

Green Writing and Elemental Poetic: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Tim Winton

Suzana Haji Muhammad¹, & Qian Zhu²

¹ School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. E-mail: szna@usm.my

² School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. E-mail: zhuqian85926@163.com

Correspondence: Suzana Haji Muhammad, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. E-mail: szna@usm.my

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Abstract

This article will draw a connection between postcolonial green writing and Winton's poetic natural space, where the material world and imagination coexist, and emphasize the unity between elemental essence and the essence of the everyday lifeworld, through examining the manifestation of the four perennial elements in the works of Tim Winton. It finds that Winton's works explore the depiction of four crucial elementary matters in his works, as well as a discourse initiated regarding the potential of literature to foster ecological awareness. Referring to postcolonial ecocriticism and Bachelard's elemental poetics, it argues that Winton's writing is in line with these two theories and aims to read Tim Winton's works as a carrier of environmental concern and demonstrate an effort to save the worsening planet.

Keywords: post-colonial; ecocriticism; Tim Winton; four elements; elemental poetics; natural space

1. Introduction

Australian author Tim Winton grew up "in a world of rocky islands, boats, and obscuring bush," and "at first blush, Australia connotes something non-human" (Winton, 2015, p. 16); therefore, the non-human elements occur frequently in his works. This effectively rich treatment of natural forces has a unique significance in today's eco-collapse. In this sense, this essay will explore four elements in Tim Winton's fiction and take the postcolonial ecocriticism theory to formulate a postcolonial ethics of elements. It argues that this detailed analysis of the four elements will immerse the post-colonial ecological issues, such as the writing of land and environment, air pollution, post-colonial ecological issues, the historical correlation between racism and speciesism, and the paradox between development and environment, reveals the cultural roots of Western hegemony hidden behind the destruction of ecological environment. As Plumwood points out, we are mostly going backward in the key area of containing energy consumption, and are facing growing pollution of land, air, and water, growing problems of the destruction of the forests, the ozone layer, global warming, acid rain, the disposal of toxic wastes, as well as the multiple crises of rationalist agriculture. Our failure to situate dominant forms of human society ecologically is matched by our failure to situate non-humans ethically, as the plight of non-human species continues to worsen (Plumwood, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, in the following work, this article pursues the appearance of the four elements in Winton's works, which respectively relate to the above-mentioned growing pollution, exploring some of their manifestations in Winton's green writing to encourage an active recollection and ongoing encounter with the elemental. Referring to some of the recent scholarships of postcolonial ecocriticism, elemental ecocriticism, and environmental ethics, it aims to discuss how humanity's failure to recognize non-human agency has wrecked the earth, forcing us to live in a wasteland. Thus, this paper attempts to read Tim Winton's works as a four-element ethic that brings to the consciousness of "rethinking social behaviors and actions" (Murphy, 2002, p. 75). Moreover, referring to Bachelard's elemental poetics, it argues that Winton's writing is in line with these two theories and aims to read Tim Winton's works as a carrier of environmental concern and demonstrate an effort to save the worsening planet.

2. The Theory of Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism focuses mainly on cultural/literary discourse systems; therefore, interpreting cultural/literary texts is one of its central tasks. The authors and works of the former European suzerainty's former colonial countries are the first to come into view: India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, African countries such as South Africa, etc. Postcolonial ideas and ecological discourses such as animals in texts, pastoral writing, postcolonial ideas, and environmental environments are the focus of postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecocriticism points out that the Western idea of anthropocentrism is not only the psychological motive that led to the global colonization of European imperial states but also the failure of human beings to properly locate their ecological relationships with the environment, animals, and other non-human worlds, resulting in the deterioration of the global ecological environment. The idea of anthropocentrism is not only the root of environmental racism but also the philosophical basis of speciesism, which regards animals as the 'other' and overemphasizes the cultural superiority of human rationality. Based on this cultural logic of hegemonic rationality, the European imperial colonizers found seemingly justified reasons for their aggression and colonization, and in the sense of the ideology of

colonization, anthropocentrism, and Eurocentrism were inseparable and unified concepts; they regarded the land outside Europe and the people and animals living on it as 'primitive,' less rational and closer to 'children,' 'animals and nature' (Plumwood, 2003, p. 53). Admittedly, the anthropocentric ideology of environmental racism that views the nonhuman world of animals and the environment as inferior is not found only in Western culture; it is even familiar in many cultural patterns, internalized as an everyday ideology. In the post-colonial period, imperialist ideology in the developed West still haunts the world.

As Huggan and Tiffin point out with concern: "Despite the recent advances of eco/environmental criticism, English studies in general, and postcolonial studies more particularly, have yet to resituate the species boundary and environmental concerns at the center of their inquiries; yet the need to examine these interfaces between nature and culture, animal and human, is urgent and never more pertinent than it is today. After all, postcolonialism's concerns with conquest, colonization, racism, and sexism, along with its investments in theories of indigeneity and diaspora and the relations between native and invader societies and cultures, are also the central concerns of animal and environmental studies" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 6). The earth that humans inhabit has never faced such a severe ecological dilemma as it does today: species extinction, land sanding, forest degradation, soil and water pollution, etc. Therefore, re-examining racism and speciesism from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective is urgent and relevant for humanity's survival.

Therefore, this article will look at the influences of the four perennial elements in Tim Winton's fiction, aiming to draw a connection between postcolonial green writing and Winton's poetic natural space, where the material world and imagination coexist, and emphasize the unity between elemental essence and the essence of the everyday lifeworld. It finds that Winton's works explore the depiction of four crucial elementary matters in his works. Referring to postcolonial ecocriticism aims to read Tim Winton's works as a carrier of environmental concern and demonstrate an effort to save the worsening planet.

3. A Brief Overview

Regarding elements, in his article "Water in Tim Winton: Critical Essays" (2014), Bill Ashcroft suggests that an elemental framing can be highly productive. He argues that water serves as the ultimate medium for change and transformation in Tim Winton's works. According to Ashcroft, this transformation represents a journey toward Heimat, symbolizing rebirth (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 18). A recent analysis of Tim Winton's work by Arthur Rose titled "Tim Winton's Pneumatic Materialism" (2020) focuses on the element of air. Rose argues that Winton employs a breath-related approach, which he terms as pneumatic materialism, to highlight the impact of uneven development on Western Australia. This approach considers the influence of factors such as class, race, environment, and mental health, traditionally associated with the Global South, on the region of Winton's interest (Rose, 2020). Regarding the element earth, in her paper "The Beat of the Land: Place and Music in Tim Winton's *Dirt Music*", Kylie Crane (2006) argues that dirt symbolizes location, existence, and the natural world, while Music is linked to feelings, history, and heritage. This paper focuses on the intricate relationship between dirt and music in shaping his identity. The novel presents a viewpoint on music that ultimately provides a resolution to the estrangement of human identity between the realms of nature and society (Crane, 2006, p. 21). Fire analysis is present in Brian Matthews's *Burning Bright: Impressions of Tim Winton*, although to a lesser extent compared to other topics. In *The Eye, the Sky*, he scrutinizes the illumination on the rooftop, which manifests as a fire devoid of flames. Veronica Brady's article, "Looking into the Light", explores the correlation between fire and Christian scripture. However, despite the rich existing Winton scholarship, few critics systematically examined all four elements. The research to date tends to focus on one element rather than the four together systematically. Also, the perspective of Gaston Bachelard's elemental theories has received little attention. Throughout Winton's works, the four elements are indispensable images containing various life forms and the power to create or destroy everything. Four classic elements unite to form the splendid natural space in which human and non-human communities live. And the perennial elements profoundly influence our daily lives in new and challenging ways.

Tellingly, from Winton's novels, extreme weather, like rainfall decreasing, severe droughts, ravaging bushfires, and desertification, appears in different novels as backgrounds. Therefore, this paper will analyze Tim Winton's novels from four aspects: land and ownership, water's ethics and life biodiversity, fire's loss and sustainability, and air's domination and global warming, emphasizing the connection between the cultural roots of Western hegemony and environmental destruction and reflecting the postcolonial eco-ethical ideology of indigenous writers who respect life, protect the environment, and advocate the harmony between human beings and nature.

In the following work, this study pursues the appearance of the elements in Winton's works individually, which are both good and bad, exploring some of their manifestations in Winton's writing to encourage an active recollection and ongoing encounter with the elements. Both the good and the bad can make us regain some emotional comfort, stimulate some vitality, and reconstruct the attitude, mentality, and modality that human beings should have in the face of nature.

4. Discussion

4.1 Earth: Land and Ownership

The land is an essential theme in Winton's literature. As Graeme Turner, among others, has observed, Australian cultural and literary narratives are inextricably linked to notions of place, national myths of the land and the configuration of self. Turner asserts that "the land is central to a distinctively Australian meaning" (Turner, 1986, p. 30). The land is not only a geographical existence but also has significant political significance and spiritual implications because "for a colonized people the essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (Fanon, 2004, p. 9). For the early white colonists, the Australian mainland was just a wilderness, a *Terra Nullius* with substantial business opportunities. Compared with the white

people's pursuit of land ownership, the indigenous people's feelings for the land are more closely related in spirit and reverence for everything in the world. This spirit of representing and speaking for the ground in a forbearing but ubiquitous way has become a sense of closeness between the indigenous people and the land. It is found in various myths, legends, and physical expressions.

"Land is the unique marker of Australian literature that distinguishes it from English literature and demonstrates the local color of Australian literature, as well as the basis for the development of national literature and the physical place where national emotions are placed" (Peng, 2019, p. 13). For the colonizers, the land was an object of coveting and plundering—the history of Britain's overseas colonies in the history of the massacre and dispossession of indigenous people. The history of colonialism in Australia began on January 26, 1788, when the first British exiles arrived, and the British established a colony there. Most indigenous people were slaughtered or expelled from the territories where they had lived for generations. It was through bloody massacres that the colonists (primarily convicts) seized indigenous land and ranches, making their fortunes through exploitation, plunder, and slavery. Moreover, The Aboriginal Turn, which occurred in 1974, coincided with the discovery of Mungo Man. This discovery revealed the existence of Aboriginal presence and their long-standing relationship with the land, spanning tens of thousands of years. This inclusion gave a sense of permanence or long duration, which additionally destabilized conventional colonial history, diminishing Australia's connections with its original country (Griffiths, 2018).

In addition, the territories of Australia are burdened by conflicting claims, diverse histories, and opposing ideals, all of which are evident in the land. In colonial and postcolonial settings, the legal possession of land has consistently clashed with the cultural ownership of a specific location. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin claim, 'the prosecution of land rights in postcolonized societies is part of the ongoing attempt to counteract a colonial history of dispossession that has had a disastrous impact on indigenous peoples, not just in terms of loss of land but deprivation of cultural connection. [...] the contest over land [is] one of definitional, not just territorial, control' (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p.137), which can be displayed from different attitudes towards the earth or land. For example, Axle, an indigenous character in the novel *Dirt Music*, derives pleasure from traversing the terrain without any footwear. Unlike other indigenous Aboriginals, he possesses an innate knowledge of the region and does not require a map. They traverse the terrain with their feet uncovered, experiencing the gentleness and harshness of the desolate landscape firsthand. Alex and his community saw the land as more than just a vacant space or a theoretical idea; it holds significant spiritual significance for them. As agents of the land or nature, indigenous people adhere to the spiritual contract between people and their homes and adhere to the concept of the unity of heaven and man. The Australian edition's cover depicts a boab tree, emphasizing nature's importance in the story and highlighting the tree's essential part in the protagonist's personal growth and transformation. The book title, *Dirt Music*, aptly symbolizes the amalgamation of nature and culture, the connection between the land and the protagonist, specifically the red soil of the Western Australian countryside, and the unrefined music that the protagonist enjoys performing. Moreover, in *The Winter's Dark*, due to owning the land, Ronnie becomes an independent woman who can feed her child by herself.

On the other hand, there was a rigid hierarchy between the white invaders and nature, who always regarded the land and animals as "others" and plundered and exploited them. Under the influence of different central values, the capitalist economic system has invaded and corrupted indigenous traditional culture and social relations, resulting in a series of environmental, cultural, and identity crises. Therefore, in *Dirt Music*, upon reaching Broome, Luther Fox typically composes a letter addressed to Georgie Jutland. However, due to his inability to comprehend his emotions, he finds himself at a loss as to how to begin, despite having a writing instrument and paper at his disposal. The packet given to George (Winton, 2003a, p. 171) contains only a small amount, specifically a teaspoonful, of red dirt. Every concept, feeling of guilt, plan, and strategy diminishes to nothing more than a small heap of soil (Winton, 2003a, p. 171). This small amount of pink soil signifies his strong connection to the land, and metaphors suggest that "soil" represents his origin or foundation. To leave without a trace, he endeavors to incinerate his identification papers, severing his ties to the physical world that symbolize his "identity" (Crane, 2006, p. 24). Fox elucidates to Georgie the significance of dirt music: it embodies the essence of the land, symbolizing one's connection to their homeland and country (Winton, 2003a, p. 81).

Earth is the fundamental origin of life. In an interview, Winton said, "I'm more content to become dust. Because we are all carbon-based life, originated from stars, and will also be classified as dust" (Liu, 2013, p. 61). He also claims that "land is a genetic connection" and it is "the gold standard." (Winton, 2015, p. 23). As Lyn McCredden (2017) puts it, Winton is a literary author with "a keen sense of earth and ecology" (McCredden, 2017, p. 1). Earth is complex in a wide variety of ways, such as soil, dirt, cave, wilderness, stone, and sand, to name but a few. Based on Bachelard, "All resistant objects possess an innate ambivalence, representing both aid and obstacle. They are things to be overcome. They call into being our mastery, our energy" (Bachelard, 2002, p. 14). The stubbornness, seriousness, hardness, and oppression of the enormous granite rocks reflect the formidable "adversarial will" (Bachelard, 2002, p. 16) of the earth elements in Bachelard's works.

Winton's work is often explored through themes of gender, identity, and alienation. Yet the ecocritical reading emphasizes his ongoing concern with nature and contributes to modernism's reexamination of traditional notions of place. Winton's work is also unique in that it is created from the dispersed perspective of individuals on the margins of society. Exploring Tim Winton's work through the lens of ecocriticism can provide new insights into understanding the poet's personality and modernist imagination of nature. Similarly, this paper argues that *The Shepherd's Hut* foreshadows what we now call 'global warming and ecological crisis,' which manifests itself in humans' individual and collective disconnection from the earth through land scarcity and desertification. The images of earth and soil highlight the regenerative properties "dirt" has for Luther, his rootedness in this area, and its role in his identity (Crane, 2006, p. 24).

As a strong proponent of the need to protect the environment, Winton writes about the resistance power coming from the earth. In 1999, he even published a documentary novel, *Down to Earth: Australian Landscapes*, to express the importance of the planet. In Bachelard's view, the earth is related to will. In this sense, the earth element lays a solid foundation for Winton's entire natural space. People turned from worshipping the God who created man to worshipping the land. As a result, the land has gone beyond the meaning of material form and become a place for people to settle down. It is time to get a sense of watching nature and pure land, a sense of respect and admiration for the earth. Except for Earth, fire also provides companionship and a decisive psychological role.

4.2 Fire: Loss and Sustainability

Australia is a fire-prone country. Bushfires have been a feature of the Australian environment for at least 65 million years and will continue to feature in the future (Cary et al., 2012). The history of human fire management dates back to the practice of fire use by indigenous Australians, known as "firestick farming", which began approximately 60,000 years ago. Annually, around 3% to 10% of Australia's land area experiences combustion, as reported by the Western Australian Land Information Authority in 2013 (Hughes, 2014, p. 4). Tellingly, Winton favors of fire element. For example, in *The Riders* (2014), Scully ceremoniously puts three candles on the windowsill of his cottage. When he departs for continental Europe, he doesn't pack many items in his bag, but the candles will accompany him. The candle flame serves as a metaphor, reminiscent of Bachelard's ideas, representing the intimate connection between a place and the feeling of home away from home. It embodies "an inhabited verticality" that is filled with life and presence (Bachelard, 1988, p. 40). They are also likely to be a nostalgic relic from a sacred bygone era - the trio of Jennifer, Billie, and Scully. The candles accompany him throughout his voyage to Greece and for most of the return journey to Ireland. However, the narrative takes a significant shift towards the end, indicating that Scully has embraced a different framework for shaping his identity. This shift involves moving away from concepts of time, belonging, and stability, and instead embracing notions of space, not belonging, and mobility. Throughout the story, it takes a considerable amount of time for the protagonist to undergo this essential transformation. However, ultimately, he discards his candles in a hotel room in Paris, symbolically leaving behind his past on Christmas Eve, signifying a fresh beginning. According to Bachelard (1987), fire is more dynamic, and tangible compared to flowing water. It has the ability to rapidly transform and evolve, even more so than a young bird in its nest. Fire symbolizes the longing for change, the acceleration of time, and the ultimate culmination of life, leading to its "hereafter" (Bachelard, 1987, p. 16). As we have been arguing, it makes them more vividly significant, making them burn in Bakhtin's words, "from the borrowed light of alterity, beginning, and end, birth, annihilation, being and becoming, life, etc" (Todorov, 1984, p. 100).

In addition, from Bachelard's statement below, fire represents enlightenment and renewal of life. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Bachelard describes the essence and spirit of fire: "It is well-being, and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad" (Bachelard, 1987, p. 7). These lines involve the psychological features and the practical application of daily life. For quite some time, fire has stimulated our imagination, producing many metaphors and symbols related to fire. The rising flame evokes the vitality of life. The burning flame represents death and purification and often reminds people of hell, fostering respect and fear. Winton's works have wide different varieties of fire, such as campfire, candlelight, match fire, stove fire, bushfire, and even live fire. Why does fire impress Winton so profoundly?

Since September 2019, forest fires in Australia have been raging, affecting Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. By February 1, 2020, more than 30 people had been killed, thousands of houses had been destroyed, and about 500 million animals had died. The fire and the haze caused by it also seriously impacted Australia's air transport, shipping, agriculture, animal husbandry, and tourism industries. Australia is the driest ice-free continent and is second only to Africa in terms of the total number of burnt annually by vegetation fires (Giglio et al., 2018). Approximately 5% (40 million ha) of the Australian continent burns annually, and all but the aridest parts are susceptible to periodic fire (Bradstock et al., 2012). Fire frequency is exceptionally high in the tropical savannas of northern Australia, with fire return intervals (FRIs) ranging from one to five years, associated with relatively low-intensity fires due to the dominance of grass fuels (Beringer et al., 2015).

Fire primarily symbolizes violence and devastation. The significant blaze in 1956 consumed all wooden structures in *Shallows*, including lintels, roof beams, doors, and cabin shutters, while causing the stones to collapse (Winton, 2011, p. 80). In *The Winter's Dark* (1988), Winton vividly depicts a recurring nightmare characterized by a terrifying sense of dread and despair. The dream entails running downhill through a landscape riddled with holes, enveloped in overwhelming darkness while being consumed by flames and uttering piercing screams. "I" illuminated the valley with a bright and intense light, resembling a torch (Winton, 2003b, p. 20). Fire can occasionally intensify the odor of decay. As an illustration, in the final scene of the novel *An Open Swimmer*, the character Jerra ignites a match, inhaling the scent of its extinguished smoke, and then proceeds to drop it into the petrol tank before hastily fleeing the scene. The destructive power of fire, on the other hand, serves as a means of protection. In *Shallows*, Queenie takes up the responsibility of safeguarding Angelus and declares her commitment to its protection by stating that she will act as a guardian for the town. A single strike of a match produces sufficient luminosity to illuminate the entire globe.

Another example is *Eyrie*. In it, heat is omnipresent and possesses autonomous motion. It can be read that 'heat rolled down from the ranges in waves' (Winton, 2013, p. 239); 'There was no relief from the heat, his [Keely's] sense of entrapment' (Winton, 2013, p. 362). Moreover, in *Eyrie*, the sun scalds (Winton, 2013, p. 4 & 374), kills (Winton, 2013, p. 14), sears (Winton, 2013, p. 8 & 420), brands and blinds (Winton, 2013, p. 15), roasts (Winton, 2013, p. 26), bakes (Winton, 2013, p. 36), beats us (Winton, 2013, p. 57), scorches (Winton, 2013, p. 145), burns (Winton, 2013, p. 131), fucks us (Winton, 2013, p. 158), digs into our eyes (Winton, 2013, p. 242), cooks (Winton,

2013, p. 245), blasts (Winton, 2013, p. 264), staves heads in (Winton, 2013, p. 387), parches (Winton, 2013, p. 223), drills (Winton, 2013, p. 302), damages (Winton, 2013, p. 400), overwhelms and leaves bodies covering (Winton, 2013, p. 11). All of these display that global warming is present but never mentioned explicitly. Western Australia is experiencing an increase in extreme heat, driven by climate change. Heatwaves are becoming hotter, lasting longer, and occurring more often in many regions of the state. Western Australia is also experiencing a warming trend with record-breaking temperatures; nine of Western Australia's ten hottest years on record have all occurred since 1991 (Steffen et al., 2015, p. 4).

Likewise, Winton links fire with life, death, rebirth, and destruction in his works, which in specific ways extend Bachelard's fire imagination, which represents life's loss and sustainability. Similarly, water is also linked intimately with life, death, and destruction in the physical, psychological, and philosophical connections. In Tim Winton's *Eyrie*, the characters may trace the routes of abandoned waste products and chemicals, leading them to and through humans. This conveys the inescapable and ongoing closeness we have with our repulsive substances, like as excrement, physiological fluids, and animal by-products. In summary, a clear knowledge of fire would assist efforts to advance proactive fire management in Australian forests and advocate environment protection awareness, including the deployment of fire-fighting resources well ahead of potentially hazardous fire conditions.

4.3 Water: Ethics and Life Biodiversity

With the arrival of the colonists, a large number of forests and shrubs were cut down, and the surface vegetation disappeared rapidly within a short period, causing soil erosion, reducing the local rainfall, and destroying the natural water ecological cycle system, resulting in extreme weather conditions such as droughts and floods. Intensive animal husbandry requires large amounts of groundwater extraction, resulting in the depletion of groundwater resources and reduced vegetation's ability to support water. At the same time, soil fertility is depleted, and the land becomes barren. Domestic wastewater and garbage, as well as sewage from factories of all kinds, enter the rivers along the valleys and penetrate the groundwater, resulting in severe water pollution, leading to an exceptionally prosperous business for water delivery trucks (Qiao, 2014, p. 119-127).

Water in *The Shepherd's Hut* and *Shallows* symbolizes the source of life, and as the colonists destroy the land, the well, which is one with the ground, naturally loses its vitality and vigor. Coupar, Fitan, and Jaxi continued to suffer from drought and decay. For the indigenous people, the land and everything on it is spiritual. The colonists' actions undoubtedly disturbed the ancestral spirits inhabiting the ground and destroyed the indigenous people's totem of life. Water, like earth, figures prominently, too. Water is the source of all things. It is "an element more feminine and more uniform than fire." Water arises as "the most receptive of the elements" (Bachelard, 1999, p. 5). Throughout Winton's works, there are various forms of water repeated: seawater, springs, wells, rainstorms, waterfalls, tidal pools, streams, rivers, rain, the sea, etc., in order to write about the abundance of water. *The Shepherd's Hut*, on the other hand, indulges in the lack of water, which causes Jaxie's mother's favorite flower's extinction. Elizabeth Guy (1996) claims that the river, water, and sea flow like an undercurrent beneath all of Winton's fiction, suggesting the powerful undertows of life/death, heaven/hell, silence/roar, love/violence, abuse/care, and so forth (Guy, 1996, p. 96).

The sea is a common example of water differentiation. In the construction of literary scene space, Winton does not emphasize the active involvement of human subjective consciousness or emotional experience but depicts the internal interaction of water from an equal perspective, which is also a reflection of the ability of matter to act. The natural things in his works are not the existence assigned by human subjects, but independent bodies that exist in the world, so both human beings and nature are qualified to be agents. Rising sea levels threaten biodiversity. Evidence indicates that through global warming (Urban, 2015) and other human activities, the earth's sixth mass extinction catastrophe has been triggered (Barnosky et al., 2011). Throughout the ages, humans have been appropriating resources, dividing ecosystems, introducing nonnative species, disseminating viruses, and directly causing the extinction of species (Barnosky et al., 2011, p. 51). While mass extinction may be a concept that many humans may understand, it is sometimes difficult to perceive in reality, similar to climate change. Contemporary Australian novelists explore aggression towards both non-human and superhuman creatures, as well as the occurrence of catastrophic extinctions, which go beyond just whales and tigers. For instance, Winton's novel *Shallows* (1996) addresses the violence inflicted upon whales for the sake of profit or the preservation of community heritage. The quote "Down at the flensing deck, a long ramp running into the bloody shallows, a whale was being winched up, hooks through the flukes of its tail, chains and cables moving, taut, noisy." (Winton, 1996, p. 32) highlights the uncertainty surrounding the depletion of whale populations. Tim Winton vividly exposes readers to the atrocities of industrial whaling.

Throughout his works, a multitude of water manifestations recur, encompassing seawater, well water, springs, rainstorms, waterfalls, tidal pools, small streams, and rivers. The various manifestations of water can be seen as nurturing, healing, and feminine. Water is the fundamental transformation that occurs between fire and earth, as stated by Bachelard. According to Bachelard, he strongly asserts that it has "the maternal voice" (Bachelard, 1999, p. 116). Water invites thoughts in *The Shepherd's Hut* too. "Looking for water" is the driving force of Jaxie's journey. And people in *Shallows* yearn for water.

At the same time, the author actively shapes a series of rhetorical carriers to construct the spatial connection between water and human or other natural elements, thereby elucidating the homogeneity between non-humans and humans. For instance, in *Cloudstreet*, as characters engage in a conversation about the Southern Cross. Fish claimed that there is water in the sky, all water. The moonlight illuminated Fish's face, which radiated with joy despite the absence of the moon. Fish gleamed under the protection of the tarp as he drifted off to sleep (Winton, 2011, p. 370). At this moment, water and fire are engaged in a synchronized dance.

Winton is an active member of the Australian environmental protection movement and one of the sponsors of the Australian Marine Conservation Association (AMCS). He actively participated in various ecological protection movements organized by the association and advocated for people to establish awareness of protecting marine life. At the same time, Winton is also a sponsor and activist of the Australian Wildlife Conservation Association and devoted himself to the activities against whaling and shark fin consumption with his practical actions. His novel *The Shallows* won the Miles Franklin Prize, Australia's highest literary prize. The book tells the story of boycotting whaling. In 2003, Winton won the Western Australia Writer's Medal, and he donated a prize of 25,000 Australian dollars to protect the Ningaloo Reef. In *Blueback*, Winton skillfully integrated his environmental protection thought into the story with the ocean as the background and announced that "there was nothing in nature as cruel and savage as a greedy human being" (Winton, 1985, p. 54) therefore this focus might be understood as the statement of a new ecocentric aesthetic—not merely "postcolonial green," but also postcolonial blue. Water—bound up as it is with life, freedom, and death—constitutes an essential theme in Winton's novels. If mentioning life and death, discussing the element of air is inevitable.

4.4 Air: Domination and Global Warming

Air is associated with breathing, and breath is associated with life. Air is considered to be the fundamental and primary element. Throughout our lifetimes, we will, on average, inhale 650 million breaths (Sherman, 2007, p. 3). Air symbolizes life and is essential for sustaining energy, which is necessary for our physical well-being and daily functioning. To emphasize the significance of air, Winton entitles one of his works as *Breath*. All extreme sports, such as surfing and skiing, in this work are closely related to breathing. Eva, the heroine, loses her breath and her life while playing the game of self-suffocation; Parker's artificial respiration for patients implies the importance of calm breathing to life. In *Cloudstreet*, Fish drowns and loses his breath, resulting in a lack of brain oxygen and becoming intellectually disabled. Even the big house in *Cloudstreet* breathes "its first painless breath in half a century" (Winton, 1998a, p. 343). Moreover, the novel *Eyrie* explores significant themes of endangerment, extinction, and planetary destruction. However, there is a noticeable lack of direct reference regarding global warming and climate change. The apparent lack of discussion on environmental issues by Winton is intriguing, considering his well-documented concerns with this topic (Anandavalli, 2008; Ben-Messahel, 2006; Crane, 2007; Galvin, 2000; O'Reilly, 2010; Winton, 1997, 1998b). Shouldn't *Eyrie* have been Winton's work focused on the topic of 'global warming'? An answer to this question is that the novel is saturated with global warming if we actively search for its intensities (Harris, 2017, p. 5).

Air, representing spirituality and freedom, manifests as intangible and formless wind, yet occasionally carries the threat of mortality. The wind exhibits a multitude of characteristics, ranging from occasional tranquility and delicacy to occasional intensity and unbridled nature. Occasionally, the wind exhibits its ferocity, reminiscent of Bachelard's concept of "violent air", referring to "wrathful winds" (Bachelard, 1988, p. 16). In the novel *Dirt Music*, the character Fox confronts a tempestuous weather event and is compelled to retreat into a small space within a cave. Occasionally, the wind can symbolize significant concepts, such as mortality. Bessie, an elderly woman whom Fox encountered on the road, seeks to experience grandiose music, weather, fish, and distances in the final stages of her life, amongst the presence of whirlwinds, sunsets, mountains, and the expansive two-mile-wide crimson river. While engaged in playing mud music, Fox reminisces on the passing of his mother. During that particular moment, the powerful northerly gale assumes the role of the deity of death, while the forceful wind serves as a forewarning of mortality. The cyclone damages the gum tree, causing a broken branch to pierce her chest, resulting in her death (Winton, 2003a, p. 294). Hence, the paramount importance of the atmosphere lies in its direct influence on the climate, which is crucial for human existence. The ecological environment of the earth is a global problem—global warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, and the melting of the Arctic ice cap, which also threaten their interests and survival; on the other hand, the developed Western countries accuse the developing countries in the Third World of lacking environmental awareness. Thus, re-examining the relationship between the concepts of development, sustainable development, and the environment from the perspective of post-colonial ecocriticism is still of great significance to the current global ecological environment and the maintenance of environmental justice.

With only 0.3% of the world's population, Australia's greenhouse gas emissions are 1.3%, making it one of the world's largest carbon emitters in per capita emissions. Mineral development, especially the mining and processing of fossil fuels such as coal, is one of the pillars of Australia's economic sector. If we add up the carbon emissions from fossil fuels mined and processed in Australia and those exported domestically and abroad, the total greenhouse gas emissions reach 17% of the world. After the start of 2019, Australia suffered a major drought due to climate anomalies such as El Niño and the Indian Ocean dipole phenomenon. After the birth of summer in November, extreme heat conditions occurred in many parts of Australia, with temperatures reaching 45 degrees Celsius and even 50 degrees Celsius in many places (Chen, 2020, p. 58). Due to this, Morrison has made some adjustments to Australia's climate policy since he began his administration in August 2018. However, the forest fires that have ravaged Australia for months since September 2019 have caused the Morrison government's climate policy to be criticized by the Australian public. Many believe that the extreme and severe weather produced by climate change in Australia in recent years is the culprit of the forest fire disaster (Hou, 2020, p. 116).

It has become an international consensus that greenhouse gases are the main culprit of global warming. To cope with the ecological crisis brought on by global warming to the earth, all countries around the world should make active efforts to control greenhouse gases. Instead of actively reducing emissions, the Morrison government's climate policy has increased support for traditional energy industries such as coal, which will increase greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbate climate change, and worsen Australia's ecological environment. Australia is one of the regions most obviously affected by climate change. In recent years, the environmental disasters brought by climate change to Australia have been highlighted, such as persistent dry weather, coral reef bleaching, land salinization, etc. In early 2019, under the influence of the El Niño phenomenon, the Indian Ocean dipole phenomenon, and another abnormal climate, extreme heat conditions

occurred in several places in Australia. Under the continuous hot weather, severe fires occurred in several parts of Australia, including Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, in June 2019. Forest fires ravaged Australia for months, killing more than 30 people, 52 million mammals, 60 million birds, and 389 million reptiles in the fires, destroying 10.7 million hectares of forest and bush, and flattening 2,000 homes (Hou, 2020, p. 132). We should also recognize the air's complex role and revenge power from these events.

The vivid physical world has become "a site of narrativity" with a natural narrative ability (Iovino & Oppermann, 2002, p. 83). The display of its internal vitality is a tribute to the power of wildlife. The voice promotes the presentation of the novel with its narrative power. As Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly (2014) write, "The transformative power of the natural world drives so much of Winton's writing" (McCredden & O'Reilly, 2014, p. 13). In this light, through air conditioning, we moderns can reasonably identify the status of nature and exhibit concern for the environment.

5. Conclusion

As demonstrated above, the postcolonialists' concern for ecology, including water, land, and animals, shares a common discursive space with ecocriticism's concern for the non-human world of forests, rivers, and species. Postcolonial ecocriticism points out that the Western idea of anthropocentric is not only the psychological motive that led to the global colonization of European imperial states but also the failure of human beings to properly locate their ecological relationships with the environment, animals, and other non-human worlds, resulting in the deterioration of the global ecological environment. Within the category of wealthy nations, Australia has the highest degree of susceptibility to the consequences of climate change. The publication "Climate Science for Australia's Future", released in July 2019 by the National Climate Science Advisory Committee, states that global warming has led to a higher occurrence and severity of extreme heat events and droughts, longer periods of wildfires, warmer and more acidic oceans, and rising sea levels. These factors exacerbate the impact of high tides and storm surges on coastal communities and infrastructure. The population of Australia is predominantly concentrated in urban areas located along its eastern coastline (Kramer, 2020, p. 28). The idea of anthropocentrism is not only the root of environmental racism but also the philosophical basis of speciesism, which regards animals as the 'other' and overemphasizes the cultural superiority of human reason. The anthropocentric idea of environmental racism indeed views the non-human world, such as animals and the environment, as inferior causes that never before has the earth inhabited by humans faced such serious ecological problems: species extinction, land sanding, forest degradation, soil, and water pollution, etc. Therefore, re-examining Tim Winton's works from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective is urgent and relevant for humanity's survival, which reverberates with Karl Kroeber's "ecologically oriented literary criticism" and "make literary studies contribute to the practical resolution of social and political conflicts that rend our society" (Kroeber, 1994, p. 1), contributing to a discernible, perceptible, secure, harmonious, and stable world.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Suzana Haji Muhammad was responsible for the research problem, methodology, literature review, study design, and revising. Qian ZHU was responsible for data collection. Qian ZHU drafted the manuscript and Suzana Haji Muhammad revised it through editing, proofreading, and final revision. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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