

Tim Winton's Palimpsestuous Australianness in *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir*

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Abstract:

Taking as a starting point the metaphor of the palimpsest, this essay explores Winton's sense of being Australian in his 2015 landscape memoir *Island Home*. Sarah Dillon's distinction between the palimpsestic and the palimpsestuous, which draws on Foucault's own differentiation between the workings of archaeology and genealogy respectively, provides the wider frame. A palimpsestic reading of *Island Home* along the lines of Abraham and Torok's reflections on mourning and loss, more specifically their theory of the psychic crypt, throws light on Winton's "inexpressible mourning" (Abraham and Torok 130) for the loss of an unshaken pre-apology Australianness. Complementarily, a palimpsestuous approach to the text evinces the emergence, among the traces of white nationalism, of a new pattern in Winton's latest additions to his palimpsest of a nation in *Island Home*. Read horizontally rather than vertically, Winton's book reveals an interest in what he calls "an emotional deepening" (168), a new sense of relatedness that acknowledges the damage done to the Indigenous population at the same time that it honours the contribution of the rightful inhabitants of Australia to the current national narrative, creating, in this way, possible openings for non-Indigenous belonging.

Keywords: palimpsestic; palimpsestuous; introjection; incorporation; relatedness;

Introduction: Of Palimpsests and Crypts

The palimpsest—this ancient document made up of superimposed layers of writing—is a particularly apt metaphor for the dynamics of imperialism, with peoples, cultures and lands erased and overwritten under the rule of the colonizers. Quite appropriately, Sarah Dillon refers to palimpsests as "uncanny harbingers to the present of the murdered texts of former ages" (*Palimpsest* 13), further stressing the connection between the process of re-inscription that results in these multi-layered manuscripts and the deleterious effects of colonization. Palimpsests, though, also fulfil a clear "retentive function" (Dillon, *Palimpsest* 26), as traces of the underlying strata typically resurface in peculiar coexistence with the most recent additions. In her monograph on the palimpsest as well as in an earlier article entitled "Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: the Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies," Dillon turns to the work of nineteenth-century English essayist Thomas De Quincey as pioneering the consistent use of the palimpsest as a "figurative entity" ("Reinscribing" 243). For De Quincey, despite all the violence and death involved in their creation, palimpsests seem to open up the possibility of metaphorical resurrection (Dillon, *Palimpsest* 26). In fact, the figure of the palimpsest—central to his work *Suspiria de Profundis*—offered De Quincey a measure of consolation in the face of the unexpected death of his sister Elizabeth, thereafter preserved in what Dillon terms "the palimpsest of the mind" ("Reinscribing" 245). Dillon reads this palimpsest of the mind as "a resurrective fantasy with which De Quincey attempts to secure the continued life of his sister" ("Reinscribing" 245) and draws on Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's psychoanalytic

theory of the “secret vault” or “crypt” in order to explain De Quincey’s fantasising (“Reinscribing” 250).

According to Abraham and Torok in “Introjection-Incorporation: *Mourning or Melancholia*,” subjects who refuse to mourn a loss develop instead a fantasy of incorporation, as opposed to the normal process of introjection that characterizes successful mourning (Dillon, “Reinscribing” 250). The fantasy of incorporation leads to the building of a psychic crypt in which “reposes—alive, reconstituted from the memories of words, images, feelings—the objective counterpart of the loss, as a complete person with his own topography, as well as the traumatic incidents—real or imagined—that had made introjection possible” (Abraham and Torok qtd. in Dillon, “Reinscribing” 250). In *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey* (1991) John Barrell studies De Quincey’s multifarious work as a “palimpsestuous oeuvre,” in Dillon’s words (*Palimpsest* 41), exploring the traces of De Quincey’s crypt such as, and above all, his guilt about his sister’s early death—for which he feels somewhat responsible—but also, interestingly, his “public guilt about British Imperialism” (Dillon, *Palimpsest* 39). The latter, Barrell explains, is “a guilt at his own participation in the imperialist fantasies that become so all-pervasive in the national imagination from the 1820s and 1830s” (21), a guilt, that is, at De Quincey’s contribution to “the public forms of imperialist discourse, and their image of the terrible Other” (149), which can be avowed “only by being displaced” (21).

Drawing on Foucault’s distinction between archaeology and genealogy, Dillon puts forward two complementary ways of reading a palimpsest: the palimpsestic and the palimpsestuous. Like the workings of archaeology, the palimpsestic approach destroys the surface in a vertical search of the older and more valuable layers, while the palimpsestuous, in line with genealogy, focuses exclusively on the surface in order to study the various traces and their “strategic connections” (Foucault qtd. in Dillon, “Reinscribing” 254). The fact that palimpsests—despite the “illusion of depth”—“always in fact [function] on the surface level” (McDonagh qtd. in Dillon, *Palimpsest* 3) grants priority to the palimpsestuous rather than the palimpsestic. Brecht de Groote confirms the primacy of the horizontal over the vertical when he states that palimpsests “do not actually arrive in neat layers that can be peeled down to their ever delayed core like the skins of an onion: they are by definition a single surface inhabited by multiple dissociated discourses, each of which is its own irreducible moment” (124).

The metaphor of the palimpsest, as well as Dillon’s distinction between the palimpsestic and the palimpsestuous, has a clear bearing on the concept of the nation and the issue of nationalism. Despite characteristic nationalist attempts at reaching down, palimpsestically, to an essential, uncontaminated, original sense of the nation and the self, national identities are always already palimpsestuous. “The genuine does not exist,” says philosopher Rodríguez Magda. “Any attempt to return to the origins entails a melancholy loop.” The search of origins is especially problematic in white settler societies like Australia where the majority of the population has its roots elsewhere, in an altogether different continent. The idea of the Australian nation was, in fact, brought over by British colonisation and “superimposed” on Indigenous people’s land by virtue of the legal fiction of *terra nullius* (Elder 30). “The nation,” believes Glenda Sluga, “understands place and habitus ... as material possession of geographical space” (153). Now that the fiction of *terra nullius* has been officially abolished (Elder 175), triggering off a succession of apologies to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, white non-

Indigenous Australians are, to some extent, left with only a fantasy of belonging, “a form of settler melancholia,” in the words of Gooder and Jacobs (232), derived from what is felt as a lack or a loss, “a seemingly irreparable rupture in the settler sense of a place in the nation” (235).

This essay engages in a palimpsestuous reading of Winton’s *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (2015), a book that accounts for his attachment to the wild spaces of Western Australia where he was born and currently resides and where most of his fiction is set. As Jean-François Vernay explains in his review of *Island Home*, the title “is a blatant homage to Neil Murray’s popular song on Australia that was originally performed by the Indigenous Warumpi Band.” The memoir opens with the Winton family in Ireland after a tour of Europe and Tim Winton’s claim that, despite his European ancestors and his Eurocentric education, his allegiance is to the geography of his birthplace. Quite appropriately, Vernay’s review mentions Christopher Koch, for whom “geography is a great shaper which has allowed those Australians who were the sons and daughters of cool-climate people to re-invent themselves as warm-climate people” (Vernay). According to Koch, white Australians “have begun to be a new, culturally distinct people.” “Of course”, he admits, “we are a European people essentially and, of course, the consciousness that comes to us from Europe is still here.” However, he thinks, “we’ve reached the point where living in a different landscape, a different hemisphere, has produced a different consciousness” (qtd. in Vernay).

In *Island Home*, Winton, a well-known environmentalist, opposes the acquisitive attitude towards the land that characterised colonisation and continues nowadays in the ruthless exploitation of the natural resources, to a new sense of admiration and respect for nature, which he considers an evolved form of patriotism (24). For Brian Matthews, Winton’s richness of allusion in his landscape memoir stems from the intensity of his “concern with the natural world—the world of *natura naturans* that moved Wordsworth and Blake, in particular, among the Romantics” (11). Matthews quotes Winton to account for the “opposites” his “jubilant and irresistible” celebration of his island home summons up in our time: “landscape [regarded] as property, territory, tenement.” In the opinion of Vernay, Winton “makes an uncompromising plea for a more sustainable world whose conscientious long-term planning and ecobuilding strategies would curb the severe damage caused by not-so-well-planned urbanisation.” Similarly, Jessica White, who analyses *Island Home* as an eco-memoir—“the literary expression of the interlacing of memory and the natural environment” (142)—believes that although Winton’s work “is complicated by the cultural memory of his forebears, his anxiety and messages about habitat loss are resonant” (White 148). Besides exhibiting his involvement and connection to the landscape of Australia, throughout the ten chapters that make up the book, Winton nostalgically dives down in his childhood and teenage memories, excavates the colonial past and digs up a pre-modern sense of belonging mostly derived from Indigenous Australians. My final palimpsestuous reading encompasses these downward palimpsestic movements but mainly focuses on their horizontal connections with the traces of white nationalism, environmentalism, and what Winton calls “an emotional deepening” (168), more in line with an ethics of caring and connecting, towards which, I defend, his memoir evolves.

Excavating the Contents of Winton’s Secret Vault

As Winton acknowledges in *Island Home*, a week before leaving Australia for Europe with his wife and three-year-old boy, he felt the urge to visit a particular spot at

Waychinicup National Park. “I’ve been coming to this *cryptic haven* since I was a teenager in Albany. At certain points of my life it’s been a timely refuge,” he explains (98, my emphasis). There are some other allusions to secret places in *Island Home*. As a kid, Winton loved “hoarding private thoughts and secret artifacts in special places” he describes as “sanctuary and sacrament” (49). One of these places is Trigg Island, where he enjoys crawling in “the guts of the rock” (45). “It’s the secret place, the private space I’m seeking,” he says (45). It is my contention here that these cryptic spaces of the Australian landscape echo Winton’s psychic topography as reflected in *Island Home*, a topography which can be better understood in the light of Abraham and Torok’s theories.

In *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994), Abraham and Torok distinguish between introjection—healthy mourning in the face of a loss—and incorporation—a pathological reaction to loss. “Incorporation denotes a fantasy, introjection a process,” they write (125).¹ They define fantasy “as all those representations, beliefs, or bodily states” that refer to a “*secretly perpetuated topography*” and that “gravitate toward ... the preservation of the status quo” (125, original emphasis). This means that in order to understand a fantasy—which is often unconscious—one must disclose the change in the topography of the psyche the fantasy attempts to resist (125) for the purpose of keeping “the original topography intact in the face of danger” (126). Incorporation, “a reassuring fantasy for the ego” (132), includes forms of possession and the introduction of “all or part of a love object ... into one’s own body” (126). The fantasy of incorporation, Abraham and Torok state, implies a refusal to mourn and “to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognised as such, would effectively transform us” (127). “The very fact of *having had a loss*” is denied in incorporation (129, original emphasis). “*The abrupt loss of a narcissistically indispensable object of love has occurred, yet the loss is of a type that prohibits its being communicated,*” they clarify (129, original emphasis). It is this “inexpressible mourning” that builds “a secret tomb inside the subject” (130). Abraham and Torok draw upon Freud’s essay on “Mourning and Melancholia” so as to cast light on the cryptic phenomenon of incorporation. According to Freud, the loss of the love object produces an open wound in the melancholic subject, a wound, they believe, that “the melancholic attempts to hide, wall in, and encrypt” (135). The “undisclosable idyll” between the melancholic and the love object “did not end because of infidelity but due to hostile external forces” (136). “This is why melancholics”—add Abraham and Torok—“cherish the memory as their most precious possession” (136). It is at the moment the walls of the crypt are shaken that melancholia arises and the subject is engaged in “an interminable process of mourning” (136) that, if properly acknowledged and channelled, can “give way to genuine mourning” and end the fantasy of incorporation (Abraham and Torok 137).

Island Home makes it clear that Winton’s love object is the Australian landscape and his sense of belonging in it, shaken, most probably, by the official recognition of dispossession and Indigenous land rights. “We’ve imbibed it unwittingly; it’s in our bones like a sacramental ache” (20), writes Winton about the Australian land. The idea of loss pervades his memoir, but, while some losses are acknowledged—when Winton

¹Abraham and Torok’s article “Introjection–Incorporation: *Mourning or Melancholia*” (1980), from which Dillon quotes, was revised and included as a chapter in the monograph *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994).

was twelve the family left Perth for Albany and he felt “the loss of home territory” (55)—some others, like the loss of full legitimacy over the Australian land, are not. In my interpretation, Winton’s crypt, a result of his fantasy of incorporation, contains the love object, namely, the Australian landscape, which he “[carries] within, as a genetic connection” (20), and Winton’s place in it, together with “the injury that ... affected the ideal object” (Abraham and Torok 134)—the acknowledgement that the rightful titleholders of the land are the Indigenous Australians. Significantly, Winton sometimes refers to the native inhabitants of Australia as “indigenes” (71, 75), a word that harbours in its bosom the very genes Winton claims for himself. “Most notably,” write Gooder and Jacobs, “it is the ‘traditional indigene,’ that figure who has enjoyed continuous occupation of and association with the land, who forms the template for ... authentic belonging” (237).

As Abraham and Torok state, in incorporation the loss is denied (129). “The fantasy of incorporation,” they affirm, “reveals a utopian wish that the memory of the affliction had never existed or, on a deeper level, that the affliction had had nothing to inflict” (134). Although Winton often alludes to the evil effects of colonisation on the native population, judging from *Island Home*, he does not seem to be part of what Gooder and Jacobs call “the sorry people” of Australia responding to the call for an apology to the Indigenous population (232). This, I believe, may be considered an indication of Winton’s refusal to mourn the loss of his ideal object and his new “unsettlement” (Gooder and Jacobs 231) that he cannot openly admit. Except for the opening pages, which picture Winton and his family in County Offaly, Ireland, *Island Home* is entirely set in Australia, where Winton insists—notice his title—he feels fully at home. “The sense of feeling that overwhelms me isn’t nostalgia so much as recognition,” states Winton of the Australian south-west, “a kind of sense memory that has never diminished. ... The ground feels firm beneath my feet” (62-63).

Island Home is written and wholly focalised from the perspective of white, non-Indigenous Australians, as is Winton’s case. This is exposed by the use of person deixis in sentences such as the following: “to behold in *our* remarkable diversity of habitats, landforms and species the riches of a continental isolation that so long troubled *us*” (93, my emphasis). The adjective “our” points at Winton claiming his right on the Australian landscape while the pronoun “us” clearly leaves out the Indigenous population, who were not surely “troubled” by their “continental isolation.” The exclusion of the island’s original native inhabitants is confirmed by Winton’s use of the word “locals” in the next sentence: “What locals had largely looked upon as marginal country turned out to be an island of flowers” (167). Again, it is unlikely that the Indigenous inhabitants regarded any part of the landscape as “marginal country” in the way settlers and their descendants, with their more instrumental frame of mind, did.

Significantly, in *Island Home*, Winton often defines himself by referring to what he is not. He is not European—“I could never connect bodily and emotionally,” he says (8); he is not an Australian expatriate, either—“*they* become ... oppressed by the relentless familiarity of their surroundings ... and seek refuge in cosmopolitanism, and who could blame *them*?” (16, my emphasis). Early in the book, Winton also sets himself apart from the attitude of his settler and convict ancestors: “Many of us are startled to learn how different we are from our immigrant and convict forebears, for this is a place that eventually renders people strangers to their origins” (23). Besides, in his landscape memoir, Winton denounces “the purely instrumental status” of nature that has

traditionally characterised Western thought (Plumwood 527), a view that fuelled the colonial enterprise itself and that is behind the sixties and seventies developmentalism, as well as behind the still functional “gospel of perpetual economic growth,” as Winton puts it (39): “At the time this process felt normal and necessary, like growing up. After all, the bush was a scruffy nothing and we were civilizing it” (35).

In *Island Home*, Winton tours some of the most atmospheric natural sites of Western Australia, as if somewhat owning them and claiming his right on them. “When you write a place you stake a claim to it,” states Melissa Lucashenko in her 2016 Barry Andrews Address entitled “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” (5). Winton affirms in his memoir that, for him, the landscape of Australia has never been mere background but has exerted upon him “a kind of force ... that is every bit as geological as family” (8). “In my own lifetime,” Winton adds, “Australians have come to use the word ‘country’ as Aborigines use it, to describe what my great-great-grandparents would surely have called territory” (23-24). Later in the book, he elaborates on the same idea: “In my own lifetime the environment has started to make the kinds of claims upon us that perhaps only family can. From the geographical ignorance and perfectly reasonable dismay of our settler forebears, we are coming, haltingly and haphazardly, to a new communal understanding” (92). Only that this time, significantly, it is the country that claims white Australians and not white Australians that claim the country. Winton personally experienced the feeling of being claimed by nature when, as an environmental activist, he became involved in the protection of the great coral reef: “I felt overcome by the reef, claimed by it” (89).

Extrapolating from Val Plumwood, we can affirm that Winton goes beyond the instrumental, acquisitive conception of the natural world and is able to appreciate it in its “intrinsic value” (529). It is this attitude, Winton never tires of telling the reader, that brings him closer to the Indigenous peoples of Australia and their relationship to the land. For Indigenous Australians, asserts Plumwood, identity “is not connected to nature as a general, abstract category ... but to particular areas of land, just as the connection one has to close relatives is highly particularistic” (531). In modern Australia, Winton believes, nature can be felt “pulsing and looming at any moment, like a *family* memory” by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike (22, my emphasis). What is more, according to Winton, the Second World War definitely put Indigenous peoples and settlers on an equal footing with respect to Australia: “when a Japanese invasion seemed imminent, [settlers] were forced to defend it as their home. Until that point, only the continent’s first peoples had ever truly fought for their country” (77). More tellingly, on occasion, Winton seems to bypass Indigenous peoples and directly tap into the land: “Australia connotes something non-human. Of course the genius of the Indigenous culture is unquestionable, but even this is overshadowed by the scale and insistence of the land that inspired it” (13). The continuous occupation by the Indigenous Australians over thousands of years seems to pale in comparison with the overwhelming presence of a land that, in an equitable manner, makes its claim upon older and newer arrivals. In her review of *Island Home*, Delia Falconer refers to the “quietly polemical—and not uncontentious—argument” underlying Winton’s landscape memoir: “while Winton pays sincere homage to the long Aboriginal history of ‘country,’ he seems to suggest that the original, physical force of the land trumps everything.” For her, the “family metaphor” that “repeats throughout the book” yields more than one meaning: “For most readers, it will have a visceral, no-bullshit force. Others might feel its uncomplicated directness misses something.”

Back in the Surface: Towards Mourning, Caring and Connecting

Island Home is much more than Winton's love song to the landscape of Australia. In my reading, the memoir arises as a narrative of white nationalist identity trying to "restore the wholeness of the settler's sense of proper belonging" (Gooder and Jacobs 244) by appropriating the Indigenous Australian's legitimacy of occupation. What lies in Winton's secret vault awaiting recognition is, borrowing from Gooder and Jacobs, his "once-certain sense of being-in-the-nation" (235). Coincidentally, Gooder and Jacobs draw on Dominick LaCapra, who "notes that when loss or lack is linked to desire for an idealised object (such as 'one nation' or a 'properly formed nation'), this desire may give way to melancholic nostalgia" (235). *Island Home* opens on a heavy note of nostalgia with Winton's four-year-old son asking whether the pictures of Australia pinned to the wall of their Irish cottage are real. "Of course ... It's home ... Remember? That's Australia," answers Winton (4). Winton also regards with nostalgia his childhood years and the pure wildness of the Australian landscape before the boom in property development, mining and the fertilizer industry (28, 37, 46). Furthermore, looking at the sepia images of his forebears, he comments on "the melancholy felt by settlers and their descendants" (117), part of the "colonial stigma" (115), "the shapeless depression experienced by the inheritors of dispossessed lands" (116-117), which "persisted well into the twentieth century" as "a response to the darker legacies of settlement" (116).

As pointed out by Abraham and Torok, nostalgia and melancholia are sometimes symptoms of the crypt's crumbling walls. In what remains of this essay I explore the last two chapters of *Island Home*, both firmly set in the new millennium, as Winton's latest additions to his palimpsest of a nation. A palimpsestuous approach to these chapters reveals the presence of traces from the older mindset alongside proofs of Winton's evolution towards a more realistic and more empathic attitude towards Australia and its Indigenous population that leads him to admit in the closing pages of his memoir that, after all, "It's possible some of us will never feel truly at home in Australian landscapes" (186). My reading very much agrees with Lucashenko's approach to *Island Home* in "I Pity the Poor Immigrant." Although she is perfectly aware of "the inconsistencies in Winton's outlook" (6) in this particular piece of work and also elsewhere (5, 6, 7), Lucashenko considers his landscape memoir as well as his 2013 novel *Eyrie* as an alternative to "the long-lived colonial attempt at shunning and destroying Aboriginal voices and stories" (1). "I shake my head at some of his statements and lingering beliefs," she states, "but I give Winton credit for making the effort in middle age" (9). According to her, "for all the confusion, the seasickness of his statements that imply that we are 'past tense Aborigines,' for all his self-proclaimed red-neckery, Winton has gone to the old people of his country and learnt a lot of what the nation needs him to know" (9).

Further delving into the subject of mourning, Dillon draws upon Derrida, who questions Abraham and Torok's clear-cut distinction between introjection—'normal' mourning—and incorporation—'abnormal' mourning. Like the practice of palimpsesting, for Derrida, in Dillon's words, "mourning is a necessarily doubled process" that encompasses the normal and the abnormal because if mourning were wholly successful it would imply losing the beloved object against the mourner's will (*Palimpsest* 31). At the same time, mourning is absolutely necessary, "since the process of 'normal' mourning—or introjection—allows the loving appropriation and assimilation of the other as other. It therefore keeps the loved one inside the mourner in a way in which

incorporation does not” (Dillon, *Palimpsest* 32). As Derrida puts it: “It is not the *other* that the process of incorporation preserves, but a certain topography it keeps safe, intact, untouched by the very relationship with the other to which, paradoxically enough, introjection is more open” (qtd. in Dillon 31, original emphasis). In my opinion, and as I shall next explain, it is this openness to the other as other—echoing Emmanuel Levinas—that characterises the closing of Winton’s memoir.

The chapters of *Island Home* are not arranged in chronological order. The first section of Chapter one, set in Ireland in foul weather, is dated 1988. The following chapters—all set in sunny Australia—keep going backwards and forwards, revisiting Winton’s childhood and teenage years, focusing on his early family life, his writing career and his commitment to the ecologist cause. They also dive down and rescue some names—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—from the times of colonisation and comment on influential international and Australian writers and thinkers such as Flannery O’Connor, Patrick White, and Randolph Stow. Chapters nine and ten, dated respectively 2009 and 2006, provide a certain idea of progression in time and take the reader back to the surface level of the palimpsest, where new patterns emerge in combination with some undeleted traces of the past. In Chapter nine, inside a cave in Cape Range, Winton bumps into a group of roos, lying “curved against one another,” as if in sleep (159). Their hides, though, notices Winton, “are almost *translucent*, like *the vellum of medieval manuscripts*” (159, my emphasis), their bodies “mummified by the high desert air” (160). However, Winton remarks, the smell he perceives is not one of death, since “all about them, like signs of tribute, are the scuffs and scat of the living” (160). To me, this appears as quite an apt metaphor of the palimpsestuous nature of Winton’s text; a text made up of the interwoven contributions, desires and anxieties of the living and the dead; a text that in its final pages—like the kangaroos huddling together at the moment of death—highlights the importance of the relational. It is precisely in this last but one chapter that Winton advocates for the first time in his memoir what he calls an “emotional deepening”—“a different kind of seeing.” “It takes humility and patience,” he states, “to see what truly lies before us ... , to celebrate what we encounter, to nurture and protect it” (168). The words of David Mowaljarlai, the Indigenous artist, philosopher and activist, which end the section, pave the way for the tone of Chapter ten: “everything standing up alive” (170).

In the first section of Chapter ten Winton drives an elderly Indigenous lawman, Paul Chapman—one of the Ngarinyin, like Mowaljarlai, hidden palimpsestically under an English name—to Dodnum, his home country. Chapman now lives in Derby because the nursing post in Dodnum has been shutdown and he is looking forward to the visit and to seeing some old faces there (178). Although focalisation is still Winton’s, as in the rest of the memoir, his use of some words of Indigenous English such as “whitefella” (175) and “blackfella” (176), makes perspective slightly more inclusive. The image Winton presents of Indigenous Australians is not a sentimentalised one and the damage done to them by colonialism and their current problems are not glossed over either. He directly mentions forced removals, separation from their ancestral lands (174), “grotesque inequalities” (177), neglect by the state, alcoholism, and a disproportionately high youth suicide rate (177). Certainly, these references truthfully reflect some of the difficulties experienced by contemporary Indigenous people as a belated consequence of colonialism, but, Lucashenko insightfully notes, they are only part of the truth and they contribute to reinforcing the Dying Race trope she and others are engaged in contesting: “I’ve read so many stories and novels and film scripts in the

past two decades about dead Aboriginal people and drunken Aboriginal people and us as suicides and us as victims of various forms of grotesque violence that I begin to believe that there is little enthusiasm for us in the Australian literary imagination as ordinary human beings” (2). The fact that Winton mentions Chapman’s death five years after their trip to Dodnum does not help in fighting the prevailing image of the Dying Race, Lucashenko contends (8). Neither does that Winton’s Elder is “*displaced* from country,” she adds (8, original emphasis). However, by and large, Lucashenko concludes, Winton’s portrayal of the Indigenous lawman is empowering and dignified. On seeing the mountains that “mark the beginning of home” Chapman transforms from a “beaten old wreck” to a “sprightly, bright-eyed man” (179). “For him” Winton explains, “the trip is no sentimental return, it’s life support” (179). Again Winton chooses to end the section with Mowaljarlai’s words: “When I’m on a high mountain looking out over country ... my Unggurr [life-force] flows out from inside my body and I fall open with happiness” (180). These references, Lucashenko believes, prove Winton’s good understanding of classical Aboriginal culture (8).

The last section of *Island Home* is meaningfully entitled “Paying respect” and begins with Winton’s lament about the Australian’s lack of interest in the sacred and the numinous, despite living, he says, on “the most spiritually potent continent imaginable” (181). Proof of this “spiritual vacuum” that demands to be filled, Winton suggests, is the sacralisation of the Australian ‘way of life’ and the sanctification of “the Gallipoli myth” and Anzac Day (181). He regards the latter as “a sort of nationalist death cult” and part of a politics of nostalgic regression (182). When holding the “bloodstained wallet” of his great-uncle killed in the Dardanelles, Winton does not experience “a sacramental, nationalistic charge” but feels instead the waste of a life for “jingoistic nonsense” at the same time that he remembers her grandmother’s life-long grief (182). This episode acquires a near epiphanic nature and leads Winton to forcefully reject abstractions like the Crown or the State in favour of concrete relations: “The first thing I think of as sacred is the bond between parent and child—then spouses and lovers, of course, friends and countrymen, for these are kinships that strengthen our connection to one another and enlarge our lives” (182-183). “We *are* related and I feel compelled to honour this” (184, original emphasis); “people everywhere yearn for connection” (193), he insists.

Quite significantly, Winton quotes from the work of the French philosopher Teilhard de Chardin, “a Jesuit of heretical optimism” (193), to prove his point: “terrestrial thought is becoming conscious that it constitutes an organic whole ... both capable of and responsible for some future” (qtd. in Winton 193). This idea of a leap in consciousness links up with Winton’s allusion to Galileo and his “explosive new understanding of the cosmos” (185) and puts forward the need for a change of paradigm: “We’re used to seeing ourselves as the pinnacle of reality, ... but we’re reminded of our true position in the scheme of things, ... [as] mere creatures of the earth, vulnerable and dependent” (186). “This earth is our home, our only home” (193). Jeremy Rifkin’s *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (2009) embraces the same idea. Rifkin, for whom the present moment in history is characterized by a race between a growing sense of empathy and “the entropic destruction of the Earth’s biosphere” (2), defends that the human species’ innate predisposition to empathy constitutes our last hope for restoring a sustainable balance with the planet (43) and avoiding an impending environmental catastrophe. Like Winton and Teilhard de Chardin, Rifkin is a strong proponent of the relational. Along these lines, ecology and

co-relationality constitute the basis of Christian Moraru's *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*, an insightful analysis of the turn towards the relational in the field of contemporary North-American letters. According to Moraru, the works of the cosmoderns, as he labels the group of writers pointing to a paradigm shift, promote "an *ecology* of relations, that is, another way of thinking about being in the world and, more broadly, about being: with oneself, with others both like and unlike oneself, with one's country and with the world beyond" (48, original emphasis).

In the last pages of his memoir Winton reflects upon his own country and finds some reasons for optimism: "many non-indigenous Australians have begun to commit. Out of reverence, from love, in a spirit of kinship to the place itself" (183). His major source of inspiration is again the figure of Mowaljarlai and his gift of "pattern thinking" to the people of Australia (191). "In his final years," Winton explains, "he threw all his energies into the project of Two-Way Thinking, a philosophy of mutual respect, mutual curiosity and cultural reciprocity" (191). Besides, on the last page of *Island Home* Winton reproduces a poem by another enlightening Indigenous figure, Kakadu Elder Big Bill Neidjie, stressing the organic nature of our connection with the landscape. The fact that Winton highlights the importance of acting according to Indigenous lore might be considered one more instance of appropriation of Indigenous wisdom by non-Indigenous Australians. There are, however, in my opinion, two reasons for reading it otherwise. First, Winton quotes Mowaljarlai insisting they are giving it away of their own accord: "We are really sorry for you people We cry for you because you haven't got meaning of culture in this country. We have a gift we want to give you" (191). As Mowaljarlai's words make clear, it is the Indigenous people that are in a position of moral superiority and the whites that are to be pitied. Second, the turn to Indigenous wisdom is preceded by the explicit acknowledgement on the part of Winton of the damage done by colonisation—"much of this damage will never be undone" (183)—and his admission, in line with Kevin Rudd's 2008 "Sorry Speech," that contemporary non-Indigenous Australians are not "absolved from reflecting upon [their] inheritance" (184). Although in *Island Home* Winton is aware that there is still a lot to be done in the way of righting wrongs, he welcomes the impact Indigenous knowledge had in the passing of the Native Title Act of 1993: "ancient tradition has begun to exert a material influence on our laws, and it has altered our broader national narrative for all time" (189). "In *Island Home*," acknowledges Lucashenko, "Winton has, like a giant ocean liner, finally turned and begun to argue with some passion for the importance of Aboriginal knowledge" (7).

In her 2017 monograph on the fiction of Tim Winton, Lyn McCredden tackles the problematic nature of his representations of place and belonging in a chapter aptly entitled "Becoming, Belonging." In spite of the fact that Winton is popularly known as "a local or regional writer with a strong, celebratory sense of belonging in the Australian landscape," for McCredden, he is "the poet of *non-belonging* who also dreams, and finds imaginative form for, the possibility of belonging, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (109, original emphasis). She situates Winton in the wider context of contemporary Australia, in which many non-Indigenous people, she believes, "have a growing, grounded awareness of the *unsettled* and dynamic nature of living in this land" (108, original emphasis). More and more, the need is felt to acknowledge the intimate connection between humans and the land, something, according to McCredden, "related to the impact of global warming and a sense of the finiteness, fragility and

wildness of land forms and weathers, as well as concern for the fate of Indigenous inhabitants;” something, she adds, “leading hopefully to a belonging *in place*” (109, original emphasis).

As Winton himself contends in *Island Home*, “not only have we started to integrate and internalise all these lessons, we’re learning to appreciate the fragility of what sustains us” (93). McCredden reads Winton as opening up to “the tentative, fallen, unfinished, and possibly redeeming processes of becoming” (110). She sees Winton’s “processual understanding of the self” as “an entering into the irreducibility or unfinishedness of the self and its relation to others, including the non-human other,” by which she means primarily the land (112). Again, McCredden points to the larger picture of becoming and belonging in postcolonial Australia and considers Winton’s processes as in line with the realisation of “white-settler and lately arrived Australians ... that they live in a huge, diverse country, one in which they are not native,” along with their dawning recognition of “the violent history of white settlement,” both of which necessarily modulate “non-Indigenous relations to land and place” (112). In the words of poet Judith Wright, whom McCredden quotes: “two strands—the love of the land we have invaded and the guilt of the invasion—have become part of me” (112). Writing about Luther Fox—the non-Indigenous protagonist of Winton’s *Dirt Music* who works through his traumas by taking refuge in the wilderness—McCredden asserts that, by the end of the novel, he has learnt that “he does not belong there *in the same ways* as those who have travelled it for centuries, hunted in it, lived and died in it, and endowed that relationship with sacredness” (116, original emphasis). After all, white Australians are but a very late addition to the palimpsest that constitutes the island continent. McCredden’s question logically follows: Do white-settler Australians have the right to belong, even if only otherwise? (119). Judging from Winton’s *Island Home* and McCredden’s reading of it in the context of his previous work, it is clear they do if and when they partake of this new sensibility towards the land and the diverse people that populate it today, especially the Indigenous Australians, still waiting for a reconciliation and a reparation that speaks meaningfully to them. Winton, defends McCredden, “is ... in his latest fiction and his memoir, radically aware of the distance still to travel” (118). The process, however, can be said to be underway. As Kim Scott and his Elder Hazel Brown put it in their *Kayang and Me*, a history of the Noongar family, white non-Indigenous Australians are “insecure thieves, wanting to really belong, yet only *beginning* to understand what that might mean” (200, my emphasis).

Conclusion

Throughout *Island Home* Winton insists on his intimate connection with the landscape of Australia. Sometimes, he shows a quasi-mystical communion with the land; some others, he is invested with the moral authority granted by his commitment to the environmental movement; often, he claims for himself the Indigenous sensibility towards the natural world. This denotes, no doubt, a special responsiveness on the author’s part, but can also be interpreted as Winton’s refusal to mourn the end of a pre-apology sense of national belonging. Read palimpsestically following Abraham and Torok’s theory of the crypt, *Island Home* throws light upon the unacknowledged contents of Winton’s secret vault, revealing that deep down in this landscape memoir there lies his unsettled sense of being Australian. However, a palimpsestous approach, especially to the book’s last two chapters, reveals an evolution towards empathy and relatedness—not at all alien to most of Winton’s previous work. Towards the end of *Island Home*, Winton expresses a “genuine deference to Aboriginal knowledge,” in

Lucashenko's appreciative words (6). She harbours no doubt "that Winton loves the country he has grown up on or that he has acted to protect it" (6). Winton, she writes, "sees the country he lives in" and "relates to the country of his birth very intimately, physically and emotionally and spiritually as well" (7). The book's "clarion call," stresses Matthews, "is Blakean: everything that lives is holy" (12). Significantly, Lucashenko ends her Barry Andrews address by urging every Australian to embark "upon the journey which Winton and [she] are both making" (9). Her reading of Winton's landscape memoir along with my own contribution based on the intriguing possibilities of the palimpsest firmly situates *Island Home* in the wake of the turn towards caring and connecting that, some critics contend, is gaining momentum in the variegated surface of contemporary fiction and thought.

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