

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *CLOUDSTREET*

"Rose had a run in with a Nice Voice that got her excited in a strange way." This marks the beginning of the relationship Toby Raven and Rose Pickles share in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*. While it is quite brief and seemingly insignificant at first glance, it successfully explores many of the values conveyed throughout the whole epic saga. Primarily through the techniques of contrast and comparison, Winton essentially uses the character of Toby to guide Rose towards what she truly needs and values – family, home and a sense of place, but definitely not him or what he represents. Their relationship also gives insight into the concepts of reconciliation and homecoming, two of the main underlying themes of the novel.

Through the relationship, their differences in education and background are juxtaposed and Rose ultimately realises how much she values family, community and the honest lifestyle she leads in *Cloudstreet*. Over the course of their relationship, Rose felt that she had to act differently to fit in with Toby and his middle class way of life. She didn't even feel comfortable showing him any aspects of her own life, as can be seen in "She always met him in neutral places out of shame, and never mentioned the big old house, the squealing, romping, toothy noise of those who sailed on in it."

For their first date they go out for dinner at Marias, "where the real people come," as Toby tells Rose. She put a lot of effort into looking up to his standards - "It'd taken all afternoon to dress for this, and she could barely move for starch." The fact that Rose puts up a façade to feel comfortable with Toby shows how much she values social mobility. This is what Toby represents to Rose - he is the means by which she can climb up the social ladder. However Rose gradually realises that she actually values her own family and sense of place more than a respectable social status.

During the date, their educational backgrounds are juxtaposed when Rose says "you've been to university, or something, haven't you?" "Ah, sharp lady," Toby replies. She then states her reason for acting differently with him: "See, we're different." It seems that Rose compensates by trying to also keep up with his educational standards. Their relationship mainly consists of witty comments such as "G'day Earl. Haven't strained yourself, have you? – it's as if they are trying to prove their intelligence to each other. It isn't romantic or heartfelt, but essentially a relationship in which both want to make the most of each other - Rose uses him to upgrade her social class and Toby uses her to get ideas for his unsuccessful writing career.

Toby's deceitful nature is evident when he completely abuses Rose's trust at his editor's party. Humiliated and trying to regain his composure, he uses Rose and her different background to his advantage, saying: "Well, actually I've been thinking of some very funny, funny material inspired only today. Rose, tell them about where you live. Tell them about the lady in the back yard who lives in a tent. Tell them about the slow boy you used to love." In this quote, Winton applies anaphora of "tell them" to generate a scornful, mocking tone, portraying Toby's character as pretentious and duplicitous.

This episode not only reveals Toby's true nature, but also satirises the entire hollow and conceited middle class. His deception results in Rose realising that the unassuming life of *Cloudstreet* is much more a part of her than the false world of Toby. This is when the theme of homecoming emerges – Rose recedes back to the safety of *Cloudstreet* and Quick; this action is a prominent symbol of the reconciliation between the families and the importance of a sense of place.

Rose's gradual realisation that Toby represents everything that she doesn't value is evident when she says to him: "Nice is an ugly word." This is strongly contrasted with her earlier description of Toby as being a "Nice Voice" - the transformation in tone and meaning represents her change in attitude. When describing the city of Perth, Toby himself said: "There's something nesting here,

something horrible waiting.” It seems he wasn’t only foreshadowing what would happen in the city, but also in their relationship. However what happens as a result of this conveys some of the most central values of the book.