

**Yielding to Country: Memory, Landscape and Cultural Reconstruction in
Tara June Winch's *The Yield***

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Abstract:

The paper examines how Tara June Winch's *The Yield* explores the deep connections between memory, landscape and cultural survival through Indigenous ways of knowing. The study arises from a growing need to read environmental crisis alongside the historical realities of colonial dispossession, suggesting that ecological damage cannot be understood without acknowledging cultural loss and historical injustice. The novel presents Country not as property but as a living presence that holds memory, identity and responsibility. Through Albert's creation of a Wiradjuri dictionary, August's return to Ngurambang and the powerful role of storytelling and art, the narrative shows how remembering becomes a form of cultural rebuilding and resistance against invisibility. Drawing on ecocritical and Indigenous perspectives, this paper explores how language, naming and storytelling restore relationships between people and land while opening pathways toward healing from inherited silence and displacement. It also situates the novel within wider conversations about destruction and renewal, demonstrating how memory can guide recovery after loss. Ultimately, the paper argues that sustainability in *The Yield* begins with humility, attentiveness and yindyamarra, an ethic of respectful coexistence, revealing storytelling as both an ecological practice and an act of cultural reclamation.

Keywords: Country, Indigenous Ecology, Memory, Cultural Reconstruction, Yindyamarra

Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019) is a profoundly ecological novel that places Indigenous relationships to land, language, ancestry, and memory at the centre of its narrative vision. Rather than presenting environmental concerns as a separate thematic layer, the novel embeds ecological consciousness within everyday life, grief, storytelling, and cultural survival. In doing so, *The Yield* resists Western literary traditions that treat nature as mere setting or metaphor, foregrounding Country as a living, sentient presence. The novel emerges

from a distinctly Aboriginal epistemology in which land, people, animals, spirits and language exist in reciprocal relationship. Winch's narrative interrogates the colonial legacy of dispossession, mission history and extractive development, revealing how environmental degradation and cultural erasure operate together. The threat of mining on ancestral land, the erosion of language and the fragmentation of families are presented as interconnected forms of violence against Country.

The narrator's articulation of birthplace immediately invokes Country as embodied experience rather than abstract territory: "I was born on Ngurambang – can you hear it? – Ngu–ram–bang. If you say it right it hits the back of your mouth and you should taste blood in your words. Every person around should learn the word for country in the old language, the first language-because that is the way to all time, to time travel! You can go all the way back." (Winch 1) From an eco-critical perspective, *The Yield* challenges anthropocentric and capitalist models of progress by foregrounding Indigenous ecological ethics rooted in respect, care and continuity. Language reveals a worldview grounded in continuity and interconnection, aligning with ecocritical arguments that environmental perception is culturally mediated (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). The novel's relevance is heightened in the present moment, marked by the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and renewed struggles over Indigenous land rights. By invoking Dreamtime as a living philosophy, *The Yield* offers an alternative environmental worldview grounded not in exploitation but in responsibility to both ancestors and future generations.

An eco-critical reading of *The Yield* requires theoretical frameworks that move beyond Western environmentalism. Indigenous eco-criticism provides such a lens by recognising land as sentient, relational and spiritually alive. Deborah Bird Rose's articulation of Country as alive with story, law and memory is particularly useful in understanding Winch's portrayal of Prosperous as a place that remembers colonial violence while sustaining cultural continuity (Rose 7-9). Country is not simply occupied by humans rather, humans exist within a network of reciprocal relationships with non-human entities. This worldview is powerfully articulated in the novel through Albert Gondiwindi's reflections on soil, knowledge, and interconnected life:

I read that inside the soil there are the same number of microbes as there are stars in the universe, and how if you farmed the soil you took the chance of rain away with the nutrients. Well, that blew my mind—just because we don't know something, doesn't mean we will always find out the answer. But I found it out. [...] Manhang—that's where the body goes eventually, and everything else from the manhang to the stars is eternally alive with our spirits. (Winch 77)

Postcolonial eco-criticism further illuminates how environmental exploitation is inseparable from histories of imperial expansion. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that colonialism reorganised land according to extractive priorities, marginalising Indigenous knowledge systems in the process (Huggan and Tiffin 3–5). *The Yield* exposes this logic through the proposed mining project, which frames land as a resource rather than a relation.

Deep ecology's insistence on the intrinsic worth of non-human life helps explain Winch's refusal to place human concerns at the centre of the narrative (Naess 95). In *The Yield*, animals, land, and water are not valued only for their usefulness to human survival or emotion. Indigenous cosmology extends this ecological principle further by grounding environmental responsibility in ancestral law and spiritual obligation, where care for Country is inseparable from cultural continuity. Ethical relations with the non-human world are therefore not abstract ideals but lived responsibilities passed down across generations. Jane Bennett's concept of "vibrant matter" (6) is particularly useful here, as it enables animals, water, and soil in the novel to be read as active, responsive presences rather than inert background or symbolic devices. This framework aligns closely with Winch's portrayal of the natural world as animated, relational and capable of shaping human experience.

Central to this framework is Dreamtime, understood not as myth but as epistemology. Dreaming governs how knowledge is transmitted, how time is perceived and how ethical relationships with Country are maintained. This theoretical synthesis enables *The Yield* to be read as an eco-critical text grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. Country in *The Yield* is not merely a setting but a living presence that carries memory and guides belonging. From an eco-critical perspective, this continuity resonates with theories of material agency and non-human vitality (Bennett 62). Dreamtime is foundational to Aboriginal worldviews and forms the philosophical core of *The Yield*. Contrary to Western misconceptions, Dreamtime does not refer to a distant mythical past but to an ongoing reality in which ancestral beings created the land and continue to inhabit it. Time within Dreaming is cyclical and layered, allowing past, present and future to coexist. Winch's narrative structure mirrors this understanding of time. The novel moves fluidly between Albert Gondiwindi's memories, August's present-day return and ancestral presence, resisting linear chronology. This fragmentation reflects Dreamtime logic, in which stories emerge as needed rather than in sequence.

The novel invokes the creative presence of Biyaami, the ancestral creator figure, whose actions establish both the physical contours of the land and the moral order governing human relationships with it:

Biyaami came upon the earth and decided to make it a beautiful place to live, so he made the plateaus and the mountains, he made the deserts, and stretches of sand and seashores. He planted shrubs and flowers and trees and ferns in different places. Then he needed to make the waterways in order to feed the plants and trees he'd created. So he made the oceans, beaches, lakes and rivers too. He blew on his creation and had a lovely breeze sweep across the land. He loved what he'd made so much that he decided to stay up in a cave on Kengal Rock with Mother Earth. (Winch 245)

Dreamtime also shapes ecological ethics in the novel. Land is not inert terrain but a living archive of ancestral presence and responsibility. Ancestral beings such as Biyaami, Marmoo and the Brolga are not confined to folklore; they continue to shape moral obligations to Country. Their presence reinforces the idea that humans are caretakers rather than owners of land. In contemporary terms, Dreamtime offers a powerful alternative to extractive development models. Its cyclical temporality resists capitalist notions of endless growth and instead emphasises sustainability, continuity and accountability. In an era of environmental crisis, *The Yield* demonstrates that Dreamtime remains a vital ecological philosophy with direct relevance to present-day environmental governance.

In *The Yield*, land is not only a site of survival but also a source of solace, memory, and spiritual continuity. The concept of *manhang* soil, earth, and dirt emerges as both a material and a metaphysical space where life, labour, death and ancestral presence converge. Winch presents soil as an intimate archive of Indigenous endurance, shaped by daily care and reciprocal engagement rather than ownership or extraction. Albert's recollection of working the kitchen garden foregrounds soil as a living partner in sustenance, "Soil, earth, dirt—manhang... we put everything into the soil, good manure, and turning, weeding it every day to grow our food" (Winch 76). This emphasis on labour and care resists romanticised depictions of land, instead highlighting the everyday practices through which Indigenous people maintained ecological balance despite deprivation. The garden becomes a microcosm of the Country itself, nurtured through attentiveness, patience, and respect. Food cultivation is shown not as domination of land but as cooperation with it. Significantly, Winch draws attention to gendered ecological labour, noting that in the absence of men after the war, women worked the land with equal intensity. This challenges patriarchal and colonial narratives that marginalise Indigenous women's environmental knowledge. Seasonal farming practices, such as growing corn during summer rainfall, reflect a deep attunement to climatic rhythms that predate industrial agriculture.

The disruption of these rhythms marks a turning point in the narrative. When the summer rain no longer arrives, the community's response shifts toward Christian faith rather

than ecological understanding. Albert recalls how people “looked to Jesus instead,” (76) believing that faith alone might restore water, yet “the water didn’t come back” (76). This moment operates as a quiet but powerful critique of colonial religious frameworks that displaced Indigenous environmental knowledge without offering ecological solutions. From an eco-critical perspective, this episode exposes how colonial belief systems contributed to environmental alienation by severing spiritual responsibility from land-based practice. The failure of prayer to restore rain contrasts starkly with the earlier emphasis on working *with* soil and seasons. Winch further deepens her critique by introducing invasive plant species, such as Paterson’s curse, capeweed, and wild oats. These foreign weeds are not merely botanical intrusions but symbols of colonial ecological violence, “They all suck the good and the water from the already-dry ground” (77).

Here, environmental degradation is shown as cumulative and cyclical. Soil becomes acidic, nutrients are extracted, and chemicals are repeatedly applied in an endless attempt to “put some life back into this place” (77). This mirrors contemporary critiques of industrial agriculture, which relies on chemical intervention rather than ecological balance. The passage culminates in one of the novel’s most profound eco-philosophical reflections, “Inside the soil there are the same number of microbes as there are stars in the universe... Manhang that’s where the body goes eventually, and everything else from the manhang to the stars is eternally alive with our spirits” (77). This cosmological vision collapses the distance between earth and sky, body and universe. Soil is no longer merely ground but a living cosmos, animated by unseen life and ancestral presence. The return of the body to *manhang* affirms death not as an ending but as reintegration into a living ecological continuum. In this sense, *manhang* functions as both a burial ground and a birthplace, reinforcing Indigenous understandings of cyclical existence.

In the context of contemporary environmental crises, soil depletion, chemical farming and loss of biodiversity, Winch’s vision of soil as sacred and alive acquires urgent relevance. *The Yield* suggests that ecological restoration cannot occur through technological intervention alone but must involve a renewed ethical relationship with land, grounded in humility, memory and care. Through *manhang*, Winch reclaims soil as a site of resistance against ecological dispossession, asserting Indigenous knowledge systems as essential to environmental sustainability. Land remembers, soil holds spirits and caring for the earth becomes an act of cultural survival. In *The Yield*, animals are not decorative elements within the landscape, they function as ethical indicators of ecological imbalance and colonial violence. Through recurring images of roadkill, invasive species, locust outbreaks and global extinction, Winch exposes how industrialisation disrupts both human and non-human life. Animals become witnesses to dispossession, grief and environmental degradation. The

image of roadkill recurs throughout the novel, linking environmental harm with personal trauma. As August drives along the highway, she is distracted by the roadside, “August was distracted by the side of the road... distracted by roadkill and the shreds of tyre treads scattered there... Imagined kicking through the rubbish and finding a girl’s pelvis simply overlooked” (79).

Here, the dead animal bodies and tyre debris symbolise the intersection of mechanical modernity and fragile life. The highway, an emblem of development and progress, becomes a site of erasure. August’s grief for Jemma merges with the scattered bones of wallabies, suggesting that colonial infrastructure produces both ecological and human loss. The trauma deepens when the narrative refers to rescue centres for joeys found alive in the pouches of mothers killed by vehicles, “A place that rescued native animals, mostly joeys that were still alive in their mothers’ pouches when the mothers had become roadkill” (154). This haunting image underscores the generational consequences of environmental harm. The orphaned joey mirrors the orphaned Indigenous child, both of whom suffer from systems beyond their control. The motif of roadkill thus serves as a metaphor for interrupted lineage, broken continuity and survival amidst devastation. From a contemporary perspective, these scenes resonate with current concerns about habitat fragmentation, highway expansion and biodiversity loss. Wildlife-vehicle collisions remain a major cause of native species decline, reinforcing Winch’s critique of industrial infrastructure that prioritises speed and profit over ecological care.

If roadkill represents modern industrial violence, rabbits symbolise an earlier but equally destructive colonial intervention. Albert recounts how rabbits were introduced for sport, “They were brought over by a grazier... He started with twelve pairs... within a couple of years there were thirteen million of the buggers eating the seedlings and the crops and the native plants meant for the kangaroos, the bilbies and wallabies” (102). The exponential spread of rabbits reflects the uncontrolled expansion of colonial settlement itself. What began as recreation becomes an ecological catastrophe. Native species are displaced, crops are destroyed and ecosystems are destabilised. Traditional knowledge was marginalised as land became a site of extraction and control. These processes reflect broader postcolonial dynamics in which imperial systems simultaneously reshape culture, land, and identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 28). The subsequent introduction of foxes to control rabbits only worsens the damage, “They built the rabbit-proof fence from one end of the country to the other... Too bloody late they’d built that fence” (102).

The fence constructed to protect the “granary of the Motherland” (103) reveals how colonial priorities privilege imperial agriculture over Indigenous ecological systems. The

phrase “too bloody late” (103) encapsulates the belated recognition of environmental harm, a pattern that continues in contemporary climate politics. The symbolic weight of rabbits extends further through Jedda’s unfinished story, “Alice fell down the rabbit hole and she did land in Australia” (176). This rewriting of *Alice in Wonderland* connects colonial fantasy with Australian ecological invasion. The rabbit hole becomes a metaphor for colonial entry into Indigenous land, seemingly whimsical, but profoundly disruptive. The teacher’s red question mark beneath Jedda’s story signifies the silencing of Indigenous reinterpretation.

Winch also uses locusts to symbolise environmental unpredictability intensified by climate shifts, “Rainfall after a dry spell is the perfect condition for good wheat yields and also, the perfect condition for locust outbreaks” (29). This statement captures ecological duality, the same conditions that promise abundance can produce destruction. Historically, locust swarms have devastated crops, exposing the fragility of monoculture. It anticipates contemporary concerns about climate volatility, in which extreme weather events produce cascading ecological consequences. The locust thus functions as both a natural phenomenon and a reminder of imbalance. In contrast to Indigenous seasonal knowledge, industrial farming practices often ignore ecological warning signs, leading to cycles of depletion and crisis.

Perhaps the most striking image of extinction in the novel appears in August’s encounter with the newspaper headline, “GONE FOREVER – BLACK RHINO EXTINCT. An animal zip! Gone!” (6). The abrupt phrase “zip! Gone!” conveys the speed and irreversibility of extinction in the Anthropocene. August’s visceral response to imagining the taste and texture of rhino skin reveals how deeply she internalises loss. The extinction of the rhino triggers a parallel realisation, “No more Albert Gondiwindi roamed the earth, and no more black rhino either” (8). By equating her grandfather’s death with the extinction of a species, Winch collapses scales of loss, personal, cultural and ecological. Albert becomes emblematic of endangered knowledge systems, just as the rhino symbolises vanishing biodiversity. The fact that August has never seen a rhino “in real life” and compares it to a dinosaur reinforces how extinction transforms living beings into distant memory. This echoes contemporary anxieties about disappearing species whose absence future generations may accept as normal.

Through the animal motifs, *The Yield* critiques the ecological consequences of colonialism and industrialisation, habitat destruction, invasive species, climate instability and mass extinction. Roadkill, rabbits, locusts and the rhino are not isolated images but interconnected signs of a world out of balance. In the present era, often described as the Sixth Mass Extinction, Winch’s narrative insists that environmental collapse cannot be separated

from colonial history. Indigenous dispossession and ecological destruction are parallel processes. To address one without acknowledging the other would be incomplete. Animals in *The Yield*, therefore, function as moral witnesses. Their deaths, invasions and disappearances prompt a re-evaluation of the systems responsible for these outcomes. Through these images, Winch elevates ecological awareness into a moral imperative. Animals in *The Yield* are not passive symbols but moral agents that witness human actions. The novel exposes colonial attitudes toward non-human life through stark phrases that reveal how animals were devalued and exterminated.

The raven emerges as a figure of ancestral intelligence and endurance, observing the world with watchfulness. The brolga, associated with ceremony and Dreaming, reinforces the sacred dimension of animal life. Cockatoos signal habitat disruption, while the rhino connects local Indigenous struggles to global extinction crises. By granting animals ethical presence, Winch challenges anthropocentrism and aligns the novel with contemporary debates on non-human rights. Birds play a distinctive role in the novel's ecological imagination. The magpie's song evokes songlines and memory, reinforcing Indigenous traditions of transmitting knowledge through sound and place. The plover, fragile and ground-nesting, symbolises vulnerability within damaged ecosystems. The novel's ecological imagination challenges anthropocentric literary traditions that treat nature as passive scenery (Buell 2–4).

Birds function as messengers, signalling ecological imbalance. Their disappearance in the real world mirrors the loss of cultural and environmental values. Native bees and wildflowers symbolise interdependence and fragility within ecological systems. Bees sustain pollination networks essential to both land and culture, while wildflowers embody place-specific knowledge. Their decline reflects climate change and industrial agriculture, reinforcing the novel's warning that ecological collapse leads to cultural erasure. Water in *The Yield* is sacred and ancestral. Rivers carry memory, while rain signifies renewal within Dreaming cycles. Water connects people to land and ancestors. This reverence contrasts with colonial approaches that commodify water. Contemporary water crises make the novel's hydrological ethics urgent and political.

In *The Yield*, environmental consciousness is inseparable from ancestral presence. Winch constructs what may be described as a spiritual ecology, in which land, animals, humans and spirits exist within a continuous ontological field. Through the figures of Biyaami, Marmoo and Gurra-gala-gali, the novel articulates a cosmology in which ecological balance is sacred and disruption carries spiritual consequences. The blending of human and animal forms is central to this worldview. Albert reflects, "Biyaami had emu feet... I reckon

that it's not so hard to imagine the blending of human and animal. We all come from the same soil... I asked my ancestors and they said, 'Little one, what does it matter? Some things just are.'" (199–200). It challenges strict boundaries between species. The emu feet of Biyaami symbolise fluidity between human and animal identities, challenging Western anthropocentrism that places humans above other life forms. The assertion "We all come from the same soil" reinforces ecological kinship that humans are not masters of nature but participants within it.

From an eco-critical perspective, this continuity aligns with theories of posthumanism and Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter, yet Winch's articulation is distinctly Indigenous. The blending of forms is not theoretical speculation but inherited ancestral knowledge. Spiritual authority affirms relational ontology rather than hierarchical taxonomy.

The Dreaming narrative of Biyaami and Marmoo further deepens the novel's spiritual ecology. Biyaami creates the land, waterways and vegetation in harmony, "He made the oceans, beaches, lakes and rivers... He loved what he'd made so much that he decided to stay... with Mother Earth" (245). Creation here is relational and sustained through presence. However, Marmoo's jealousy disrupts the ecosystem. He releases "millions and millions" (245) of strange creatures that attack the plants. The image evokes plagues, infestations, and invasive species, echoing earlier references to locusts and rabbits. Mother Nature's response is equally significant. She creates birds to restore balance, "'Look!' Mother Nature said, and released the birds... there they soared down and ate all the insects. Before long the insects were under control and there was no more plague" (245). It affirms ecological equilibrium through biodiversity rather than domination. Birds function as agents of restoration, embodying non-human agency in maintaining balance. The narrative conveys the idea that ecosystems regulate themselves when diversity is protected. In present-day ecological discourse, such insights resonate strongly with conservation biology and ecosystem management. Rather than relying solely on chemical intervention, Indigenous cosmology emphasises interdependence and natural checks and balances.

Winch also addresses the encounter between Indigenous spirituality and Christianity through Gurra-gala-gali. Albert reflects on the similarity between Gurra-gala-gali's story and that of Jesus but receives correction from his ancestor, "Biyaami is the creator, but we don't worship Him or His son. We worship the things He made, the earth... Gurra-gala-gali was just a son, a coincidence." (246). This distinction is crucial. Unlike Christian theology, which centres worship on divine figures, Indigenous belief directs reverence toward the created world itself. The earth becomes sacred not as a symbol but as a living presence. This

theological shift reframes environmental care as an act of worship. In ecological terms, this worldview resists transcendence that separates the divine from material existence. Instead, sacredness is immanent in soil, water, animals and the sky. This way of thinking challenges the idea that humans have the right to dominate the earth and instead reminds us that the land must be treated with care and responsibility.

The spiritual connection to the land portrayed in *The Yield* remains highly relevant today, especially as the world grapples with climate change, the extinction of species and damaged ecosystems. These crises are not only the result of technological mistakes or poor policies but they also reveal a deeper problem, a growing distance between human beings and the natural world that sustains them. Through the stories of Biyaami, Marmoo and Gurra-gala-gali, Winch suggests that environmental destruction is more than physical damage. It reflects a loss of balance, a disturbance in the relationship between people and the Country. When land is exploited, mined or ignored and when Indigenous knowledge is silenced, the harm does not end in one generation. It carries forward, affecting communities, memory and future possibilities. By weaving ancestral cosmology into a contemporary novel, Winch challenges the long-standing colonial assumption that Indigenous spirituality belongs only to the past. Instead, she shows it as living, adaptable and urgently needed. In this sense, spiritual ecology in *The Yield* becomes a quiet but powerful act of resistance, refusing to let Aboriginal belief systems disappear and reminding readers that these ways of understanding the earth may hold vital lessons for our shared future.

In *The Yield*, language is not merely a tool of communication but a living repository of ecological knowledge, memory and ethical relation. Winch presents Wiradjuri not as a relic of the past but as a breathing system shaped by land, ancestors and shared responsibility. Words arise from Country, they carry within them histories of soil, water, animals and spirit. To speak the language is to enter into a relationship with the world it names. Central to this ethical relationship is the concept of yindyamarra, which Albert defines as more than simple respect,

“Only equals can share respect... But yindyamarra is another thing too, it’s a way of life – a life of kindness, gentleness and respect at once. That seems like a good thing to share, our yindyamarra” (104). Yindyamarra establishes a framework of reciprocity rather than hierarchy. Respect cannot be demanded from a position of dominance, it must be shared among equals. Applied ecologically, this principle challenges systems that treat land as subordinate property. If humans are not equals with the earth, then what exists is not respect but control. Yindyamarra, therefore, becomes an environmental ethic grounded in gentleness and mutual recognition.

Albert's dictionary itself functions as an act of ecological preservation. He explains, "The dictionary from Elsie is why I'm writing it down... I am writing because the spirits are urging me to remember, and because the town needs to know that I remember" (2). The act of recording language is framed as a spiritual obligation. Memory is not a nostalgic indulgence but a necessary resistance. By writing the dictionary, Albert refuses linguistic and ecological erasure. The dictionary becomes a counter-archive, opposing colonial documentation that sought to categorise, confine and often eliminate Indigenous knowledge. Winch complicates the idea of the dictionary further, "The dictionary is not just words – there are little stories in those pages too" (11). Unlike Western lexicons that prioritise fixed definitions, Albert's dictionary blends story, history, humour, grief, and personal memory. This structure disrupts the rigid classificatory logic of colonial archives. Language here is relational and experiential rather than abstract.

The reference to Alcoholics Anonymous within the English dictionary, "That punched me in the guts" (11), reveals how colonial intrusion extends into language itself. English carries within it histories of dispossession, mission life and introduced alcohol. The linguistic realm reflects the ecological environment, with both influenced by invasion and disruption. Perhaps most powerfully, the entry on bangal-ngaara-ngaara reveals how language encodes spiritual ecology, "We went bangal-ngaara-ngaara... she showed me that dust to dust is just where we are resting... 'They now soil, they now water, they now lightning.' Afterwards we flew back to the fire" (35). This episode dissolves the boundary between the human body and the natural world, presenting death not as disappearance but as transformation into soil, water, or lightning. Life continues through change, returning to the living systems that sustain all existence. Language here reveals a worldview grounded in continuity and interconnection, where a single word opens access to Dreaming knowledge and cyclical understanding (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). Albert's dictionary resists fixed definitions by linking words to memory, land, and lived experience, unsettling colonial linguistic authority and affirming Indigenous knowledge systems. In a time when many Indigenous languages face extinction, *The Yield* highlights how linguistic loss parallels ecological degradation. By grounding environmental ethics in concepts such as *yindymarra*, the novel demonstrates that sustainable relationships with the earth begin with worldview, as language shapes perception, which in turn shapes action.

In *The Yield*, sustainable living is not abstract environmental theory but daily practice grounded in balance and cooperation. Albert recalls, "The women would collect berries while the men hunted for kangaroo in the mornings. After they had dealt with the catch they'd take some fat of the animal and go hunting again for the sugarbag... They'd let the honeybee – ngarru – go and follow him... and were always led to the sugarbag hidden in the tree"

(196). The description is careful and intimate. Women gather berries in rhythm with the land, while men hunt and later follow the bee back to its hive using nothing more than animal fat and a strand of hair. The bee is not crushed or captured, it is released and trusted to return home. Survival depends not on domination but on close observation and respect for another species' instincts. The practice reveals a way of living in which human beings pay attention to the behaviour of the natural world and move gently within it.

The division of labour between women and men suggests complementarity rather than hierarchy. Gathering and hunting both require knowledge of seasons, plants and animal movement. Each role contributes to the community's nourishment and each depends on restraint and awareness. This memory stands in quiet contrast to industrial systems that extract resources quickly and at scale. Here, sustainability grows from patience and reciprocity. The inclusion of the Wiradjuri word *ngarru* further reminds readers that language itself carries ecological knowledge. Naming the bee is part of understanding it. In a time when pollinators are declining globally and food systems are increasingly fragile, this episode from *The Yield* feels especially urgent. Winch presents sustainable living as relational and inherited, an ongoing conversation between people, animals and Country.

In *The Yield*, art becomes a powerful way to remember place and refuse erasure. Albert reflects on the work of Bernardo Bellotto, describing how the Italian painter created detailed *vedute* of Warsaw long before its destruction:

“I saw a painting in a book, it's called Długa Street; it was painted by a bundadhaany called Bernardo Bellotto... Almost two hundred years later the Nazis bombed Warsaw... But then they had all these paintings... and they rebuilt the city from paintings done generations before the city was bombed to bits” (305).



Fig. SEQ Fig. * ARABIC 1 Warsaw Old Town before and after reconstruction: (a) WWII destruction (b) reconstructed Old Town Square.

The *story* of Warsaw's reconstruction, as told through Bellotto's paintings, becomes more than a historical anecdote, it offers a vision of how art can safeguard memory when physical landscapes are destroyed. Paintings preserve architectural detail, daily life and atmosphere, allowing a city to be rebuilt from remembered images. In the context of *The Yield*, this example functions as a metaphor. Just as Warsaw could be restored through art, so too can Indigenous land, culture and identity be reclaimed through storytelling and memory. Art becomes a form of resistance against disappearance. Albert's reflection turns toward his own community, "I want the younger ones... to look into the riverbed, to stare up into the tops of the gums, to look and know and name the birds... I wouldn't be invisible anymore, none of us would be" (305). Here, visibility is not merely physical presence but recognition. To "look and know and name" (305) is to acknowledge that Country exists, that it has meaning and that its people belong to it. The fear of invisibility reflects the long history of Indigenous marginalisation within Australian national narratives. In this context, art whether through painting, writing, or storytelling emerges as a powerful way of affirming presence and belonging. When colonial systems attempted to silence and erase Aboriginal voices, the act of remembering, recording and describing the land became an assertion of existence. Through these creative expressions, Indigenous people reclaim visibility, ensuring that both their stories and their connection to Country continue to endure.

The reference to Bellotto places *The Yield* within a wider, transnational dialogue about loss and renewal. Just as Warsaw was devastated by war and later rebuilt, the novel reflects the cultural disruption caused by colonisation in Australia. Yet Warsaw's reconstruction also offers hope, suggesting that memory, when carefully preserved, can serve as a guide to renewal. In the novel, this preservation appears through Albert's dictionary and August's return to Ngurambang, both acts resembling painting in their attention to detail,

texture, and place, allowing future generations to recover what was once at risk of being lost. Ngurambang itself emerges as a living presence. The invitation for younger generations to look into the riverbed and up into the gum trees highlights the deep connection between art and landscape. Naming birds, recognising the rhythms of the river and observing the land become quiet but powerful acts of cultural survival. Here, art does not distance people from nature instead it returns them to it, revealing the landscape not as a backdrop but as a living subject with meaning and memory.

The longing to no longer remain invisible signals a moment of change, a willingness to move beyond inherited silence and unspoken pain. Art becomes a space where memories can be expressed openly and where identity may be reclaimed with dignity rather than hesitation. The rebuilding of Warsaw serves as a powerful reminder that even after profound destruction, cultural life can be renewed through the careful work of remembering. In the present day, as Indigenous heritage sites continue to face threats from mining and large-scale development, the question of visibility remains deeply urgent. Documentation, storytelling and artistic expression help safeguard what might otherwise disappear. *The Yield* ultimately shows that art is not merely decorative, it is essential. It protects what has been wounded, gives voice to what has long been overlooked and affirms that Country and the people connected to it cannot be erased or rendered invisible.

The eco-spiritual parallels between Indigenous Dreaming and Western poetic traditions find a powerful contemporary expression in *The Yield*. The novel reimagines nature not as scenery but as a living continuity that sustains identity across generations. While Andrew Marvell's "Bermudas" imagines nature as spiritually restorative (Marvell), Winch's narrative presents Country as an active holder of memory and responsibility. Nature does not merely inspire reflection; it speaks, remembers, and teaches. Albert Gondiwindi's dictionary becomes central to this understanding. Each Wiradjuri word reconnects language to land, demonstrating that ecological knowledge survives through naming. Rivers, trees, birds, and soil are not abstract symbols but living relations embedded within cultural practice. In this way, the Dreaming's sense of eternal presence emerges through language itself: words function like pathways back to Country, allowing cultural knowledge to endure despite displacement. August's return to Ngurambang reinforces this regenerative cycle. Her journey mirrors the renewal suggested in both Dreaming philosophy and eco-spiritual poetry, yet it remains distinctly Indigenous in its emphasis on responsibility. Healing occurs not through escape into nature but through re-entering a relationship with it. By learning to see, listen and recognise the land, August participates in an ongoing process of cultural restoration. The novel therefore transforms the idea of eternal nature into an ethical call. The country endures, but its continuity depends on remembrance and care. Storytelling, like a ceremony, renews

connections that colonisation attempted to sever. Through this framework, *The Yield* affirms that nature's eternity lies not in timeless stillness but in living relationships continually renewed through language, memory and return.

Tara June Winch's *The Yield* reimagines ecology through an Indigenous worldview in which land, language, memory and spirituality exist in an ongoing relationship. Rather than treating nature as a setting or a metaphor, the novel presents Country as a living presence that sustains identity and carries ancestral knowledge. Through Dreaming narratives and acts of storytelling, Winch challenges Western environmental frameworks that separate humans from nature and instead foregrounds an ethic grounded in reciprocity, care and responsibility. Across the narrative, soil, animals, water and language function as interconnected forms of life. Manhang affirms cyclical existence with returning animals witnessing ecological imbalance and colonial disruption. Additionally the Wiradjuri language preserves ecological knowledge embedded in relationships to the environment. Albert's dictionary and August's return to Ngurambang demonstrate that cultural and ecological renewal emerge through remembering and re-establishing connection with Country. Storytelling becomes a form of restoration, linking past, present and future.

The Yield demonstrates that environmental degradation and colonial dispossession are deeply interconnected, making it impossible to understand the ecological crisis without acknowledging historical injustice. Mining, extinction and linguistic loss appear as interconnected forms of erasure produced by extractive systems. Yet the novel also offers hope that art, memory and language preserve the knowledge necessary for renewal. In an era defined by climate crisis and ecological uncertainty, Winch's work proposes an alternative environmental philosophy grounded in Indigenous knowledge. In the novel, sustainability is imagined not as a policy but as a way of being rooted in humility, attentiveness and *yindyamarra*, the practice of respectful coexistence. Winch's narrative ultimately suggests that sustainable futures may depend on listening to Indigenous knowledge systems that have long understood land not as a resource but as a relation.

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