

# I Pity the Poor Immigrant

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*Dedicated to all refugees currently imprisoned by the Australian State*

Many years ago I read a now forgotten novel by a now forgotten author, which had a truly wonderful preface. It read, simply, *this bloody book nearly killed me. I therefore dedicate it, dear Reader, to myself.* There is a delicate irony at play, I think, in my long remembering this dedication while the book itself is erased completely from my memory. I'll touch on the interplay of knowledge and memory in due course. What I want to start by saying, though, is that in my case, as in the case of that forgotten preface's author, while writing can be a horrifically stressful business - and while writing this paper did indeed feel like it was going to kill me - the Author is emphatically Not Dead.

*The author is not dead.* More specifically, the Aboriginal author is not dead, a double happiness! This needs saying over and over. It bears repetition because the long, lingering reach of the Dying Race trope is not dead either, and shows signs from time to time, like the TV character Monkey, of being 'a little bit immortal.' Aboriginal people and indeed entire Aboriginal nations have been having the Last Rites pronounced upon us since almost the earliest days of white invasion. In the colonial project, to the British mind, we were not just lower beings, but also aberrations, and the only things to do with aberrations are to destroy them, imprison them, or assimilate them into your own reality.

There are a lot of my Goorie people in prisons, and a lot of people of Aboriginal descent assimilated into the so-called Australian mainstream. But it is the long-lived colonial attempt at shunning and destroying Aboriginal voices and stories that I first want to talk about, before turning to the emerging alternatives, and to what I try to do in my work to reify one Aboriginal world.

A vast, sophisticated and almost unknown body of first Aboriginal literature exists here in a diminished form. I don't refer to the works of David Unaipon—well not exactly—nor to the works of the 1960s poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal nor storytellers of the 1980s like Jack Davis or Uncle Kevin Gilbert or my countrymen Gerry Bostock and Aunty Ruby Langford Ginibi. This other Aboriginal literature consists of narratives in the forms of song and chanted story. This indigenous oral literature which must have begun many thousands of years ago claimed and named and in several (intellectual, political, spiritual and psychological) senses, established the Australian continent as one vast web of knowledge. This body of complex interwoven narrative—our great Aboriginal creation myths - spans the continent, from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Great Australian Bight. From Cape York to Victoria. The songlines—which are still sung and performed today—constitute our Book of Genesis as well as our maps, our moral code and our encyclopaedia. Colonisation severely disrupted the songlines, but they are not destroyed. Scores of Aboriginal nations today find direction, and great meaning, and solace in their ongoing performance. Goorie people in south eastern Queensland and northern New South Wales have access to this body of knowledge. We reference the old literature. Elders along with ordinary community members are engaged in projects of its revival. Ours is still a culture through which the impact of the songlines runs, just as reinforcing steel runs through

concrete. Just as Shakespeare and Milton and the King James Bible run through modern English literature. You might not see it, but it is there at the heart of things. And there are still people of great knowledge who hold the songlines in the south as well as the north and the west.

So the songlines, or the Tjukkurpa or the Dreaming, form the Upanishads, the Torah, the Testaments New and Old for this place. Yet the concept of the songlines is entirely peripheral to most Australians, if they have heard of them at all. What we have in their place is the widespread image of the remote Aboriginal Elder as a repository of timeless mystical wisdom. It is a romantic image hauled out to do service at certain public spectacles and the occasion of sending a postcard overseas, and so on. (In the United States his equivalent is the Magical Negro.) The Wise Elder, to paraphrase Paul Keating, is the Aborigine this country had to have. But the songlines themselves, the original source of all real Aboriginal gravitas, and the basis of the vast majority of Australian literatures if you take the long view, remain a vague curiosity, where they are known of at all. First British and then Australian racism has prevented any serious attempt at the nation understanding them or their purpose.

What is much better known, and (perhaps unconsciously) celebrated, is the damage that has been done to Aboriginal narratives of many kinds. Of course damage has been done and must be recognised. But there is a point where mourning cultural loss turns into memorialising and ossifying, as though everything has been wiped away, where it transparently has not. And as though mourning, with its focus upon the dead and the damaged, the past and the irrecoverable, can ever be a foundation for a living people, with living stories in a modern Australia. I was in a community meeting in Brisbane last week, a meeting underpinned by the Aboriginal Law that derives from the very songlines I'm talking about. A South Australian Elder urged the meeting to remember that we have to always behave Lawfully under our ancient Law, and she talked about how our languages never die. Because they come from country, and the country remains, they are only sleeping. In indigenous cosmology nothing is ever lost. Preempting the physicists of the twentieth century our people knew for eons that energy can never end; it only changes form. And the songlines are in the land, where they can never be lost.

We blackfellas know we are alive. We know we go to school, to work, to the supermarket and the cinema and the music festival and the cricket. But 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 living humans. Is it valuable to acknowledge the horrors of the past and the present? Yes and no. Truth heals. *But partial truths do not.* The desire to examine and perhaps make literary amends for colonial violence has reinforced the Dying Race trope. This is changing but the change is small and very late. It is also very badly executed most of the time. Australians overall are not much better at writing live blackfellas than dead ones, in other words. There's a couple of interesting exceptions, and I'll get to them in a bit.

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I received Anita Heiss' *Barbed Wire and Cherry Blossom* in the mail last week and the sense of relief I had at reading Anita's uncomplicated story of an Aboriginal community that is alive and, although very poor and incarcerated on a mission, ordinary, was something to behold. It felt like breathing out after a long time under water; as though reading much contemporary Australian writing about us is a kind of gradual drowning. This yarn felt like someone was

giving me permission to think about my people on the page as living contemporaries. I recognised myself there. Of course I get a similar experience when I read Jared Thomas' *Calypso Summer* or Tony Birch's *Blood*, or Vivien Clemen's *Bitin Back*, or the poetry of Natalie Harkin or ... the list goes on. It is the very *ordinariness* of Anita's Koories that is so refreshing. Fathers, mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts and uncles, presented with an extraordinary situation—the presence of a Japanese POW in their midst—but all informed by an understanding that we are not racist tropes, or sentimental symbols or archeological relics, but ultimately people. However, I'm writing here more about non-Aboriginal representations of us.

If so much of modern Australian literature about us fixes upon our victimhood, then *what and who do such stories serve? Who benefits?* Is it an act of misplaced respect which talks about our dispossession but not our survival? Is it pure ignorance on the part of non-Aboriginal authors, who fail to see the Aboriginal people and communities in front of their eyes? Very likely this is the case, for our communities today mostly don't resemble the Aborigine you Had to Have. As Uncle Bruce Pascoe has written, many Australians think they have never met an Aborigine but if they've stood in a city street in a Southern capital for half an hour and been passed by three hundred people, then statistically, ten of those people were Aboriginal. You can't often see us if you insist on looking for Truganini or Gulpilil, but that's not our failing.

It's useful to ask *what stories are for* when we examine the trope of the Dying Race. If the purpose of stories is to tell us who we are, or who we might aim to become, then let me contrast just two of modern Australia's vignettes of Aboriginal senior men. What is being said about our senior men, who in the Western literary imagination must correspond to either our seers or our warriors? First, David Malouf's short story, 'The Only Speaker of His Tongue.' This is a short story written in 1985 but reproduced in print only eight years ago. It is narrated by a Scandinavian linguist, a professor, who while in Australia is briefly and rather awkwardly introduced to an Aboriginal labourer, 'a flabby, thickset man of fifty-five or sixty, very black,' who within his unlikely physical form contains something wondrous (207). The sole survivor of a massacre decades earlier, this man holds within him a universe in the form of an Aboriginal language that will soon die with him. After him, the deluge.

Malouf is concerned here about the precariousness of worldly things, which he writes are held fast only in the naming of them. (I don't entirely agree—a wattle by any other name would smell as sweet, and a boomerang by any other name feel just as hard, but that's a different argument.)

Of language he writes:

these syllables were the magic once for calling the whole of creation to come striding, swaying, singing towards them. (Malouf 208)

Those of you familiar with John Chapter 1 will remember that 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' In his possession of language - the means of creation - the Aboriginal figure Malouf has written is Godlike.

The Scandinavian professor observes of the black man:

Things centre themselves upon him—that is what I feel, it is eerie—as on the one and only repository of a name they will lose if he is no longer there to keep it in mind. He holds thus, on a loose thread, the whole circle of shabby-looking trees,

the bushes with their hidden life...the minds of small native creatures that come creeping...and look in at us from their other lives. He gives no sign of being special...he rises with the rest, stretches a little, spits in the palm of his hand, and goes silently to his work. (209)

Malouf's narrator is in complete awe of what is housed within the Aboriginal man, the power of the apparently very ordinary ('flabby,' 'very black') man who is anything but ordinary:

O holiest of holy things! ... since we touch here on beginnings, go deep down under Now to the remotest dark ... into the lives of our fathers ... all our long history of doing and being. When I think of my tongue being no longer alive in the mouths of men a chill goes over me that is deeper than my own death, since it is the gathered death of all my kind. (208)

*The gathered death of all my kind.* Malouf's narrator has enough respect for what will be lost, when the man goes, to be frightened into aurality himself. At the end of the story he recites aloud the names of objects in his own Scandinavian tongue, a chanting into being of his own world, which all of a sudden seems precarious. Malouf has noticed in this story that Aboriginal language creates the world just as much as European languages do. His narrator is patronising. He refers to the Aboriginal language as 'simple' when Aboriginal languages are anything but (207). Nevertheless the narrator and by extension Malouf gives value to the man's intellectual inheritance. But for its merits the story is deeply rooted in and gives extra weight to the Dying Race trope. There are other Aboriginal men in the story labouring but we don't meet them; they are mere workers while the linguist is something special. At sixty odd, an informed reader will conclude that the flabby man has less than a decade to live. The story, in short, is *an elegy* for a God, a man, a language, and at least one Aboriginal world. These are valuable things—but they are at an end.

In 1969 Judith Wright wrote:

Australia is still, for us, not a country but a state—or states—of mind. We do not yet speak from within her, but from outside: from the state of mind that describes, rather than expresses, its surroundings, or from a state of mind that imposes itself upon, rather than lives through, landscape and event. ('Upside' 301)

And in 1961:

Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must be first observed, understood, described and, as it were, absorbed. (*Preoccupations* xi)

As is well known, Judith Wright had good relationships with Aboriginal people, including the poet Oodgeroo. Reading Malouf I was immediately struck by the contrast to Wright's 'Woman to Child':

You who were darkness warmed my flesh  
where out of darkness rose the seed.  
Then all a world I made in me:  
all the world you hear and see  
hung upon my dreaming blood.

There moved the multitudinous stars,  
 and coloured birds and fishes moved.  
 There swam the sliding continents.  
 All time lay rolled in me, and sense,  
 and love that knew not its beloved. (21)

Wright was a woman, a mother, and someone sensitive to Aboriginal Law. She saw us as alive and I believe this is a big part of why she wrote about creation as not just internal but also ongoing. Creation, or the Godhead, is not externalised by her in another human, nor is it doomed. Her vision of creation, while intensely fragile in her damaged womb, is at the same time vibrantly alive. It glows with potential, where Malouf's Aboriginal Creator-Linguist sags and is monosyllabic under the weight of his people's impending cultural extinction.

Which brings me to some of Tim Winton's recent work. In particular *Island Home*, the novelists' memoir of his life in Perth and in rural Western Australia. Winton jokingly describes himself as a littoralist – meaning someone strongly attached to the margins of the continent. In this book Winton talks about going to Europe as a young man and discovering to his surprise that he is not European after all. He writes at length about feeling out of place there. Publicising the book, he described himself rather as 'a pink Australian' (*7.30 Report*). I was dismayed that the words white Australian seem too confronting for Winton. In an interview for the *Sydney Morning Herald* he again referred to himself as pink, as though whiteness is something too difficult to claim, or as though he can, in a feeble joke, deny a cultural and racial position he was born into (Feneley). (Malouf in contrast has spoken insightfully of the whiteness of his characters in *Remembering Babylon*. But then Malouf is non-white, or at the least, racially ambiguous.) Like a million Australian rednecks, Winton must ignore or distance himself from whiteness, because whiteness is synonymous in Australia with the fruits of illegal dispossession. And Winton is all about the possession of place, in complicated and contradictory ways.

When you write a place you stake a claim to it. This claim can be tentative or it can be bold. I named my last book *Mullumbimby* as a deliberate assertion that Mullumbimby is an Aboriginal place, a Goorie place. I wanted as much as anything to make sure than no non-Goorie writer wrote a novel with that title. I note with interest that Winton names his memoir *Island Home*, not 'My Island Home,' as in the famous song. He has stepped back from that provocation, a decision that got my attention and prompted me to pluck the book off the library shelf.

His writing is well known as full of sand and saltwater; fishing and driving on bush tracks, and always family, family, family. Winton explicitly claims a familial relation with Western Australian country—it's on the back of his book. I'm respectful of white people who have taken the trouble to understand the places they live, who do have intimate relationships with loved country, who in Aboriginal terms are at least slightly awake to our Law. Because of this I've always had a kind of indulgent tolerance for what white writers have to say when they first demonstrate a serious connection and commitment to the places they come from. It's as though love of country is a trump card and when they whip it out I'm doomed and can't be too hard on them. But a funny tidal thing kept happening with this memoir. I flowed between the two poles of respect and irritation again and again and again. I began sympathetic to Winton's project, then the more I read on and thought about his littoralism, the less impressed I became by it. The cheerful mention of R. M. Ballantyne's white supremacist novel *The Coral Island* (1858) as a formative influence didn't help. Nor did generalisations, such as: 'Like any islander

I feel compelled to leave' (122) and, in *Land's Edge*: 'from beneath the furrowed brows of our houses, in the shallows and beyond the surfline, we look out to sea, and things, wonderful things, do turn up' (22). Maybe if you're not Aboriginal, wonderful things turn up, but for us mob in the past two centuries things have turned up that are a lot less than wonderful. Things have turned up that decided the planet would be better off without us. Things turned up that kicked the heads off Aboriginal babies buried in the sand that Winton waxes lyrical about.

Yet Winton knows a lot, and is also capable of writing things like:

The fragile persistence of the people of the Wandjina is something to treasure and to celebrate... But although many are keen to preserve what they see as the treasures of antiquity, they're far less passionate about the sacred power and ongoing cultural roles these sites retain for living people, fellow citizens whose lives only make sense because of them. (149)

And

...there remains an organic, material reality over which we have little control and can claim no credit. To be mindful of that is to be properly awake and aware of our place. (28)

By halfway through *Island Home*, I was beginning to feel a bit seasick. I was being mentally thrown about by the inconsistencies in Winton's outlook.

Then the tide turned once more, as it always does, when late in the book Winton introduced a senior Aboriginal man, Chapman. His relationship with Chapman is left for the reader to guess at. Winton talks about the late Aboriginal philosopher and statesman David Mowarlarli in terms of someone he has learnt from, and he seems to have some kind of ongoing connection to Chapman, but it isn't spelt out. Are they friends? Are they skin relations? Or are they merely acquaintances, and Winton giving Chapman a trip back to his country in order to employ him as a literary device? It's not possible to know, though Winton's lack of cultural understanding of basic cultural elements like homosociality is telling. I don't want to be churlish here, just accurate. He may not be terribly insightful about our living culture but Winton does express a genuine deference to Aboriginal knowledge and the songlines. And as his quite brilliant novel *Eyrie* demonstrates to an Aboriginal reader that he has done his research. He gets it, or a lot of it.

There's no doubt that Winton loves the country he has grown up on or that he has acted to protect it, most notably in the case of Ningaloo Reef. But what does it mean to love the country if there is little or no explicit recognition of Aboriginal ownership? How many Australian sagas of men trooping off to Gallipoli, or of men in this century going on fishing trips on remote beaches, does it take to change a lightbulb in the minds of the nation? Judith Wright called for a Treaty in the 1970s, a call still to be answered. I suspect that no matter how many times Tim Winton cheats death on the page in car accidents or boating disasters, the lives of Western Australian Aborigines will not be illuminated to white readers. They will especially not be illuminated when Winton writes one way and speaks another.

In a recent essay, 'Silent Country'—an essay about the efforts of a wealthy philanthropist to restore mammalian habitat in wheat belt Western Australia—Winton states that 'Quandong fruits were a favourite bush food of Aborigines and in recent years they have enjoyed a minor

vogue as a preserve' (38). You might think this is a small thing, but it isn't. It indicates that, for all his expeditioning with Aboriginal Lawmen, for all his deep insights into Wandjina culture, Winton isn't mindful of the Dying Race trope, and our ceaseless efforts to reverse it. As someone very fond of eating the East Coast quandong—admittedly a different species altogether—I and every blackfella I know are getting pretty tired of being written about in the past tense. It's just not good enough from a leading public intellectual who says in *Island Home* that Aboriginal knowledge is the most under-utilised resource in the country.

In an interview on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's television current affairs program *The 7.30 Report*, during the publicity for *Island Home*,<sup>2</sup> Winton stated that:

It would be awkward to be part of the first Australian generation to bequeath less to the future than what they've inherited. It's always been an Australian tradition and one that's worthy, I think, that *you make the country better for those who come behind*.

Like Keely, Winton's protagonist in *Eyrie*, I hear statements like this from someone who says they value Aboriginal knowledge and tradition—and people—and I feel the room begin to spin. The centre cannot hold.

Winton has told us for decades that he loves the land, and he keeps discovering on the page that only country matters—a very Aboriginal philosophy. For the first three quarters of *Island Home* he doesn't talk much about the Aboriginal owners of country or about its colonial history. Then, in introducing Chapman at the eleventh hour, he swerves and tells us that Aboriginal knowledge is vital. But in Winton's world, Aboriginal people like Chapman are hovering on the edge of doom and he proposes no antidote to that—he displays the reluctant activist syndrome that has typified his career. He speaks about the Wandjina paintings that are prized and secreted by rich white pastoralists on their properties, kept away from the people themselves. Maybe Winton thinks it isn't his fight or his place to say more publicly that this is a despicable and racist act. But as Neil Murray wrote decades ago – *are you the one who's gonna stand up and be counted? Are you the one who's gonna be there when it matters?*

In *Island Home*, and much more so in the earlier *Eyrie*, Winton has answered much of the challenge that Judith Wright and ten thousand Aboriginal voices have urged. He sees the country he lives in. He relates to the country of his birth very intimately, physically and emotionally and spiritually as well.

Quite an accomplishment in a country as racist as Australia, and especially in the remote West. He also appears to understand the importance of the songlines, the Dreaming, and how they reify country and people. He has spoken in defence of Ningaloo Reef, though he admits it took a lot to get him to that place. In *Island Home* Winton has, like a giant ocean liner, finally turned, and begun to argue with some passion for the importance of Aboriginal knowledge. He has also, more critically still, begun to see in his fiction the *living* Aboriginal people whose stories of the continent predate his, and mine, by millennia. There are stories from Quandamooka country near my home that talk of yam farming in what is now six fathoms of seawater. Stories known and sung today from Yidingi country around Cairns, that talk about insults to the Stingray Ancestor which resulted in the flooding of the land shelf we now call the Great Barrier Reef. When you consider these facts, you quickly develop a little humility. Winton and I are both Johnny-come-latelys to the storytelling game in Australia.

When I wrote *Mullumbimby*, a story about Aboriginal struggles to find love upon our homelands again, I did so partly in response to the urging of my sister Alexis Wright, who told me it was high time to write another book and to write it as a hymn to the ancestors. I took up her challenge and I decided to write Aboriginal characters with four things: Power. Beauty, Humour, and Land. At the end of *Island Home*, the blackfellas Winton writes about as possible friends have a bit of power, but they don't have much access to their land, and there isn't a lot of beauty or humour talked about. And I'm very sorry to say that of the two named Aboriginal people Winton discusses—the men whose knowledge he reveres so deeply—both these men are deceased when he writes about them. Aborigines in the past tense, yet again.

On the evidence of *Island Home*, Winton knows and loves the land, but he does so as a beleaguered individualist. He belongs to it, but has defended it only reluctantly. His Aboriginal informants, who may or may not be his mentors, are first alive on the page, and then dead. To be fair, he ends this part of the book with the inspiring and vivifying words of David Mowaljarli, talking about the eternal spirit of country, which remains 'standing up alive' (206). He also talks about the joy, the ecstatic Aboriginal experience of being on one's own country. Winton understands a lot about classical Aboriginal culture, as his stunning interpretation of Wandjina culture in *Eyrie* shows. Still, his obvious Aborigines trouble me. They are almost exclusively distant, damaged, or dead. Who do these Aborigines serve? Not me. Not my daughters, not my son or my nephews or nieces.

It's also worth mentioning that the Elders Winton refers (and almost defers) to, at the end of *Island Home*, are themselves *displaced* from country. This struck me quite hard last week, because I spent time in the meeting I mentioned earlier with Law men and women who live *on their own lands* in south east Queensland. In contrast, the Elders Winton writes about must travel long distances in order to become whole again on their own country far from Derby in the Kimberley. As is clear from his writing and from this book in particular, Winton's mindset is one that inevitably requires movement onto remote country to find peace.

And so is that of the Elders he writes about. The thread of loss and inadequacy, of needing to leave home to find salvation in distant, wild country, continues to run through Winton's narratives. Perhaps this is exile from the Garden of Eden rearing its ugly head. Perhaps it's the saga of the First Fleet, transposed to the Kimberley in 2006. Or perhaps it's a realistic reflection of contemporary displacement in one West Australian Aboriginal nation.

So where does this leave us? Steve Earle says of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict: 'As a recovering heroin addict I simply can't afford to believe that anything is a lost cause. So I'm just gonna keep singing it until it comes true, or I die, whichever comes first.' Following Steve Earle, I'm just gonna keep singing my tune, which is that realise it or not, we all write in an Aboriginal land. As Auntie Lilla Watson, a senior Birri Gubba woman in Brisbane says, we all live in the belly of the snake.

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In his poem 'The Conquest,' Les Murray wrote of classical Aboriginal culture, the people before Cook, and concluded:

They couldn't tell us how to farm their skin (59).

It's a great poem, but for all his insight, Murray is wrong. Eora people could have told Phillip exactly how to farm their skin, if he had been willing to listen, on fair terms. We still can. In



*Dark Emu* Uncle Bruce Pascoe has told Australia just how to go about farming our skin. He shows, with the backup of the early white explorer's journals and the invaluable work of Bill Gammage, that our people were the world's first farmers, first bakers and first diplomats. Uncle Bruce shows that we were not the hunter-gatherers the world believes we were, but skilfully managed our vast estates and lived lives that were rich and sustainable and sophisticated, before Christ was birthed in Bethlehem. I'll finish by returning to Malouf's doomed Aboriginal linguist. In his short story, Malouf talks about the man being very quiet, if not entirely inarticulate in English. The only words the man utters are English ones – 'you wanna see me boss' (207). These words are, Malouf writes, 'neither a statement nor a question' (209). 'You wanna see me boss.' *Not a question, not a statement.* He's good, Malouf, even if he did reprint in 2008 a story that has us doomed as cultural beings.

Modern Australian literature is struggling, as the country is struggling, to come to terms with its place in an Aboriginal land. For us to arrive at a place of real reconciliation it will not be enough to love the Dead Aborigine, nor, as Winton has previously urged, to love the stolen land. Not enough to mourn the lost languages, which are really sleeping languages, nor to eulogise the (mis)perceived end of the Dreaming that can never end. Nor is it enough to say I like to fish and to go camping on country I know very well in my four-wheel-drive. And it's not even enough to say that Aboriginal knowledge is the most underutilised resource in this country but then fail to fight tooth and nail to defend that knowledge and the living people who hold it.

Many senior Aboriginal people have been waiting a hell of a long time to show you how to see our civilisation. But Australians have to learn to listen. As the zen saying goes, you can't fill a vessel that is already full. When you stop yapping for a few hours or a few days or a few years, and sit down with Aboriginal Law people, and try to understand what the songlines are saying to us all, that's a very good step in the right direction. I shake my head at some of his statements and lingering beliefs, but I give Winton credit for making the effort in middle age. 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 learned a lot of what the nation needs him to know. His young boy in *Eyrie* is in grave danger but he is under the protection of the Wandjina, just as the damaged white man Keely is. And because of that, they both are alive at the end of the novel, against all odds. There is genuine reconciliation. There is great fierce love, too, for it is our Law that gives us courage. Not everyone is equipped to learn about the songlines. Not everyone will enter the Dreaming; but I long for the day when Australian writers don't routinely decide that 60 000 years of learning is dispensable and irrelevant to their work here. Luckily my people are patient people. One day the nation will wake up, and see us not as cultural trophies or museum pieces or dangerously dysfunctional monsters, but as cultured people with an inheritance like none other on the planet. Until that time arrives, I will continue to write as best I can. And until every Australian embarks upon the journey which Winton and I are both making, I will:

...pity the poor immigrant,  
 Whose strength is spent in vain  
 Whose heaven is like *Ironsides*  
 Whose tears are like rain  
 Who eats but is not satisfied  
 Who hears but does not see  
 Who falls in love with wealth itself  
 And turns his back on me. (Dylan)

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