

Nature Symbolism in Tim Winton's *That Eye, The Sky*

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Abstract

Tim Winton is an Australian author of both adult and children's novels that highlight both the experience of life and the landscape of his native country. He is the author of *That Eye, The Sky* and he writes about the Australian lifestyle and the impact of landscape in his books. During his youth, his father met with an accident, and this could be related with *That Eye, The Sky* as the main character Ort's father faces a car accident as well. Tim Winton wrote this book to express his life experience when he was in adolescence to demonstrate that hope and ardent belief help people in surviving the trials and tribulations of life. He uses many symbols to manifest that though situations may remain worse to a level that one feels that the entire world is against oneself and in such a terrible condition, a person ought to hope that a family staying together is more important than anything else. This research paper will focus on deciphering the symbols used by Tim Winton in the novel to bring out the light of hope in Ort's life.

Keywords: Symbolism, Experience, Faith, Symbols, Hardships

Tim Winton is an Australian author whose novels are popular among the readers for their dedication and indulgence with land and its surrounding. He has written short stories, memoirs, and novels. He was born in Western Australia and he seems to have inscribed the beauty and ambience of the same place in almost all of his works. It is the land and its association with the plot that he has in mind that are essential for producing literary works. His works are also filled with symbols, motifs, and images. He uses specialised techniques while drafting the plots for his stories so as to make sure that his works are different from others.

The novel, *That Eye, The Sky* is a story of love, faith and family. The main character Ort Morton is a young boy who loves his family but fails to understand them and keep them together. The faith that builds in Ort is different from the faith that has been institutionalised in the name of religion. Ort's family lives in a wood house at the edge of a town in Western Australia, and things go well between the family members but tragedy seems to perturb their peace when Ort's

father meets with an accident. The entire family is shattered and everything comes to a stop for each one of them, particularly for Ort and his mother. The Ort family is also struggling with the depression of Ort's mother, the arrogance of Ort's elder sister Tegwyn, and the aged grandmother.

The protagonist Ort is the one who is struggling and wriggling in confusing thoughts that make him a silent spectator in his own household. He watches everyone carefully all the time and stumbles upon faith at times. During his distraught collaboration with faith, he associates himself with sky and a few other entities. He faces intuitive visions that might have sprung up from his faith or that might have been the result of his intuition. His imagination encourages a spirit in him to not give up even in the worst kind of situations. This research article engages in the critical study of symbols through visions and imaginations related to Ort, in Tim Winton's *That Eye, The Sky*.

Symbolism runs through literature, poetry, and in all forms of art. It can be considered as an important literary device as the meaning derived is highly effective. It is described as “the art of imbuing objects or things with meaning, making them represent something more than the sum of its parts”. It involves expressing the unexplainable ideas through apt and voluptuous presentations. It enhances the reading experience undergone by a reader. In literature, it helps in expressing the conscious and unconscious convictions of the characters. They are an important source of determining a character's psychological setup.

Order, samples, and symbols satisfy human beings. In symbolism, abstract ideas are used to portray real world objects. It provides a clear understanding to pass on ideas with depth beyond their usual understanding. In places where a person wants to indulge in showing instead of telling, certain concepts are easily explained using symbolism. With a combination of imagery, symbolism can embark on a display of clarity and boldness.

Symbolism examples are everywhere around the world. The symbol heart means love, Rainbows mean hope. In literature, symbolism is used to produce a greater and deeper meaning. Symbolism allows authors to tie up distinct entities and ideas into an organized story structure. In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth's guilt is symbolized through the blood that she imagines on her hands: as she sleepwalks, she tries to clean them but later understands it to be the result of the sin she committed. The blood was the result of her guilt consciousness that had developed because she provoked her husband Macbeth to kill Duncan and usurp his position as the king. Another example of symbolism that is used by Robert Frost in his poem “The Road Not Taken”, The roads in this poem do not bluntly stand for the pathway that is usually taken for travel or walk - they represent the chances and choices that are available in life.

J.M. Barrie, in his work *Peter Pan* says, “All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.” Faith is wholehearted trust or confidence in something or someone. Everyone lives in this world with a slightest hold on something or the other. In *That Eye, The Sky*, Ort Flack is an 12 year old Australian boy who is rejoicing in his childhood and adventurous journey of happiness and liberty. After Ort's father is left in a coma due to a car accident, his mom finds it difficult to hold everyone together. Ort tries to manage using his constant visions, and begins to locate a thick fog like screen resting upon his house. This is not noticed by other family members. In Tim Winton's own words,

Ort just has that dragged out from under him the moment his father's hurt. And he somehow has to negotiate that uncertainty the best he can ... and watching his mother do the same. You know, one piece of the family falls down and the whole structure begins to crumble (Company South Australia)

After that, a mentally unstable Henry Warburton enters their family, extends his help in taking care of Ort's father, and the other members. He preaches Christianity and its beliefs to them and even baptizes Ort and Alice.

In *That Eye, The Sky*, Ort Flack is bound to build his life upon the intuitive symbolic elements that occur only to him. Other family members cannot look at everything in the way he does and so they tend to struggle with the reality of life as they merely think religious principles give faith. In times of trouble, Ort has developed the habit of holding onto the symbolic visions that specifically get presented in his dream. Ort could visualize jewels in cookie jars or during a quiet night, he hears sounds. In an interview Tim Winton says, “the world is alive and it speaks to him. The natural world feels and reaches for him now” (Company South Australia)

The themes of the novel *That Eye The Sky* have been vividly elucidated through symbolism. Sky is considered to be the strongest symbol. Ort considers the sky to be an eye which watches over the happenings of the world. It remains as an onlooker that knows about everything and so he is able to have conversations with it. Only after Henry introduces God into Ort’s life, he replaces the sky with God. In this novel, the sky stands for God and Ort is the one who opens up to God through prayer. For Ort, the sky is an eye -

....the sky is the same colour as mum and dad’s eyes. When you look at it long enough, like I am now with my nose up in it, it looks exactly like an eye anyway. One big blue eye. Just looking down. At us.(4)

According to Ort, he believes that a fallen star to be a teardrop from fallen by the sky. As he is a small kid who does not understand the functioning principles of religion and God, the sky represents the unstable trust in an unknowing power that connects with him to the things around him. Ort makes the readers believe in faith as he himself as a small boy is able to withstand his pain through intuitive visions. It is evident that he knows that his father will not die and will recover from his illness.

The entry of Henry Warburton changes the perspective that Ort has about faith and religion. Both have their own version of faith, the author delineates a clear difference between them. Henry provides an identity for that intuitive imagination that Ort has been feeling ever since the tragic event. Henry is the one who teaches Christianity to Alice, Ort and Tegwyn. His past life and other details are not completely revealed in the novel. He comes out of nowhere right when the family needs moral support. His way of belief is more distinct than that of Ort’s as he does not indulge in visions presented through nature.

Ort suffered from meningitis during his childhood and his mother seems to remember all the tough times by saying, “twice, you know, they said it was all over. But I didn’t listen to them and neither did you”. Ort spiritually connects each and everything with nature which is evident when he thinks, “The sky is very clear tonight. Kind of the same colour as my dad’s poor mouth. Stars look like they’re moving and still at the same time ... A word slips out of my mouth”(30). The noises that he hears at night time, illuminate his desperate soul and he cannot comprehend the fact that those implications from nature reveal themselves to be sent by God. The sky gives him the greatest hope that things would get better very soon as he thinks, “its crazy, but inside me it feels like that shining cloud is the most normal thing in the world. and I bet no one else can see it. It just shines down at me and it makes me smile and I stand there until I feel tired enough to go inside to bed.” (51)

An important symbol in the book is the trees and the countryside in which they are located. Ort’s parents, Sam and Alice Flack decide to live among the trees after their marriage and so they shift to the countryside. The trees and the countryside symbolizes the innocent and true nature of the Flack family.

The sound of bells symbolizes the presence of a divine figure and his declaration of belief. Red Tool Box is an object that symbolizes Mr Cherry’s share in taking away Ort’s father Sam’s conscious present. The novel comes to closure on an Easter morning, which indicates the resurrection and Sam Flack’s restoration to consciousness which means that Ort’s faith finally gave way to victory and he feels, “The cloudy white light is coming in- I breathe in it; it’s warm and it tastes good” (149).

The end of the novel is marked by the death of Ort's grandmother, his sister Tegwyn finally comes out of her depressive episode and goes into the town with Henry and his father Sam is able to feel and bring up a smile on his face. This ending is also symbolic as it is not a happy one though the characters of this novel find freedom from their previous state of mind. The novel encompasses a powerful message on trust and faith as everything in this world begins with that faint faith to live life.

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