

The Material Sea and the Human Body: A Transcorporeal Study of Tim Winton's *Blueback* and *Shallows*

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Abstract:

Tim Winton's *Blueback* and *Shallows* really show how closely about how people and nature are connected. His works show the ocean as a force that affects our lives. The ocean is not just a background; it is something that is always influencing people. The way Tim Winton writes about the ocean is very different from how people think about it. Usually, people think of the ocean as a background, but Tim Winton shows it as something that is alive and always changing us. The ocean shapes who we are, what we remember, how we make a living and the choices we make. In *Blueback* the main character Abel Jackson has a close relationship with the ocean. He dives in the ocean. Meets many marine animals, especially the giant groper, Blueback. This relationship is not about the body it is also about feelings. In *Shallows*, what happens when people do not care about the ocean and the animals that live in it? The whaling industry is very bad for the ocean and for people. When we hurt the ocean, we are also hurting ourselves. This is what Stacy Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality is about. Our bodies and the environment are always exchanging things. Affecting each other. Tim Winton's books teach us that we need to take care of the ocean and the animals that live in it. It is important to think about how our actions affect the ocean and how the ocean affects humans. The ocean and human life need to be treated with respect. The paper concludes that Tim Winton's fiction shows us that we are all in this together and that we need to be kind to each other and to the ocean.

Keywords: Ocean, Whaling industry, Transcorporeal, Environment, human body.

Introduction

In recent years, the field of Blue Humanities has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary inquiry that examines the cultural, ecological, and historical relationships between human societies and the ocean. Moving beyond the traditionally land-centred

perspective of the environmental humanities, Blue Humanities foregrounds seas, oceans, and coastal environments as dynamic spaces. The ocean is therefore understood not merely as a physical landscape but as a site where human histories, labour systems, ecological consciousness, and cultural imagination intersect. In particular, coastal communities often develop complex psychological and cultural ties with the marine environment, their livelihoods, traditions, and collective identities are deeply influenced by maritime practices such as fishing, navigation, and whaling.

Timothy John Winton's work is really connected to the coast and the environment of Western Australia. The novels of Tim Winton's are known for their themes and how they are linked to the place of the coast of Western Australia and the sea. In his writing, the sea is a mystery and powerful. It is also very calm which affects the emotions and culture of his characters. The coast around him influenced his work. His writing often includes the land and the sea as parts of his novels.

Stacy Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality says that our bodies are interconnected with the environment. Humans are not alone; they are always linked to the world around them. Stacy Alaimo explains that humans are mixed up with the natural world and everything in it. Our bodies are always. Taking from the earth, sharing things like matter and energy, and vulnerability with the systems that make up our environment.

Blueback is about Abel Jackson, a boy who grows up in a small coastal community in Western Australia. Abel's mother, Dora, is a diver and is deeply connected to the sea. When Abel was a child, his mother explains that his connection with the sea existed even before his birth. Abel was born after spending nine months floating within his mother, who in turn has an intimate bond with the ocean. This is one of the strongest examples of transcorporeality in the novel. Abel's identity cannot be separated from the sea because his earliest bodily existence is described through water. The ocean is not simply an external landscape surrounding Abel. The human body is materially connected to the aquatic environment even before birth. "Abel loved being underwater. He was ten years old and could never remember a time when he could not dive. His mother said he was a diver before he was born; he floated and swam in the warm ocean inside her for nine months, so maybe it came naturally"(BB 9). Alaimo's concept helps us understand that the boundary between human body and environment is porous. Abel's body is connected to the ocean before he consciously knows the sea. His later life as a diver therefore develops from an already existing human-ocean material relationship.

When Abel meets Blueback under the water. The fish is not just something away that you watch; instead, Abel touches him. The narrator says "He came in close as they reached the bottom. Abel stretched out and touched him under the chin. Blueback's eyes rolled, watching him. His fins vibrated. Abel felt the enormous weight of the fish's body as

it brushed him” (BB 21). This scene shows a physical connection between two different bodies. Abel moves because of Blueback's body and the water connects them. Abel does not just see nature; he is part of a water world that includes his body, Blueback's body and the water. Winton shows the sea as a material place that helps shape how people feel and act.

The sea and the land are connected in a cool way through Abel and his mother. They use things from the sea in their orchard. For example, Abel picks up kelp from the sea. Takes it to the land. “He puts the kelp around the fruit trees like the fig trees and the apricots” (BB 12). They also use fish like pilchards and salmon to help their plants grow. They make compost with lots of things like tree bark, old vegetable scraps and seagrass. The sea and the land are not separate. They are always exchanging things. The way Winton writes about Longboat Bay shows how everything is connected. The people, the fish, the kelp, the soil and the plants all rely on each other. The sea and the land are a part of the system. Marine materials, like kelp become a part of the land. Help the plants grow. The sea and the land are always giving each other things.

The pilchards died suddenly. This is another good example of what happens when the bodies of humans and animals and the earth are all connected which is called transcorporeality. Abel went home. Found that the beach was full of dead fish. The whole beach was black because of all the fish. Abel and his mother picked up the fish and put them in the soil of their orchard and gardens. Dora recognised that it was not a simple thing. “Something’s wrong with the sea. The ocean is sick ”(BB 60). This shows that what happens in the sea can affect the people who live on the land. Abel and Dora were worried, about the fish. They physically moved the dead fish from the sea to the soil. The human body and the marine ecosystem are connected, so when one gets hurt, the other can get hurt too. The pilchards and the people are connected through transcorporeality.

As a biologist, Abel sees what people have done to the ocean. He looks at the world and it is like a big empty space because of dynamite fishing and pollution. This shows that what people do can really change the ocean. The bad things people do to the ocean do not just hurt people they also hurt the homes of animals that live in the water and the animals themselves. “He was diving in the Greek islands one day, looking at the great underwater desert that dynamite fishing and pollution had created when he realised that he was older than his father” (BB 68). Something similar happened when an oil tanker had an accident near Longboat Bay and oil spread over the water. Abel realized that the whole coast was very close to being hurt. When we think about what happened we can see that people and the ocean are connected. What people do to the ocean can also hurt people. The ocean is like a system that includes people, animals and water. What we do to the ocean can come back to hurt us. Tim Winton is saying that people are not separate from nature; we are a part of it. The marine biologist, Abel sees this when he looks at the ocean and the animals that live in

it. The ocean and people are connected in a circle. What people do to the ocean can hurt people. What hurts people can also hurt the ocean.

In the novel *Shallow* Queenie's childhood memory of the whales. This moment shows that the whale is not separate from Queenie's surroundings. The movement of the whale causes physical changes on the farm and the thunder, rain and water become part of Queenie's emotional experience. The whale therefore moves across the idea of the boundary between the ocean world and the human world. "Poppa didn't come out. After a while He stopped calling and from down in the bay came this thunderous splash and the whole farm shook and in the moonlight I saw this glistening, black . . . whale inching up towards the house. I screamed and fell back into bed and pulled the sheet over my face and there was thunder all of a sudden and heavy rain. When the storm was over I went to Poppa's room and he was gone and the floor was wet and I was alone in the world" (SS 9). This scene can be seen as an example of the connection between human bodies and nonhuman bodies. Queenie's body and her thoughts are shaped by her meeting with the whale. the whale's movement changes the land where she lives.

Queenie sees the killing of the whale at the whaling station. Winton describes the entire process using images of blood, machinery, blubber, and the dissection of the whale's body. "... 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"(SS 35). The whale is pulled up with hooks, chains and cables, while workers cut into its body. This scene is much more than just an environmental one. The body of the whale is intertwined with the bodies of humans, machinery, blood, water, and the surrounding coast. Whale blood makes its way into the "shallows," and human beings literally manipulate the body of the whale.

It appears that the absence is simply the vanishing of an animal. But for Queenie, this vanishing becomes a disturbance within her personal universe. This whale has become part of her memories, her childhood, her landscape, her sense of place: "one year the whales did not appear at all"(SS 16). Thus, the whale's body is connected to the human body even when the whale is physically absent. This analysis reveals that whales are not just ornamental additions to the ocean; they are integral to the ecosystem of the oceanic environment. Without the presence of whales, the ocean is a different material reality. It means that Winton reject the concept of the separation of individual entities in nature. Rather, he conceptualizes the ocean as an interconnection of bodies.

In the final scene, the whales are described as "floundering, suffocating under their own weight" (SS 205). The words floundering and suffocating emphasise the physical condition of the whale's body. These are not abstract ideas about environmental destruction. Winton shows the suffering through the body. The whales are living bodies struggling in the shallow water because of their enormous weight.

Tim Winton's *Blueback* and *Shallows* present the sea as a living force that has intimate connections with humans. As opposed to simply being a static background, the sea affects people and influences how they think, remember, feel, behave, do work and make decisions. The interaction with the sea takes place through the human body (movement, sound, touch) and weather, marine life and environmental changes. Therefore, the characters cannot be seen as separate from the sea, which is affecting them and other living things within it.

The comparison between the two novels also reveal two different dimensions of human-sea relationships. *Blueback* largely emphasises belonging, care and ecological responsibility, particularly through Abel's growing commitment to protecting Longboat Bay. *Shallows*, in contrast, foregrounds conflict, exploitation and environmental violence, particularly through the history and continuation of whaling in Angelus. Nevertheless, both novels arrive at a similar understanding: human survival cannot be separated from the condition of the marine environment.

Conclusion

Tim Winton's statement, "The health of our seas determines the future of humanity," suggests that the ocean is not an external environment separate from human life; rather, human survival is materially dependent on the health of marine ecosystems. Through transcorporeality, *Blueback* and *Shallows* reveal that the health of the sea and the health of the human body are inseparable, making ecological care not simply an environmental responsibility but a fundamental condition of human survival.

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