

# Realism in jim grimsley's winter birds



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Realism in Jim Grimsley's *Winter Birds* When thinking of a work of fiction, one would most likely consider the unrealistic story or the happy ending.

Additionally, most wouldn't think of "the harsh realities of everyday life" (Feldman, 485) like domestic violence and alcoholism. This is because nowadays, most books aren't realist novels. A realist novel is a fictional book that focuses more on character analysis rather than plot, and describes things as they really are, with no excess details. One can argue that *Winter Birds* by Jim Grimsley is a realist novel because of its portrayal of faith, unresolved plot, and absence of emotion.

Throughout *Winter Birds*, the portrayal of faith that takes place in the novel really shows how realistic the events of the book are. The first part of the book where this occurs is when the narrator Danny Crell must go to the hospital. Danny, a hemophiliac, has a declining in condition because of uncontrollable blood loss. He starts to dream of death: "Or else you dreamed of clouds. You dreamed you were no longer a child, you were something other, something you assigned no name but only imagined" (Grimsley, 61).

This proves to be quite realistic because as the unreliable narrator, eight-year-old Danny can easily imagine things he's never seen before. It also shows Danny's ability to put his mind in another place when in a problematic position, a technique used in many real situations. It also displays the anomaly of how children can sometimes be more sensible or even more mature than adults. This is a very realistic idea that sparks much interest in relating the novel's discourse back to the previous thought, raising the question of the possibility of a small boy speaking like an adult.

Another example of Winter Bird's realist portrayal of faith occurs when Danny mentions the River Man. This provides insight into Danny's everyday rituals and his hope that change can occur. For example, Danny's faith is seen in the following: " You did not go down to the black water where River Man was waiting...and when you are there you will know that facts are your only friends" (Grimsley 209). When Danny thinks in this way, he is insinuating his beliefs to the reader and proving he can think for himself.

It relates to realism because " the use of symbolism is controlled and limited; the realists depend more on the use of images" (Penrose 2). The majority of the book's contents are relayed through the use of imagery, which not only makes it easier for the reader to understand, but also gives the reader a bigger opportunity to relate to what they are reading. Although realism depicts events that could actually happen, depending on the social, wealth and racial statuses of the reader, they may not be able to fully grasp the harshness of Winter Birds, which at times can seem like a satire of sorts.

The next aspect of realism found in Winter Birds, unresolved plot, is something that gives the book lack of drive. The second chapter of the novel, which takes up pages eighteen to eighty nine, is nothing but an extremely long chapter about the past, addled by the use of flashbacks. While somewhat interesting, these seventy out of just over two hundred pages discusses only the number of houses the Crell family lives in from the point when Bobjay Crell loses his arm up until the present. When the second chapter finally ends, the plot is nothing more than a description of the events that unfold on Thanksgiving Day.

Many examples of realist works, both past and present, take place in one setting over the course of one day. This is to highlight the fact that realism is supposed to follow nothing more than everyday life. However, the flashbacks used to show all of the other houses the family has lived in give *Winter Birds* the slight element of depth, especially in the barely-there plotline. While this alters the drastic simplicity often used in realism, it is human nature to dwell on the past; to make things complicated is almost something that is programmed into every person's mind.

Therefore, the novel exemplifies realism in a slightly more intricate way while still maintaining the main explanations of the style. To add to the abundance of flashbacks, nothing is resolved by the close of *Winter Birds*. In fact, it ends with a very real conflict taking place, with no resolution in sight. Danny finds that he must decide how his feelings towards both of his parents have changed after living through the nightmarish experience of his father killing his dog, and then forcing Danny and his mother to have sexual relations.

With such a disturbing conflict in mind when the book comes to a close, one can channel those thoughts into conflicts that are slightly more common. Most of the time, when an argument or dilemma ensues, there is usually no resolve. In an article written on BBC's website, it is noted that "at its best, the realist novel is like life itself- complex in appearance, rich in character, diverse in outlook" ("*Victorian Realism*"). Because of *Winter Bird's* unresolved plot, the reader is left with nothing to go further with, making the end seem almost abrupt.

While it is not pleasing to the reader to not know what comes next, realist novels are like that more often than not. When studying the realm of realism, it is common knowledge that the writer spends more time on the character's development than any other part of the novel. In *Winter Birds*, one of the main character traits that take up a substantial portion of the book is Danny and his brother Grove's hemophilia. Because of this, the storyline overflows with ideas and operates on several levels ("Victorian Realism").

An example of this appears on page seventy three of the primary source, when Grimsley describes the photographer: "she remembered the foreign sound of his car...and she remembered the dark camera and the patches for decoration on his elbows". There is more time spent on the man's detailed appearance than on the role he plays in the novel, which distinguishes this book as a realist novel rather than a post-modern, which is the respective time period in which it was written.

Emotion is usually something that makes a novel more engaging, but in a realist novel, it is something that is not usually used. Unsurprisingly, *Winter Birds* does not draw emotions from the reader, nor does it evoke such. Throughout the book, events take place, but are never really thought about or dissected. This gives the novel neither a sense of coldness, nor melodrama, but a believability that coincides with realism itself. In the novel, when pivotal moments take place, they are described as if they were on a list; with no inflection and dull expression.

This can be seen when Danny bites his tongue open after running to defend his mother in a heated argument with his father, but fails to notice a tree

root on the dark ground: " You felt the fall when it began and knew perfectly what it was. You saw the ground burst toward you..." (Grimsley, 47). When emotion is not used in a novel, the reader must decide for themselves what feeling should go with the novel, thus making it more relatable. Making the reader think freely about a novel's tone and mood can be beneficial to making the book more enjoyable to the reader.

When the reader is able to think what they want to about the book, it becomes partly their story, and transforms what would've been an unfortunate realist piece into something more personal. Although caught in compromising situations, Danny rarely thinks about his emotions in *Winter Birds*. There is no punctuation to his actions, which proves that he is acting sensibly as a child. Since he is a young boy, Danny is a character who could easily suppress his emotions.

Realism is " broadly defined as ' the faithful representation of reality' or ' verisimilitude,'" (" Realism in American Literature") so it cannot be stressed enough that every part of a novel is the defining point in determining what style of writing it belongs to. Grimsley cleverly writes this in a way that easily bounds the reader to what the narrator says. By making Danny a more independent character, the thoughts conveyed are verging on being too wise or pensive to be his.

On the other hand, there is no compensation needed to make up for the lack of emotion because of powerful description. After reading *Winter Birds*, one can easily see that it is a realist work. Jim Grimsley depicted a story free of excesses, and has done so in his other books as well. The emotionless boy as

a narrator, lingering dilemma by the novel's close, and the portrayal of faith are what makes this work of writing realistic. Although contrary to its publication date, the preceding evidence is proof that Winter Birds is what is explained by the thesis.