



Ecological Prospects through Proverbs and Myths in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music and Breath*; and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*

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Summary: The global ecological degradation has caused stakeholders from all fields, including literature, to project their views and/or propose solutions regarding the issue. This work set out to examine the significance of proverbs and myths in the representation of the relationship between man and nature in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music and Breath*; and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The question that guides this paper is: what role do proverbs and myths play in bringing out ecological perspectives in *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music and Breath* by Tim Winton; and *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe? It is hypothesized that proverbs and myths project the contextualized aesthetic dimension of the writers' environmental visions thereby making it very specific to their settings. Ecopoetics according to Sarah Nolan constitutes the theoretical framework employed to investigate the manner in which Winton and Achebe use proverbs and myths to bring out their ecological perceptions in their respective sets of texts. The paper concludes that Tim Winton and Chinua Achebe have environmental protection discourses in their texts with proverbs and myths providing contextualized stylistic elements that corroborate their backgrounds. By incorporating traditional narratives into their ecological narratives, Winton and Achebe project the role of indigenous knowledge systems in preserving nature; and present unique visions on the bearing of literature in ecological discourse.

Keywords: Ecology, Fiction, Orature, Ecopoetics, Chinua Achebe, Tim Winton, Vision.

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Introduction

The world's ecosystem is endangered for numerous reasons and this has raised serious concerns in all parts of the globe. This environmental menace is so serious that if nothing significant is done urgently, man's existence on earth is under threat. In line with this, Tosić states that: "Man feels *vital*ly threatened in the ecologically degraded world. Overexploitation of natural resources and man's disregard of the air, water and soil that sustain him have given rise to the question of the survival of both man and the planet (Earth)"(Tosić 2006: 44). Unfortunately, however, efforts put in place so far to reverse or halt this environmental crisis have not yielded the desired results and the degradation of the environment is getting worse by the day. While talking about the industrial society, Ingram et al say: "Such a system of production creates the environmental problems we face today—pollution, deforestation, species extinction, global warming and it bequeaths even worse problems to future generations" (Ingram et al: 112).

Consequently, all people of all walks of life need to put efforts together in order to create a good global environment. In this light, Tosić indicates that: "The end of the twentieth century showed clearly that *everyone* had to do something to help the Earth survive. [...] The reflection of that difficult struggle in the area of culture and spirit speaks for the urgency of action or the urgent This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license

need to do something in this respect" (Tosić 2006: 44). Literature can play a great role in environmental protection, albeit through the sensitization of readers, and this is exactly what this work is out to demonstrate. Handley affirms that literature can help in ameliorating our relationship with the environment as he opines that "[...] we need environmentally oriented literature more than ever, especially if it can remind us, as Jonathan Bate suggests, that: "Although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world"(Handley 2007: 27).

This work analyzes Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music and Breath*; and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* ecocritically with focus on the significance of proverbs and myths in that regards. The question that guides this paper is: what role do proverbs and myths play in bringing out ecological perspectives in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music and Breath*; and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*? It is hypothesized that proverbs and myths project the contextualized aesthetic dimension of Winton and Achebe's environmental perspectives thereby making it very relevant to their settings. The Ecopoetics theory as outlined by Sarah Nolan is used in this work to analyze the stylistic devices that help in bringing out the writers' ecological concerns. This



corroborates Jonathan Bate's declaration that: "[e]copoetics renounces the mastery of enframing knowledge and listens instead to the voice of art." (Quoted in Peters and Irwin 2002: 5) In this case, Ecopoetics is employed to bring out the stylistic devices Achebe uses recurrently in bringing out his ecological concerns. Sarah Nolan states:

Ecopoetics investigates how poets attempt to use unique forms to capture the multiple elements that constitute lived experience while simultaneously foregrounding the textual space in which such expression occurs. Rather than separating the material world from nonmaterial aspects of experience, this understanding of the term ecopoetics focuses on the ways in which individual memory, personal experience, ideology, and the limitations of the senses shape experience and, just as importantly, on how new forms and experimentation with language can work to expose the agential power of the material and nonmaterial worlds alike. (Nolan 2015: i)

Nolan adds: "I not only expand the applicability of ecopoetic theory across literary studies and gain a more diverse understanding of the ways in which people from a variety of economic situations, cultures, locations, and ethnic backgrounds understand and interact with their environments, but also acknowledge the ways in which nature and culture are irreversibly intertwined" (Nolan 2015: i). Thus, Ecopoetics will be used to examine the manner in which Winton and Achebe's cultural and artistic backgrounds projected through proverbs and myths highlight their visions of man's relationship with nature. This work has two parts namely; "The Role of Proverbs in Achebe and Winton's Ecological Perspectives" and "Myths and Nature in the Texts of Tim Winton and Chinua Achebe".

The Role of Proverbs in Achebe and Winton's Ecological Perspectives

Achebe uses dialogue very much in his texts generally and in relation to nature particularly. This is because Achebe, like many other African writers who grew up in societies where oral literature was dominant, often brought in many elements of oral literature in their novels. Obiechina talks about the influence of oral literature on written forms as he says:

To begin with a theoretical question, what happens to the development of literature when a relatively new cultural system based on the written word is superimposed upon an ancient oral traditional culture? The first discovery is that the oral culture does not immediately disappear by the mere fact of its being in contact with writing, nor does the literature of the oral society disappear because of the introduction of written literature. Rather, a synthesis takes place in which characteristics of the oral culture survive and are absorbed, assimilated, extended, and even reorganized within a new cultural experience. Also, vital aspects of the oral literature are absorbed into an emerging written literature of greatly invigorated forms infused with vernacular energy through metaphors, images and symbols, more complex plots, and diversified structures of meaning. (Obiechina 1990: 197)

One of the conversational devices Achebe employs to great effect is proverbs. Gogoi points to this as he says: "Again, Achebe shows how the language of the Igbos was shaped by the landscape. Being an oral society, Igbos used numerous oral devices for effective communication, such as proverbs, sayings, riddles, myths etc. in their conversation. Frequent references to flora and fauna

implied the Igbos' closeness to nature" (Gogoi 2014: 3). Proverbs are short wise meaningful sayings usually meant to warn, advise or guide as Alimi opines that "Proverbs could be described as short, popular witty sayings with words of advice or warning. Proverbs could also be viewed as a repository of native intelligent, code of moral laws and philosophy of both life and social justice." (Alimi 2012: 122) He adds that:

They are kernel which contains wisdom of the traditional people and they are also philosophical. They are moral expositions shrunk to a few words because it is didactic. Proverbs are also used to suit every situation and occasion. This is because every significant affirmation traditional value or belief can be strengthened and supported with the use of appropriate proverbs. Social problems and personal difficulties can also be settled by an appeal to the sanctioning proverbs. (Alimi 2012: 122)

Mindful of the fact that his texts bring out the realities of the Igbo people in Nigeria, Achebe says: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten." (Achebe 1958: 5) Talking about proverbs in African literature, Obiechina opines that "They are extensively used in the works of African novelists—in the novels of female and male African novelists, in those of older and newer writers, in works produced in the different regions of Africa south of the Sahara—and they extend across broad ideological and generic divides" (Obiechina 1990: 200). Most of the proverbs used by Achebe in his texts have ecological leanings. Alam explains this by stating that: "This sense of 'connectedness' and of being in the tradition of oral story-telling is most clearly manifested in Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs and his use of metaphors and similes that arise from the African story-teller's oneness with the physical environment" (Alam 2010: 46). In this light, there are some of the proverbs that paint a positive image of nature and indicate man's protective tendencies towards it while others dress nature negatively and bring out man's abusive habits towards it. This section thus focuses on Achebe's ecological dynamics brought out through proverbs.

Achebe uses proverbs in which natural elements are employed to bring out positive qualities like justice, tolerance, fairness, strength and faith as well as those which depict situations in which man is protecting the nonhuman nature. Tolerance and peaceful co-existence are brought out when Okonkwo in negotiating for yam seeds from Nwakibie tells him "You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break" (Achebe 1958: 14). The fact that the eagle and the kite co-habit peacefully is a call for items of the ecosystem to live in harmony with one another and in that situation man will not harm other elements and they too will not harm man. When Obi is taken to court for taking bribe, his Umuofia village men are unhappy for that as the president of the Umuofia people in Lagos talks justice in the saying "I am against people reaping where they have not sown" (Achebe 1960: 5). When he remembers that Obi is sued only for twenty pounds, he decries the fact that Obi should risk his reputation and freedom for so small an amount of money as he adds "But we have a saying that if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one" (Achebe 1960: 5). The understanding is that toads should not be eaten but if they must, the fat ones should be sought for. On its part, fairness is brought out when Unoka tells Okoye his creditor that he will pay his big debts before paying the small ones as he says "Our elders say that the

sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them" (Achebe 1958: 6). The sun represents fairness in this proverb.

The fact that nothing happens for nothing but for a reason is also brought out in proverbs involving natural elements. For example, when Ogbuefi Idigo is talking about the palm-wine tapper, Obiako, who suddenly gives up his trade, he says "There must be a reason for it. A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing" (Achebe 1958: 15). Okika also uses the same proverb in the meeting of elders in the market after their release to ask for the gathering as he declares "You all know why we are here, when we ought to be building our barns or mending our huts, when we should be putting our compounds in order. My father used to say to me: 'Whenever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life'" (Achebe 1958: 143). Equally, Nwosisi who represents the village of Umuogwugwu in the meeting with Ezeulu in which villagers raise concerns about the fact that the day of the Yams Festival has not been announced says "You have asked if all was well and we said yes; but a toad does not run in the daytime unless something is after it. (Achebe 1964: 203). The fact that something must be after a toad before it runs in the day time indicates that there is conflict between the toad and other elements of the ecosystem; and this unusual situation explains why the toad running in the day is rare. Living things are also used in proverbs to indicate the great quality of adaptation for survival. Nwakibie tells Okonkwo "Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching. I have learned to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you." (Achebe 1958: 16). The fact that men are behind Eneke the bird indicates that man preys on animals and this needs to be controlled if it is not sustainable.

It is worth noting that this proverb that shows man harming nature is used in Umuofia long before the coming of the colonizers and therefore dismisses the claim that proverbs before colonialism indicate a perfect relationship between man and nature and those after colonialism project a totally catastrophic view between the two. This claim is further dashed away because many proverbs, like this one, are used repeatedly and they appear before and after colonialism in Achebe's works. This at the same time proves Alam not to be totally accurate when he says "It is significant that the proverbs and the metaphors of the first part of the story begin to disappear as the whites make their presence felt in Umuofia. The proverbs that replace them are often from the tradition of the white colonizers" (Alam 2010: 47). In the same dimension, Danlami also states that: "When the colonial authorities arrive, they disrupt this *largely* peaceful and harmonious co-existence between man and nature" (Danlami 2020: 1640). In this light, when a Christian convert unmasks the dreaded egwugwu masquerade and the village elders are locked up, they decide to hold a meeting after their release to decide what to do with the white man. Somebody asks if they will also harm their natives who were converts in the church and working for him. Okika answers that "Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: 'Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching on a twig.' [...] if our brothers take the side of evil we must root them out too." (Achebe 1958: 144).

Nature is also used to bring out the theme of continuity. This is seen when Okonkwo is worried over the weakness of Nwoye, his son, whom he says a bowl of pounded yams can throw down in a fight. Okonkwo then rhetorically asks his friend Obierika "Where are the young suckers that will grow when the

old banana tree dies?" (Achebe 1958: 46) The suckers used to indicate continuity indicates that both man and plants are supposed to be given chances to continue existing. In the same dimension, the narrator talks about the fact that Okonkwo's exile made other people to grow up to his former greatness when he says "As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard, if it lost its tail it soon grew another" (Achebe 1958: 121). In this case, it is not the suckers that represent the continuity but the lizard. Closely related to these are proverbs which indicate the continuity of knowledge as the younger ones learn from the elders. When Obierika is proudly complaining that his son Maduka is too sharp, the latter's elder brother says "When mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.' Maduka has been watching your mouth" (Achebe 1958: 49).

The same image is brought out in the proverb in which Akuebe is telling Okonkwo about the reason for which his, Akuebe's daughter, Udenkwo, likes leaving her husband's house at the least provocation. Akuebe says "Udenkwo learnt it from her mother, my wife and she is going to pass it on to her children, for when mother-cow is cropping giant grass her calves watch her mouth" (Achebe 1964: 173). The calf learning from the cow here brings out the positive quality of the passing down of education from generation to generation not just in man but also in cows. In relation to this, Okonkwo in talking disapprovingly of Nwoye says "A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him" (Achebe 1958: 46).

Achebe also uses many proverbs with natural elements that show abundance. When Okonkwo is leaving his mother's people in Mbanta back to Umuofia his father land after serving his exile term, he throws a very big feast to thank his mother's people for the good reception and support. Okonkwo says "I am calling a feast because I have the wherewithal. I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle. My mother's people have been good to me and I must show my gratitude" (Achebe 1958: 117). Okonkwo uses water to show abundance.

Achebe equally highlights informed decisions and priorities when he presents the deliberations of the Umuofia union in Lagos in relation to Obi's court case in which he is accused of collecting twenty pounds as bribe. Some of its members say they should leave Obi on his own for the ways in which he has failed them. They argue that he changed from studying medicine as he was given a scholarship to study and does English, he insists on marrying Clara who is an outcast, is not yet paying back the loan he was given as a scholarship and is not helping any of them. But those holding this view were very few and they decided to stand by him despite his short comings. Despite all these, they decide to stand by him as the narrator says "The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush" (Achebe 1960: 5). This proverb brings out the conflicting relationship between items of the ecosystem in which man has a part to play – the fox trying to eat up the hen and man stopping it. Thus, the Umuofians rather sympathize with Obi's ignorance of the way withal of corruption as one of them says "Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done" (Achebe 1960: 5). The narrator adds that "He told the proverb of the house rat who went swimming with his friend the lizard and died from cold, for while the lizard's scales kept him dry the rat's hairy body remained wet" (Achebe 1960: 5). Obi who is the house rat here ignorantly followed bribe takers who are already adapted to it like the lizard is adapted to swimming and end up getting caught like the rat gets

drowned. One of the Umuofians in Lagos, talking about the arrest of Obi, the only man they have in a government job says “‘An only palm-fruit does not get lost in the fire.’ Amen” (Achebe 1960: 6).

Equally, when people gather in Isaac Okonkwo’s compound to wish his son Obi good luck as he is travelling to England, Mary prays for Obi and her prayer is spiced with lots of proverbs which bring out the worth of nature. In her prayers she says “Oh God [...] The great river is not big enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight.” (Achebe 1960: 8). Here, she uses the adjective “great” to show the worth of the river but states that God is even greater. Achebe also uses proverbs to project help. This is brought out when members of the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos are planning to ask Obi to help them. One of them states the point thus: “We now have one of our sons in the senior service. [...] Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in” (Achebe 1960: 72)? In line with this, Charles, a minor worker in Obi’s office, borrows money from Obi. Later, when Obi is angry that Charles has gone silent about the money, the latter says “I take you as my special master. Our people have a saying that when there is a big tree small ones climb on its back to reach the sun.” (Achebe 1960: 88). The snake and the tree here highlight positive attributes though the killing of the snake could be a problem if it is not sustainable.

Ezeulu uses a proverb concerning fowls to prove that some disappointments are blessings. This is seen when he is venting anger against the gossips of his neighbours and Idemili’s message after Oduche, his son, puts the python in the box. Ezeulu says “It is good for a misfortune like this to happen once in a while [...] so that we can know the thought of our friends and neighbours. Unless the wind blows we do not see the fowl’s rump” (Achebe 1964: 59). The wind which is Oduche’s act thus permits Ezeulu to know his people’s intentions like the rump of the fowl. In connection to Oduche’s act, proverbs with natural items are also used to show the fact that man should take responsibilities over his actions. When the python is discovered in Oduche’s box, Ezeulu asks his mother where he is and she says she does not know. Given that Oduche’s mother did not want Oduche to be sent to the school and church from which he learns about killing pythons, Ezeulu tell her “You must be telling me in your mind that a man who brings home ant-infested faggots should not complain if he is visited by lizards” (Achebe 1964: 59). By this, Ezeulu, should take responsibility over his decision to send Oduche to the white man. Ezeulu says the same thing to Akuebue thus “So let nobody come to me now and complain that the white man did this and did that. The man who brings ant-infested faggots into his hut should not grumble when lizards begin to pay him a visit” (Achebe 1964: 132). Ironically, the same thing is said about Ezeulu when Captain Winterbottom summons him to his office. When the elders of Umuaro and other villages are called to discuss the issue, Nwaka says, “[...] a man who brings ant-ridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards. But if Ezeulu is now telling us that he is tired of the white man’s friendship our advice to him should be: You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it” (Achebe 1964: 145).

Achebe equally uses natural elements weaved in conversational artistry to show the interdependence of elements in the ecosystem as the narrator says “My in law is like a bull [...] and your challenge is like a challenge of a tick to a bull. The tick fills its belly with blood from the back of the bull and the bull does

not even know it is there. He carries it wherever he goes – to eat, drink or pass ordure. Then one day the cattle egret comes, perches on the bull’s back and picks out the tick [...]” (Achebe 1967: 101). Here, the fact that each element of the ecosystem depends on the other is highlighted and so man, as part of the ecosystem, cannot be left out of the food chain as far as the ecosystem’s protection is concerned.

As said earlier, there are some proverbs that link natural items to negative things. When Ozumba is announcing Obika’s death to Ezeulu, he says “An abomination has overtaken us. Goat has eaten palm leaves from off my head” (Achebe 1964: 227). The goat’s eating of the palm leaves shows misfortune for man. Alimi states that “Achebe intentionally uses the proverbs not merely to add touches of local colour but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflicts and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying” (Alimi 2012: 123). Some of these conflicts put man against nature. Proverbs are also used to indicate that difficulties hardly come alone. This is seen in the message of Umuogwugwu of Onwuzuligbo to Ezeulu as he says “You are right, in-law, it is indeed a long time since I came to see you. But we have a saying that the very thing which kills mother rat prevents its little ones from opening their eyes. If all goes well we hope to come and go again as in-laws should” (Achebe 1964: 61). This proverb laments the lack of money not just to take their wife but even to visit.

Conspiracy is also brought out in a proverb that involves nature when the narrator, talking about the source of Nwaka’s courage to challenge Ezeulu says “Where did Nwaka get this power? For when we see a little bird dancing in the middle of the pathway we must know that its drummer is in the near-by bush” (Achebe 1964: 40). The narrator goes ahead to admit that Nwaka is in fact a bird whose drummer found in the bush is the priest of Idemili, the personal deity of Umuonneora. Also, the danger that comes with being too inquisitive is brought out in the proverb “Everyone of you go back to the house. The inquisitive monkey gets a bullet in the face” (Achebe 1964: 44). This is said by Ezeulu to his curious wife and children while opening the box to see what was later discovered to be a struggling python. Furthermore, self-harming is brought out as Moses Onachukwu tells Mr Goodcountry who preaches the killing of pythons “If you want to do your work here you will heed what I have said, but if you want to be the lizard that ruined his own mother’s funeral you may carry on as you are doing” (Achebe 1964: 50). The lizard spoiling its mother’s funeral implies doing things that have a negative impact on one’s activities and making it difficult for their collective objectives to be achieved. The numerous nature proverbs used indicate the attachment of the Africans had with nature as Gogoi states: “Being an oral society, Igbos used numerous oral devices for effective communication, such as proverbs, sayings, riddles, myths etc. in their conversation. Frequent references to flora and fauna implied the Igbos’ closeness to nature” (Gogoi 2014: 3).

From all these, it can be seen that Achebe uses proverbs to great effect to pass across his ecological vision. Some of the proverbs praise and protect natural elements while others bring out their negative aspects as well as the manner in which man mistreats them. It should be noted that before and after colonialism, proverbs are used and in either side of the picture, proverbs are brought out that bring out negative and positive aspects about nature. Thus, part of what Achebe himself calls “Africanisation” of the novel is the use of conversational elements and the “Achebeism” (as Phanuel Egejuru characterizes Achebe’s style) (Dia 2014: 56) of his

ecocritical vision lies in the use of proverbs hinged on nature which become his signature in ecological narratives. In line with this, Dia adds that “These hallmarks of his style lie also in the significant use of proverbs and Igbo saying as a marker of local colour writing performed by his characters”(Dia 2014: 74). It is thus clear that Achebe makes proverbs part of his ecological discourse that he uses to bring out different dimensions of the relationship between man and nature.

Like Chinua Achebe, Tim Winton uses proverbs in bringing out the relationship between man and nature in his Australian setting. This is particularly true of his novels *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath* in which the characters have direct sustained contact with the natural environment. It should be noted, however, that Achebe and Winton do not use the same kinds of proverbs because each author's proverbs are informed by his cultural and environmental background; though both use proverbs to highlight both positive and negative aspects of man's interaction with the natural environment. In *Cloudstreet* Winton employs a good number of idiomatic expressions and metaphors to project his ecological perception. The title of the novel with the “cloud” and “street” elements lends it an environmental dimension; so too is the setting with aspects like The Swan River and Perth in Western Australia. Set in the Western Australian city of Perth, the novel explores the realities of two working-class families, the Pickles and the Lambs, in post-war Australia over twenty years. While highlighting issues of family bond and identity negotiation, the novel projects the use of proverbs in the author's ecological discourse. Some of these proverbs are used to underscore man's reliance on nature for luck to achieve certain things in their lives. For example, Sam Prickles states: “Luck don't change, love. It moves.” (Winton 1991: 19). In this circumstance, Sam Prickles is reflecting on the fact that luck is transient and life as a whole is very unpredictable given that no one knows when nature can decide to alter his or her fortunes. This highlights the fact that man relies on nature for luck, cannot do much to change what nature decides and consequently has to humbly accept whatever nature chooses for him. From this perspective, it is in man's best interest to be in harmony with nature so that he may be favoured in terms of luck.

Furthermore, luck may not be limited to an individual being but has the potential to be transferred from one person to another in terms of inheritance. In this regard, Sam Prickles tells his wife Dolly Prickles that: “Some people are lucky, she heard him say. Joel, he's lucky. Got a good business. His hayburners win. See, I got me ole man's blood. Dead unlucky.” (Winton 1991: 19) This proverb underscores the strong belief Sam Prickles has in the fact that luck can be inherited and that ancestors consequently have a significant part to play in an individual's success or failure. Therefore, there is great connection between human beings and their family lines as well as the natural world in which they live.

Underscoring the connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the narrator states the following about Fish Lamb: “Fish will remember. All his life and all his next life he'll remember this dark, cool plunge where sound and light and shape are gone, where something rushes him from afar, where, openmouthed, openfisted, he drinks in river, whales it in with complete surprise.” (Winton 1991: 29). This utterance presents the fact that memory and continuity are part of human life beyond the stage of living. By linking Fish Lamb's experience with the river to a bigger picture concerning life after death, Winton accentuates the idea of the interconnectedness of life, death and natural elements.

Another positive element projected through proverbs that highlight ecological dimensions in Winton's works is breathing. This is brought out in the novel *Breath* that follows two friends Bruce “Pikelet” Pike and Ivan “Loonie” Loon as they choose surfing as the best way through which to pass their adolescent age in the coastal town of Sawyer in Western Australia. Bruce Pike states: “It's funny, but you never really think much about breathing. Until it's all you ever think about.” (Winton 2008: 9). This saying highlights the very essential yet quite often overlooked action of breathing; a necessary activity for man's survival and one whose absence signifies his death. This throws more light on the novel's central theme and title source which is the act of breathing that is both natural and necessary for the survival of all living things on earth. A constant reminder that breath is provided to man by nature should make him thrive to live in peace with the natural environment.

The ecological dimension consisting of the venerating worth of the Australian ecological setup projected through metaphor is also brought out in *Dirt Music*. In this light, the narrator states thus: “This land looks dreamt, willed, potent.” (Winton 2001: 35). This authorial discourse on the landscape projects the powerful and mystical dimension of the ecological setup in Australia. It brings forth a sense in which the land holds a sort of divine prowess that overflows into the lives of characters and impacts them in various ways. Therefore, man needs to be in harmony with the environment that has a mystical dimension capable of affecting him.

This deep connection between man and nature is equally highlighted in relation to music when the narrator states that: “Dirt music, Fox tells Georgie, is ‘anything you can play on a verandah or porch, without electricity.’” (Winton 2001: 7) This saying indicates the fact that simple and authentic music that has a profound connection with the natural world can be produced by man. This is because such music is produced without the use of electricity; and by implication only natural elements are used. This further highlights the fact that man needs to be in peaceful cohabitation with nature in order to enjoy the things it can provide for his own pleasure and leisure.

The positive aspect of leisure and surfing much specifically is also presented using a proverb in *Breath*. This is brought out when Bruce Pike states that: “How strange it was to see men do something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant, as though nobody saw or cared.” (Winton 2008: 25). This perspective on the worth of surfing underscores the goodness that exists when human beings engage with nature in a way that is not harmful to it. This elaborates the fact that the deep value of natural elements is in their intrinsic awesomeness and pleasure it provides; and not really in any utilitarian dimension. Thus man will gain more from nature if he adopts a more cordial way of relating with it.

This harmonious relationship between man and nature through surfing is accentuated when the characters engage with the waters in surfing so much so that they scare onlookers and even themselves. Bruce Pike states that: “We scared people, pushing each other harder and further until often as not we scared ourselves.” (Winton 2008: 16). This utterance brings forth the action-packed attitudes of the characters with regards to surfing and highlights their deep connection to water through it. Thus pushing boundaries in a positive way can permit man to relate better with his natural environment and derive much pleasure from it.

Like Achebe, Winton also brings out proverbs that highlight a negative connotation regarding man's relationship with his natural environment. This is particularly brought in the novel *Dirt Music* which presents two characters, Georgie Jutland and Luther Fox, haunted by their realities in the past and seeking comfort in nature. This is perceived when Luther Fox tells Georgie Jutland thus: "You can hide in someone else's rage - it blinds them." (Winton 2001: 25). This statement made by Luther Fox during an intense emotional exchange with Georgie Jutland about their relationship, past and trauma, indicates the destructive abilities of anger and the way it can destroy one's connection with nature; though one can hide it for a short time by enclosing his in another's.

From all these, it can be seen that Achebe and Winton are similar in their manipulation of proverbs to bring out their visions of man's relationship with nature. This is because they both make use of proverbs that highlight not just the positive aspect of man's relationship with his natural environment, but also project sayings that bring out the negative aspect of such interactions. However, the two authors differ in the sense that each of them uses proverbs that are peculiar to his culture, and relevant to his ecological background. The difference comes through, then, because Achebe and Winton are from different cultural backgrounds and natural environments.

Myths and Nature in the Texts of Tim Winton and Chinua Achebe

Achebe also uses myths to bring out his ecological concerns. Bate defines myths thus; "Myths are necessary imaginings, exemplary stories which help our species to make sense of the world. Myths endure so long as they perform helpful work" (Bate 2002: 24-25). Obiechina adds more facts to the understanding of myths as he says:

Why are sky and earth equal in their sizes? Why does the mosquito sing into the ear? Why did disease and death come into the world? How did human beings develop the depression in their backs? Why does the lizard always nod its head? Why does the tortoise shell look as if put together from fragments? These and many more observable "facts" find expression in the fireside tales. Local trees, animals, and birds find roles in numerous tales. Orphan, hunter, obdurate child, wicked foster-mother, vicious servant or slave, all these and more are the stock characters of fireside and village-square tales. (Obiechina: 1992: 184)

As said earlier, Achebe, like other African writers who grew up in African communities where oral literature is part of the lives of the people, often injects aspects of oral literature in their written narratives making such works have a lot of oral dimensions. To this effect, Tsaior states that "[...] African novelists have domesticated the novel form through their exploitation of indigenous oral literary and cultural elements and submits that a thriving relationship exists between the African novel and African folkloric and cultural forms, which gives the African novel its oral flavour, cultural particularity, and authenticity" (Tsaior 2009: 1). These myths have a lot of ecological implications. Buell, Heise and Thornber go further to hint to the fact that an ecocritical analysis of local literature without an analysis of myths is not complete as they say "Within ecocriticism's broad interest in works of indigenous environmental imagination, several specific concerns stand out. One is attentiveness to native artists' storytelling practices and underlying

mythographies." (Buell, Heise and Thornber 2011: 429). Alam limits the use of nature as sources of narrative devices as he opines that "Achebe makes it quite clear that for the story-teller of a people who live in harmony with the land, nature is the source of all the figures of speech necessary for their story-telling" (Alam 2010: 47). One of the elements of oral literature Achebe uses in his novels to bring out his views about man and nature is the myth and this section will focus on that.

One of the settings in which Achebe brings out his ecological views through myths is in Okonkwo's house. In Okonkwo's household, the women and children are always involved in story telling in the evening while cooking and myths feature regularly in such situations. One of such myths is that of the Tortoise and the birds narrated by Okonkwo's wife, Ekwefi, to Ezinma her daughter; and it brings out the cunning nature of the Tortoise. In narrating the myth, Ekwefi says some time in the distant past, all the birds were invited to a very big feast in the sky. The birds were very excited and happy about the feast and all the birds looked forward to it. Consequently, they began to prepare themselves seriously for the feast that will take place on the great day. They were unanimous on the fact that they had to look strikingly beautiful to their hosts. For that reason, they all painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew very beautiful patterns on them with uli. As all these preparations were going on, Tortoise soon started being inquisitive about the reason for all that. Tortoise became very interested in these preparations and soon discovered what they were all about. The Tortoise was so intelligent, inquisitive and cunning that nothing that happened in the world of the animals could go without him noticing. When Tortoise heard of the great feast in the sky to which the birds were invited and for which they were preparing his mouth began to salivate while his throat was itching just at a thought of the event. This was so because there was a great famine in their land and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for about two moons. He had become so hungry that his body always rattled like a piece of dry stick in his empty shell. With this news, Tortoise decided that he would do everything possible to partake in the festival and told himself that he had to attend the event in the sky. So, as the birds were preparing, he too was preparing.

But Tortoise was faced with a monumental problem by virtue of its features. Unlike the birds that had wings with which they would simply fly to sky for the festival, Tortoise did not have wings and consequently had no means to get to sky. So he began to plan how he would go to the sky. Achebe brings the oral art real at this juncture by making Ezinma interrupt. In real life situation, when myths are being narrated, listeners at times intervene with questions, remarks and clarifications and this is exactly what Achebe does at this juncture. After hearing that the Tortoise was also making preparations to go for the festival in the sky, Ezinma interrupts the story to express her surprise to the fact that the Tortoise wanted to go to sky without wings. When Ezinma raises this concern, her mother simply asks her to be patient and continues the story. Ekwefi continued that since the Tortoise had no wings, it sought help from the birds and that explains why he went to the birds and asked them to allow him to go with them.

Unfortunately for the Tortoise, he was not in the good books of the birds and they made him understand that right away. The birds tell the Tortoise that he was too cunning, ungrateful and evil and that if they allowed him to go with them he would inevitably cause one problem or another for them. They made him understand that they think his characteristic mischief will not

permit him to do any good if he travels with them. Tortoise defended himself by explaining that he was a changed person since she has learned that when someone causes problems for other he is indeed creating long term difficulties for himself. Tortoise has a very persuasive way of talking and within the twinkle of an eye he succeeded to convince all the birds that he will not do them any harm if they allow him to travel with them. He sounded so convincing that all the birds believed he has changed and accepted that he should come with them to sky for the festival. The birds then decided to contribute a feather each for Tortoise which he used to produce two wings. When the day of the festival reached, the Tortoise got to the meeting place before all the birds. They then took off for sky and Tortoise was very excited to experience flying for the very first time in his life. For a meeting of such magnitude for which the birds were so prepared, they needed someone to speak for them and since the Tortoise was very eloquent in speech and was even considered an orator among the birds, he was chosen to be their spokesperson. At this particular moment the Tortoise put his characteristic mischief on play. As they were flying to the sky, he told the birds that there was one important thing they all had to remember. He explained to the birds that when people were invited to a great feast like the one they were going to attend, they had to take new names for the occasion as tradition demanded. He then told them that their hosts in the sky would expect them to honour this age-old custom and come with new names. This sounded very strange to the birds as none of them had heard of that custom before.

However, they knew that despite his numerous shortcomings that they were all aware of, the Tortoise was widely travelled and certainly knew the customs and traditions of far off areas more than them. Consequently, they accept the Tortoise's proposal and took a new name each. The Tortoise waited for all birds to take new names before he took his. He told the birds that they would all call him "All of you". They subsequently arrived in the sky and their hosts were extremely happy to see them. As the spokesman of the birds, the Tortoise stood up in his many-coloured plumage and thanked them for their invitation. His wings of many colours impressed their hosts and his speech was so eloquent that all the birds were glad they had brought him, and nodded their heads in approval of all he said in his speech. Due to his exceptional looks, his speech and the approval of the birds, Tortoise was considered as the king of the birds by their hosts. The hosts present kolanuts as custom demands and after the kola nuts had been eaten, the people of the sky set before their guests the most delectable dishes Tortoise had even seen or dreamed of all his life. The soup was brought out very hot from the fire and in the very pot in which it had been prepared. The soup was full of meat and fish and Tortoise could not help sniffing aloud. The food that was brought before them was pounded yam and also yam pottage cooked with palm-oil and fresh fish. In addition to this, there were also several pots of palm-wine. By the time all the food and drinks were set before the guests, one of the people of the sky came forward and tasted a little from each of the pots after which he invited the birds to eat and drink. At this juncture, Tortoise jumped to his feet and asked the host to tell them exactly the person for whom the food was prepared. The man to whom the question was asked replied "For all of you". When this was said, Tortoise turned to the birds and said reminded them that his name was "All of you" before going ahead to say that the custom of the sky people was to serve the spokesman first and serve the others later; and that was why it was his new name that was mentioned in relation to the people for whom the food was meant. He then said they would

serve the birds after he must have finished eating. On their part, the people of the sky thought it must be their custom to leave all the food for their king whom they thought was Tortoise. With this, Tortoise ate most of the food and then drank two pots of palm-wine to such an extent that he was full of food and drink and his body filled out in his shell. The birds had no choice than to gather round to eat what was left and to peck at the bones he had thrown all about the floor. Some of the birds were so angry that they refused to eat and decided to fly home on empty stomachs.

However, before they left each took back the feather he had lent to Tortoise to enable him to fly to sky. Consequently, Tortoise was left in his hard shell full of food and wine but without any wings to fly home. He pleaded but this time around the birds did not listen to him. He then asked the birds to take a message for his wife telling her how to limit the harm on him when he falls from sky but all the birds refused. Finally, Parrot who had felt angrier than the others, suddenly had a change of mind and agreed to take the message to Tortoise's wife. Tortoise pleads with Parrot to tell his wife to bring out all the soft things in his house and cover the compound with them so that he could jump down from the sky without very great danger and so that even if he were to be hurt it should be limited. Parrot listened attentively and promised to deliver the message. However, when Parrot reached Tortoise's house he instead told his wife to bring out all the hard things in the house. Thus, she brought out all hard things in the house including her husband's hoes, machetes, spears, guns and even his cannon. After waiting patiently, Tortoise looked down from the sky and saw his wife bringing things out; but it was too far for him to see that they were instead the things that would hurt him. When he was convinced that everything was set, Tortoise jumped from the sky targeting the things he saw in his house. The distance was very long and so he fell continuously until he began to fear that he would never stop falling till he crashed into objects producing a sound similar to that of a cannon. Again, Ezinma asks if Tortoise died and the mother's answer is negative. She however adds that his shell broke into pieces. Fortunately, there was a great medicine man in the neighbourhood and Tortoise's wife sent for him. He gathered all the bits of shell and stuck them together. She ends by saying that "That is why Tortoise's shell is not smooth" (Achebe 1958: 69-70).

This myth is filled with a lot of ecological dynamics. To begin with, it is focused on nature-birds and tortoise. The presence of natural elements in the myth is indicative of the part they play in the lives of the people. Secondly, the myth brings out a harmonious co-existence between man and nature. This is seen as the men of the sky commune with the birds in such a way that they invite them to the sky for their feasts. This is indicative not only of the fact that man can live in harmony with nature but also that he can protect it and enable it to blossom. Furthermore, the myth brings out the survival and selfish instinct that characterizes natural items especially the animals and birds in the ecosystem. In this case the Tortoise cares about nothing else but itself. It is thus not bothered about the birds when he is eating and drinking all what the hosts gave them. It equally touches the interconnectedness of elements in the ecosystem. Natural items in the ecosystem are connected to and affect each other in such a way that when something affects one element, it has a chain reaction on other natural elements of the ecosystem; be they positive or negative. Here, the bird's anger makes them collect their feathers from Tortoise.

As a result, Tortoise cannot fly back safely and this further affects him in that his shell is scattered. The birds' happiness is

what gives Tortoise the possibility to eat and drink in the sky thereby highlighting the collective fate of living things. Finally, another ecological perspective raised in this myth is the part played by man in the well-being or suffering of the other elements of the ecosystem. All these that happen to the birds, their expectations, decorations, feather donation, travel, disappointment and anger are all caused by man's invitation. In the same light, the shape of Tortoise's back can be traced to man's invitation. This implies that be it directly or indirectly man has a key part to play in the ecosystem especially given that he is part and parcel of it; affecting it and affected by it. This way, man can avoid the excesses in his treatment of nature and try to make his connection and co-existence better. The ability of myths to provoke a change in people's attitude towards nature is indicated by Buell, Heise and Thornber when they say "Ecocritics have been attracted to indigenous place-based stories and myths both for their own sake and for their potential adaptability as models for contemporary artistic and life practices, e.g., for their insights into the challenges of sustaining or restoring ecocultural identity notwithstanding the traumas of cultural change, displacement, and discrimination" (Buell, Heise and Thornber 2011: 429).

Like Ezinma, Nwoye who is a boy prefers to sit in the mother's house listening to stories than sitting in his father's Obi and learning masculine things like most male children of his age are expected to do. He really appreciates the stories their mother tell them and his favourite is the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago which made Sky to withhold rain for seven years. This had devastating effects on other elements of the ecosystem and man particularly. Due to the sustained drought caused by Sky's refusal to release rain, crops withered and people who died at this time could not be buried because the hoes broke on the Earth that had been made to be as strong as stone. When the situation became unbearable, Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to sing a song about man's suffering to Sky so that his heart is softened. When this was done, Sky developed pity and gave rain wrapped in cocoyam leaves to Vulture. Unfortunately, as Vulture was flying home with the water, his long talon pierced the leaves and this caused rain to fall as it had never fallen before. In fact, the rain fell so heavily on Vulture that he never returned to deliver his message but flew to a distant land where he had seen a fire. When he got where the fire was, he realized that it was a man making a sacrifice. Then, "He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails" (Achebe 1958: 37-38). In this case, we see the inharmonious relationship between man and nature with nature meting a lot of suffering on man. Sky withholds rain from Earth for long after the two quarrel and this negatively affects aspects of the ecosystem like grass and crops that wither and man who does not only lack what to eat but cannot bury his dead because the earth is too strong. The fact that the rain that was tied on cocoa leaves was accidentally burst by Vulture is an indication of the point that there are some natural occurrences which are more accidental than planned and have great effects on the ecosystem.

Equally, when Uchendu wants to illustrate how foolish Abame people were to have killed the white man, which brought war into their land, he uses the myth of the Kite and Chicks. When Obierika narrates that war was brought to Abame because Abame people killed a white man and tied his horse to the sacred cotton tree, Uchendu asked what the white man had said before he was killed and Obierika answered that the man said nothing. Uchendu then said nobody should kill someone who says nothing and illustrates with the myth of the Kite and the Chick. He narrates that

Mother Kite once sent her daughter to bring food for them. When she went and brought back a duckling, Mother Kite asked what the duckling's mother said and when the answer was that it said nothing, Mother Kite said the duckling should be returned because there is something very dangerous about silence. With that the Daughter Kite returned the duckling and took a chick in its place and when the reaction of the chick's mother was that it was crying, cursing and threatening, Mother Kite said they could eat the chick safely. (Achebe *Things* 98) This myth reinforces the fact that elements of the ecosystem feed on each other and so should man. The fact is that man should limit his consumption and avoid consuming items that can pose a problem for man's own existence later is brought forth by the Mother Kite's restraint from killing the duckling whose consumption was deemed to be dangerous.

The transmission of myths from generation to generation is brought out in Achebe's texts as we see Ekwefi teaching Ezinma the myths. Story telling itself in Africa is hinged on natural dynamics as there are particular periods of the year when there is less work in the farms and the weather also has a role to play. In line with this, Achebe says:

Sometimes it poured down in such thick sheets of water that earth and sky seemed merged in one grey wetness. It was then uncertain whether the low rumbling of Amadiora's thunder came from above or below. At such times, in each of the countless thatched huts of Umuofia, children sat around their mother's cooking fire telling stories, or with their father in his obi warming themselves from a log fire, roasting and eating maize. It was a brief resting period between the exacting and arduous planting season and the equally exacting but light-hearted month of harvests. (Achebe 1958: 24)

This, in effect, is the transfer of ecological concerns from one generation to another given that the myths are coined with a lot of ecological dynamics. This comes to play when Ezinma herself tries to tell her own story when it is her turn. She starts that once upon a time, Tortoise and Cat went to wrestle against Yams, before realizing that it was not the correct beginning of the myth. This is indicative of the fact that children hear the same myths several times and they do not still get the myth exactly as they are told. This probably explains the variation of myths not only from one area to another but also from one generation to the next. With this variation, there are also variations in the way people view nature with respect to the myths. Ezinma then restarts her story by saying that once upon a time there was a serious famine in the land of animals. As a result of that everybody became lean except Cat who was fat and whose body shone as if oil was rubbed on it. At this point, Ezinma's myth is interrupted by the loud high pitch voice of Chielo who is coming to take Ezinma to the shrine of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. (Achebe 1958: 70) Here, ecological concerns are already being raised. The myth is about the Tortoise and the Cat; thus making nature central. In addition, it is all about the suffering of animals due to famine. Thus the link between man and nature is being transferred to the younger generation.

Equally, a myth that has ecological inclinations is narrated by Nathaniel to those around him when they go to condole with Obi who never attended his mother's burial. Nathaniel tells a story of Tortoise who went on a long journey to a distant clan and before going, he told his people not to send for him unless something new under the sun happened. Unfortunately, when he was gone, his mother died. His people did not know what to tell him so that he returns home for his mother's burial. They knew that if they told

him that his mother had died, he would say it was nothing new in the world. Consequently, they told him that his father's palm tree had borne a fruit at the end of its leaf which was really new. It worked because when Tortoise heard this, he said he must return home to see this great monstrosity for himself. This way, his plan to escape the burial of his mother was made to fail. (Achebe 1960: 148-149) In this myth, the connection between man and nature is brought out clearly. The tortoise is juxtaposed with Obi in the lack of will to attend their mothers' burials. However, a strange natural phenomenon is invented to bring the tortoise home to attend his mother's burial. This indicates that man and nonhuman elements of nature share common pains and so should all be treated kindly.

These myths and others like the quarrel between the Earth and Sky and the Locust Myth highlight the harmonious as well as clashing relationship between elements of the ecosystem including man and can teach people the need to avoid or limit the conflicting links and solidify the friendly ties. Pinion indicates the ability of myths to impact reality as he says "I assume that myths are religious in origin, and relate to gods or similar personalized powers, that they were thought to reveal inescapable truths about the universe and nature, and that, even though their narrative features are fictitious, they can be used imaginatively by virtue of their original significance to reinforce or symbolize aspects of life" (Pinion 1976: 125). Obiechina also says that an ecocritical analysis of African literature without an examination of the oral component is incomplete as he states; "It is no longer possible to undertake a meaningful critical discourse of African literature, whether written in the indigenous languages or in the languages of the former colonial powers, without seriously adverting to its oral traditional constituents in the matrix of composite forms and contents" (Obiechina 1992: 198). Thus myths and their analysis are indispensable in African ecological discourse.

Therefore, myths are some of the elements used by Achebe in bringing out his views of man's relationship with nature. In this case, he uses myths concerning nonhuman living things like the tortoise, cats and birds to highlight the part natural items play in the lives of the people; bring out the harmonious co-existence between man and nature; indicate the survival and selfish instincts that characterize natural items especially the animals and birds in the ecosystem; project the interconnectedness of elements in the ecosystem; hint on the part played by man in the well-being or suffering of the other elements of the ecosystem; bring out the suffering of animals; and indicate the fact that man and nonhuman elements of nature share common pains and so should all be treated kindly. So, myths are vital in Achebe's ecological narrative.

Winton exhibits similarities with Achebe in the use of myths to highlight ecological dynamics. However, his approach is quite different from Achebe's. While Achebe presents narrative myths in which the interaction between man and nature is projected, Winton links myths to environmental perspectives by giving natural elements mythic attributes. This aligns with Glotfelty's assertion that: "Mythic narratives often encode ecological wisdom, teaching us about the intricate web of relationships between humans and the natural world. By tapping into these myths, we can gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of living things" (Glotfelty 1996: 17). In Winton's *Dirt Music*, the baobab tree is one of the natural elements attributed mythic qualities. The narrator states that: "The baobab was a tree of myth and legend, a symbol of the enduring power of nature." (Winton 2001: 201) The tree has an air of timeless awe around it despite the ever-evolving landscape. The baobab tree

possesses a huge ancient trunk and twisted branches which highlight the enduring potential of nature that makes it to outlast several generations of human beings. Winton describes the baobab tree thus: "The baobab stood like a sentinel, its trunk thick and gnarled, its branches reaching up towards the sky like withered fingers [...] a hulking monument in the land, knotted and patient, older than time itself." (Winton 2001: 156) This description gives the baobab tree a mythical dimension by implying that it evolves out of the normal passage of time. It is mythical in the fact that it is able to resist the tremendous forces of destruction, renewal and transformation that characterize the Australian landscape; symbolizing strength and resilience.

Closely related to this is the fact that the baobab tree has its mythical prowess because it is a witness to memory and loss; helping those around it to reconnect with their past glories and fears. In this regards, the narrator states that: "The baob stood mute, a sentinel to all that had passed and all that would come. It knew the land's secrets, the people's whispers, their cries" (Winton 2001: 167). As far as Luther Fox is concerned, the baobab tree is a milieu where he reflects and reconnects to his past as Winton states thus: "In the shadow of the baobab, Luther felt a sense of awe and wonder that he had never experienced before." (Winton 2001: 278) This is also because it is a place of refuge as Winton describes it as "a hollow embrace, a place where the wind's bite softened, and a man could feel small and safe." (Winton 2001: 261). The baobab therefore has a mythical status as it symbolizes the enduring reservoir of memory in the midst of human and natural tragedies that have retransformed the Australian landscape over the years; providing a space for mankind to reconnect with his past and at the same time take refuge from the traumas of daily life. .

Furthermore, the baobab possesses spiritual qualities. The mere imposing massive physical presence of the baobab evokes a sense of awe and reverence as if the case with many natural elements especially trees with mythical attributes in many civilizations. The narrator describes the baobab thus: "The baobab stood like a sentinel, its trunk thick and gnarled, its branches reaching up towards the sky like withered fingers [...] a thing of reverence, its twisted limbs raised as if to hold up the sky " (Winton 2001: 156) This description gives the tree a divine dimension underscoring the fact that it is metaphysically connected to the earth and the cosmos. Winton also states that: "The baob held the earth together, its roots like veins running deep, anchoring the world in place" (Winton 2001: 187). This explains why many characters especially Luther Fox always retreats to the baobab for contemplation and connection to the spiritual realm.

Another natural element that has mythical attributes in Winton's *Dirt Music* is the red-eyed barramundi about which Winton says that: "The barramundi was a creature of myth and legend, a fish with eyes that glowed like embers in the dark." (Winton 2001: 242). The barramundi especially with the vivid description of its red eyes is a mythical symbol of survival and resilience. This fish that is reputed for striving in very difficult conditions in Australia symbolizes the struggle against adversity; and aligns with the realities of characters like Luther Fox and Georgie Jutland who face tremendous difficulties overcoming their physical and emotional difficulties. The connection between the barramundi's surviving conditions and those of man are brought out in relation to the character Li. The narrator explains that when Lu thinks about the red-eyed barramundi's looks, he feels "a kinship, as though the fish carried in its body the same scars and burdens he bore." (Winton 2001: 276). Winton describes the

barramundi as "gleaming and fierce, its crimson eyes glowing like embers from another world" (Winton 2001: 298). This indicates that the red-eyed barramundi has a mythical dimension as it suggests that the fish seems to have come from another cosmos sphere; and its survival in difficult environments highlights the resilience man needs to overcome his own life challenges.

Also, the barramundi is given mythical qualities by Winton in the sense that he attributes to them a spiritual dimension. The narrator states that: "The red-eyed barramundi was a symbol of the mysterious and unknown, a reminder of the power and majesty of nature." (Winton 2001: 293) It represents a profound and almost supernatural link between human beings and nature; and its vivid description projects the importance of the natural elements like land and water in defining the lives of the characters and their identities. Such description is seen when the narrator describes the barramundi's red eyes as "burning coals in the dark water" (Winton 2001: 137). The red-eyed barramundi's spiritual dimension is highlighted in its encounter with Luther Fox who views it as "not just a fish, but a being of the place, a spirit in scales" (Winton 2001: 205). Winton states that: "As Luther gazed into the eyes of the barramundi, he felt a sense of connection to the natural world that he had never felt before" (Winton 2001: 319). This attributes to the barramundi abilities beyond the natural aspects of a fish; by ascribing to it spiritual and mythical dimensions necessitating awe and fairness from mankind as it has the ability to affect his life since it connects him to greater natural forces.

The ocean in Winton's *Breath* has mythical attributes. This is alluded to when Winton says that: "The ocean was a vast and mysterious thing, a place where the known and unknown coexisted." (Winton 2008: 50) The ocean highlights the characters' pursuit of freedom and transcendence. This is particularly true of Pikelet and Loonie for whom surfing is not just a sport but has become a way of escaping the troubles of their daily lives and connecting with the ocean that is much bigger than they are. In this regards, the narrator states that: "Out on the ocean, everything felt bigger, the sky broader, and the self smaller. It was where you were truly alive" (Winton 2008: 126). This brings out the ocean's ability to provoke a sense of awe and relate with the characters at a level higher than their normal potentials. Winton highlights this with regards to Bruce when he states that: "As Bruce gazed out at the ocean, he felt a sense of awe and wonder that he had never experienced before" (Winton 2008: 200). In this context, the mythical dimension of the ocean is in the fact that it provides a feeling of freedom and self-rediscovery to the characters; and represents a space in which Pikelet and Loonie transcend their normal abilities.

However, the ocean can equally symbolize danger and mortality if man is not careful when interacting with it. And this projects the ocean's mythical role as a giver of life and a taker of it thereby necessitating respect and humility from man. The danger and mortality associated with the ocean is presented by Pikelet thus: "The ocean didn't care. It had no feelings, no malice, no intent. It was indifferent to whether you lived or died" (Winton 2008: 138). This indifference attributed to the ocean underscores the danger that the ocean can represent to mankind. The double mythical perspective associated to the ocean regarding its provision of freedom and representation of danger captures the ocean as a metaphor of the unpredictable natural forces that shape the lives of human beings. The author underscores this as he states that: "The ocean was a symbol of the sublime, a reminder of the power and

majesty of nature." (Winton 2008: 120) Therefore, human beings have an interest in respecting, fearing and living peacefully with natural elements like the ocean.

One of natural elements given mythical qualities in Winton's *Cloudstreet* is the river about which Winton states that: "The river was a force of nature, a reminder of the power and mystery of the natural world" (Winton 1991: 120). He equally adds that: "The river was a symbol of the cyclical nature of life, a reminder that all things must come to an end." (Winton 1991: 250). The river acts as a mythical entity projecting rebirth and healing. The river serves as a retreat for cleansing and renewal for characters seeking comfort and exit from the traumas of life. This is the case with Quick Lamb who finds refuge in the river to keep away from the troubles he faces; and the river is said to provide him with calm, serenity, transformation and emotional renewal. His immersion in the river could be equated to the Christian act of baptism which breathes a new fresh positive life into the individual; washing away all the sins, trauma and burdens of the past. This aligns with the myth of water being a source of life in many cultures. This probably explains Fish Lamb's supernatural bond with the river after he nearly drowns in it. He says he is being drawn to it and this reinforces the mythical prowess of the river as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual spheres.

Similarly, the river's mythical dimension is brought out in the sense that it constitutes a reputable source of physical and emotional healing. This is perceived through Rose Pickles whose traumatic family realities push her to seek healing by the river; where she diagnoses her emotions and gets some tranquility. Winton states that: "As Fish Lamb gazed out at the river, he felt a sense of connection to the natural world that he had never felt before." (Winton 1991: 320). This aligns with her inner journey from chaotic to quietude; and highlights the belief in many traditions that water has the ability to purify not just the outer body but also the soul.

Another natural element that has mythical powers in *Cloudstreet* is the shifty shadow. Winton states that: "The shifty shadow was a symbol of the unknown and the unconscious, a reminder that there are forces beyond our understanding that shape our lives" (Winton 1991: 280). The shifty shadow mythically symbolizes guilt and conscience. This is because it represents guilt and inner conflict; transforming itself as the moral conflict evolves, thereby acting as a barometer of characters' emotional situations. This is particularly the case with Quick Lamb who grapples with the weight of the shadow with regards to the lack of closure about Fish's accident and the guilt that his family has to deal with. He indicates a that he feels he is being "watched" or "judged" by its presence; and this shows that the shadow signifies conscience modifying itself as the person's moral state evolves.

Equally, the mythical dimension of the shadow is brought out in the fact that it is a spiritual force in *Cloudstreet*. The shadow is associated to the Aboriginal spirits that have been haunting the house and entire land indicating that there is a much profound metaphysical restlessness. The narrator states that: "The shifty shadow was a presence that haunted the house, a reminder of the secrets and stories that lay just beneath the surface" (Winton 1991: 200). Winton indicates that the shadow is haunting the house and is linked to its supernatural dimension. The character Fish Lamb who has a more profound relationship with the supernatural relates with the shadow more easily than other characters do. The mythical attributes of the shadow highlight the link between the world of the

living and the world of the dead and accentuates the fact that the past and the present are always connected.

Based on this, it can be perceived that both Achebe and Winton use myths in bringing out their visions of the relationship between man and nature in their respective texts. This corroborates Buell's declaration that: "Myths are not just stories but ways of thinking, ways of understanding the world and our place in it. They are a way of connecting with the natural world, and of finding meaning and significance in the land and its creatures" (Buell 1995: 123). However, while Achebe provides narrative myths that project ecological dimensions, Winton presents natural elements that have mythical attributes.

Conclusion

Proverbs and myths are significant in the ecological perspectives of Tim Winton in *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath*; and Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. With regards to proverbs, the two authors use proverbs that highlight both the positive and negative aspects of man's relationship with nature. However, owing to the different cultural, ecological and historical backgrounds of the novelists, they differ in the sense that each uses proverbs that are peculiar to his background and relevant to his ecological realities. As far as myths are concerned, Achebe and Winton equally explore them differently in their environmental discourses. While Achebe narrates myths that highlight the relationship between man and nature, Winton attributes mythical dimensions to natural elements to illustrate their connectedness to man. Overall, Chinua Achebe and Tim Winton incorporate the traditional narratives of proverbs and myths from their respective contexts in their ecological visions; underscoring the importance of the indigenous knowledge of different backgrounds in preserving the ecosystem. This work presents a vision on the role of literature in protecting the environment by indicating that writers can use the local narratives of their areas to foster the environment protection discourse.

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