

# Spirituality within cloudstreet



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

One of the most significant themes explored within Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* is spirituality, and the novel reflects a wide range of differing spiritualities, including the belief in luck and chance, religion, as well as exploring Australian history through Aboriginal spirituality.

As an increasingly diverse and multi-faith nation, *Cloudstreet* reflects Australia's changing belief systems and growing secularism, particularly prevalent to its 1940's-1960's context. Following the absolute horrors of WWI and WWII, many previously religious individuals began to become disillusioned with their faith. The Lambs are a testament to this, as Fish's near-death experience prompts them to disregard their belief in God, religious allusion clearly identifying this, "No one believes anymore: the disappointment has been too much." After "The Lambs of God" could no longer be applied to his name, Lester struggled to completely disconnect from his faith and sought spirituality in knife spinning, "The knife never lies, you know... It always knows best." The theme of luck and chance arises within this quote and it is an understanding that Lester shares with Sam, who blames his impulsive and irresponsible behavior on "the shadow", a recurring motif within the text: "Well the shadow was on him, the Hairy Hand of God, and he knew that being a man was the saddest, most useless thing that could happen to someone." Winton's utilization of episodic structure allows each differing spirituality to be showcased and compared to that of others, demonstrating the increasing diversity of faith within society. In representing relevant spiritual issues within *Cloudstreet*, Winton enables the novel to be able to connect to a wide variety of individuals with varying beliefs and increases the value of the text as a whole.

Spirituality in *Cloudstreet* is most distinctly explored through the characterization and experiences of Fish. Divided into Spiritual Fish and Physical Fish, the character acts as the narrator for the text and the entirety of the saga is told within the seconds of his dying breaths, “ I’m Fish Lamb for those seconds it takes to die, as long as it takes to drink the river, as long as it took to tell you this.” The anaphora of “ as long as” exemplifies the length of the saga and allows the novel to come full circle. Before his final release in the river at the end of the novel, Fish consistently yearned for “ the water”, and his spiritual approach to it became a passionate devotion, “...he’s hungry for the water, he wants it more than ever.” The motif of the water is ultimately a metaphor for Fish’s release through death, which he thirsts for ever since “ only half of [Fish Lamb] came back”. It is only through death that the Physical Fish and Spiritual Fish can be united, and the cyclical narrative can reach its end. Fish’s spirituality, and ability to connect with other spiritual beings such as ghosts and the pig, eventually lends itself to other characters. Much to Lester’s surprise, he recognizes Fish’s communication with the anthropomorphic pig: “ The flamin pig. The pig has just spoken. It’s no language that he can understand but there’s no doubt.” Magic realism is depicted through this quote and Lester eventually determines his own understanding of the pig as “ Pentecostal”, thus connecting it to his own Christian faith.

The spirituality of *Cloud street*, the “ living breathing house”, is made most apparent through Winton’s introduction of Aboriginal spirituality. Drawing upon Aboriginal social issues of assimilation and racism, which increase the value of the text to an Australian and Aboriginal audience, Winton provides a

dark history of Cloud street, “ Girls were procured and the house filled. She aimed to make ladies of them so they could set a standard for the rest of their sorry race... the mission girls climbed into bed with one another at night and cried.” This foreshadows Fish’s many negative experiences in the house, particularly in the library, as well as his cries and pain from his communications with the ghosts in that room. Winton further presents Aboriginal spirituality through the character of the Aboriginal man, who interacts with Quick and Sam, and watches over Cloud street in an attempt to rid the negative spirits that reside in it, “ Down the street, looking up with bloodshot eyes, a dark, woolly man stands with a stick, beating it slowly against his knee, humming under his breath until the dusk claims him and the library goes back to being vile and dark and fluid.” The negative connotations in this figurative language reinforce the dark history and spirituality that is within Cloud street, which is eternally released with the birth of Wax Harry, “ The spirits on the wall are fading, fading, finally being forced on their way to oblivion... freeing the house.” Winton employs cyclical narration to juxtapose the beginning and end of the negative spirituality within Cloudstreet: the spirits awaken with a death in the library and are finally freed from the library with a birth.

In conclusion, Cloudstreet successfully represents the various belief systems within Australian society through the differing personalities of its characters, and thus reflects the nature of Australian society as a whole.