

## ENGLISH ADVANCE MODULE B

### Cloudstreet Speech- Symbolism Contributes its Textual Integrity

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“Cloudstreet, by Tim Winton, is an insightful novel with rich symbolism, which enhances its textual integrity”. ‘Textual integrity’ sounds esoteric, so what does it really mean? We must get a fuller understanding of the concept before we can explore how the use of symbolism in Cloudstreet contributes to it. Textual integrity is “the unity of a text; its coherent use of form and language to produce an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value”. This means we’re talking about the unity of Cloudstreet developed by three aspects: coherence, integration and wholeness in terms of meaning and value.

The first of these characteristics, coherence, is the linking “of the underlying ideas and the logical organization and development of the thematic content”.

Although it sounds complex, literary coherence can be easily created using symbolism, as shown in Cloudstreet.

The house is an example of the symbolism used by Tim Winton to express complicated ideas in a more tangible way. No. 1 Cloudstreet is a symbol of the two families and their movement over time. When the two families first move together, the backyard is clearly divided, showing their segregation, and the fence of “old signs patched together” is symbolic of the patching together of each families broken lives. At the end of the novel, “A square little woman unpegged and folded a tent...another woman stepped forward, tottering a little. She crossed the long gash...where yesterday there’d been a fence, and took a corner of the tent herself”. The removal of this fence and tent from the house symbolizes that all barriers have been dismantled and all aspects of Cloudstreet have been restored into a functional whole; that which was fragmented is now a symbol of the union of two families.

The house is also a broader symbol, as Catherine Byrnes stated, “The great continent of a house that lives and breathes is not some suburb in Perth, it is our land, it is our country”. A post-colonial reading of Cloudstreet may suggest that the house is a reflection on the entire nation, as a metaphor of the breaking down of divisions in society and the union of Australian people as a federation.

In these examples of the symbolism of the house, complex ideas have been communicated metaphorically to create coherence in the message, thus achieving textual integrity.

The second complicated yet crucial characteristic of the textual integrity of a piece is integration. Symbolism such as the river in Cloudstreet integrates concrete and abstract elements of the text into a harmonious whole. The concrete event of Fish drowning in the river and being resuscitated has a parallel abstract event, on a spiritual level, that “not all of Fish Lamb had come back”. The river is a symbolic object of both Fish’s traumatic drowning as well as his physical self being separated from his spiritual self in the water, and his body’s desire to be reunited with its other half once more.

Cloudstreet is such a richly textured book because it not only manages to present both the concrete and abstract concepts, but it integrates them as one through the use of symbolism, as shown in the symbol of the river.

Finally, symbolism contributes to the wholeness of a piece by weaving together meaning and values. Tim Winton presents the value of spirituality as an integral part of life through the symbols of the elusive blackfella and other events. The spirituality conveyed is both of Christian and aboriginal tradition.

Symbolism that relates to Christian teachings may be found in the biblical parallels of the blackfella's seemingly inexhaustible bread and wine, in Quick's experience of seeing a man walking on water, and in Quick's body giving off light as did the face of Moses. Neil Whitfield believes there is another clear symbol of the Christian faith in the character of fish, as he states "Fish is therefore a saviour, whose final release comes after a life of sacrifice to bring the families together. His death is Christ-like in his effect on others-especially that his death opens the way for Oriel to return to the family and the place where she belongs and release Quick's twenty years of crushing guilt."

The Blackfella then represents indigenous spirituality when he "stands with a stick, beating slowly against his knee, humming under his breath" to rid the house of its spirits, as well as when he flees from the centre of the house as a reaction to the ancestral deaths of the library. The indigenous spirituality of the Blackfella is also echoed in Rose, who says regarding No. 1 Cloudstreet "We belong to it" counterintuitive to the white notion of human 'ownership', and she goes on to say of the two families, "It's a new tribe".

In these examples of the role of the blackfella and other events as symbols of spirituality in differing faiths, values are threaded throughout the text to both give it meaning and create a backbone to the novel that holds the individual stories as a whole.

The symbolism in Cloudstreet clearly creates unity through the three aspects: coherence, integration and wholeness; contributing to its well-appraised textual integrity as a 'Modern Australian Classic'.