

# Family and identity within cloudstreet



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It is through Tim Winton's primary characters, including Quick and Rose, as well as the manipulation of other literary elements that concepts such as family and identity are explored within *Cloudstreet* (1991).

The concept of family is universal to any time period, and Tim Winton's honest approach to exploring family life within *Cloudstreet* has ensured the novel's lasting value to an Australian audience. Winton clearly presents two very different families with contrasting values: the Pickles and the Lambs. Rose and Quick within these families demonstrate a lack of belonging to Cloud street, which is why they are essential in revealing the growth and change that the Pickles and Lambs experience over the twenty-year course of the text. Quick's survivor's guilt following Fish's near death leaves him lost and with low self-esteem, his connection with his family completely detached, " Jesus I hate this family stuff. It makes me sick. I don't need this." The truncated sentences and simple syntax reflect Quick's poor education and lower-class upbringing, and his rejection of emotion is very similar to that of his hard-hearted mother, Oriel, with whom he has an ever-maturing relationship. Rose's relationship with her mother is far more unpleasant, however, as she hyperbolically exaggerates her hatred to hurt Dolly, " Hating you is the best part of being alive." Through Winton's utilisation of saga, it can be seen that this relationship does change, and Rose ultimately forgives Dolly, " Rose Lamb got up out of her chair, put a knee up on the bed, hoisted herself, and felt the sobs beating up at her from the body beneath... the two women wept together on the sagging bed." Alliteratively, " women wept" softens the kinesthetic image that physically connects mother and daughter, reflective of the improving relationship between the two. Due to their

improved family ties, both Rose and Quick finally feel a sense of belonging to Cloud street, “ I can’t bear to think of any of us leaving. We belong to it, Quick, and I want to stay.” Rose demonstrates that the house has ownership over her and Quick, and by choosing not to leave Cloud street, the couple ultimately strengthen and assure their positive relationship with their families, of which will last for many years to come.

The growth of Rose and Quick over the course of the novel, both physically as they age from children to adults and emotionally as they discover their true sense of identity, is enabled due to Winton’s utilisation of saga and his fragmented episodic structure. The episode “ The Dance” depicts Quick morose and depressed due to his survivor’s guilt, pinning horrific pictures from the Korean War to “ the flaky wall to remind himself that he is alive, he is lucky, he is healthy, and his brother is not.” Descriptive language and cumulative listing emphasise the intensity of Quick’s “ misery radar”, which quickly become a defining feature of his identity. It is not until he discovers the lifeless body of a young boy in a river that his story comes full circle, and Winton employs flashback to exemplify the far-reaching impact of the event upon Quick’s identity: “ The Nedland’s Monster, the face of evil. That was his son he’d been holding, trying not to weep over in front of a crowd. He’d seen himself, Harry, Fish in that dead boy’s face.” After this incident, Quick realises “ There’s no monsters, only people like us” and this liberation allows him to let go of the guilt that had been tormenting him since Fish, ultimately coming to peace with himself. Rose’s struggle to come to terms with her own identity differs from Quick’s as she is more articulate and is better able to communicate her feelings. The characteristically strong and pragmatic

woman begins to question herself only when she is compared to other, higher class individuals, “ Toby’s friends painted and sculpted or wrote... they spoke with their heads back and their eyes closed and their accents were Englishy.” Winton utilises Australian vernacular in this quote to represent Rose’s connection to Australian culture in her struggle to discover her true identity amongst Toby’s friends. As a cynic, Rose ultimately recognises the superficiality of Toby’s friends and rejects them, just as Australian culture has embraced its own, unique identity and moved away from its English heritage. The importance of Cloudstreet to Australian society is thus once again cemented as it manages to acknowledge Australian cultural history through the universal struggle of individual identity.

Thus, it can be seen that Winton utilises various literary elements to illustrate an authentic portrayal of family and identity, and one particularly pertaining to his Australian audience.