Spaces, (Non-)Places, and Fluid Identities in Tim Winton's Fiction

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Abstract. One of the major issues addressed by postcolonial literature is identity crisis. In Australia, a multicultural country and a former settler colony, where the sense of belonging is particularly troubling, this literary theme has been exploited by writers to address the ambiguity of home and belonging. This article attempts to examine Tim Winton's fiction and show how the writer explores the concepts of place and space to set his protagonists' shattered selves in the postcolonial geography. The analysis of his fiction from the perspective of humanistic geography, Edward Relph's concept of *placelessness*, and Marc Auge's idea of *non-place* reveals that a simple categorization of Winton's settings into oppressive places and liberating spaces may be insufficient to analyze his characters' experience of displacement and the uncanny for, as the third category – the postmodern notion of non-place – enters the scene, a stable sense of identity seems unattainable.

Key words: Winton, space, place, non-place, postcoloniality, identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Tim Winton's representation of space is the major aspect of his narratives. His fictitious worlds comprise vast, deserted and seemingly boundless spaces, as well as apparently distinctive landscapes, places and locales. The duality of the world presented in his narratives, its tendency to be both boundless and discontinuous, has a profound influence on his protagonists' struggles to overcome their identity crises and recover from traumas.

Boundlessness of Winton's spaces derives from their numinous character. For the author (2010, 33), the sacredness of the country's interior and the ocean – the fields of "miracles, a profusion of depths and mysteries" – tends to eradicate all kinds of boundaries and render the spaces seamless and uniform. In addition, vast geographic settings are usually repositories of gnostic knowledge and mysticism. Primaeval and unpopulated areas, where astounding natural formations often carry symbolic meanings, offer characters insight into the ancient history of the land as well as Aboriginal and

Christian beliefs. In this respect, the unbound spaces bridge the past and the present, which contributes to their timelessness.

Contrarily, places and locations are responsible for the fractured, gap-slashed, and discontinuous quality of Winton's universes. Consequently, when his protagonists traverse the imagined Australia, the boundaries separating the settings expose psychological fault lines that run through their lives and force them to confront their pasts. Since, in Winton's oeuvre, cities, towns and suburbs are frequently sites of personal dramas, it is no surprise that the protagonists' traumatic past and the present merge in those locations. As a result, Winton's characters are emotionally and psychologically paralyzed; they are consistently deprived of the possibility to forget the past, recover and start their lives anew. As the places are rendered timeless, the characters remain time-trapped and the future becomes impossible.

Timelessness and lack of authentic, intimate relationships, in turn, transform places into non-places. In a timeless and placeless universe, relatively stable identities become unattainable. This paper attempts to examine the relation between Winton's settings and characters, the ways in which Winton exploits postcolonial identity crisis, how he sets it in a postcolonial geography and intertwines personal recovery with national reconciliation. The article also explores how Winton's fictitious places are rendered non-places, and looks into the implications of the process for his characters' identities.

2. OPPRESSIVE PLACES AND LIBERATING SPACES

Settings in Winton's works comprise a variety of places and embrace a number of different landscapes: cities, suburbs, towns, dwelling places and domestic interiors, on the one hand, and the continent's interior, coastal areas, swamps, deserts, beaches, the bush and the ocean, on the other. The abundance of locales is not surprising since Winton has frequently emphasized the role of settings in the development of both action and characters. In one of his comments to Bill Bachman's 2001 collection of photographs entitled *Local Colour: Travels in the Other Australia,* Winton notes:

> Faces are landscapes of their own . . . You can see the seasons in them, the passage of time, of conflagration and drought, of bounty gone, chances lost. You can see the nuggetty foundation coming through.
> Genial, surprised, coy, proud, open, Australian faces all somehow manage to retain a terrible scepticism, the long stare within the expression which truly expects the worst. A matter of origins, I imagine . . . In the faces of stockmen, ringers, shearers, shopkeepers there is a cockiness, a swagger that belies a backlog of failure, defeat, and disappointment. There isn't the optimism you see in American faces, for there was no glorious frontier, no promised land, only a long, tough apprenticeship to the land that rendered people equally unequal.
> Curiously, the land often renders itself in faces too, and it bears similar stories. Antiquity, attrition, fire, torrent, the grinding crash of continents. (Bachman 2001, 126)

To express the idea that people are molded by the environment, the author depicts his characters' bodies to resemble the topography of the land, and constructs their

personalities by means of encounters and transgressions they make when crossing spaces and visiting places of memory.

The comparisons of characters to the land are frequent. In *Eyrie* (2013, 4), for example, the main character, Tom Keely, looks into the mirror and sees "how far the eyes had retreated from the battlefield of his face. Above the wildman beard he was all gullies and flaky shale. Badlands. His wine-blackened teeth the ruins of a scorched-earth retreat." The regularity with which such comparisons appear in Winton's works demonstrates the existence of an umbilical cord between the characters and the land. In addition, places, spaces and landscapes tend to have a great impact on characters' personalities. In *Eyrie*, it is neither history nor passing time that shape the characters of individuals. Instead it is the place, Fremantle in particular, that has an effect on Tom Keely: "he knew the place backwards, had lived here most of his working life. But he had to remind himself daily that it was quite another town to him now; in his new circumstances he lived in it differently, feels its properties anew. These days he was more at its mercy, it acted on him in ways he hadn't really experienced before" (40).

As the passage illustrates, places remain dynamic in their ability to impact the characters' psyches. However, it should be emphasized that while places tend to oppress characters, spaces offer them freedom, liberation and recovery from traumas. For example, in "Big World," a short story in the collection *The Turning* (2004, 2), two young meat workers, leave the town of Angelus, where they live in dysfunctional families and which offers them nothing but monotony, dullness, and lack of perspectives – the unnamed protagonist-cum-narrator states it explicitly when he says: "It's not hosing blood that shits me off – it's Angelus itself; I'm going nuts here."

In Winton's works, open spaces are frequently juxtaposed with oppressing places. In *Dirt Music* (2003), Luther Fox leaves White Point and sets off on a journey to the northern part of Western Australia, where he hopes to find solace and come to terms with his past. His derelict farm and house are memory sites that remind Lu of both his cheerful moments before he lost his family in a car accident and his loss. To overcome traumatic stress constantly evoked by the place, Lu explores unknown and deserted territories where, like Patrick White's eponymous Voss, he is guided by Aborigines. With their help – they burn his maps and direct him to the Durugu islands, where "*djuari*, spirit people" (309, emphasis original) go – Lu arrives at deserted isles on the verge of the continent. The exhaustive journey and weeks spent in isolation have a destructive effect on his physical self and psyche. On the one hand, Lu's frequent hallucinations and nightmares blur the distinction between the past and the present, the real and the imagined. On the other, however, they force him to face his traumas and discover a soothing power of the land in the form of ephemeral and numinous music flowing out of it. This experience helps Lu establish a link with the land and, ultimately, reconcile with the past.

In contrast to liberating spaces in *Dirt Music*, places and landscapes in *Eyrie* offer virtually no freedom. The descriptions of overwhelming, suffocating, crippling and paralyzing Fremantle extend almost entirely over the first part of the novel and then reappear throughout the story to emphasize Tom Keely's uneasiness, malaise and disgust with his own fate and the town. The narrator describes the town as the "gateway to the booming state of Western Australia. . . . Lying dazed and forsaken at the rivermouth, the addled wharfside slapper whose good bones showed through despite the ravages of age and bad living" (5). In addition, the Mirador, the building Keely lives in, does not offer any relief from the heavy and thick atmosphere of the town.

Apparently, places and spaces in Winton's fiction should be associated with human activities. They are not static geographical locales exploited in terms of a background only. Rather they are dynamic elements originating from and integrated with human experience. To consider the role of geography in Winton's fiction, it is thus necessary to focus on character-place connections, and study the background in terms of humanistic geography, which, as Yi-Fu Tuan notices, seeks to achieve "an understanding of the human world by studying people's relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place" (1976, 266).

In his "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) acknowledges the multifaceted nature of *place* and *space*. On the one hand, Tuan (1979, 388) accepts the abstract mathematical and geographical conceptions of the notions, but on the other hand, he emphasizes the role of human experience in the understanding of space and place: "The study of space, from the humanistic perspective, is thus the study of a people's spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience. . . . The geographer's understanding of space is abstract, though less so than that of a pure mathematician. The spatial apprehension of the man in the street is abstract, though less so than that of a scientific geographer."

More importantly, however, Tuan (1979, 409) discerns that space is general – "space is formless" – and place is unique since each place has its own "personality": "the personality of place is a composite of natural endowment (the physique of the land) and the modifications wrought by . . . human beings." In addition, for Tuan (1979, 409, 411) place carries "greater emotional charge than location or functional node" and "it is a small world, the node at which activities converge." In general, what distinguishes places form spaces is the fact that place is space characterized by human interactions. Accordingly, Winton's fictional space can be divided into places and spaces with reference to human interactions and lack of human interactions respectively, but with reservation that Winton's spaces should not be considered purely abstract geographical concepts. Rather they should be approached from the humanistic perspective suggested by Yi-Fu Tuan, especially that there exists a link between Winton's fictional spaces and his protagonists' attachment to these spaces in terms of home, community and nation.

The division of Winton's fictional places and spaces is based on the apprehension of places as loci of human interaction, and occupation in particular, and space as the exterior area outside of these places. Consequently, places are Winton's protagonists' dwelling places – houses and homes – as well as suburbs, towns and cities, where interpersonal relations are established and practiced within families and communities. On the other hand, Winton's spaces, in terms of smaller units, distinguished by Heidegger (2001, 153) as "spatia," are the land's interior as well as coastal areas: the bush, the desert, the beach, the sea and the ocean. In Winton's works, these tend to serve as spaces of individual contemplation and reconciliation. However, reconciliation may take two forms: the first is coming to terms with one's own trauma, identity and the self; the second is the reconciliation and acceptance of what is ancient, numinous and indigenous through the experience of the land. Here the postcolonial character of Winton's fiction comes to the forth.

In settler colonies, such as Canada and Australia, postcoloniality tends to revolve around accepting and reconciling with the past, which haunts non-indigenous members of the society. The problem multicultural and pluralist societies face is the problem of the national identity. Due to the lack of consensus as to the shared values that would form the

basis of a coherent national identity, such nations suffer from unstable (national) identities – identities that are continuously vulnerable to raptures and divisions.

In his essay "DissemiNation" (1990), Homi Bhabha (292) discerns that most modern nations have applied a peculiar discourse of nationalism characterized by an erasure of memory, a process of forgetting and the language of metaphor to overcome divisions and promote national unity. Bhabha (1990, 294) claims that metaphors and literary tropes such as "the nation as one," "out of the many one" or, in Australia, "unity in diversity," have become important ways of negating a nation's heterogeneousness to establish a sense of unity and belonging.

However, in order to forge a coherent and universal national identity, it is necessary to accept those values that every member of the nation would adhere to. To achieve this, all other values that fall outside the core of the national project must be abandoned or forgotten. In his essay, Bhabha implies that there exists a relation between the process of forgetting, or repression, and the chance for the repressed to surface. He (1990, 310) writes that "where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity make their claims on the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, a minority discourse that speaks betwixt and between times and places." More importantly, however, Bhabha (1990, 296-7) discerns that the "distracting presence" of the repressed always disturbs the nation. In this, the suppressed returns in the form of the ghostly and the uncanny to haunt he nation with the result that the homely becomes unhomely.

Winton's fictional spaces apparently embrace the presence of what has been intentionally forgotten. In his works, the homely and familiar – the metropolitan, non-indigenous, secular center – intertwines with the unhomely and unfamiliar – the rural, indigenous, numinous and sacred periphery. The writer creates landscapes with sensitivity to Aboriginal cultural heritage – Aboriginal mythology in particular – and in this Winton sets up a haunting ground, i.e. the space where the repressed comes back.

Spectrality of Winton's space is apparent for the numinous land hosts a plethora of supernatural characters: ghosts, phantoms and revenants. On the one hand, thus, the land is the source of distraction and uneasiness that haunt white members of the postcolonial nation. On the other hand, the ancient land is the space where Winton's characters may come to terms with their personal traumas. In this, Winton skillfully merges the personal with the national, and this convergence seems not to be coincidental for the space is a vent to all that has been repressed: the history of the land and character's personal traumas. This makes identity crisis experienced by Winton's characters – white non-Aboriginal Australians – a complex issue as their personal dramas intertwine with the maladies of the postcolonial individual and society: unsettled past (both personal and national) and unaccomplished reconciliation (also personal and national). If this is not enough, Winton further challenges the notions of identity, home and belonging in his works by developing fictitious worlds that are both timeless and placeless.

3. FROM PLACES TO NON-PLACES

In his 1976 book *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Relph suggested that place is in the process of gradual disappearance due to its increasing geographical uniformity. Relph (1976, 45) noticed how postmodern aesthetics "destroyed place's persistent sameness and

unity which allow[ed] that [place] to be differentiated from others." For Relph (1976, 143), kitsch and mass values contributed to "undermining of place for both individuals and cultures, and the casual replacement of the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments." Accordingly, landscapes are transformed and lose the variety they once had. Shopping malls, chain stores, airports and other increasingly alike architectural objects change places into non-places. They deprive places of their unique character, contribute to their loss and hence to a growing sense of placelessness.

The term *non-place* has originally been coined by Marc Augé, who in his *Non-Places: Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995, 78), uses the term to denote anthropological spaces that are characterized by transience and insignificant enough to be regarded as places. For Augé (1995,77-8), a space that "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place." In the contemporary world of telecommunication, digital and mobile technology – the age of supermodernity, as Augé calls it, or the era of nomadism, according to Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners (1997, 6) – people are increasingly freed from the constraints of time and location (place). The result is, as John Urry (2002, 99) suggests, that nowadays places become deprived of security; they are no longer a refuge, no longer stable and unchanged. Rather, they are like motels which represent movement, speed and perpetual circulation, and as such they demolish a particular sense of place and location (Urry 2002, 160). For Augé, non-places are transit points – spaces where people enter a no necessary relation with each other – hospitals, clinics, hotel chains, squats, holiday clubs, and refugee camps.

Non-places emerge in spaces where individuals from various, often remote, places and backgrounds intersect, cross and meet. As such, non-places are the result of relations that individuals have with each other, and with these spaces (Augé 1995, 94). However, because these relations are accidental, circumstantial and scarce, and individuals have no emotional connection with non-places, non-places are "terrae nullius," a no man's land. Non-places are everywhere alike, identical, deprived of local character and singularity, and, more importantly, they never change. Therefore, as Augé (1995, 104-5) points out, in non-places, "space is trapped by time," and an individual "has the simultaneous experiences of a perpetual present and an encounter with the self." In this respect, non-places can be characterized as timeless.

Augé also points to another characteristic feature of non-places; he (1995, 95) argues that they appear as the images brought up by proper names, and in this sense they are "imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés." Also, non-places have power to erase individuality of people passing through them since non-places create a shared identity, by treating people collectively as for example passengers or patients (101). However, because the individuals do not establish any deep relationships with each other, non-places are the opposite of utopia as they do not contain any organic society (112). Finally, places and non-places are in a constant interaction. They can mix and permeate each other. In the contemporary world, according to Augé (1995, 107), "places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place. Place becomes a refuge to the habitué of non-places."

4. NON-PLACES IN WINTON'S FICTION

In Winton's fiction, some places are rendered non-places by economic development and progress. In *Cloudstreet* (1992), Perth undergoes a process of transformation from a town into a city, due to which its original character is lost. Its uniqueness is destroyed when its singularity is erased by factories, offices and skyscrapers. Perth, the town, is gradually deprived of positive features; it becomes callous, bland, unremarkable. Economic development driven by growing consumerism and mass production influences the town's architecture, and, like cancer, consumes and alters one district after another transforming the places into unrecognizable, unfamiliar non-places. In *Cloudstreet*, Perth of the 1940s and early 1950s is a vibrant town, a site of authentic human interactions, whereas the city of the 1960s is a conglomerate of alike, strange places, where a disintegrated community is endangered by crime represented in the novel by a serial killer.

Similarly, in *Eyrie*, Tom Keely's apartment in the Mirador is a non-place. The building – "a harbinger of progress" (21) – can only be distinguished from the town's architecture for its height and design – it is the tallest and ugliest building in Fremantle. For Keely, it is "a classic shitbox: beige bricks, raw concrete galleries, ironbar railings, doors and windows like prison slots" (21). The Mirador is a space deprived of human relations. Its dwellers are anonymous individuals confined in the walls of their small flats. Although the Mirador discloses the presence of human activities with sounds coming from within its apartments, these are only echoes of human everyday existence.

The interior spaces of the building are the products of sameness and uniformity. Keely observes the similarity of apartments during one of his rare visits at his neighbor's flat. What differentiates Gemma's place from his are sparse and hardly distinguishable elements of design – some posters, a plant and a coffee table; the rest is identical:

> The window could have been his own. Same sink. Same terylene curtains. Same view of the war monument and the date palms on the hill. The human things were unfamiliar: the cheesy knick-knacks, the Blu-Tacked posters, the potted cactus on the bench, the happy snaps in Kmart frames. But the bare brick walls, the mean, low ceiling, the shifty parquet floor in the kitchen – they were no different. . . . A totally separate life being lived in exactly the same space. That was the Mirador for you. Ten floors of architectural uniformity. And within it, all these folks resisting replication. (137)

As a non-place, the Mirador transforms individuals into a mob. It deprives its inhabitants of their distinctive character by imposing a shared identity of dwellers on individuals. For Keely, his neighbors are strangers, "his fellow tower-dwellers were alien to him . . . anonymous and reassuringly disconnected" (4). The Mirador traps its residents in its never changing form as it has never been redecorated or repainted. The building has remained very much the same since it was erected. Like a non-place, the Mirador offers Keely no protection or refuge against the danger posed by gangsters chasing Gemma. Deprived of security, he becomes panicky and increasingly suspicious of anybody he sees inside or in front of the building: "Everyone began to look sinister. Lurking, plotting, in gaggles of colour and movement" (396).

Another factor that contributes to the transformation of places into non-places is setting towns and cities in-between two great mysteries: the desert and the ocean. Winton's towns and dwelling places are ambushed by overwhelming and astounding formations of land on one side and an immensurable expanse of the sea on the other. As a result, the protagonists are trapped on the fringe of the continent, in the zone where the two spaces collide and intertwine with places. Consequently, in Winton's imagined towns, such as Angelus, White Point and Sawyer, individuals get stuck at the edge "in a permanent state of moral numbness and unrealised potential" (Ashcroft 2014, 22). Angelus, White Point and Sawyer, the towns that appear in Winton's novels *Shallows*, *Breath* and *Dirt Music* respectively, are inhabited with the old and young who seem to be in a constant limbo, with no purpose in life and nowhere else to go. In these towns, people with battered and toothless faces keep preoccupied with fishing and drinking. The towns are mostly built-up with leaning bungalows, decrepit farmhouses and hampies, while their inhabitants either wander dirty streets, drink on the jetty waiting for a miracle or stay in their crumbling huts "possessed by some deep-rooted shame which prevents them from coming out" (Winton 2007, 5).

In general, the town dwellers are dour and blunt; their only form of entertainment is drinking in the local pub and fishing, when the pub is closed. In *Dirt Music*, White Point is nothing more than just "a personality junkyard . . . where people still washed up to hide or to lick their wounds. Broke and rattled they dropped sail in the bay and never left. Surfers, dopeheads, deviants, dreamers . . . sensed that the town was a dog" (17-18). The town itself is represented as isolated and dull: "White Point was . . . just a bunch of tin sheds in the lee of the foredune. . . . The settlement lay wedged between the sea and the majestic white sandhills of the interior. It was a shanty town whose perimeter was a wall of empty beer bottles and flyblown carapaces. . . . The place was isolated, almost secret, and beyond the reach of the law and the dampening influence of domesticity" (16-17).

Such representations of towns and communities emphasize their dystopian character. Decrepit and squalid dwelling places that make up the townscapes reflect the deadlock its dwellers have reached and cannot break. The sensation of being in a bind, is additionally reinforced with the stagnant and changeless surroundings of towns. As a result, the inhabitants and the communities they form are not characterized by genuine human relations. Winton's coastal settlements, with their peculiar run-down architecture, epitomize the inhabitants' psychological paralysis and powerlessness. Angelus, White Point and Sawyer are "personality junkyards" wedged on the border between the land and the sea, which offer only an apparent refuge to the mob of demoralized and disheartened people. Consequently, the towns are rendered non-places: spaces outside of time and place.

In his article entitled "Water," Bill Ashcroft claims that the placelessness of Winton's coastal dwellings derives from their location between the land and the ocean. For Ashcroft (2014, 16), water lets Winton's characters through, grants them a passage to a different state of being, is a medium of transformation and as such allows his protagonists to escape to a different life and discover the holiness of the earth. Also water metaphorically lets characters through to Home, not in terms of a place or location, but, according to Ashcroft (2014, 18), as "*Heimat* – the home we have all sensed but never experienced or known. Water is significant because as *Heimat* it cannot be tied to location." By establishing a connection between water and *Heimat* – the imagined relationship of a human being towards an idealized concept of home – Ashcroft indicates

the utopian character of water, which is further emphasized in Winton's works by its association with timelessness[1]. This however leads to a peculiar ambiguity: on the one hand, water is tangible and accessible in the present but, on the other hand, it is a medium through which characters may experience *Heimat*, which is something anticipated and desired, but never attainable in the present.

This ambiguity has further implications for characters inhabiting towns like Angelus, White Point and Sawyer. In fact, these towns are "a refuge to the habitué of non-places" (Augé 1995, 107), and as non-places they are, first, the opposite to *Heimat* – they are anti-utopias in the sense that they exist but do not contain any organic or genuine community; second, the towns are traps holding their dwellers in limbo – since like non-places they bring the present to a standstill and trap the characters in a loop of time; third, they are deceptive: for their proximity to water, the towns offer protagonists a sense of *Heimat* but, because they imprison its dwellers in their dystopian communities, they never realize the promise of Utopia. As a result, Winton's towns tend to be oppressive to protagonists, which contributes to their identity crisis and the experience of the unhomely.

The role of Winton's eager involvement in environmental protection should not be underestimated here. In his earlier novels the main protagonists, such as Jerra Nilsam, Luther Fox and Bruce Pike, could rebuild their identities and feel at home again through their geographical and psychological transgressions, the experience of the land as well as a symbolic purification. However, in his later writing, in *Eyrie* in particular, this opportunity is lost. *Eyrie* illustrates the consequences of economic development and frenetic consumerism. Here the whole region and the environment are devastated and corrupt. Keely's boat ride up the Swan River into the wild reveals that the swamps he explored to observe endemic birds now reek of miasma, and the marri tree where the birds nested is "more skeleton these days than living tree, a barkless grey column topped by contorted white limbs that towered out across undergrowth, rocks, shadow, water. . . . That tree stood . . . before whitefellas even dreamt of this place. It was here when the river was teeming, when cook-fires and dances stitched the banks into coherent song, proper country. Just to see it was a mental correction, a recalibration" (Winton 2013, 86).

The pollution of the environment in *Eyrie* is equivalent with the transgression of the destructive and toxic activities associated with the economic development of towns and cities onto the entire region. Spaces outside of metropolitan centers, which in his previous works offered redemption and reconciliation, have lost their pristine and unmarred character; the wilderness is perishing and nature is on the verge of extinction. As the passage above suggests, ancient indigenous communities are gone and their vernacular, oral culture destroyed; there is nothing left: no song, no dance, no myth and no trace of the culture that had the power to "stitch the banks" of the river, eliminate gaps and allow transgressions that used to be crucial for Winton's protagonists' "mental correction, a recalibration."

Previously, travels across the country's interior were usually synonymous with protagonists' experience of the sacred. Now, the land – deprived of all symbols of

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[1] For example in "Aquifer," a short story in the collection *The Turning*, water has the capacity to fuse past and present. This is directly stated by the narrator (2004, 53): "When a wave breaks, the water is not moving . . . only the energy is moving, not the water. Perhaps time moves through us and not us through it . . . the past is in us, and not behind us. Things are never over."

continuity – has lost its antique numinous character. The consequences for Keely are tragic since for a character with a shattered sense of home and belonging, the confrontation with and the subsequent acceptance of the unhomely could be a way forward. Once this opportunity is lost, everything else is lost: the promise of Heimat, spiritual and psychological recovery, the opportunity to feel at home again.

In *Eyrie*, Winton seems to suggest that when all kinds of links with the past are erased and haunting grounds cease to haunt, the postcolonial subject's future becomes vague, less predictable and secure than before. This is illustrated in the novel by Keely's nightmarish but prophetic visions. Although Keely can anticipate the forthcoming events: "He couldn't get past the suspicion of more to come, that something worse was necessary, or at least inevitable" (Winton 2013, 41), he cannot prevent them. Deprived of the possibility to wash his sins away and oppressed by the city, he plunges into alcoholism and suffers from delusions, headaches, memory lapses and amnesia. In the end, Kelly is a psychotic whose mental condition has been forged to a large extent by the oppressive character of the modern non-place. In addition, Keely's apparent death in the final scene of the novel does not provide a decisive ending. Standing over the body of a man Keely associates with himself, the reader is not given a clue on whether his falling from the balcony is just another vision or a fact. Although literary texts usually acquire an open and flexible meaning due to unresolved endings, in Winton's novel, the open ending that results in the destruction of an individual, and by synecdoche, the irremediable destruction of the postcolonial identity, seems to indicate that any postcolonial society that deprives itself of the possibility to reconcile with the past is doomed to fail.

6. CONCLUSIONS

There exists an inseparable bond between Winton's characters and the land. Space and place are central to the psychological and emotional recovery of his protagonists. Winton's multiplication of geographical locales is motivated by the idea that communal and individual identities are constructed and negotiated with relation to landscapes, and because the author seems to believe that Australian genuine character lies in-between the oppositions of the country and the city, the rural and the urban, nature and society. Hence, Winton privileges the natural environment, Australia's history and traditions over the metropolitan culture of the city. Consequently, his characters live on the edge of society and prefer geographical margins to urban centers.

Moreover, Winton's transformation of places into non-places reflects a postmodern assumption that because there are no fixed and distinguishable places in the contemporary world, the notion of identity becomes fluid and uprooted. It should also be pointed out that apart from being geographical units, space and place are cultural products. For example, in *Geographical Imaginations* (1994), Derek Gregory (11) treats space as a product of discursive practices and, as such, for him it is "no longer confined to any one discipline, or even to the specialised vocabularies of the academy; it travels instead through social practices at large and is implicated in myriad topographies of power and knowledge." As a result, cultural geography has become inter- or trans-disciplinary, and the question of a relation between identity and place has become the principal focus for postmodern geography. Previously, identity was a historical issue as it was perceived a product of evolution over time. For poststructuralist thought, as Michael

Keith and Steve Pile note in *Place and the Politics of Identity* (1993, 28), identity "is always incomplete, always subsumes a lack, perhaps is more readily understood as a process rather than an outcome." Therefore, for Gerry Smyth (2001, 13), identity is no longer a product but a process shaped by spatial factors such as topography, landscape, location and proximity as well as movement within and transgressions beyond these categories. This postmodern thinking about place, space and identity seems concurrent with metaphorical travels across timeless, placeless and numinous universe undertaken by Winton's characters to cope with their rootlessness and fluid identities.

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