missing car reveals Soprano's operation with stolen cars<sup>171</sup>. A.J.'s comment at breakfast motivates the action<sup>172</sup>. The car gets dismantled even before Soprano's network can stop it, but Miller receives a different car. One theft makes up for another.

4/ 12: "Eloise" describes other breakfast situations. In one example, at 02:24-05:12, Mrs. Soprano takes scones from the oven, talks to A.J., and welcomes Soprano's soldier and driver, Furio Giunta. A close-up of the scones begins a tracking shot which zooms out to reveal Mrs. Soprano. Her new haircut is evident. A.J. reads an assignment but is interrupted by the doorbell:

A.J.: All right, so I rewrote it: "The entire point of Melville's *Billy Budd*, it seems to me, is to show how mean human beings can be to each other, especially when living in cramped conditions".

Mrs. Soprano: Whoa, hold that thought. (She answers the door.) Come on in. So, how is your mother's apartment coming?

Furio Giunta: Eh! Artie's Uncle Zio finish the framing. But now, the Sheetrock, it's weth on the bothom. There is a leak maybe in the foundation.

Mrs. Soprano: My father is a contractor. If you want, I can have him take a look at it. He is free, I think, tomorrow afternoon.

Furio Giunta: That would be a huge relief.

Mrs. Soprano: Hm.

Furio Giunta: Hm. What smells in this house? *Madonn'*, it's like the smell of heaven.

Mrs. Soprano: Home-made scones, my son loves them. Here, try one, they are just out of the oven.

Furio Giunta: Thank you, no.

A.J.: Well, that's all there is for breakfast, is fat and carbs?

Mrs. Soprano: Excuse me, we have a guest. You think you might say hello?

<sup>169</sup> *Primavera* is a vegetable pasta, considerably healthier than *sfogliatelle* – so, Mrs. Soprano labors. "Primavera" denotes the season "spring".

<sup>170</sup> Cf. theplazany.com/history: "The History of Eloise at the Plaza" refers to Kay Thompson's *Eloise: A book for precocious grown-ups*.

<sup>171</sup> Soprano's car scheme may still be unknown to his biological family.

<sup>172</sup> A.J.'s interpersonal skills are referenced later, for example at a PTA meeting, a break-in at a chapel, and when a fellow student loses a toe.

A.J.: Anyway: "When Mr. Claggart gets mad at Billy, it is a surprise, because he is always saying how handsome Billy is. This does not seem realistic, because, why would an officer care if a sailor was handsome or not?"

Furio Giunta: Hey, Tony.

Soprano: Hey.

Furio Giunta whispers: *There. Yeah.*

Soprano whispers at first: *Right. Hm.*

Mrs. Soprano: A.J., your father's leaving. I'll come up in a minute. Go over it. What is this? "*Ocean Club at Paradise Island*".

Soprano: We leave tomorrow for three beautiful days.

Mrs. Soprano: Tomorrow?

Soprano: M-hm. I know it's short notice, but the deal came through. It's got a view suite, first-class plane tickets, guy owes me a favor. What?

Mrs. Soprano: I don't know. Um, A.J., school?

Soprano: He's old enough to spoil himself, now. I saw how jealous you were when I left for Florida.

Mrs. Soprano: My mother, Tony, with the skin condition? Just the time it's gonna take to pack?

Soprano: To pack.

Furio Giunta: I'll wait outside.

Soprano: Carm, with all the shit that's been goin' on, I mean, the horse and all? Now, I know you need a break. Deep down, that's... probably the reason you got your hair cut.

Soprano joins the others at the end of this scene, receives money in an envelope from Giunta, tastes a scone, nods his approval, puts the scone back on the plate, then reveals the surprise vacation to his wife. In the 1/2 breakfast, Soprano's interest is aroused by a business idea (trading a car against better grades for his son). In this 4/12 breakfast, Soprano takes the payment from Giunta even before tasting the food. Mrs. Soprano has confessed to Intintola about her taste for luxuries, but her confession is unknown to Soprano<sup>173</sup>. She mentions A.J. and her mother's psoriasis as reasons and suggests that she is put off by the packing. The audience is privy to her confession, hence, understands that Soprano is skeptical of this reasoning<sup>174</sup>. Giunta leaves.

A different interpretation exists, given Giunta's and Mrs. Soprano's earlier shared scenes. In 4/12, one such scene is shown at 02:23-05:11 and commented on by other characters at 08:02-09:23<sup>175</sup>. Mrs. Soprano has slowly been developing an infatuation with Giunta. In light of this, the above transcribed scene takes on added meaning. She takes the scones out of the oven just

<sup>173</sup> See p.32, *Carmela's confession*. Soprano and Meadow are touring colleges in Maine when Mrs. Soprano shares the evening with the priest.

<sup>174</sup> In 1/5: "College", Mrs. Soprano sits back to back with Intintola and confesses that she has sacrificed what is "right" for what is "easy".

<sup>175</sup> Meadow later talks to her brother A.J. in his room. Meadow grasps something about Giunta which A.J. seems not to understand.

moments before Giunta arrives. She says that her son "loves them", but A.J.'s posture and expression indicate that he is not fond of his mother's scones. She avoids A.J.'s question ("Well, that's all there is for breakfast, is fat and carbs?"). Her scones are also turned down by Giunta, but that causes no reaction. She eagerly offers her father's help to Giunta "tomorrow". Soprano comes in, tastes the scones, nods and smiles his appreciation, then offers a surprise trip to his wife. She is still not happy, which is suggested by her re-iteration of a selected piece of Soprano's message, that the trip to Paradise Island begins "[t]omorrow". Her suggestion for her date with Giunta ("tomorrow") is thus rendered worthless. The glances that she exchanges with Giunta after hearing about the surprise trip seem to corroborate their common understanding that they will now, sadly, not meet "tomorrow". Soprano sees off a rival he may not have known he had<sup>176</sup>.

Later in 4/ 12, another breakfast occurs where Soprano spends little time with his family. Having made a night of it the day before together with Giunta and Mrs. Soprano's cousin Brian Cammarata at 13:40-16:29, Soprano comes down to breakfast in dark robes. Mrs. Soprano is reading a newspaper as the scene begins at 16:29-18:39 but then pours him a cup of coffee.

Soprano: Furio come by?

Mrs. Soprano: He's already 40 minutes late.

Soprano: Probably worse off than me.

Mrs. Soprano: What, d'you to go out?

Soprano: Can I get a cup of coffee? Fuck is he?

Mrs. Soprano: Uh, was he out with somebody last night?

Soprano: He's a single guy. How should I know? Anyway, my memory is a little hazy. I'm goin' back to bed. When he gets here, don't wake me.

Mrs. Soprano dials a number and gets Furio Giunta's answering machine: "I'm not home now. Leave a message". The message repeats in Italian. Mrs. Soprano ends the call, then pours Soprano's coffee in the sink. The phone rings, and Mrs. Soprano answers with an optimistic tone in her voice, which suggests her hope that it is Giunta returning her recent call.

Mrs. Soprano: Hello?

Meadow: Hey, it's me.

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<sup>176</sup> Mrs. Soprano's interest in Giunta, the young soldier, seems to mimic the class-defying relationship described in *Remains of The Day*. Also, at the introduction of any younger rival, old French literary conventions threaten Soprano who could be identified as a *senex amans*, an old lover, impotent and weak, while his wife would be identified as a *mal mariée*, unhappy Mary, married to an older man, who is a bad lover and may even have bad breath. Soprano seems to fit the description more than once in the series, and handling it adds to his sense of pressure.

Mrs. Soprano: Meadow, hi.

Meadow: You all right? You don't sound very happy to hear from me?

Mrs. Soprano: Of course I am. What's up?

Meadow: Nothing. I was calling to invite you guys over for dinner Sunday, so Dad could see the place and meet the crew.

Mrs. Soprano: How nice. What brought that on?

Meadow: I figure before break. Finn invited me to go skiing in Canada next week.

Mrs. Soprano: You want me to make anything?

Meadow: Nothing. I'm doing everything myself. Maybe wine. We only drink good wine when parents come. Anyway, I gotta go.

Mrs. Soprano: Okay, bye.

Soprano ignores familial quality time with his wife. He does not taste her coffee before going back upstairs. She reads a newspaper. Her posture and expression suggest tension. She asks about Giunta. Soprano, on the other hand, replies with new questions: "Can I get a cup of coffee? Fuck is he?" His breathing gets louder, a possible sign of a panic attack, but also of a hangover. He tells his wife not to wake him "when" Giunta comes, so he seems to expect Giunta. Meadow detects Mrs. Soprano's anxiety: "You all right? You don't sound very happy to hear from me?"

Directly after this, at 18:39-19:00, Mrs. Soprano stops by Giunta's house, anxious not to get noticed. The house is silent, void of Italian-speaking laborers<sup>177</sup>. No car is in the driveway. Uncomfortable, she closes her eyes. Then, she drives away. The audience can judge how accurate her feelings are, having seen Soprano's party with Giunta and Cammarata<sup>178</sup>. As she does not attend, she relies on information from the party-goers: Her cousin, Brian Cammarata, vomits and is unable to walk. Soprano is drunk enough to walk around with the end of a lollipop sticking out of his mouth. Giunta is as sober as the helicopter pilot and capable of registering the unfolding events. His expression is grim. Soprano is allowed to ride in a private helicopter which can take them where they want to go, but Soprano needs to take a leak. He does so, close to the helicopter.

Then, through a sequence of close-ups of Furio Giunta's grim face, Soprano's drunken expression, and the spinning rotor blades, a sense of danger is created. Soprano stands with his eyes closed, while Giunta's eyes are alert and determined. Suddenly, Giunta grabs the lapels of Soprano's jacket and yanks him closer to the rotor blades. Soprano opens his eyes in surprise and

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<sup>177</sup> Earlier in 4/12, Giunta's house teems with activity due to a planned refurbishing. A worker says in Italian that materials will be sent later

<sup>178</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, p.246: "Editing can even create omniscience".

looks at Giunta, asking for an explanation. Giunta blinks his eyes before saying that Soprano is standing too close to the helicopter. He lets go of Soprano's jacket and exits the frame. Soprano ponders what happened. A close-up of Giunta's sad face marks his last appearance alive.

## Chapter Six: *Lemme Tellya Somethin'* – Stories and Melfi Sessions

The theme of orality occurs every time Soprano talks to Melfi or others about dangers in his life, as in the above rotor blade incident<sup>179</sup>: Giunta might have caused Soprano's death and made it look accidental, but Something held Giunta back. Soprano survived<sup>180</sup>. At breakfast, his mind is set to a business, rather than a family sociability mode. Potential rivals like Giunta are aided, which contributes to tensions underlying his panic attacks. At the *Regaleali Dinner*, the Prozac (for his panic attacks) and the sessions pose a risk. But once he is in Melfi's office, no obviously dangerous contact with the outside world seems to take place: The "cocooned" office provides a space somewhat akin to the eye of a storm<sup>181</sup>: The world rages on outside. Inside, Soprano has opportunities to relax and, possibly, insights about his life<sup>182</sup>. Beyond peace, the sessions carry significance in their own right, as noted by key staff<sup>183</sup>. The therapist provides the show with a narrative device which allows for a meta-level discussion on storytelling.

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<sup>179</sup> A helicopter flies, so it can be seen as a kind of bird. Birds appear to have an association to death on *The Sopranos*.

<sup>180</sup> In 4/8, at 36:10-38:22, Giunta attends a funeral in Italy, talks to his father's brother about his love for "[t]he boss' wife". He is advised to end it, or, if he cannot, to kill the boss before the boss kills him. His biological uncle sees three options. As he cannot bring himself to kill Soprano. Giunta chooses between being killed or ending it with Soprano's wife. Soprano has moral credibility in the matter due to the way he begins his business affairs with Annalisa Zucca, for whom Giunta serves as middle-man. Giunta has confessed to his uncle, so Zucca will not take his word over Soprano's. Giunta has brought shame on the family. It must be acknowledged. What happens next, is an open question. Soprano seems to see something odd in the way Giunta rescues him - Soprano has been alerted. Giunta is never again seen alive. Returning to Italy would land him in a dishonorable situation. He could be ostracised, like others on *The Sopranos*. He might even be killed due to the dishonor. His "old-school" standards led Soprano to bring him over. Unable to cope, Giunta does not jump from the helicopter of his own volition. He is probably not thrown out, either: There are sober, independent witnesses. One more (dubious) option exists: Giunta may have changed sides.

<sup>181</sup> In Martin, p.99: For shots of the therapist's office, which feel like home, directors are instructed not to move the camera. No movement suggests calm and quiet – the role of the home (or "garden", in children's literature). See also p. 103, where the therapist's office is described as having "calming tones and womblike curves". Cf. Peacock, in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, p. 277: "The Sopranos is cocooned in silence".

<sup>182</sup> In her sessions with Soprano, Dr. Melfi employs analytical tools from psychotherapy in talking about Soprano's life. This Freudian approach for reconstruction is suggested in the opening credits: See Martin, pp. 30-31, for a comment. Cf. Bordwell & Thompson, p. 318: "In analyzing Citizen Kane's narrative, (...) we, the spectators, are invited to ask questions about Kane and to seek the answers. The very beginning of the film sets up a mystery." The intro to *The Sopranos* shows bits of Soprano's drive from New York to New Jersey, ending at his mansion, the Holy Grail, the end target for the American Dream. The bits of scenery are suggestive of the story which unfolds in the series. Time, guidance and patience are required to reconstruct it as a metaphor for Soprano's journey through life: He sees glimpses of passing scenery but cannot see the big picture, the totality – the meaning is lost on him, and he despairs. As episodes premiered between 1999 and 2007, the intro was a weekly reminder of this quest for wholeness. A song accompanies it whose lyrics suggest a hostile world, for which one should be armed.

<sup>183</sup> In Martin, p. 99: Gandolfini calls the sessions a "Greek chorus" which replaces the voice-over. On p. 99, Chase says the sessions are almost not needed: The audience goes through a learning-curve and can do the therapist's work themselves. Cf. Abrams, pp. 51-52.

Before any food scene, the show is introduced *in medias res* at 01:39-02:05 by showing a man in a room. The audience is kept guessing about where and who he is. The man sits alone, looking at a dark statue of a nude woman. The camera angle traps him face-on between the statue's legs, which create the shape of a pyramid whose apex is unseen. He raises his eyes to look up at the statue, now shown from the front. The audience is given the *POV* of the unknown man, thus being put in his place. A close-up of the dark statue's upper body shows its wing-shaped arms lifted into the air, forearms folded back down behind her head, elbows pointing up at the sky, forming the top points of a V whose apex points to the head, drawing attention to the upper part of her face<sup>184</sup>. Her eyes are shrouded in darkness<sup>185</sup>. Intercut close-ups of the man and the statue's head suggest that this area catches his attention and gives him a thoughtful frown.

His thoughts are interrupted by an opening door. A woman with a dark complexion and dark hair stands intermediately framed in the doorway, asking: "Mr. Soprano?" Thus named, the man clears his throat: "Yeah". He enters her office. After sitting down in the chair of his choice and looking around the office, the man's attention is drawn towards the woman in apparent surprise at her movement when she puts on her glasses. After the scene where his fascination seemed to be drawn towards the eyes of the bronze statue in his therapist's anteroom, his reaction to her putting on her glasses represents a second subtle highlighting in a short space of time of Soprano's fear of inspection, of being seen by someone unseen. He may fear the *malocchio*, the evil eye, an important part of his heritage. In the *Crazy Horse* night club, a wall poster with a big eye wards off the *malocchio* before secret meetings. Also, a murder happens here, and LaCerva is held responsible (after which she can be said to spill her guts out before her double life begins).

On a desk, a clock faces the two chairs, a reminder of time's significance<sup>186</sup>. Soprano is silent. Breaking the silence, the woman asks unmistakably psychotherapeutic questions. Soprano avoids them, for example by making a pass at her<sup>187</sup>. By talking about his father, wife, children,

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<sup>184</sup> Due to camera control, the statue unites the shapes of a pyramid and two triangles – two threes, apexes turned upwards and downwards.

<sup>185</sup> Bordwell & Thompson, pp. 131-137. See esp. p.131, *attached lighting*: Light failing to illuminate an object because of that object's features.

<sup>186</sup> Two time concepts of the Ancient Greeks were Chronos – chronological time – and Kairos – an indeterminate time in which everything may happen. On *The Sopranos*, the flashbacks occur out of the chronological order. Hence, they exemplify Kairos. Thus emphasizing the significance of the flashbacks strengthens the referencing of the Oedipus narrative as a device in the story of Soprano's search for his identity.

<sup>187</sup> This time, Soprano's flirtatious remarks are meant to distract Melfi. He is unsuccessful. Later, Melfi seems to get taken with Soprano, since the directors choose to show what turns out to be her sex dream about him during a period in which he tries to ask her out to dinner. He is again unsuccessful, but Melfi acknowledges that his endeavours are genuine and resulting from the therapy. Because Soprano is capable of showing and talking about emotions to Melfi, a person he now trusts, he may not be suffering from Alexithymia, "no words for emotions", which, according to Melfi, is associated with certain personalities. Melfi's therapy treats patient Soprano, a human being capable of trust and emotions, until she is presented with the Yochelson report, which she finds to be a good enough pretext for her to end his treatment.

mother, and uncle, he reveals his therapist's name, as well as his role models<sup>188</sup>. This session runs 02:05-28:13. Intercut scenes are interpreted as flashbacks (*analepsis*)<sup>189</sup>.

Therapist: Have a seat. My understanding from Dr. Cusamano, your family physician, is that you collapsed. Possibly a panic attack? You were unable to breathe?

Soprano: *They* said it was a panic attack. Of course, all the blood work and the neurological work came back negative. And *they* sent me here.

Therapist: You don't agree that you had a panic attack? How are you feeling now?

Soprano: Good. Fine. Back at work.

Therapist: What line of work are you in?

Soprano: Waste management consultant. Look, it's impossible for me to talk to a psychiatrist.

Therapist: Any thoughts at all on why you... blacked out?

Soprano: I don't know. Stress, maybe.

Therapist: About what?

Soprano: I don't know. The mornin' of the day I got sick, I'd been thinkin'. It's good to be in somethin' from the ground floor. And I came too late for that, I know. But lately, I'm gettin' the feelin' that I came in at the end. The best is over.

Therapist: Many Americans, I think, feel this way.

Soprano: I think about my father. He never reached the heights like me. But in a lot of ways he had it better. He had his people, they had their standards, they had pride. Today, what do we got?

Therapist: Did you have these feelings of loss more acutely in the hours before you collapsed?

Soprano: I don't know. A couple months before, there's these two ducks landin' in my pool. It was amazin'. They're from Canada, or some place, and it's matin' season. They had some ducklings. My daughter's friend was there to drive my daughter, Meadow, to school. Now, my wife feels this friend is a bad influence. This isn't gonna work. I can't talk about my personal life.

Therapist: Finish telling me about the day you collapsed.

Soprano: I drove to work with my nephew, Christopher. He's learnin' the business. Now, he's an example of what I was talkin' about before. Bear in mind, this is a kid who just bought himself a \$60,000 Lexus. We saw this guy. And there was this issue of an outstandin' loan.

Therapist: Can I just stop you for a second. I don't know where this story is going. But there are a few ethical ground rules we should quickly get out of the way. What you tell me here, falls under doctor/ patient confidentiality. Except if I was, if I was to hear, let's say, a murder was to take place. Not that I'm saying it would, but if - if a patient comes to me and tells me a story where someone's going to get hurt, I'm supposed to go to the authorities. Technically. You said you were in waste management.

Soprano: The environment.

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<sup>188</sup> Talking is a type of orality. An audio commentary by David Chase for Season 6 mentions fans' remarks on how much people talk on the show.

<sup>189</sup> See p.15, *analepsis*.

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Therapist: Dr. Cusamano, besides being your family physician, is also your next-door neighbor. See what I'm saying? I don't know what happened with this fellow, I'm, I'm just saying.

Soprano: Nothin'. We had coffee.

Therapist: So you had coffee?

Soprano: Right.

Therapist: Go on.

Soprano: Next, I had a breakfast meetin'. I was called in to consult by a garbage haulin' company I represent. And a situation came up. It involves my uncle. I can't go into details on this one.

Therapist: That's fine.

Soprano: But I will say this. My uncle adds to my general stress level. Uncle Junior's my father's brother. Good guy, just gettin' old, cranky. Used to take me to the Yankee games when I was a kid. I love my uncle. At the same time, when I was young, he told my girl cousins I would never be a Varsity athlete, and, frankly, that was a tremendous blow to my self-esteem. And that night was my son's birthday party. My wife invites the priest. He's always at the house. At first, it felt like ginger ale in my skull. Dr. Cusamano put me in the hospital. Gave me every kind of test. My nephew, Christopher, was handlin' the garbage problem. But on this, I will also not go into detail. The doctors kept me hangin' about the... the tests. As doctors will do. So my uncle and I played a round of golf and had lunch.

Therapist: You keep mentioning your uncle. What seems to be the problem? Can we focus more on your immediate family?

Soprano: My wife and my daughter were not gettin' along. But this shit I'm tellin' you, it'll all blow over.

Therapist: Didn't you admit to Dr. Cusamano that you were feeling depressed?

Soprano: "Melfi". What part of the boot are you from, hon'?

Melfi: Dr. Melfi. My father's people were from Caserta

Soprano: Avellino. My mother would have loved it if you and I got together.

Dr. Melfi: Anxiety attacks are legitimate psychiatric emergencies. Suppose you were driving and you passed out.

Soprano: *Lemme tellya somethin'*. Nowadays, everybody's gotta go to shrinks, and counselors, and go on Sally Jesse Raphael and talk about their problems. Whatever happened to Gary Cooper, the strong, silent type? *That* was an American. He wasn't in touch with his feelin's. He just did what he had to do. See, what they didn't know, was, once they got Gary Cooper in touch with his *feelin's*, that they wouldn't be able to shut him up. And then it's dysfunction this and dysfunction that and dysfunction, *va fangul*."

Dr. Melfi: You have strong feelings about this.

Soprano: *Lemme tellya somethin'*. I had a semester-and-a-half of college, so I understand Freud. I understand therapy, as a concept. But in my world, it does not go down. Could I be happier? Yeah. Yeah. Who couldn't?

Dr. Melfi: Do you feel depressed? *Do* you feel depressed?

Soprano: Since the ducks left, I guess.

Dr. Melfi: The ducks that preceded you losing consciousness. Let's talk about them.

At 28:13, Soprano leaves, and the first session ends. The burial of Kolar ensues, whose murder at the hands of Moltisanti has been shown in an intercut sequence at 21:56-23:55, when Kolar snorts a line of a white powder. Bending down, he exposes his neck. Moltisanti shoots him

from behind <sup>190</sup>. Kolar collapses and hits the table, beside a big meat cleaver with the white powder lines. Kolar's demise justifies Soprano's anxiousness and accomplishes a juxtaposition to the silence in Dr. Melfi's office. This forces TV viewers out of safety into confrontation with death and violence. The above transcribed conversation is heard partly as voiceover while the images show other places than the office. An ambiguity is created with regard to what Soprano actually tells Dr. Melfi during his first session. Does he say only that which is contained in the voiceover (transcribed above), or are descriptions of pictures and sounds seen and heard in the intercut scenes included? Kolar's murder occurs *after* Dr. Melfi stresses that she must, "[t]echnically", alert the authorities in certain cases. Melfi's "[t]echnically" precedes Soprano's "[w]e had coffee", which misrepresents what happened – Soprano economizes with the truth. He has one of the speaking roles in the intercut scenes, so talk is included. But he probably does not take the time to describe other details that are included in the TV pictures. This question is not resolved explicitly <sup>191</sup>. Soprano at least expresses the contents of the above transcript.

If Soprano speaks only the words in the voiceover, significant moments can be identified, including some where the talk between *analyst*, Dr. Melfi, and *analysand*, Soprano, breaks down. This is a typical, expected resistance in the therapy <sup>192</sup>. At 04:00, a close-up of Soprano's eye introduces his flashback: "I'd been thinkin'". The outward-looking eye links to the inward-looking cognitive process of thinking, needed in therapy <sup>193</sup>. From 04:56, a close-up of the garden pines gives a build-up of tension, released by the ducks— Soprano smiles. This is foreshadowing <sup>194</sup>. The flashback goes on at 05:27: Carmela, Meadow and Hunter are in the kitchen. Soprano calls for them to see the ducklings. A conflict exists between wife and daughter. He also scratches an itch and is told to attend A.J.'s birthday. A cut to Melfi's office follows: He cannot talk about his personal life. Despite this denial (crafted to catch curiosity), Soprano does so for seven seasons.

At 07:20, Soprano is in a \$60,000 Lexus driven by Christopher Moltisanti. Soprano reads a book on birds <sup>195</sup>. The audience sees his interest in birds and that he finds information when he

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<sup>190</sup> In Soprano's words from the *Regaleali Dinner*, this is a "steel-covered anti-depressant to the head".

<sup>191</sup> In Chapter Five, the analysis of a therapy session suggests that Soprano relates dialogue and a few crucial details from his flashbacks.

<sup>192</sup> Resistance expresses the Freudian super-ego. This censors what can and cannot be seen, done or talked about. As such, the Soprano family meals with applicable rules of decorum seem like an outward expression of Freud's inward-looking theories, with Soprano as the super-ego.

<sup>193</sup> The image of the eye becomes significant in relation to dreams, various *POVs*, blindness, and Bentham-style fear of inspection.

<sup>194</sup> Abrams, p. 140: *foreshadowing*.

<sup>195</sup> Soprano also reads in this encyclopedia in the earlier kitchen scene. On *The Sopranos*, birds seem to be bound together with death.

wants it. Moltisanti spots a man called Mahaffey "next to the boo-boo in pink"<sup>196</sup>. "Back up", says Soprano, smiling, as if already savoring the moment, seemingly welcoming the opportunity to exercise violence. More cuts to the therapist's office follow as Soprano enjoys a car chase, removes his wedding ring before hitting Mahaffey, and also enables Moltisanti to participate in the violence, which starts at 11:05. Soprano calls Mahaffey a "[d]egenerate fuckin' gambler", justifying his actions to the onlookers<sup>197</sup>. At 11:52, there is a cut to *Centanni's*<sup>198</sup>. The garbage business competition is discussed. Moltisanti says: "Lemme see what I can do". The potential murder of crime boss Malanga is also discussed<sup>199</sup>. Other characters at the table talk include *consigliere* Dante, Moltisanti, "Paulie" Gualtieri, and Salvatore "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero<sup>200</sup>.

From 13:23, a food-related scene in *Bucco's Vesuvio* is shown, where Soprano has lunch after seeing Uncle Junior and acquaintances Arthur and Charmaine Bucco. Soprano taunts Bucco: "How's your rash?"<sup>201</sup> Mrs. Bucco in animal print clothes looks displeased<sup>202</sup>. A waiter pours red wine in Soprano's glass at his lunch with Christopher Moltisanti<sup>203</sup>. At 14:31, Soprano says on the voiceover that he loves Junior, despite his negative Varsity comment<sup>204</sup>. Soprano's car arrives outside a white house with the legend "Fifty-Five" on the side, the house of his mother Livia<sup>205</sup>. Her first words come through a closed door: "Who's there? Who are you?" The mother-son relationship is tense: He rejects her offer of eggplant<sup>206</sup>: "I told you, I already ate lunch".

<sup>196</sup> Christopher Moltisanti is describing a young woman who is escorting Mahaffey.

<sup>197</sup> Soprano later calls Vin Makazian a "degenerate fuckin' gambler with a badge". After he helps Soprano, Makazian jumps (flies) off a bridge.

<sup>198</sup> After this episode, the meat market where Soprano has sit-downs is called *Satriale's*, after its nine-fingered owner – cf. 3/3: "Fortunate Son".

<sup>199</sup> Malanga is mentioned at this table talk. He is arraigned by the FBI later. In 6-1, 1, at 04:44-06:00, Soprano says Malanga has been dead for 6 years, suggesting Malanga goes away at the show's beginning. His death, funeral, or grave stone are not shown. He is probably "dead" like Livia is "dead" to Soprano in 2/ 1, from 23:09: Not literally dead but scorned and ostracised. Livia actually dies in 3/ 2. See footnote 110, p. 28.

<sup>200</sup> In 2/ 13: "Funhouse", at 31:12-40:59, Soprano's long-time associate Bonpensiero is murdered for having served as an FBI informant.

<sup>201</sup> Soprano displays a rash in this and later episodes. This is one of the traits which make Soprano and Bucco foils.

<sup>202</sup> Some women wear animal print clothing, which associates to animals. For example, in 5/ 2, "Rat Pack", at 15:46-18:18, Ms. Francesco explains why she wears fur. The clothing also parodies Francesco's attitude in order to serve other functions, as in episode, at, when the FBI agent focuses on animal print underwear and misses Mrs. Soprano's missed chance of a date with her tennis coach, chaperoned by LaCerva.

<sup>203</sup> On *The Sopranos*, red wine associates via the color red to fire and blood, signifiers for life as well as death, power, rank, and a bride's veil, the *flammeum*, cf. Herder, pp. 157-158. Wine is a social drink at meals. Coffee can replace wine as the social stimulant. Cf. Blum-Kulka, p.11.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Freud, 5, B, iv, 2: "my father remarked: 'That boy will never amount to anything.'" This has relevance, because it gains Soprano sympathy from 1/ 1 onwards. In 1/6, Junior says the *opposite*: Soprano does not react. In 5/ 3, Junior does say Soprano "never had the makings of a Varsity athlete". Here, he supposedly suffers from dementia, but that may be queried, after he tries to escape prosecution, in 4/ 9.

<sup>205</sup> The two fives may symbolize the five senses (one of which is taste) and the five fingers on each hand which Livia uses to prepare food.

<sup>206</sup> Eggplant, or aubergine, is "*melanzone*" in Italian, a symbol of motherly love. This *Nightshade* family member with bitter taste, associations to poison. It suggests a living language: *Melanzone* serves as a racial slur against people with darker skins - *moolies*. Some characters on *The Sopranos* take the eggplant's taste as a negative property, which is transferred onto *moolies*. Thus, food enters language. Cf. Daunay and Janick, p.21: "In Sicily, eggplant is called *quaglie* (partridge) because its long fruits are often cut by cooks in such a way to resemble wings". Wings associate to birds, hence to death on *The Sopranos*. The eggplant's death link means Soprano rejects it. In 1/ 1, Meadow rejects Mrs. Soprano's *primavera* under a tin foil swan. In 1/ 1, Bucco says he might "go postal", a reference to death. In 1/ 3, his wife says he is squeezing the quail.

(Livia may be watchful, not necessarily demented<sup>207</sup>.) Soprano, sweaty, brings a stereo. Livia asks: "For who? For me? I don't want it", soon employing a trademark hand wave<sup>208</sup>. Soprano leaves, and Livia comments: "Sure. Run off!"<sup>209</sup> At 18:37-20:00, Soprano's barbecue and panic attack ensue. From 20:00, his MRI scan is due. At 21:56-23:55, in *Centanni's*, Kolar snorts cocaine, is shot in the back of the head by Moltisanti, and falls beside a meat cleaver<sup>210</sup>.

At 24:08, outside *Bucco's Vesuvio*, Junior says "How many fuckin' hours did I spend playin' catch with you?"<sup>211</sup> Soprano is silent on the voiceover – presumably, he says nothing. In the office, Melfi asks about the ducks and Soprano leaves. After he has left, Melfi is shown from behind, sitting in her chair, as she stretches her forearms upwards at the ceiling before folding them back down behind her neck, thus referencing the femininity of her anteroom statue.

Another session with intercut scenes from other times and places gives background on Soprano, Melfi, and their relationship after Soprano falls to the floor a second time after his mother resists his attempts to place her in the *Green Grove* retirement community. This is an archetypal Melfi session which merits a closer look. Neither Soprano nor Melfi seem like straightforward characters. Taking Soprano on as a patient after "[t]echnically", violates ethical standards. This reveals some of Melfi's personality. Soprano's talk diverges from the flashbacks. Thus, some of his personality is visualized. He talks about golfing with Uncle Junior, but the intercut images suggest that he is unsuccessful in discouraging Junior from murdering Malanga in *Bucco's Vesuvio*<sup>212</sup>. Melfi asks what the problem is with Junior, who keeps being mentioned. As Junior comes into focus, no answer is heard: Soprano uses silence as interruption. Melfi asks more about Soprano's immediate family. Intintola is mentioned, and the narrative jumps to the food-related ginger ale reference, then to the MRI scan. No *words* are uttered about the attack: Those impressions are intimate experiences that Soprano shares only with the audience. Melfi mentions depression. Soprano derails the talk, calls Melfi "*hon*" and talks about the '*boot*', the

<sup>207</sup> Livia's dementia is queried in 1/ 12: "Isabella", at 42:31-43:14. The episode title may allude to a substitute mother in *Wuthering Heights*.

<sup>208</sup> In his audio commentary with Peter Bogdanovich, series creator David Chase remembers his mother using a specific hand gesture.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. 5/ 3, at 42:17-45:09: Livia's daughters left home early. Soprano confronts sister Janice. See also 1/ 13, at 19:43-21:40: Soprano's wife says his sisters left home so early "you'd think there were contracts out on *them*", suggesting contracts were out on *someone*.

<sup>210</sup> The cleaver is eponymous of Moltisanti's therapeutic horror film, set in New Jersey's underworld. Taking drugs associates to orality and "getting high", flying like a bird. In 6-2/ 4, Soprano says, "big-picture-wise, I'm up. Way up". Cf. footnote 232, p.56. In the audio commentary, Chase confirms Bogdanovich's question that the script called for intercut close-ups of "two mobsters and Dean Martin", and of pigs' heads.

<sup>211</sup> Junior's long-term memory is corroborated during a flashback in 1/ 5, at 27:13-39:10, when Soprano tells Melfi about his early years.

<sup>212</sup> Soprano expressly wishes for the murder to happen in a different place, but he does not express an objection to the murder itself.

geographical representation of Italy on maps<sup>213</sup>. That Livia "would have loved it if you and I got together", speaks to "mother issues". His resistance suppresses the truth – and not for the last time. Melfi re-rails the talk, asking what would happen if he were to pass out while driving<sup>214</sup>.

Soprano counters by launching into his *Gary Cooper speech*, ending in a general criticism of the psychiatric profession: "dysfunction, *va fangul!*"<sup>215</sup> Melfi sidesteps Soprano's attempt to make the sessionn more personal when she acknowledges his anger: "[y]ou have strong feelings about this". He is encouraged to act as the sole narrator and defining force – "Lemme tellya somethin'". Melfi wants an answer: "Do you feel depressed?" He admits: "Since the ducks left, I guess", thus linking his depression with the ducks<sup>216</sup>. Melfi also understands Freud: She puts Soprano's connection into words. This explication, a thought transferred into actual sound, makes the situation unbearable for Soprano. It contradicts his "strong, silent type" idea of the *omerta*<sup>217</sup>.

The so-called talking cure is a type of orality which dominates the show together with eating and drinking. Its expected role is that the *analyst* helps the *analysand* in a quest for hidden truths, where both parties wish to contribute in a positive way<sup>218</sup>. The quest is accomplished by allowing the patient to reconstruct a life story by telling it – *diegesis*<sup>219</sup>. The fragmented opening credits suggest such a quest. Food scenes treat one type of orality<sup>220</sup>. The telling of the story thus reveals plot points and key characters who are either in Sopranos' biological family or in his

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Dunbabin's *The Western Greeks*, p.218: "Italia": The name "originally of the extreme South below the Isthmus of Catanzaro, is confidently derived from a word equivalent to *vitulus*". It means "calf" or "bull", and associates to "land of the calf" or "land of young cattle" in the Oscan language, a reference to the fertile earth, hence, to the cult of the Earth Mother, Cybele, the "Mother of the Gods", whose attenders included castrated priests. Cf. Conway, *The Italic Dialects*, i. 48. In 2/ 12, from 04:50, Irina Peltsin is pleased with Soprano's gift, the calf skin boots.

<sup>214</sup> In 2/ 3: "Toodle-Fucking-Oo", at 40:51-42:40, this happens in Melfi's dream: Soprano crashes his car to a tune from *The Wizard of Oz*.

<sup>215</sup> This expletive, short for *va a fare in culo*, means "up yours", "fuck", "fuck off", or "fuck you", or "my ass", to signal disbelief. In 1/ 7: "Down Neck", at 27:13-42:42, this expression occurs in a flashback to Soprano's youth, in a telling of the father mythos. Cf. Abrams, pp. 230-232, *myth* (Greek, *mythos*): any story or plot, whether true or not. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 304, *fallible narrator*. Bell, p.21, quotes Fabrizio Cabrera, the Prince of Salina, who wrote *The Leopard*: "The mythical past offered a world without exploitative landlords and hungry mouths (...). Storytellers, and every villager was a storyteller, perpetuated myths without fear of possible contradiction. History and myth became one". This happens in 6-2/ 3, from 34:01, after a dinner, as these phrases are linked: "Gary Cooper", "stand-up guy", "role model" and "Paulie", a reference to Gualtieri. A "stand-up guy" also refers to a comedian, or clown, thus creating a link to Soprano's "sad clown" image of himself. See p.22 and footnote 88, p.24.

<sup>216</sup> In 6-1/ 2, from 32:52, Soprano as Kevin Finnerty is told about areas in his brain which have been oxygen-deprived, signs indicative of Alzheimer's. Soprano says he is 46 years old, which matches his current age, not the age at the time of his dream in 2/ 13. This suggests that, while connected to earlier memories, this issue is current and appears in altered form because it has found no other expression for its wish fulfilment. Soprano's subconscious is finally letting through an old memory, but a distance to it is maintained through a change of identity because it still hurts. As it may have happened in Season 1, a doctor now tells Soprano, masked as another person: "Mr. Finnerty, talk to your own docs back home". "Docs" is a homonym for "ducks". Now, the dream in 2/ 13 may be corroborated: Molitanti, perched like a harbinger of death on the park bench in Soprano's "Funhouse" dream, reveals his fear about an actual situation. He is in denial, see p. 48: "They said it was a panic attack. Of course, all the blood work and the neurological work came back negative". But Soprano's brain damage may have other causes.

<sup>217</sup> The *omerta* is treated in a fictional interview which Soprano and his crew see on TV in 1/ 2. Uniquely, this comes *before* the opening credits.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *OED*, p.199, Freud and psychology: "for the therapy to work, the patient must (...) say everything that comes into his or her mind".

<sup>219</sup> In this respect, *The Sopranos* may be said to reference the myth of *Oedipus Rex*. See actor Chianese's comment on p. 22.

<sup>220</sup> Other types of orality on *The Sopranos* include drug consumption, smoking, kissing, and oral sex.

organized crime family. But the limits normally separating these categories are blurred. Being a source of his strength, blurred boundaries also lead to trouble, complicating the narrative structure and creating interest. Psychology, ethnicity, cultural history and family structures are social dimensions that contribute to the revelation of his identity, as in the *Regaleali Dinner*. The food scenes and Melfi sessions as constant factors are good analytical material<sup>221</sup>.

Melfi's analysis interrupts Soprano's daily routine, introducing the session, a new category of allotted time in his life. While increasing the risk of exposure, this risk implies a thrill. The sessions also offer stability and predictability – a safe risk. This arrangement is initiated by his family physician, Dr. Cusamano. Soprano seems skeptical as he uses avoidance techniques. The sessions give the audience Soprano's *POV*. His story therefore seems more personal and closer to the audience due to the use of such tools and techniques as close-ups, intercut scenes, voiceovers, and the choice of music. This adds power, realism, and profundity to the conflicts. Melfi treats Soprano in a seven season series, and the longevity contributes to the show's sense of realism. The session as narrative device allows the series' creators to interrupt and fill in selected bits of pertinent information at any point in the telling of his story. The sessions – cut scenes of his life – are a main channel for intertextual information presented in other scenes. A representation of Soprano's innermost thoughts and feelings, important for interpreting and understanding his character, is expected in the sessions in the form of dreams and flashbacks. Flashbacks are rare, but when used, they serve as interruptions that frustrate the narrative on key matters, hiding the truth and inviting interpretation. Soprano economizes with the truth and frustrates his own quest for truth. In a supper scene 1/ 8, from 13:11, he is said to have "[m]other issues", supporting a notion that female roles carry significance on *The Sopranos*<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>221</sup> Regularly shown from a bug-on-the-wall *POV* which engages the viewer, the scenes on *The Sopranos* are not unbiased. They represent a reality based on subjective selections of material. Such regularness bothers Moltisanti in 1/ 8: "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti", at 31:43-35:48. In 3/ 3: "Fortunate Son", at 34:48-36:22, Soprano says his father cut off Satriale's finger with a meat cleaver. He tells Melfi it was "a rush" but may be wearing a "sad clown" mask: His "strong, silent type" words come after Melfi notes in 2/ 11: "House Arrest", at 47:32- 49:47, that "certain personalities" with Alexithymia ("no words for emotions") "crash" without constant stimulation, like a shark which "keeps moving". He says she looks "very mellow", so Melfi is influenced by the Luvox prescribed by her therapist. Soprano's earlier silences deceive her: He has "no words for emotions" because he *chooses* silence, *not* because he *cannot* describe emotions. In fact, helped by Melfi and others, he describes his emotions increasingly well. The entire series of *The Sopranos* is his "talking cure". By lowering his head here, he looks guilty. Perhaps not manipulating the angle as at the *Regaleali Dinner*, he still understands Melfi's reference. He later changes his behavior at sessions, as in 3/ 3.

<sup>222</sup> As per the Dante's *Inferno* link, significant female roles such as Soprano's mother, wife, therapist, *comares*, and foils such as Bucco, who labors over food, represent obstacles. In 1/ 8, Melfi hosts a dinner. Her son, Jason, lauds Nana's "guinso gravy" – a food-reference to a derogative for an Italian-American, *guinea*. Melfi's ex-husband Richard LaPenna asks: "Ah, Italian male seeing a shrink. Let me guess: Mother issues?" Soprano is thus betrayed during a supper. (This recalls a close-up in 1/ 1 of a stone tablet showing The Last Supper. Soprano talks about his Master Mason ancestors who built the chapel.) Melfi's crucial choice in 6-2/ 8, after the dinner at 12:50-15:13, links to this scene when Elliot Kupferberg says: "I only suggested you re-evaluate your work with... Leadbelly, or be prepared to deal with moral and possibly legal consequences". The dinner discourse suggests that slow-poisoners can mimic empathy.

## Chapter Seven: The Red Lead

Soprano's expressed wish, "[I]emme tellya somethin'", is witnessed in 1/7, from 08:04, where his childhood memories are described<sup>223</sup>. A closer inspection of this episode is also warranted by the presence of a key female character, Mrs. Soprano, who serves Spaghetti Bolognese, with bread and red wine – so, truths are to be expected. Livia and Junior dine with the Sopranos and discuss A.J.'s suspension<sup>224</sup>. Soprano is challenged as the lone narrator<sup>225</sup>. Junior asks: "Whatever happened to "*boys will be boys*"?" Livia ignores her son's presence: "Oh, his father was the same way. I practically lived in the vice principal's office. (...) Well, you only remember what you want to remember. (...) Yeah, well, I must have had another son who stole a car when he was 10 years old". Junior says Soprano's "little crew" sold stolen lobsters on Bloomfield Avenue. A.J. lights up. Soprano reacts: "How many times do I gotta say this? I don't want that kind of talk in front of this kid. That stuff is wrong, and I don't condone it." A.J. ironizes: "Yeah. Sure<sup>226</sup>". Mrs. Soprano punishes A.J.: No Mario Cart, no TV, no internet, no skateboarding for three weeks. And he must visit Livia every day – as punishment. Livia: "Oh, that'll be nice". A.J. is expelled by the larger "we" to join the marginalized Livia<sup>227</sup>.

At 13:39, the Soprano home is full of diegetic noise after A.J.'s punishment<sup>228</sup>. Soprano's stress level increases. He staggers to the bathroom, takes his Prozac, and the scene is cross-faded with a flashback to his youth<sup>229</sup>: At 14:47, Junior yells for Johnny to join him in the car. Young Tony, Livia and Giovanni "Johnny Boy" Soprano appear from inside their home. Johnny joins Junior. Livia goes back inside. Young Tony does not go with the two men, misses the bus, and starts walking to school. Hiding behind a tree on the sidewalk, he sees Junior and Johnny beating

<sup>223</sup> "Down Neck" is the nickname for the area in Jersey where Soprano grew up, a reference to origin and identity.

<sup>224</sup> At the beginning of this episode, A.J. leads two other boys into temptation as they break into the Verbum Dei all-male Catholic school chapel and get drunk on wine which, according to A.J., is "not sacramental until they bless it".

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Blum-Kulka, p.9. Soprano wants to decide alone, through monologues, what is acceptable and unmentionable at the dinner table. He is challenged by his guests. This exemplifies extended discourse - a co-narrative speech act which gives his guests co-ownership of the story.

<sup>226</sup> Soprano's interest in cars also exists his adulthood, suggested by the business with Mr. Miller's maroon Saturn. A.J. has seen this now.

<sup>227</sup> In 6-1/2: "Join The Club", from 12:10, A.J. is copying Livia's dark outlook and hair style: Gualtieri calls A.J. "Van Helsing", after the hairy, fictional witch hunter. The film *Van Helsing* depicts Frankenstein's Monster as a tragic hero, close to Shelley's description. Soprano, called "a Frankenstein" in 1/3, is in hospital after being shot. A.J. stoically bears this trauma. In 6-2/7: "The Second Coming", at 21:10-23:13, Soprano eats Lincoln Log sandwiches, then tries to midwife A.J. away from the depressive Livia legacy in a potential re-birthing scene.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Bordwell & Thompson, pp. 80-81: "Diegetic" elements originate *inside* the story. "Nondiegetic" elements originate *outside* the story.

<sup>229</sup> Soprano has this experience alone – no audience is around – and the cross-fading to white suggests a day-dream, not a flashback of the sort seen during his first Melfi session. In a footnote to Chapter 6, Freud notes on a "complete analogy between the nocturnal dream and the daydream. In hysterical patients an attack may often be replaced by a dream; it is then obvious that the daydream fantasy is the first step for both these psychic formations". Therapy now seems to have helped avoid a panic attack. The transition effect prepares the audience for 1/12.

up a man named Rocco over a debt<sup>230</sup>. The flashback ends with a rare freeze-frame of Johnny walking and counting the money he has taken from Rocco. A dissolve leads into a white screen accompanied by fading, nondiegetic period music by Jefferson Airplane – a reference to flying. A white screen associates to a blank slate, wiped clean, suggesting that memories have been cleaned up, suppressed by Soprano's super-ego. It is good that he dreams<sup>231</sup>. The white screen dissolves into the picture of Soprano, staring at himself in the mirror. His wife enters: "You're up". He says: "Who the fuck can sleep with all this shit goin' on?" His *wish* to sleep is implied<sup>232</sup>.

At a session, Soprano describes the first time he saw his father "whack the shit out of somebody". Freudian theory suggests that Soprano's earlier sessions have caused this dream<sup>233</sup>. His father used a belt as a "child development tool", but the "whackin'" was different<sup>234</sup>: "You could tell he knew what he was doin'". He was glad his father was not a "fag", and that everybody liked his father, whom Soprano calls "[a] good guy", since "[h]e knew how to have a good time. Loved shellfish, clams, oysters"<sup>235</sup>. The mention of sea food strengthens the father mythos, as sea food associates to Roman identity<sup>236</sup>. Soprano interrupts himself: "My mother never ate anythin' raw. But he wasn't around much". Melfi does not say the word "absence"<sup>237</sup>. Instead, she asks what line of work his father was in. Soprano answers, "[r]etail meat and provisions." He pauses, Melfi stares, and he continues: "And a little numbers, extortion, loan-sharkin'." Melfi's gaze breaks Soprano's *omerta* – while he talks about food<sup>238</sup>. Melfi asks how he felt when he found out about his father's illegal activities. Soprano stalls: "You know, I- I never really knew about it". Melfi persists: "When did you find out?" Soprano resists: "Who remembers?" Melfi

<sup>230</sup> Rocco's debt enables the men in Soprano's childhood to be violent, like Mahaffey's debt enables Soprano. Soprano copies his role models.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Freud, 7. E: "the dream relieves the mind, like a safety-valve". Also, in 7. F: Attention directed at dream content leads to "*hyper-cathexis*".

<sup>232</sup> In 5. C, Freud remarks on the wish to sleep – and escape responsibility. Soprano's dreams echo this, as do characters' drug abuse in pursuit of a numbing experience. See also *Mangione & Morreale*, pp.67-68: "Southern Italians were believed to be irrevocably rooted to their native soil. The reports of Northern government officials stationed throughout the *Mezzogiorno* confirmed the general impression of their superiors, notwithstanding the peasant revolts against the regime in the 1860s, that the southerners were an apathetic lot, hopelessly fatalistic, hardly the sort to stray from what they conceived as their preordained way of life. The Sicilians, who were to be the most numerous of the Italian American immigrants, were regarded as the least enterprising southerners of all by their masters. "Sleep, my dear Chevalley, sleep is what the Sicilians want," says the Prince in Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* to an emissary from the North. "They will always hate anyone who tries to wake them, even in order to bring them the most wonderful gifts". Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, where a description of the Risorgimento ensues: The Italian Unity and the Southern Exodus, partly architected by Giuseppe Garibaldi. Cf. *Ibid.*, p.55: The "hero-adventurer", supposedly said that, sometimes, "you have to force liberty on people for their own good". Soprano's leopard tattoo is a representation not just of Sicilian heritage, but also of sleep.

<sup>233</sup> Freud, chp.5, lists three points about dreams: They often relate to memories from recent days; the selection of dream content is not arbitrary; and early life memories come to the surface in altered form.

<sup>234</sup> According to Freud, elongated objects like belts or ties can be seen as dream references to the male sexual organ.

<sup>235</sup> This is an example of Soprano's use of the word "good" in connection with food, mentioned on p. 12.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Conti, p.189: "Fish and seafood were omnipresent on the Roman table".

<sup>237</sup> Wion's essay on the Absent Mother in *Wuthering Heights* becomes useful: Johnny Boy is absent, so Junior is a male role model for Soprano.

<sup>238</sup> This link between truth, (sea) food, and stares is seen in 1/ 5: "College", when Soprano's car radio conveys a commercial for the Stone House in Waterville, offering Maine Lobsters, and a new salad bar. Meadow then asks, at 04:56: "Are you in the Mafia?" Soprano speaks the truth.

alters the angle, asking about his concern that A.J. is going to find out about him. Soprano is in denial: "Don't start talkin' to me about legitimate business. What about chemical companies? Dumpin' all that shit into the rivers and they got all these deformed babies poppin' up all over the place". Shielding Soprano business equals striking other businesses<sup>239</sup>. Melfi focuses: "Does he know anything?" Soprano buckles under her gaze: "I don't know". Melfi pursues her success: "Has he asked you?" Soprano, flatly: "No". Melfi, quickly: "How are you going to handle that?" Soprano: "I don't know." Melfi returns to the suppressed, old memories: "Did you ever talk to your father about it?" Soprano blocks Melfi: "What, are you kiddin'?"

Here, Soprano is unsure about Melfi. He minimizes exposure and avoids talking about the past, since soul-searching is unpleasant<sup>240</sup>. In Chapter 1, Freud describes "the human spirit, which has, of course, a kinship with the divine". Freud writes that therapy takes bravery<sup>241</sup>. A kitchen scene follows. Soprano drinks juice and quarrels with his wife about A.J.'s possible ADD after A.J.'s *Roschach* test<sup>242</sup>. The Soprano "gene pool" is thematized. A.J. visits Livia, as per his punishment, and reveals that Soprano is in therapy. Livia asks why. A.J. asks for a pear and avoids the question. Livia concludes: "He goes to talk about *his mother*." Her self-pity is food-related: "Oh, I gave my life to my children on a silver platter. And this is how he repays me".

At 27:14-28:40, Soprano brings thoughts from the talk with his wife into his next Melfi session: "I'm goin' crazy with this shit, what he knows, what he doesn't know. He's goin' to find out eventually, what difference does it make? Me, my father. It's probably in the genes, right? You know, this ADD thing". He says Bonpensiero is "a stone gangster" and then talks about Leopold and Loeb, who Soprano says murdered a kid "for fun", and their father was "a succesful businessman, a fuckin' millionaire". The audience sees Soprano "singing", breaking the *omerta*. He can see no FBI agents in the therapist's room and trusts Melfi. She asks whether he holds his

<sup>239</sup> In 6-2: 6, Soprano has a peyote trip when his company dumps "shit" (asbestos) into water, where it may cause "deformed babies".

<sup>240</sup> In 1/ 7: "Down Neck", directly after the dinner scene discussed on p. 50, Mrs. Soprano asks her husband about the college trip. A close-up of Soprano is interrupted several times by brief, intercut images from the scene in the car where Meadow asks if he is in the Mafia. These images differ from the colorful pictures in the flashbacks to Soprano's childhood: The car scene is now shown in the monochromatic scale, as if having been bleached. The flow of the images is also interrupted several times. Thus, Meadow's question is heard in fragments: "Are – are you – are you in – are you in the Mafia?" The use of black-and-white images together with the fragmentation suggests Soprano's deliberate attempt to suppress this memory. Mrs. Soprano's questions force the truth into Soprano's conscious mind, but he manages to avoid expressing it.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Freud, 6. H. V.: "It cannot be denied that great self-control is needed to interpret one's dreams and to report them. One has to reveal oneself as the sole villain among all the noble souls with whom one shares the breath of life".

<sup>242</sup> ADD is short for Attention Deficit Syndrome. A.J. has taken a *Roschach* association test, and the results indicate that A.J. is a borderline case, depending on whether or not he fidgets. Soprano's question as to what constitutes a fidget is followed by suggestions that a diagnosis, although seen as a weakness, can still be used to A.J.'s advantage. Soprano defends A.J. from a shameful diagnosis. The juice Soprano drinks, is acidic.

father responsible for what he has become. Soprano: "Yeah, sometimes I think what life would have been like if my father hadn't gotten mixed up in the things he got mixed up in. How life would have been different. Maybe I'd be sellin' patio furniture in San Diego or whatever<sup>243</sup>".

At 28:40-39:10, an important dinner scene follows in flashback after Melfi says, "[I]et's talk about your father." Soprano answers: "My father." The screen dissolves from a close-up of Soprano in Melfi's office to the flashback showing a color picture of Junior throwing a ball with Young Tony outside his home<sup>244</sup>. Janice comes out. Young Tony's interest in her makes him miss Junior's curve ball. A medium waist-up shot of Junior fades to a white screen, signifying the mind's censorship. Soprano talks about Junior, not Johnny. He says he was 8 or 9 years old at the time of this memory. His smile fades: "Then my sister came out". Melfi asks what his sister thinks of the parents. Soprano blocks Melfi: "Who gives a fuck what she thinks? She calls herself Vishnamantha or somethin'. "Soprano" isn't good enough for her. Fuckin' wannabe dot head".

Soprano's sense of identity clearly involves more than accumulating wealth like the ancient Roman patricians. A last name signifies a whole family. Associating it with honorable values is important<sup>245</sup>. Besides ending in a vowel which suggests its pedigree, "Soprano" denotes the register of a voice, which is heard as Soprano faints in 1/ 1. Sopranos are honored in the "old world" and in the "new". Male sopranos called *castratos* due to their ability to sing high notes are also honored. During the Melfi sessions, Soprano "sings" for seven seasons. On *The Sopranos*, the castrato's sexual aspects relate to the significance of male identity among mobsters<sup>246</sup>. These aspects link to Freudian fear of castration visualized by the first panic attack in 1/ 1. This happens after Junior and Livia appear to collude to have him killed – extreme castration. Oedipus' mythic search for identity is referenced by the fragmented opening credits (p. 50). In "soprano", the root "sopra" means "high", or "on high". Soprano is high: As boss, he is high in his family. He is "on

<sup>243</sup> Melfi is leading her patient, possibly breaching APA standards. If so, it happens despite her comment: "He who does not understand history, is doomed to repeat it", a misquote of George Santayana's words about perpetual infancy from *Vol. I of Reason in Common Sense*. In 1/ 7, a flashback shows Johnny trying to leave. Livia stops him. This may be Soprano's edited version of the past or a complete and true memory.

<sup>244</sup> Notably, when Melfi says "father", Soprano's memory links this first of all to Junior, next to Janice, then to Giovanni "Johnny Boy" Soprano.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Bell, *Fate and Honor, Family and Village*, pp. 1-3: "Four words capture the essence of the Italian peasant's response to life: *fortuna*, *onore*, *famiglia*, and *campanilismo*. (..) *Onore* (honor, respect, dignity) has meaning only within the context of *fortuna* and *famiglia*. (..) For every happening some response is required, and it is the pattern of such responses that establishes *onore*. (..) Respect and dignity come with continued support of one's immediate family at a level appropriate to one's station in life. (..) *La famiglia* is at the center of Italian life; it is (..) the society's basic mode of organization. (..) *Campanilismo*, the unity of everyone who lives within the sound of the village church bell, is secondary only to family in the code of rural Italy. (..) loyalty to place of birth remains strong. (..) these four values served to define the peasant's self-identity and to circumscribe his behavior". In 1/ 8: "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti", from 38:11, Soprano explains the significance of vowels at the ends of names. In 3/ 10, from 48:39, Melfi concludes that Soprano is a "very conventional man", which Soprano takes as a taunt.

<sup>246</sup> Irina Peltsin asks about "Tony's *cannoli*"; Gualtieri refers to Dr. Freud's "[h]ard-ons"; Junior tells Livia: "[y]ou're lookin' to crack his *coglioni*".

high" coming down the stairs to breakfast; or going down the driveway for his *Star-Ledger*; or sitting in an elevated position in 1/ 1 for business with Rabkin in the *Bing!* He goes to the Mother country, Italy, in 2/ 4, takes in the balcony view, and is called down to dinner with Annalisa Zucca<sup>247</sup>. In 5/ 2, from 25:43, he is up on a balcony in his strip club overseeing LaManna's gift to Blundetto, newly released from jail. In 6-2/ 1, he puts on white robes and goes downstairs to talk to police officers near his pool<sup>248</sup>.

Also, "sopra" refers to being "high", "intoxicated", which Soprano sometimes is. In 4/ 12, he parties with Furio. In 2/ 4: "Isabella", he follows Melfi's orders and mixes Prozac and Lithium. In 1/ 9, he again mixes alcohol and Prozac, does the Camel Walk, and tells his wife, "I didn't hurt nobody". In 6-1/ 4, from 05:26, he cannot administer his own morphine: "They're tryin' to wean me off"<sup>249</sup>. Another intoxicated scene is his peyote trip to the Red Rock Canyon in the Nevada Desert in 6-2/ 6:<sup>250</sup>. Soprano's highs also include a trip on a private jet to Las Vegas in 6-2/ 7.

Melfi asks about the association from his "father" to his "uncle". Soprano: "I don't know". Again, he blocks Melfi. The camera shows Young Tony asking what Janice is doing. Teasingly, she does not answer but gets into the car. The camera in both shot and reverse shot pulls away, so he is left behind, seeming ever smaller<sup>251</sup>. Johnny comes down the front stairs (he is a Soprano). Young Tony is denied a ride with "you guys" – he is not one of the "guys". He must help Livia get "the screens down to the garage"<sup>252</sup>. Janice gives Young Tony "the bird"<sup>253</sup>. The car drives away. In mid-frame, two men look at a car's engine, frustrated by a mechanical problem<sup>254</sup>.

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<sup>247</sup> Freud, 6. E. 7: Assuming that the mother's body can be represented in dreams as a house, balconies may represent the mother's bosom.

<sup>248</sup> Like Johnny Soprano who returns home quickly after his *Rideland* arrest in 1/ 7, at 39:10-40:06, Soprano's quick return now (in spite of TV reports in this very scene that he will be prosecuted) leads A.J.'s girlfriend Blanca to echo Livia in remarking, "They let him out already?"

<sup>249</sup> Soprano is a foil for Moltisanti, in 2/ 9: "From Where To Eternity", at 10:44-14:40, since Moltisanti "likes his chemistry set a little too much".

<sup>250</sup> LSD plays a role in therapy, cf. Baker (1964). "Use of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide". Kennedy and Heidi may have been referenced before this.

<sup>251</sup> This camera movement and intercutting of angles is also utilized in 1/ 5, after Petrulio's murder.

<sup>252</sup> Staying with Livia becomes a punishment, like when Mrs. Soprano sentences A.J. to stay with Livia as punishment for his break-in in 1/ 7.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Crumpacker, p.26: "throughout the Mediterranean the word for fig means "fuck". It also means the finger gesture "fuck you", which is different from the American erect middle finger. It's an unmistakable penis as the thumb, tucked between the index finger and the middle finger, projects from a clenched fist. The last gesture didn't begin as an insult. It was originally a protective device to ward off the evil eye, a "Devil repellent". At one time, figs were supposed to bring good luck. And, of course, fertility". Yet, Satriale loses a finger. Livia's, "she won't eat" links to Hunter's advice to Meadow in 2/ 3 on how to control parents: "Start purging, they won't say anything". Cf. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*.

<sup>254</sup> According to Freud, childhood memories appear in altered form. The camera lingers on two men with a mechanical problem, a possible stimuli for Soprano's dream where he runs, penis in hand, looking for a mechanic, and a bird takes it. As a possible distorted representation of an actual, specific molestation, the dream, after Melfi's guidance, represents a more general fear in Soprano of losing his family.

The camera cuts to Melfi: "Go on." Soprano says Livia was inside cooking meat for the gravy, "the red lead. Pork bones and veal, it was a Sunday"<sup>255</sup>. The last four words serve as voiceover in a lead-in to the flashback. The pork meat in the image sequence with Young Tony and Livia are paralleled by the images of Johnny and Junior at *Centanni's/ Satriale's* Meat Market and Pork Store. Livia overhears Young Tony's requests for an electric organ, mumbling, "[w]hat's the matter with that child? She won't eat". Livia is referring to Janice – "she" is not present and may be talked about in the third person. It is not clear who Livia is talking to here<sup>256</sup>. Young Tony is disappointed at being denied an electric organ. He wants his mother's attention. Livia turns around and shouts "*Enough!* He won't give me a moment's peace." Now, "he" refers to Young Tony – who *is* present. Livia's disturbed mind leads her to alienate her son, who asks why Janice got to go. Livia: "That's because your sister does as she's told." He asks more. Livia walks menacingly towards him: "You are driving me *crazy!*" The high angle – Livia's *POV* - suggests empathy towards the visibly scared boy: "No, I'm not". The pitch of his voice rises – he is begging her to take back her words. In a stressful situation, he looks into her eyes. Father, sister, and mother all seem to push him away. Soprano's fear of abandonment is manifested.

In close-up, Melfi says: "She said *what?*" Soprano defends Livia: "She's very high strung, my mother, very dramatic. You know, every night to her is a night at the opera". Soprano looks to one side as if digesting Melfi's empathy. The camera again shows the past and a close-up of Livia

<sup>255</sup> Lead is heavy and poisonous, a symbol of Soprano's depression. Red associates to the blood connection and cannibalism. Cf. Harris in Counihan and van Esterik: The pig is a Southern animal, an almost human ethnic marker, and a good animal to sacrifice to Osiris. A big pig statue is the *Satriale's* trademark, a clear signifier of Southern identity with associations to sacrifices to the Roman gods. Inside *Satriale's*, the wall poster of the sow and the suckling pigs is a reference to Cybele. The word "pork" masks the pig as the source of the meat. In 6-2/1, Soprano associates "pork" to the male sexual organ and his sister's mouth. Cf. Conti, p.187: "Illnesses were not equal for all. The wealthy often had problems tied to dietary excesses; the urban plebs, who lived crowded into unhealthy, multistory housing blocks and ate little and poorly, were subject to respiratory diseases, malnutrition, dermatitis, and rheumatism. Farmers, who often came into contact with swampy environments, were subject to malaria. Moreover, like sailors, soldiers, and slaves, they suffered from arthritis, rheumatic illnesses, and hernias, due to strained positions, intense and prolonged exertions, and exposure to dampness. Toothache was a widespread malady. Then there were some illnesses that are unusual today, like lead poisoning, caused by the use of lead pipes to bring water into houses (an illness that often also caused sterility, to such a degree that it may have had an impact on the birth rate)." By serving "red lead", Livia is slow poisoning Young Tony and threatening to castrate him. Teeth have significance as a symbol of potency and masculinity in Freudian theory. In 4/12, when Sacrimoni tells Soprano that Carmine (the word for a rusty red substance) is in a bad mood due to Cf. Bell, *Fate and Honor, Family and Village*, pp. 1-3: "Four words capture the essence of the Italian peasant's response to life: *fortuna, onore, famiglia, and campanilismo*. (..) *Onore* (honor, respect, dignity) has meaning only within the context of *fortuna* and *famiglia*. (..) For every happening some response is required, and it is the pattern of such responses that establishes *onore*. (..) Respect and dignity come with continued support of one's immediate family at a level appropriate to one's station in life. (..) *La famiglia* is at the center of Italian life; it is (..) the society's basic mode of organization. (..) *Campanilismo*, the unity of everyone who lives within the sound of the village church bell, is secondary only to family in the code of rural Italy. (..) loyalty to place of birth remains strong. (..) these four values served to define the peasant's self-identity and to circumscribe his behavior". In 1/8: "The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti", from 38:11, Soprano explains the significance of vowels at the ends of names. In 3/10, from 48:39, Melfi concludes that Soprano is a "very conventional man", which Soprano takes as a taunt this bad teeth, Soprano smiles, as if he has heard a joke. Soprano organizes a HUD scam to procure copper pipes – monetary value as well as a purifying effect on water, cf. <[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9059983](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9059983)>.

<sup>256</sup> In 1/13, at 07:29-10:16, Melfi refers to the APA's manual, DSM-4, and suggests that what Livia has, "at the very least, is what we call borderline personality disorder." Melfi says these personalities are good at splitting behavior and creating bitterness among their closest friends and family. According to Janice, her therapist, Sandy, concurs, cf. 6-1/2, at 14:34-16:57.

from a low angle. This clearly imitates the *POV* of Young Tony. The TV audience is thus forced to experience Livia first-hand when she shouts: "I could stick this fork in your eye!" Seen from her high angle, Young Tony's expression suggests that he really believes what his mother says. Judging from the eyeline mismatch between the shots, he is no longer looking into her eyes. He may be staring blankly into space, as in the preceding shots. Or, he focuses on the fork in Livia's raised hand, a blurred part of which protrudes in close-up into the bottom left corner of the frame. The fork's teeth seem to draw his attention. The narrative is not altogether unambiguous here. It is unclear whether he looks at the fork due to an attached shadow partly covering his eyes.

The camera cuts to Soprano in Melfi's office. His expression credulous, the pitch of his voice rising, he explains: "She wasn't gonna *do it*". The tone of his voice suggests a response to Melfi's earlier reaction. There is no voiceover in the meantime. The fork reference seems to be shared exclusively with the audience, not with Melfi. His comment, "[s]he wasn't gonna *do it*", might also just refer back to the shot of Livia telling Young Tony that he is driving her crazy. The fact that Melfi reacts to the flashback by asking, "[s]he said *what?*", suggests that Soprano at least includes Livia's comments. So, he probably also includes the detail of the fork. Hence, it seems plausible that Soprano relates dialogue and crucial details from his flashbacks. He looks away, probably not only to avoid Melfi's gaze, but also in order to properly focus on the flashbacks from his impressionable young age. Melfi, astonished, looks to one side, like Soprano. Her straight posture turns to a slump as she if she tries to glimpse what Soprano has suggested. He says: "Holy shit, that's why I'm rememberin' all this. On account of where they were goin'." Melfi asks: "[w]here *were* they going?" Soprano says: "I found out a couple of Sundays later"<sup>257</sup>.

Soprano's past is seen. A TV set shows "looting and sniper fire along Springfield avenue", thus placing the shot in time<sup>258</sup>. Young Tony comes down the stairs, on his way to the CYO to play ball<sup>259</sup>. Livia looks at the TV news and tells him to bring a bat. He goes outside. Police sirens are heard in the background. He hides in the trunk of his father's car. Janice and Johnny Soprano leave the house, get into the car, and start driving. Parked near an amusement park,

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<sup>257</sup> This way of ordering his memories ("a couple of Sundays later") speaks to the significance of Sundays and of Sunday dinners in Soprano's mind. Soprano takes his wife and A.J. to Meadow's Sunday dinner in 4/ 12: "Eloise", at 21:03-27:11. He also tells Janice on the way to a reunion dinner at Junior's (where Junior repeats his Varsity line) in 5/ 3: "Where's Johnny?", at 17:25-18:28: "Sunday dinners are important, Janice".

<sup>258</sup> These are the 1967 Newark riots, whose basis was the segregation of different ethnic groups based on police racial profiling.

<sup>259</sup> CYO is short for Catholic Youth Organization.

Johnny and Janice go in and are joined by Junior. Young Tony stays by the car. Johnny gives Janice a quick kiss and sends her away with some money. Johnny follows Junior inside *Rideland*.

The camera cuts to Melfi's office as Soprano's voiceover serves as a transition between scenes: "My heart was broken". Melfi's voice bridges to a close-up of her, shot over Soprano's shoulder: "You felt your father was showing favoritism". Soprano: "I still remember that feeling in the pit of my stomach". Melfi asks: "Did you confront them?" He asks: "Have you been listenin' to what I've been sayin', hm? Kids don't confront in my family". Soprano explains that, "this amusement park was where I found out that my father wasn't like other fathers. I took the bus this time. It was three transfers from Newark. I had this candy bar in my pocket, and it had... sand or lint or somethin' on it". The chocolate bar (food) associates to law-breaking and guilt<sup>260</sup>.

In the flashback, the camera tracks bus 90 until it stops by a fire hydrant. A girl steps off the bus followed by Young Tony. He walks towards the camera, which pulls away. He throws a chocolate wrapper on the sidewalk. Three African Americans tell him to pick it up and then start chasing him<sup>261</sup>. A police car screeches to a halt, the three pursuers run away, and Young Tony instinctively raises his hands<sup>262</sup>. Police cars and officers converge on *Rideland*. A running man is shot by the police. A woman screams, and Young Tony looks scared. Soprano's voiceover says: "Guy's name was Ciccho Sasso, my father's cousin on his mother's side. Get out of Vietnam on account of the cops blew his kneecap off"<sup>263</sup>. Then, arrests are made and Johnny and Junior led away. Janice screams "Daddy!"<sup>264</sup> Johnny says it's okay and tells her to go home, after loudly asking whether it is not allowed to take kids to parks. Junior shouts: "Va fangul! Why don't you go lock up the *melanzanes*? They're the ones that are burnin' down Newark"<sup>265</sup>. In the tumults,

<sup>260</sup> Some writers describe chocolate as transcending – hence, challenging – traditional categories. Cf. Crumpacker, p.29: "Chocolate is so sexy it's beyond gender, in the mystical way in which opposites – here, male and female – meet and become one". In 4/4, Ginny Sac eats chocolates.

<sup>261</sup> Livia's attitude towards African Americans is suggested in 1/2, when Perrilyn, the home help, leaves: "These blacks". Cf footnote 115, p.29.

<sup>262</sup> The way Young Tony raises his hands might not signify what Blundetto calls the "convict mentality" in 5/8: "Marco Polo", at 40:26-43:40.

<sup>263</sup> Soprano pronounces Sasso's first name "Cheeky". Instead of complaining about the knee, Sasso screams "[m]y leg!" This could indicate a Freudian slip on Soprano's part – "kneecapping" seems more like the Mafia's than the police's tactics. Thematically, this echoes Charmaine Bucco in 1/1, who tells her husband not to accept Soprano's tickets: "Someone donated their kneecaps for those tickets."

<sup>264</sup> The little girl's call for her daddy is a powerful motif on *The Sopranos*, used sparingly. Meadow shouts to her fainted father in 1/1. In 6-1/3, at 45:56, Meadow's third call for "Daddy" breaks through just as Soprano is about to enter the bright light in his coma dream.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Anderson, E.N., p.201: "Ethnic slurs are often based on foods". "Melanzane" refers to eggplant, or aubergine. The word is used as a derogative, takes the form "moolie", and associates to "blacks". See for example 1/10, at 11:19-12:22: Moltisanti is frustrated about the luxuries at rapper Massive G's house: "I sit in a fuckin' pork store, for Christ's sake. But the *moolies*, they got it goin' on. And they're on the news. Soprano crew, it's always secret this, *omerta* that. Fuckin' gets on my nerves". LaCerva comforts him: "Talk about *paesano* pride". They likely proceed to have sex after the scene ends. In 1/12, at 34:19-38:28, in a lunch scene after an attempt on Soprano's life, Gualtieri asks who they should blame. Dante says, "[t]he live one took off in a Taurus". Gualtieri suggests other forces are at work: "*Moolies* in a new Taurus? Doesn't exactly fit the profile". Cf. footnotes 115, 261, and 80, p.21. Revealingly, with Soprano near, Moltisanti now says Soprano is "like a father to me".

the police also arrest one of the clowns at the amusement park, who might be involved in crime. Young Tony witnesses this from "behind bars": he is outside the fence, looking through it at people getting arrested<sup>266</sup>. At 38:30, the image with cops, clown, clothes rack, and a red police beacon blurs and ambiguously dissolves into an image of the lights on the merry-go-round<sup>267</sup>.

Soprano's voice bridges to a close-up of him: "He was usin' my sister Janice as a front. All the guys brought their daughters, so that when they did their business, it looked sweet and innocent"<sup>268</sup>. Melfi responds: "That must have been devastating." Soprano: "Nah, it turned out it was no big deal." Melfi is unsure: "To see your father handcuffed, being led away by the police?" Soprano ponders: "Well, at the time, I thought my head was gonna explode"<sup>269</sup>. He looked helpless. But when I got home, my... mother had a differed perspective<sup>270</sup>. Which made me feel better." Melfi: "So, in her pain, she reached out to you?" Soprano: "That's one way to put it".

The camera cuts back to Soprano's past. Livia sits on the couch, smoking. Young Tony enters through a door in the background. Not looking at once, Livia says: "Your father may not be home for dinner tonight. Go wash up". Young Tony says he knows and that he saw his father getting arrested. Looking into Livia's eyes, he asks: "What did he do?" Livia is seated, so Young Tony looks down at her when he thus asks her for the truth. Livia answers his plea with a lie, turning away from Young Tony's gaze: "He didn't do anything. They just pick on the Italians"<sup>271</sup>.

At 39:10-40:06, Johnny comes home a few hours after his arrest. Young Tony, Janice and Livia are watching The Rascals on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Coming in, Johnny shows physical closeness when he lifts up Janice and hugs Young Tony briefly before handing him a paper bag

<sup>266</sup> *Clarabell* is the name of the mute clown in the *Howdy Doody Show*, a children's program which aired 1947-1960. The Asbury amusement park in a dream in 2/ 13 is associated with the wide-eyed clown *Tillie*. This may be an example of memories occurring in altered form – a clown is present in both cases, but the names differ. In the "Funhouse" dream, Soprano's forward movement is impeded. In the above 1/ 7 scene, Young Tony's view from "behind bars" may suggest a convict mentality. It also signifies the sense of being separated from his father, of losing his family, and hence, of being impeded in his psychological forward movement – he is unable to grow up properly. His *ego* is trapped, like an animal in a cage. His *super-ego* is represented by the grown-ups who are arrested, then released, and by Livia who later displaces blame. His *id* is left unrestrained. If so, his personal developmental struggle to restore the *status quo* begins here, despite Soprano's denials.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Messaris, *Visual Literacy*, p.105: A blurred image in close-up is a conventional cue for a visually disorienting dream sequence. The added effects of a spinning police beacon and a spinning merry-go-round emphasize Young Tony's dizziness.

<sup>268</sup> Conversely (perhaps inspired by his own background), Soprano later meets two of Junior's *capos* where the men's mother's serve as fronts.

<sup>269</sup> "Well, at the time, I thought my head was gonna explode" conveys the same sensation as the one Soprano describes at his first panic attack in 1/ 1, from 18:37: "At first, it felt like ginger ale in my skull". Soprano's very first panic attack may be seen in this flashback. The shot's ending is suggestive: Blurred images of a merry-go-round blend with the image of a flashing police beacon. Beacons also appear in dreams.

<sup>270</sup> Soprano hesitates before saying "mother", as if unwilling to accept her role. Later, he tells several people that Livia is "dead to me".

<sup>271</sup> Livia represents Young Tony's super-ego, being a role model and, here, his *only* anchorage. Her displacement of blame is strengthened by the shouts of Junior, another role model for Young Tony, Soprano suppresses the memory, but Melfi's sessions bring it forth again. The Italian-American victim mentality is echoed in a breakfast scene after the raid on the Soprano home in 1/ 8, at 38:11-40:51, a family dinner.

with food: Sundaes with cherry vanilla, from *Nasto's*<sup>272</sup>. Livia says Johnny must "be in good with the uppity-ups". Johnny lies that the cops went to the wrong place and arrested the wrong guys. Then he puts his arm around Janice and asks how *she* is. It is not shown that he ever asks Young Tony how *he* is. Then, the voice of Rocco Alatorre, is heard off-screen. The man Johnny beat up for being late with the payment, which Young Tony witnessed, is now in bandages but congratulates Johnny with coming home. Young Tony does not understand the suggestion that, at the time, the Mafia controlled the police – a source for Soprano's nostalgia in Melfi's sessions.

Melfi presently expresses surprise, like Young Tony, but Soprano does not explain. Either he still does not understand, or this is (probably) another example of *omerta*. He tells Melfi that Johnny was arrested due to violating his parole by "associating with known undesirables"<sup>273</sup>. Melfi asks whether Johnny had been in prison. Soprano confirms it: "Yeah, he was away when I was a little kid, but they told me he was in Montana bein' a cowboy"<sup>274</sup>. Soprano smiles grimly at Melfi, who silently gives Soprano an uneasy look. He says: "What?" Melfi shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head briefly. A therapist is supposed to stay neutral, and Melfi certainly is not judgmental when she avoids commenting that Johnny might have known better than to go "associating with known undesirables" after he had already served jail time<sup>275</sup>. But by doing this, Melfi mimics Soprano's body language, which he seems to recognize, as he adds: "My son is doomed, right?"<sup>276</sup> Melfi: "Why do you say that?" Soprano: "Come on, this is the part where I'm supposed to tell you how terrible my father was and all the terrible things he did to me, and how he ruined my life." To Soprano, the sessions seem scripted, like a play, where he is a "sad clown", heading for an already determined fate ("*doom*"). If this reflects his views on therapy, it may be a sign of an almost stereotypical view of the psychiatric profession. But it is not the whole *story*.

<sup>272</sup> Such use of comfort food is seen as problematic by some writers, such as Mead in *Food and Culture. A Reader*, pp. 19-23. Mead concludes that the use of food as punishment and reward leads to punishment of the obese and feelings of guilt. In 1/ 7: "Down Neck, at 47:56-50:16, acting from a sense of guilt caused by the suggestion that A.J. could be a "borderline" ADD case, Soprano nevertheless shares a sundae with A.J.

<sup>273</sup> "Associating with known undesirables" is legal lingo, with which Soprano is thus shown to be familiar, as a direct result of Johnny's arrest. However, this does not stop Soprano from associating with "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero, whom Soprano himself calls, "a stone gangster".

<sup>274</sup> Soprano plausibly associates Johnny, hence the father mythos, with the cowboy film genre. Hence, his *Gary Cooper* speech (p. 49) and the intercut scenes from various Western classics on *The Sopranos* signify his sense of having lost a father figure and role model. Cf. Conti, p.87: "Ancestor Worship: In family religion, the worship of ancestors was extremely important. Indeed, the continuity of the family represented survival beyond the time of the individuals, each of whom felt, not isolated, but rather part of a centuries-old organism for which he or she could ensure continuity". Cf. footnote 235, p.56. Soprano as a *pater familias* is a priest, and he preaches the father *mythos*.

<sup>275</sup> The "Three Strikes Rule" in U.S. Criminal Law describes that any third-time convict is eligible for the death sentence, which in most states amounts to life imprisonment. At the start of 1/ 2, very long sentences are given as a reason for the Mafia's decline. In 6-1/ 5: "Mr. & Mrs. John Sacrimoni Request...", at 06:04-08:42, Soprano tells Melfi he has survived two shootings: "Three strikes, and I'm out, right?"

<sup>276</sup> In 1/ 11: "Nobody Knows Anything", at 12:26-14:01, after Livia has declined an invitation to the annual open house dinner and Bonpensiero's back aches start to look suspicious, Soprano says he feels, "like a safe's gonna land on my head", and Melfi asks: "A sense of impending doom?" After playing several popular video games such as *Mario Kart*, A.J. develops an interest for *Doom*.

The "red lead" is an ethnic marker, and Soprano expresses Italian traits, of which there are other references on *The Sopranos*. Melfi sees Dr. Kupferberg professionally but often talks about Soprano in the sessions. Presumably, patient Soprano creates her need for her own talking cure. Melfi talks about family ties and Kupferberg dismisses the "cousin" detail as just "the Italian thing", in 5/ 1, from 38:02. LaCerva tells Sanseverino it is just "an Italian thing", in 5/ 3, from 35:57<sup>277</sup>. Soprano's yearning for Italy and its values is evident, seen first in his reference to the "boot" in his 1/ 1 session with Melfi, whom he trusts "[a] little", because he has himself chosen a "paesana" over Cusamano's two other, Jewish candidates<sup>278</sup>. In 3/ 11, from 14:43, Soprano describes to Melfi a new woman he is seeing on the side. Without mentioning Gloria Trillo's name, he says: "You stick with your own kind, you know". This attitude is echoed in words like "paesano". LaCerva uses it in 1/ 10, from 10:32, commenting "*paesano* pride". In a bar in 3/ 7, Mrs. Soprano meets Columbia University dean Ross and calls him a "paesano", as he lives in New Brunswick,. A.J. associates the ethnic marker with violence, in 6-2/ 6, from 30:40.

Two endings exist for a high-profile man like Soprano, he says: "Dead, or in the can". Melfi is impressed by his frankness: "Anthony, why don't you give it up?" Soprano has a third way: "You trust only blood". The meaning of "blood" is ambiguous because of the rite of passage undergone by made men, exemplified by Moltisant's initiation in 3/ 3, from 04:02. After this follows a breakfast scene which Janice attends. Soprano explains about how he has started bonding Moltisanti to himself – an example of *nepotism* (Latin *nepos*, nephew, from the practice of Catholic popes in the Middle Ages who accorded places of office to their nephews, as they did not have legitimate sons due to of a vow of chastity. In 4/ 4, from 35:40, Sacrimoni sanctions the murder of Cifaretto without "the Pope's blessings", referring to Cifaretto's crime boss, Soprano. Soprano removes the third option. Only two options are left – and he must accept this reality.

In *Fate and Honor, Family and Village*, Bell describes the "Italian thing" and "cugini":

"The peasant identifies some fellow villagers not merely as paesani but as cugini. The literal translation "cousin" is not intended; rather, the term designates a kinship tie of significance. Kin who are less close, and especially relatives through marriage, are referred to with the phrase "*siamo parenti*" (we are related). The choice of "*siamo parenti*" or "*mio cugino*" is a sure indicator of the depth of attachment for the person mentioned. Frequently, the term violates genetic distance in order to take into account an important historical event. A family feud reduces even a brother to *parente*, whereas acceptance of the role of godparent, perhaps even several

<sup>277</sup> The FBI knows that Soprano calls Moltisanti his "nephew": The FBI uses cameras, microphones, undercover agents and collaborators.

<sup>278</sup> The word "paesana" occurs in 1/ 6: "Pax Soprana", at 03:00-07:32, "a little" occurs in 4/ 1: "For All Debts Public And Private...", from 47:31.

generations earlier, raises a third cousin by marriage to a *cugino*. A complex network, learned from early childhood as part of evening storytelling (called *firozzi* in Albareto) and reinforced by patterns of attendance at weddings, funerals, feasts, circumscribes every individual's actions. This network, rooted in genetic relationships but nourished by history, determines responses to requests for aid, offers of assistance, and proposals of marriage" (*Ibid.*, 32-33).

Soprano tells Melfi he felt proud that his father could beat up Rocco, and he told his friend at school about it. Melfi asks whether Soprano thinks this is the way A.J. feels about him, and he says: "Yeah, probably." But then he goes on to say that even if he is glad if A.J. feels proud of him, Soprano is still "in a bind", since he does not want his son to actually *be* like him. He says A.J. can become whatever he likes, and that he could be like someone Soprano knew at school, whose grandfather made a lot of money from making the "ties on the ends of salamis". Soprano thinks this is a good invention, because the inventor "made millions of dollars just sittin' on his ass"<sup>279</sup>. With this in mind, Melfi asks if he has told A.J. Soprano says he has probably not, but that it does not make a difference since "it's in the *blood*, it's *hereditary*". This amounts to *self-loathing*. Melfi stresses that genetic predispositions are "[n]ot destinies written in stone". Soprano: "She finally offers an opinion". He talks to Melfi in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, emulating Livia from the flashback. Soprano asks why he is not making "fuckin' pots in Peru? You're born to this shit. You are what you are". This also takes blame off Soprano. Melfi answers: "Within that, there's a range of choices. This is *America*". Soprano answers ironically: "Right. America."

A dissolve begins a flashback. From 41:53, Johnny and Livia argue about his proposal to move to Reno and "open a new book", a supper club with Alatorre. They argue, and Young Tony, teddybear in hand, hides behind a wall by a staircase in the background. Johnny says, "[i]t's a chance to get in on the ground floor"<sup>280</sup>. Livia refuses, and he shouts: "Me and the kids will go without you". Livia: "I'd rather smother them with a pillow than take them to Nevada". A chance to defend his children is lost when Johnny avoids confronting Livia about her choice of words: "Always with the drama!"<sup>281</sup> A close-up of the scared Young Tony fades to a white screen (censorship), then fades back in to a close-up of Livia's hand holding the piece of a jigsaw puzzle at Green Grove, as Junior visits. The puzzle piece is diegetic but serves as a nondiegetic comment by the director who has consciously chosen to edit this exact image into the discourse at this exact moment. It reinforces the theme of Oedipus' quest for meaning and truth and hints that

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<sup>279</sup> This is one idea of "earning" money – Christopher finds that he is not earning money in an episode aptly named "Chasing It".

<sup>280</sup> Soprano describes the business using this "floor" metaphor in his first session with Melfi in 1/1.

<sup>281</sup> At the *Regaleali Dinner*, Soprano echoes his father when he tells Mrs. Soprano: "You, always with the drama, you".

fragmentary memories escaping the super-ego's resistance are like pieces which can be joined into a picture if someone will do the work<sup>282</sup>. The flashback suggests why Soprano goes to Nevada in his Finnerty dream, "beside the water" of the Hoover Dam, after his peyote trip<sup>283</sup>.

Livia, Mrs. Soprano, Melfi, and others represent constricting factors in Soprano's life, people who want to change him. In this respect, Soprano's *comares* seem to differ in that they are initially attracted to a powerful man. It is a practical arrangement where Soprano gets his sexual needs looked after and his *comares* get a meal ticket. Soprano seems to have longer relationships with his *comares*, but, notably, he leaves them when they start to make demands, when they try to get power over the powerful man. The most interesting case in point is Irina Peltsin, who in the first season seems to have everything Soprano will later understand that he wants. For example, in 1/ 6, from 09:13, she uses sex-food metaphors which Soprano must practice with Valentina before daring to try with his wife<sup>284</sup>: Peltsin asks, "Tony's *cannoli* doesn't want to stand up?"<sup>285</sup> Peltsin also wears new calfskin boots in bed and rubs them against Soprano. He wants to talk<sup>286</sup>. When she suggests they have sex, he gets up and throws money at her, which she refuses to take: "I'm not a fucking whore". This thematizes a historico-cultural difference between *prostitute* and *comare*, a "kept" woman, courtesan, who might easily advise on politics. At this point, Soprano is also having trouble with the sex with Carmela, so, the Melfi sessions serve a need.

In 1/ 7, Soprano calls Peltsin – *he* calls, so he is interested in her. Peltsin, however, is upset that her cousin Svetlana is about to marry after just months in the U.S. Her mention of knights in white armors refers to her desire to marry. In order to marry Peltsin, Soprano would first have to separate from his wife. In a modern America with freedom of choice as a creed, he must still confront Carmela, their children, and the rest of his associates within their boundaries of customs and traditions. He is not ready. He chooses the path of, seemingly, lesser resistance. He leaves Peltsin and later gets a call which indicates that she has attempted suicide. He visits her in the hospital and meets Svetlana who later becomes Livia's caretaker. By leaving his wife

<sup>282</sup> Cf. 6-2/ 3, where actor Chianese says on the audio commentary that Soprano is Oedipus Rex, and that one must learn to love oneself before one can love others – and that this is in order to be able to forgive oneself.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Freud, 5. B: "because desire is unwilling to check itself before the thought of doing wrong, this philosophy of carpe diem has reason to fear the censorship, and must conceal itself behind a dream."

<sup>284</sup> Cf. footnote 145, p. 37.

<sup>285</sup> "*Cannoli*" means "little tube", and refers to ricotta-filled tubes or shells, a sweet pastry used for dessert. Here, it links to sex, or the inability to have sex. Hence, it is an attack on Soprano's identity. Later, "*cannoli*" might be a fitting expression in relation to Dr. Freid's penile implants.

<sup>286</sup> The boots are a metaphor for Italy, and a link to the favorite pastime of the Ancient Romans, horse racing.

alone, Soprano prefers his *comare*<sup>287</sup>. Drunk on Vodka, Peltsin calls and tells Mrs. Soprano she would be out on the street if it wasn't for the kids. Mrs. Soprano warns Irina: "we have got guns".

Meanwhile, Junior has "business headaches like you wouldn't believe". Soprano and Livia talk inside Green Grove at 44:08. He asks about the Alatores. Livia says they moved to Nevada and are billionaires now. Soprano confronts his mother with the fact that Johnny wanted to go with them, but that she wouldn't allow it. Livia seems to be in denial: "You tell me one time your dad didn't do exactly as he wanted." Soprano, from 44:57: "I don't know. Maybe this was his chance to get out". Livia blocks Soprano, until he says: "You're a real stone player, aren't you? You threatened to smother his children. (...) If you'd been born after those feminists, you would have been the real gangster." Livia grits her teeth: "I don't know what you're talking about"<sup>288</sup>.

From 45:44, Soprano and his wife learn about A.J.'s test scores (a possibility of ADD, and the APA demands 6 of 9 symptoms, A.J. manifests 5). Soprano asks: "What constitutes a fidget?" The teacher calls A.J. a "borderline case". Soprano protects A.J., saying he is in puberty. His wife agrees. From 47:56, the lead gets even heavier as Soprano looks at a WWII news reel about Admiral Nimitz. He stops watching TV and finds A.J. on the sofa in the living room, with a book on government. Soprano tells A.J.: "It's not the end of the world, Anth." A.J.: "I'm depressed"<sup>289</sup>. Soprano: "You're not depressed. You're sad and you're angry 'cause you did somethin' stupid, and you got grounded. And you can't watch TV or play on your fuckin' computer for two-and-a-half

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<sup>287</sup> In 4/ 7, Soprano whips Zellman, elevating Peltsin's status so she becomes a desirable woman worth fighting for. Loneliness is represented by lone diners. Livia creates the link from 1/ 7 to 2/ 7: From being handed life on a "silver platter", "you die in your own arms".

<sup>288</sup> It is not clear that Johnny never went to Nevada. If he did, in fact, go to the desert town of Las Vegas, Soprano's confrontation with Livia is a shameless lie in the hopes that she really is demented so the world will therefore change according to the words of the *pater familias*. Soprano's question to his peyote date in 6-2/ 6, from 38:51, about "why the fuck I'm here" (in Las Vegas) may have found an answer. This is also the case with Soprano's words in 1/ 1 that his father was "a squeakin' little gerbil when he died". A gerbil is a desert rat, and on *The Sopranos*, "rat" denotes a snitch. Cf. 124, p.30. If true, this provides a reason for Soprano's insistence on the father *mythos* and his singling out of his mother as a sacrificial bundt: Freudian developmental theory suggests that Soprano finds it impossible to accept that his father was an informer. Since this offers a new understanding of why Johnny was released so quickly (not because he was "in good with the uppity-ups"; see p.64), it also puts a whole new complexion on Soprano's arrest and quick release in 6-2/ 1. There are no pictures to show what has happened during his arrest, but a RICO case against Soprano has long been under construction. If he has become a collaborator, this introduces a new interpretation of Harris' otherwise malplaced comment in 6-2/ 9, "Damn, we're gonna win this!" Instead of suggesting that Harris has become a follower of Soprano, this comment indicates the opposite, and Harris' outburst might also be transmitted via a hidden radio microphone to other agents listening. It would also add an extra layer to Soprano's comment in 2/ 6, that he is now one of the "pussies": "Little Pussy" Malanga is arraigned in 1/ 2, and probably becomes a collaborator: His death is not evidenced although Soprano tells Junior in 6-1/ 1, from 04:44, that Malanga has been "dead" for six years. Cf. footnote 110, p.28. "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero becomes a collaborator, and as a foil for Malanga, he really dies in 2/ 13. Soprano chooses which of the "pussies" he will follow. He elects Malanga's way out – but goes Bonpensiero's way, uniting the "pussies".

<sup>289</sup> It is a good sign that A.J. can put it into words – he does not have Alexithymia.

weeks. It's gonna stay like that" <sup>290</sup>. AJ: "It isn't fair." Soprano: "Got *that* right." He then takes out a sundae with chocolate sprinkles – comfort food. They spray whipped cream into their mouths.

## Chapter Eight: Unions and Oneness

Benny Crumpacker describes (p. 2) meals which are "happy marriages", like bacon and eggs, and ham and cheese, where the idea is to combine foods which can be categorized as male with foods similarly seen as female. Crumpacker's "List of old married couples and perfect pairs" follows on p.31. This principle is followed on *The Sopranos*, for example in 1/ 13, from 10:16, when Arthur Bucco interrupts a tense dinner talk between Rosalie Aprile and Mrs. Soprano <sup>291</sup>. Bucco serves his *Bucatini amatriciana* – literally, "*Hole(s) of the Mother*", although *Amatrice* may also refer to a gem, due to the combination of *American* and *Matrice* (*matrix, from "mater"* – "mother", and genitive "matris", "mother's"). The dish is made from hard durum wheat <sup>292</sup>. Wheat was made into a sexual metaphor by Soprano (1/ 9: "Boca": Soprano learns that Junior has been pleasuring Ms. Sanfilippo with his mouth – "whistlin' to the wheat field" <sup>293</sup>. Bucco's dish is made with anchovies or sardines, both representing the smell of the sea (stereotypically associated with the female genitals) and symbolizing the primordial soup, which associates to Mother. Also, the *ziti* in this dish are long hollow rods, smooth in texture and with square-cut edges – a masculine sign. There is imported pancetta in the dish, and "imported" means "high status". Bucco's luxurious dish therefore unites the masculine and feminine principles <sup>294</sup>.

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<sup>290</sup> Thus, Soprano blurs and undermines the clear statement which A.J. has just made.

<sup>291</sup> At the dinner table, Rosalie Aprile talks about husband Jackie Sr.'s death, thus reiterating the food-death link. She thinks he died from all the work and the *agita*. Angie Bompensiero has become a "wreck" since her husband disappeared. Mrs. Soprano initially lauds the peaceful reign under Jackie Sr.'s rule and contrasts it with the current, under Junior, when Soprano has been shot. When Mrs. Aprile mentions Bonpensiero's disappearance (a consequence of Junior's and Soprano's joint decision), Mrs. Soprano says nothing and avoids raising attention.

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Harper and Faccioli, p.167: As there are "two Italies", there is the concept of "two pastas", one Northern and one Southern, the latter growing well in Sicily and up to Naples and Puglia. The durum wheat is therefore also a Southern ethnic marker.

<sup>293</sup> The union of feminine water with masculine plants like the durum wheat is repeated away from the Soprano home's pool and triangular pines. In 5/ 11, Soprano stays at the Plaza Hotel in New York beside The Pond, a V-shaped lake. Cf. greenmuseum.org: In 1982, Agnes Denes created an art installation, "a two-acre field of wheat in a vacant lot in downtown Manhattan. Titled, *Wheatfield -- A Confrontation*, the artwork yielded 1,000 lbs. of wheat in the middle of New York City to comment on "human values and misplaced priorities". In 5/ 10, Soprano visits Uncle Pat's farm. Crickets are heard, which indicates the presence of a field, possibly a wheat field, and Pat's farm is also located near water. In 6-2/ 1, Soprano visits the Bacalieri lakeside cabin, bounded by woods, not fields (although Bacalieri talks about a "playin' field"). No crickets are heard from 09:36, and the stay is not relaxing, as Janice's gift to her brother is a collection of recordings from his childhood. She thereby acts as a Janus figure, simultaneously looking backwards in time to the youth and forwards, as she fears what will happen after Bacalieri hits Soprano.

<sup>294</sup> The Arthur Bucco who has a lot in common with Soprano – baldness (cf. 1/ 1), separation from his spouse and staying in a motel (cf. 5/ 3), depression and tendencies towards violence and infidelity (cf. 4/ 6), a fondness for food and nostalgia about his heritage (cf. 6-1/ 7) – differs from Soprano, as Soprano struggles to combine the right elements – until there is a little breakthrough with Mrs. Soprano at *Nori Sushi* in 6-1/ 1.

Father Intintola joins the women, saying the Dellacrocces have given him a gift certificate. So, the *schnorrer* reappears. Mrs. Soprano explains this is part of Bucco's PR strategy. There is now bread and wine on the table, so truths may be expected. Intintola may be flirting when he says that the chefs in *Nuovo Vesuvio* must be really good if they are to compete with "you two ladies at the spice rack". But, Intintola's inclusion of the spice reference is ambiguous, given that they both have included red pepper flakes in their separate gifts of food to him as a sign of intimacy. While smiling and lauding, he seems to be reminding them of their past involvements, meaning to shame them. Intintola says: "I was over at Carmela's the other night, Ro. We had some *zabaglione* that... well, now, of course, we did make it together... But, everybody was just raving about it". Mrs. Soprano appears as courteous: "Please, *you* made it, basically" If this indicates the truth, Intintola may have pleased her with his mouth twice. Intintola panders to her by saying he was "over at Carmela's", and signaling that, a) he thinks of the Soprano mansion as being "Carmela's"; and, b) he is intimate with the owner of the big house.

Intintola refers to an Italian dessert. *Zabaglione* is a light, whipped custard, which can sometimes be a beverage, and which is made with egg yoke, sugar, and usually a Marsala wine. When Intintola says, "we did make it together", the double meaning of "make it together" cannot be lost on the two women. He is far from embarrassed about this, because he has made a stand. While it may be an indication of truth suggested by the presence of the bread and wine, it signals Intintola's confidence that the women are just going to have to grin and bear it, since engaging in a discussion on this subject might lead to the revelation of intimate details which the two women would rather leave unmentioned. Therefore, Intintola seems to control the dinner table discourse.

The priest adds, "everybody was just raving about it", which raises the question of exactly who was raving about what. Intintola may be describing an actual event, but if not, Mrs. Soprano does not correct him. This suggests her attitude. Her comment, "[p]lease, *you* made it, basically", accomplishes both a continued sense of a (tactical) alliance between her and the priest, a continued ambiguity as to what they are talking about (shared secrets strengthen bonds), a meekness towards the priest considered suitable within the patriarchal Catholic society, and an acknowledgement of Intintola's quality work, specifically, "at Carmela's the other night". By foregrounding Intintola, she diverts attention from what her role may have been "the other night", which helps her escape any blame. By controlling the discourse, Intintola helps unite the women

despite their tense talk at this dinner, since they are later shown to be each other's *confidantes*<sup>295</sup>. Intintola soon wants to leave, but Mrs. Soprano wants him to stay, keeping up the appearance of an alliance between her and the priest. Mrs. Aprile agrees, and she also asks how his watch is. Intintola expresses how good his watch is. Mrs. Soprano asks if it is Jackie's watch. Mrs. Aprile sniffs and nods. Intintola places his hand on her. Shown in a close-up, the watch signifies the status endowed to Jackie Sr.'s widow. At seeing Intintola choose intimacy with Mrs. Aprile, Mrs. Soprano smiles stiffly and casts her eyes down. The audience sees, either, Intintola playing the women against each other, or, the women competing for him – or both. The food-death link now includes intimacy and references to sex. This echoes Soprano's memories of Livia's sensuality.

Uniting laborers is in fact what he seems to be doing in both his families, by bringing people together on various occasions, at barbecues, the big dinners both in and away from the Soprano home, and at the table outside Satriale's where he may feel that his sit-downs are safe from the ongoing FBI surveillance. Unions are found in the language as well, for example in the compounded names of dishes such as chicken *parmesean* and veal *pizzaoila*, where there is also a sense that the Old World is united with the New. Soprano is sometimes less successful in forging unions as a labor leader after Junior is given the figurehead position of boss in Season One,

Before giving Carmela the car, Soprano dines alone, perhaps in order to guarantee a little satisfaction, predicting that she will not be pleased. At an earlier dinner, his wife tells him she cannot stop fantasizing about this particular restaurant. Soprano says he also fantasizes about the food in that restaurant, "[s]ometimes durin' sex". His linguistic prowess stems from an even earlier scene, in 5/ 1, where Soprano talks to his *comare* Valentina in a motel room in a way which suggests vague boundaries between food and sex. He seems to be practicing before his attempt at reuniting with his wife, in a bid to escape unwanted stress. He seems to accomplish this reunion in a dinner in 5/ 12, from 20:53, when he, his wife and A.J. gather at the Soprano table and talk about the important things in life. Soprano says A.J. eats too fast: "You're supposed to savor it". The family atmosphere is serene. At 21:00-21:02, nearly all sounds disappear. The

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<sup>295</sup> A *confidante* is a (female) person who can be trusted in intimate relationships. Cf. for example 5/ 6: "Sentimental Education", at 29:21-31:03.

only sound is that of the bread being broken by Soprano's hands. While signaling peace and a renewed companionship, he follows up the broken bread by disappearing Adriana LaCerva<sup>296</sup>.

Soprano combines his marriage to Carmela with his affairs to other women. This is a union of parallel relationships, parallel lives, parallel identities. Such a life style allows him to escape from trouble in one relationship into a respite in another of his relationships. Perhaps his Melfi sessions function in the same way at times. Soprano is all the time seeking this respite. It does not seem to matter whether he gets it in the form of a woman's love, a bite to eat, or revenge.

However, not all elements are as easily unified as the existing food-death union. There is a potential union between food and circumstances which could lead up to life-threatening situations, such as the helicopter scene with Giunta. These situations are also potentially deadly, but the characters seem to have more time and better *opportunities* to make good choices. They do not always *make* better choices. At A.J.'s confirmation in 2/ 7, Moltisanti chooses not to smoke but instead to rejoin the in-group and try to unite with Soprano for a while longer. This combination of sobriety and a network of people who pride themselves on being there for each other seems like a good choice for Moltisanti. At this point, A.J. appears to be his foil, since he smokes marijuana and is labeled an "animal" by his mother, who thereby denies him the possibility of being part of any union. His sponsor and godfather, Salvatore Bonpensiero, has agreed to wear a wire for the FBI at this occasion. Bonpensiero is a family man, but he now finds

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<sup>296</sup> After Moltisanti leaves, Soprano's phone call to LaCerva proves his involvement in ordering Dante to do what needs to be done. In directing the camera into the sky and away from LeCerva crawling cat-like on the forest floor when Dante shoots, series creator David Chase references a similar forest execution scene from a gangster classic, the Coen Brothers' *Miller's Crossing* (1990), which describes a power struggle and how protagonist and *consigliere* Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne) plays both sides off against each other: The intercutting of scenes in *Miller's Crossing* and the sounds of two gunshots suggest that the bookie Bernie Bernbaum (played by John Torturro) is murdered despite pleading for Reagan to "[l]ook in your heart". Reagan spares Bernbaum's life. The forest scene thus describes a *mock* execution. Bernbaum tries to blackmail Reagan and is shot dead. The *Miller's Crossing* reference indicates that going against a mob boss's orders in sparing someone's life may be a gamble. In *Miller's Crossing*, the protagonist remains in control in spite of taking this risk. Dante does not take any risks with LaCerva, considering how much she has already helped the FBI. Dante follows LaCerva, calls her a "cunt" despite her cries for mercy (which resemble Bernbaum's pleas for Reagan to "[l]ook in your heart"), and he points his gun in her direction and pulls the trigger twice. Thus committed, he is not here to gamble. However, LaCerva might survive, provided that Dante changes sides. If this is the case, the scene in *The Sopranos* shows a mock execution where one FBI collaborator helps another, despite LaCerva being unaware that Dante is a collaborator. Her attempt to flee threatens her rescue plan. Mock executions have been shown on *The Sopranos*: Moltisanti's in 1/ 3, at 40:52-42:13, and Lorraine Calluzzo's, in 5/ 3, at 09:44-11:41. Two FBI collaborators might not know about each other, as evidenced by Pontecorvo's reaction when he understands that his associate, Curto, was an informer, in 6-1/ 1, at 43:25-44:34. The FBI may have "flipped" Dante in 6-1/ 3, after 36:30-37:09. If so, *The Sopranos* now looks like a reference to the *Donnie Brasco* story. That the FBI may visit high-ranking mobsters in hospital is seen in 1/ 12, at 30:12-32:33, when Harris visits Soprano after a failed attempt on his life. Harris offers Witness Protection. Soprano signals resistance at this juncture. Perhaps he changes his mind later, see footnote 288, p.68. Dante may then follow Soprano's orders and proceed with a *mock* execution. Soprano would then have negotiated a deal with the FBI in order to cut his sentence. If he has, he would be honoring the old philosophical tradition which he has adhered to at negotiations throughout *The Sopranos* – he has found a compromise, a middle way. This would explain the slow-motion shot of Dante being hit by bullets in 6-2/ 8, from 37:12 – blood seems to be spurting out of Dante's chest – in the opposite direction of the bullets supposedly hitting him, in violation of the laws of physics. Dante may also have been an undercover agent from the beginning, who has only now succeeded in convincing Soprano to collaborate, but then his participation in the murder of Jimmy Altieri in 1/ 12 seems like either a tremendous gamble to strengthen Dante's cover, or a good reason to have him fired from his job.

himself in a sensible situation when he is called upon to talk sense into A.J. From 47:23, Bonpensiero talks about how his sister got help from Soprano when she had spinal meningitis. If true, this shows that Soprano takes his role as *pater familias* seriously and honors "old school" codes of taking care of his family. If untrue, it suggests that Bonpensiero is well-acquainted with the codes of honor. A.J. goes to be photographed, but Bonpensiero, having tried to bolster A.J.'s morale, lingers in the restroom. By reminding A.J., Bonpensiero has reminded himself about what values he will betray. He is full of regret for having become an informer. He has agreed to work with the FBI and must betray an old friend in order to save himself some jail time. Because he wears a wire, the FBI hears everything, so he must wear a brave face, as if he were a friend of Soprano's with no intention of harming him. His weeping is heard by the listening FBI agents

When Bonpensiero is confronted aboard the *Stugots* by Soprano, Dante, and Gualtieri, he appears as a strong, not entirely silent type who nevertheless manages to express a measure of "old school" stoicism, joking and asking not to be shot in the face – which they honor<sup>297</sup>. When his dead body is committed to the sea, he embodies a genre metaphor in Soprano's dreams as a talking fish placed between two other "sleeping" fish on a table at a market in 2/ 13. Soprano is later given a singing Big Mouth Billy Bass, a reminder that Bonpensiero is no longer a singing mobster. He is a rapidly disintegrating organism which is eaten by other organisms, thus becoming part of something bigger – Nature's food chain. Particles of "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero's body form unions with sea organisms such as fish. In 1/ 13, from 19:43, Soprano regrets having told a joke at Junior's expense: "I never should have razzed him about eatin' pussy. This whole war could've been averted". In addition to the turf war, Soprano knows that when he eats fish, he, too, may be "eatin' Pussy"<sup>298</sup>. In the later seasons of the series, he does not seem worried that, thus letting foreign elements into his body, he might be made to look weak.

In the earlier seasons, this fear of the permeable boundary between Self and Other causes Soprano to loudly joke about what he fears, whereby he hurts people around him<sup>299</sup>. It leads to the tragic joke about Jimmy Smash with the cleft palate, which he tells Melfi he regrets in 1/ 10.

<sup>297</sup> In a scene in the back office of his strip club, Soprano drinks whiskey and says in a sad tone, "Oh, Pussy", clearly indicating regret about what has to be done about his old friend turned FBI informant. Soprano is alone when he expresses this regret, so he seems to convey the truth. Because he is not alone onboard the *Stugots*, the murder has to take place, despite the misgivings of everybody on board – except Gualtieri.

<sup>298</sup> He regrets joking about seafood and cunnilingus. Since he also has no problem eating fish, Soprano finally becomes a waste management consultant: he can both eat and talk about the sea (a symbol of Mother) and the sea's food – fish, with some particles of Bonpensiero ("Pussy").

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Schlosser, p. 5: "Customers are drawn to familiar brands by an instinct to avoid the unknown". Cf. Ibid., p. 7: "Much of the taste and aroma of American fast food (...) is now manufactured at a series of large chemical plants off the New Jersey Turnpike". Cf. the opening credits.

He has not learned from his mistake by 2/ 2, since he tells Baccalieri he should "seriously start considerin' salads". He drives off, and Baccalieri spits contemptuously on the ground. In 2/ 13, he gets food poisoning, for which Bucco will accept no responsibility. Soprano directs his anger at an Indian restaurant, which he shouts must have served him "a fuckin' cocker spaniel"<sup>300</sup>. After many similar jokes stemming from Soprano's own insecurities, Blundetto enables him in 5/ 10 to joke about Moltisanti's looks, calling his nose a "beak"<sup>301</sup>.

A good example of Soprano's inability to successfully unite the different pieces in his life's jigsaw puzzle occurs in 3/ 2: "Proshai, Livushka" ("Good Night, little Livia"). Near the beginning of this episode, Soprano is lying on the kitchen floor. Mrs. Soprano comes home and finds him. All he can say is, "[u]ncle Ben". Then, Soprano's fall is shown in reverse and the story continues to unfold backwards until the point where he comes down the stairs in his white robes, newspaper in hand. He begins to speak to Meadow, who is watching Public Enemy. Her boyfriend, Noah Tannenbaum, comes in from the garage. Soprano does not approve of this match for his daughter, so he threatens Noah into leaving, using racial the racial slur melanzane about him before he and Meadow leave. Already agitated, Soprano finds himself some *capicola* and *provolone* (cured ham). From his direct, vigorous, almost spastic movements, his irritation is easily discernible. His breathing is quickening a little bit when he opens the cupboard and sees the box of Uncle Ben's Rice, the "Original", which is "Perfect Every Time" and which has "All Natural Ingredients". A colored man smiles at Soprano from the packet: Soprano might call Uncle Ben a "melanzane", thinking about Noah, and since Soprano has probably consumed this "Converted brand" of rice before, it means "Uncle Ben" is inside Soprano – the "melanzane" is already a part of Soprano. Soprano fears he may also have been "converted", like it says on the packet. Soprano's expressed wish from two minutes back of not allowing races to mix – the reason he gives for not allowing Noah to go steady with Meadow, a wish for racial cleanliness, of remaining as "original" as the rice – is forfeit: By ingesting Uncle Ben's Rice, the boundaries have been crossed. In one interpretation, this leads to Soprano's panic attack.

This preoccupation with keeping Self separated from Other is inherited from Livia and mirrored in Gualtieri's obsession with physical cleanliness, with cleaning hands and feet, and

<sup>300</sup> Cf. 2/ 13, from 13:57.

<sup>301</sup> That Soprano is anxious about his own nose, is made clear in 5/ 1, during the period when he asks Melfi out to dinner. He wonders whether she does not like "the cut of my jib", a nautical expression referring to the front end of a sail, which serves as a metaphor for Soprano's nose. Melfi reassures him that she likes his face.

with wet shoelaces<sup>302</sup>. The labels read "Capicola 1/ b" and "Provolone". They are reminders of *Satriale's*, of Mr. Satriale's lost little finger, and of the resulting sexually charged food-scene between Johnny and Livia – the lead-up to one of Soprano's first panic attacks. It is a reminder of Livia's meat delivery, which arrives weekly even some time after her death, later in this episode.

From 07:07, Soprano brings Livia audio books. Soprano has in fact hired Svetlana to take care of Livia. Livia moans: "I wish the Lord would take me now". Soprano replies: "Well, in the meantime, I brought you *The Horse Whisperer* and *Omerta*". Both these themes can be said to carry significance within an Italian-American setting, so Soprano seems to be making an effort to please Livia<sup>303</sup>. Svetlana brings Livia's baby journals. Livia seems to smile a little, after Svetlana has convinced her to do something nice. Livia seems to like the thought of doing something nice.

However, the mood suddenly changes when Soprano finds out that Livia has not filled out anything in the journals. He swears and blames Livia for being too busy feeling sorry for herself. When Svetlana calms Soprano, saying Livia will do it, he responds: "Why do anythin' if there's nothin' in it for her?" Svetlana goes into the kitchen. Soprano talks about the upcoming RICO case and instructs Livia to say nothing about the tickets from the bust-out<sup>304</sup>. Soprano asks what Livia told the FBI when she was in for questioning, but she evades the question: "Who? What? Wh-what did I do?" Livia seems to have become a liability after her contact with the FBI. This may be due to the earlier, botched attempt on Soprano's life, for which he still blames her as much as he blames Junior. It may also be because of what seems to be oncoming dementia, although Junior in 1/ 12 commented that her forgetfulness came with "terrific timing". In 2/ 1, Soprano says Livia is "on the lam in there, from me", referring to Green Grove. Livia is no longer in Green Grove but has returned to her own home, and she has a private nurse, who has just arrived after her first meeting with Soprano in the hospital<sup>305</sup>.

After a while, Soprano gets irritated with Livia's mannerisms. He gets up: "Fuck it. Do what you want". This is how Soprano looks when he has decided something. This scene echoes his behavior at the opening of 2/ 13, when he decides to give her the tickets. The last time the

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. footnote 115, p. 29, and 206, p. 51. In 1/ 7, Soprano makes a Freudian slip which reveals that shoelaces remind him of salamis.

<sup>303</sup> However, both films are references to the act of speaking softly. *The Horse Whisperer* revolves around natural horsemanship and can be seen as a rejection of abusive horse training. *Omerta* discusses the Mafia code of silence, the breach of which often leads to death.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. episode 2/ 10.

<sup>305</sup> At the end of 3/ 1 (the previous episode, shortly before this scene), Soprano says he has gotten a new home help via an "[a]gency".

audience sees Livia alive, she is sitting alone in her chair, with a miserable look on her face, handkerchief in hand. Svetlana is not seen, but she is probably in the kitchen, preparing Livia's Last Supper (late dinner). The nondiegetic music is a suspenseful soundtrack from *Public Enemy*.

At 09:36-13:34, after giving Livia the soundtrack, Soprano watches *Public Enemy*. Thus, the director creates a link between the two scenes. Soprano smiles at the on-screen text referring to Tom Powers and Rico. Soprano watches James Cagney's tough act. He drinks whiskey. Meadow comes home and asks about Noah. Soprano hints, and she gets angry. Mrs. Soprano then calls Meadow upstairs. Soprano checks his watch, as if in anticipation of something. He then takes another sip of his drink and he goes outside, moves the water sprinkler just a little bit, then smokes a cigar, then goes back inside.

These small events in succession seem odd: Moving a water sprinkler is mundane enough, but cigars are associated with celebration on *The Sopranos*. Soprano smokes a cigar in 1/ 1 when he decides on the lucrative MRI scam together with Rabkin in the *Bing!* He smokes a cigar right up until his panic attack at the barbecue in 1/ 1. Soprano then gives Cusamano a box of illegally imported Cuban cigars in 1/ 10, to show trust and gratitude because Cusamano recommended Melfi; in 2/ 2, he sits by the pool at night, splashing his feet in the water, smoking a cigar in celebration of Janice's visit; in 2/ 4, he smokes a cigar at his first exclusive meeting with Annalisa Zucca for a round of golf; in 2/ 5, he smokes a cigar in his car while Giunta solves his first job; in 2/ 6, he tells Bevilaqua to give cigars to himself and Dr. Freid at the Executive Game. He fires up a cigar at a funeral where he gets shortness of breath. The list goes on, implying cigars are commonly smoked at special occasions. Moving the water sprinklers is not a special occasion.

Soprano goes back inside and is met by Mrs. Soprano and his kids. His wife says Svetlana has just called to say that Livia is dead. Soprano's reaction is a half-smile: "You're kiddin'"<sup>306</sup> He then looks at the children and corrects himself: "I mean, uh... Jesus Christ". Mrs. Soprano says, "after dinner, your mother went upstairs to get ready for bed. When Svetlana came up, your mother was under the covers in her night gown". At the exact moment (and a brief one it is) when Soprano checks his watch, toasts in whiskey, and goes outside in the night to move the sprinklers, leaving the screening of *Public Enemy* (one of his favorites, which is just beginning, and he

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<sup>306</sup> In this case, there is a possible occurrence of the opposite of a sad clown, since Soprano might be happy inside but required to look sad.

seems reluctant to go, but still, he leaves), Svetlana calls to report the death of Livia. Rounding it off is the fact that Svetlana, the messenger, is a private nurse who has only just arrived.

Soprano looks over in the direction of Meadow and A.J., as if to check their expressions. Mrs. Soprano is standing with her back turned to her children when she tells Soprano that Livia has died, so her children cannot see her face. If Livia "wears a smile" a few episodes back, on a hospital gurney after Soprano arrives at the hospital fidgeting with a pillow, then, it might as well be said that Mrs. Soprano wears a smile when Soprano spontaneously asks, "[y]ou're kiddin'? <sup>307</sup>" She certainly does not show any emotions that are near to those she does later on in the series <sup>308</sup>.

Soprano's tongue comes out briefly at 11:47-11:57 and again at 12:15-12:20, when he tells Meadow and A.J. that "your grandmother loved you"). Why Soprano should lick his lips at the thought of his mother is connected to his thoughts about her – and her food. In 2/ 6, Junior refers to Livia as a woman with a Virginia Ham under each arm, but "cryin' the blues 'cause she's got no bread". In 2/ 10, Soprano relays these words. As he sits in the vicinity of a merry-go-round (a reminder of the traumatic *Rideland* arrest), seeing and hearing a little girl shouting for her mother (which brings a flashback to the recent murder of Matt Bevilaqua's final moments), he insults Richie Aprile by comparing him to a woman who has Virginia hams under her arms but no bread. If Soprano uses Junior's words as a way of venting his inner turmoil it shows, first of all, that it is the same as he did when he comforted Bucco by relaying Melfi's words ("Hope comes in many forms"), and then, it shows the same kind of pattern which is seen when he verbally attacks Noah Tannenbaum. This trail of ham actually starts in 1 /1, in an intercut scene where Dante approaches Soprano outside *Centanni's/ Satriale's* and warns him about the planned hit against Malanga. Dante's first words are: "Hey, Gabriella sends me down here for the *gabbagool*" (*capicola*, cured ham). Soprano associates *capicola* with Livia's meat deliveries, as seen in a Melfi session in 3/ 3, from 39:50. The salt in cured ham connects instantly via receptors on the tongue to the brain's pleasure center. An active tongue may hence be taken as a sign that the body longs for more of the same pleasure. Soprano's tongue flicks over his lips on several

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<sup>307</sup> Cf. Bondanella, p. 315.

<sup>308</sup> Mrs. Soprano's calmness can be traced to a bedroom scene in 1/ 13, at 19:43 – 21:40: Soprano sits on the bed talking about his low self-esteem after being attacked by "[t]wo pricks with nine-millimeters". She says she could kill Livia with her own hands. Soprano then tells her to "play the concerned daughter-in-law, for the sake of the business". She gives Soprano one of her sleeping pills, which he is never seen to ingest

occasions, for example as he is garroting Petrulio . In 3/ 2, the link from salt craving due to childhood associations to mother is made evident <sup>309</sup>.

Not only tastes, but smells have an impact. This is impossible to detect for TV audiences. But it is evident in that Soprano also reacts slightly at a breakfast in 2/ 1 when he senses a strong smell in the kitchen, which Janice explains is her *misa* and seaweed soup <sup>310</sup>. Soprano seems to have immediately recognized a smell, but it might not be Janice's soup. Directly after breakfast, Soprano demands, "[g]ive me hit off that", and she gives him her cigarette, which in other scenes is stuffed with weed. Presumably, this olfactory link was established inside *Centanni's/ Satriale's* in Soprano's childhood, as he tells Melfi in 6-1/ 8, from 16:45: "My dad used to, uh... drop us off there when he had to run errands. We'd go into the back and we'd steal cigarettes, play house". It is possible that Soprano senses this familiar smell off the leather jacket that Richie Aprile hands him in 2/ 8, from 10:39 <sup>311</sup>.

In the close-ups of Soprano talking to his children, a possible reason for his going out to adjust the water sprinklers becomes evident: Soprano's brow seems wet with sweat. His eyes seem teary. This is due to the waterworks <sup>312</sup>. At 12:25, the family members then drive to Livia's house in time to see the truck from Verona Rescue Squad taking Livia's body away, passing a couple out walking a small, yipping dog. Svetlana brings drinks, and with no particular lead-in, she says, "[s]he was in no pain, Tony". This appears to be a comforting comment. However, it also describes accurately what happened. Svetlana answers Mrs. Soprano that the death was due to a "[m]assive stroke" Then she sips Vodka (a "water of life" type of drink, like the one Soprano tastes when he adjusts his sprinklers). In the next episode, 3/ 3: "Fortunate Son", Svetlana tells Soprano how Janie managed to steal her artificial leg: "She put into my Sprite three Halcyon".

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<sup>309</sup> Cf. Schlosser, p. 123: "olfactory epithelium". If the meat industry has made Soprano a slave to salt craving, and if this hunger, associated to childhood by the industry, leads to his behavior, Soprano has fewer real choices. Hence, he can be seen as a tragic hero, like Oedipus Rex.

<sup>310</sup> According to fda.gov: "Kikunae Ikeda of Tokyo Imperial University isolated glutamic acid as a taste substance in 1908 from the seaweed *Laminaria japonica* (*kombu*) by aqueous extraction and crystallization, calling its taste umami". The umami taste now occurs in many foods.

<sup>311</sup> Smell is one indication that Isabella in 1/ 12 may not be a dream but an agent. Soprano picks up a white undergarment which seems to have been picked up and carried by the wind, landing on the grass. Before returning her "biancheria", he smells it. If Isabella is an agent, her cover is based on the same psychological profiling which underlies the creation of "Danielle from Whippany" in 3/ 13, which gets her into the Soprano home in 4/ 1, cf. footnote 129, p. 30. "Isabella" is a form of "Elisabet", which is a Greek form of the Hebrew נָתְרָה. "Elisheva" means "My God Is An Oath", or "My God Is Abundance" – both of these are seem eminently suited to describe Soprano. Isabella appears in the garden of Cusamano (Latin, "the hand of the weaver"). Another clue is the nurse in Dr. Schreck's office, who is the same type as both Isabella and Danielle, which means she could have been based on the same profiling. The nurse is said to be an agent and later appears as a witness for the prosecution against Junior. The FBI must have a psychological profiler working for them who is at least as good as Dr. Melfi. Soprano's weakness to Italian beauties is known to Melfi, since he tells her about it. He also relates to her the story of how he cheered up Jackie Sr. by bringing in a nurse, who turned out to be a disguised dancer from the *Bing*!

<sup>312</sup> Soprano comments other people's weeping around him thus: "Here come the waterworks".

This is the same trick as Janice used in 2/ 12 when she had sex with Richie and wanted to avoid Livia's interference. Janice killed Richie after he hit her and then sat down to eat<sup>313</sup>. Svetlana's toast becomes a libation: "Proshai, Livushka", which she says means "Good bye, little Livia".

No mention is ever made about suspicious circumstances surrounding Livia's death. She is an old woman at this point, and her death may plausibly be termed "natural". However, juxtaposed to this in 4/ 12 is the death of another mother. Gaultieri suffocates and snaps the neck of Minn Matrone ("mother"), and afterwards, no mention is made of suspicious circumstances in this case, either – although the viewers have been shown that it is not a "natural" death at all. This means that other deaths on *The Sopranos* sorted under "natural" causes can be questioned<sup>314</sup>.

Livia's death seems like a "natural" death. However, Svetlana's first comment, that Livia did not suffer, is similar in timing and execution to the *maitre'd*'s comment in the *Regaleali Dinner*, "Months we don't see you", which is meant to reassure Mrs. Soprano that Soprano has not dated other women in that restaurant. Svetlana's comment suggests prior instruction, but after Mrs. Soprano's comment in the bedroom scene in 1/ 13, her involvement could also be suspected. In any case, Livia's murder may have been premeditated a long time ago. The reason for hiring someone else would be that Soprano had reasons for not doing it himself. It is not because he cannot take lives, since Gaultieri oversaw his initiation murder of Willie Overall. Soprano can be juxtaposed to Moltisanti in this case, who cannot bring himself to suffocate LaCerva in 5/ 12. Soprano shows no such qualms in 6-2/ 6, after the car accident. Just three episodes from the end of the series, Soprano is still capable of taking a life and then lying afterwards in an attempt to get away with murder. Hence, in 3/ 2, Soprano wants to stay away from suspicion and escape guilt.

Since Soprano is capable of murder at the time of Livia's death. It occurs not long after he shoots Bevilaqua to death, so he would be able to shoot Livia – technically. At the end of 1/ 12, he comes into a hospital corridor, pillow in hand, ready to smother mother Livia. She is rushed away after what hospital staff call a stroke. Svetlana, a caretaker, says Livia dies from a stroke. A stroke occurs when the blood flow with oxygen is cut off from the brain – exactly what happens in the event of strangulation and suffocation. This is Soprano's m.o., as seen at the Petrulio murder and as suggested by his fidgeting with a pillow in the hospital in 1/ 12. If true, other deaths on

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<sup>313</sup> Just before he is shot, Aprile leans back with outstretched arms. After this bird-like gesture near food, he dies and his soul takes flight.

<sup>314</sup> This leads to the suspicion that Carlo, on Soprano's orders, murdered Renata, Rabkin's *comare*, in 6-2/ 3.

*The Sopranos* which have so far been put down to "the headless horseman" may turn out to be premeditated murders as well<sup>315</sup>. It would mean that these murdere are clearly premeditated.

That Soprano is capable of getting away with murder is evidenced in 3/ 10. Soprano adds "Janice's Russian" to his Christmas to-do-list. A member of the local Russian Mafia, Agron who launders money for Soprano, reveals the name "Igor"<sup>316</sup>. Janice is in her kitchen (food-scene) when "Igor", a cabbie, is reported lying dead inside a broken shop window. However, in earlier scenes, Soprano and Giunta are seen entering Igor's cab. Giunta has let loose his fury earlier on the show and seems a natural suspect for Igor's real murderer. Seeing the news report makes Janice tremble. She wakes up her narcoleptic boyfriend Aaron and says that their attempts at spiritual music have been missing the "brother concept". Janice knows Soprano is behind this.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Renata, Rabkin's *comare*, seem similar. Soprano appears near the situation, but someone else – in this case, Carlo – stands closest to the action<sup>317</sup>. And, again, the cause of death is given as "stroke"<sup>318</sup>. Soprano's habit of getting off scot-free (as seen in botched attempts on his life) begins in 1/ 1, with the arson in *Bucco's Vesuvio*. This leads to tension and aggressiveness, which may partly cause his panic attacks. Doing everything himself means not trusting anybody else. His wish to isolate himself, to stay "clean", and to have "no hundred questions", seems to underpin many of Soprano's actions<sup>319</sup>.

Another interpretation exists where Soprano faints at the sight of the Uncle Ben's rice because he has just ordered Livia's murder. The Uncle Ben incident occurs at the start of the same episode as when Livia dies, as a result of the director's choice. Further evidence of how difficult it is for Soprano to confront Livia is found from 1/ 1 onwards. After complaining about her to Melfi, he is immediately seen bringing her flowers. When he takes her to see Green Grove, and she reacts, "[t]his is a nursing home", he has his second panic attack and falls flat on the floor. After he has successfully placed her in Green Grove, Soprano visits her empty house and,

<sup>315</sup> Leotardo uses this phrase about "Rusty" Milio's death in 6-1/ 7, suggesting Soprano's involvement. Regarding the deaths of Gigi Cestone, Carmine Sr., and others, the Advil may be the details. Jackie Sr. ("air in the line'll kill you")

<sup>316</sup> Agron is played by Alik Sakharov, director of cinematography.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. footnote 80, p. 21.

<sup>318</sup> For inscrutable reasons, "stroke" is given as the cause of Renata's death even on the official HBO webpage.

<sup>319</sup> The obsession with staying clean is shown in many ways. Soprano uses Slava's overseas accounts for money laundering. After Janice kills Richie Aprile, Soprano goes into business mode, calls Moltisanti and Giunta over, and cleans Livia's floors. Inspired by a romantic film, he sends Melfi flowers and a bottle of Tide detergent. Dante needs "biangalin" after the 6-1/ 11 murder of "Fat Dom", cf. Martin, p.147. This word creates a direct link to the poem "Legless" on p. 21 in *American Boy*, Anthony Buccino's growing-up account from New Jersey. Also, Soprano's daydream about Isabella in 1/ 12, he focuses on her white teeth.

retrieving a picture of her as a memento, he is almost overcome with emotions. He gets dizzy and has to sit down immediately. His aggression against Noah Tannenbaum links indirectly to Livia.

## Chapter Nine: Bite on *The Sopranos*

Juxtaposed to Soprano's pattern of extroverted violence, A.J. is almost a non-descript character for a long time<sup>320</sup>. He gets the occasional smack on the head, often in front of others, and sometimes in food-related scenes. One of these instances is episode 4/ 1 starts with a close-up of Mrs. Soprano reading from the newspaper to her son A.J. at the breakfast table that "raccomandazzione" (influence peddling) is "not a crime". She sips coffee from a mug, but her mouth is hidden behind the newspaper. Her eyes look straight into the camera, which presumably mimics A.J.'s *POV*, but which directly challenges the audience, especially since Mrs. Soprano's voice and facial expression seem to suggest that she is actually pleased with what she is reading. It is useful to note that she uses her position as parent and role model in the socializing institution of the breakfast to highlight such news. Soprano and A.J.'s sister Meadow are absent, so Mrs. Soprano is the only authoritative speaker. A.J.'s remains the listener. It is important to reflect on what impact his mother's choice of news might have on A.J., especially since he is expected to pick up whatever his parents tell him at the breakfast or dinner table.

It is uncertain whether anything would have been different if Soprano had been present in this scene. In 1/ 1, A.J.'s "ziti"-comment gets a sharp reaction; in 1/ 7, Soprano says A.J. needs "a smack upside the head"; in 1/ 8, A.J.'s use of the F-word takes the focus away from Meadow's "[w]ho invented the Mafia?"; in 3/ 9, 4/ 1, 4/ 11, Soprano smacks A.J. in some way. In 5/ 6, Soprano pours A.J.'s cereals in the sink. When the boy protests, Soprano slams A.J. up against a wall in the kitchen, and A.J. looks Soprano in the eyes and says through gritted teeth, "[o]ne of these days, you wait, I'm gonna kick *your* fuckin' ass"<sup>321</sup>. This seems an ominous echo of Soprano's words in a Melfi session in 5/ 10, about how "[r]evenge is like eatin' cold cuts", and how "old school" mobsters would be able to wait and then make sure "you got it later".

<sup>320</sup> In 1/ 1, A.J.'s "ziti"-comment gets a sharp reaction; in 1/ 7, Soprano says A.J. needs "a smack upside the head"; in 1/ 8, A.J.'s use of the F-word takes the focus away from Meadow's, "[w]ho invented the Mafia?"; in 3/ 9, Soprano smacks A.J., and then reasons, "[o]n your mother's birthday"; in 4/ 1, Soprano smacks A.J. for talking back; in 4/ 11, at Sunday dinner, Soprano again smacks A.J.; in 5/ 6, Soprano pours A.J.'s cereals in the sink and slams him up against a wall. This goes on until the point when A.J. says the F-word at the table without being punished for it in 5/ 12, when Soprano breaks bread as a sign of peace and reconciliation. After this, A.J. something changes in A.J.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. Crumpacker, p.36: "chewing is inward, biting is outward".

Another role model of A.J. seems to be Livia, probably as a result of his having been forced to visit her – a manipulative with possibly far-reaching consequences. On his first visit, he eats fruit and avoids Livia's question about what Soprano might be doing in a therapist's office. When Soprano is hospitalized in 6-1/ 2, A.J. gets teary-eyed and decides to direct his anger at Junior. He manages to bring a knife almost up to Junior, and it seems that a coincidence saves Junior when A.J. drops his knife – his resolve seems unwavering. In 6-1/ 2, during another visit at the hospital, his haircut and posture leads Gualtieri to refer to him as "[v]an Helsing"<sup>322</sup>. From 10:43, Soprano has his Frankenstein moment, after which A.J. seems to comfort the others that, "Anthony Soprano is not goin' to die". It seems odd to talk thus about his father in the third person. It seems even stranger, and an indication of a disturbed mind, if it turned out that A.J. were referring to himself in the third person. In 6-2/ 7, A.J. appears in a potential rebirthing scene in the pool – but Soprano shouts at him, "[w]hat's wrong with you?" Later in the same episode, A.J. refers to Livia's overall sentiment: "It's all a big nothing".

When Soprano presses A.J. up against the wall, he is at the limit of what he can do to. Rhetorics is about winning the argument by any means, but Soprano cannot hurt or kill A.J., because of the message this would send: The boss of New Jersey is incapable of protecting his own biological family. This shows weakness, which is dangerous on *The Sopranos*. In 2/ 3, Soprano tells his wife in a bedroom scene that if Meadow finds out that the parents are essentially powerless, "we're fucked". In Season 6, A.J. is at approximately the same developmental stage as Meadow is in Season 2, and he is struggling to get through his individuation process, all the time longing to re-establish a *status quo* – which is impossible. But A.J. has enough interpersonal skills to understand that Soprano cannot hurt or kill him.

A.J. is institutionalized and he meets Rhiannon Flammer, an ex-girlfriend. A.J. plays video games and seems mellow on the surface. As his car catches fire when he and Rhiannon are kissing, this seems like an echo of trouble from Season 1, when the fires were out of control<sup>323</sup>. A.J.'s development in Season 6, where he passively watches violence done to other young people, seems to reference Leotardo. A.J. also has a newfound interest for the Israel-Palestine conflict, he watches TV news reports about suicide bombings, and he plays the first-person shooter, *Doom*.

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<sup>322</sup> Cf. footnote 227, p. 55.

<sup>323</sup> Philip Zimbardo's 2011 TED-talk, "The Demise of Guys", offers insights on the modern identity crisis of young males.

## Chapter Ten: Conclusion

*The Sopranos* uses orality in various ways to reveal and enhance the character that are intricately woven together in a story about the search for a *whole*, unbroken identity. Oneness and the different attempts at creating unions is thematized in psychological developmental theories. The ways that different characters deal with their struggle becomes the basis for HBO's series. Soprano is an Oedipus Rex type of character, whose actions lead him inextricably into trouble as his rash actions and quick tempers make him more enemies, all the while under FBI surveillance, until the result is made clear at the final blackout, as previously suggested by Annalisa Zucca: "You are your own worst enemy". During the series, it becomes obvious that Soprano barks. It also seems clear that A.J. bites. Soprano is betrayed by an enemy from within, coming from an unexpected "3 o'clock" position – the front. Zucca's words corroborate Gualtieri's from 6-2/ 8: "There could be a line at *Cozzarelli's* a mile long".

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