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# “Do Not Ask Me to Remain the Same”: Charles Darwin in Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy

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Cedarville University

**“Do not ask me to remain the same”:**

Charles Darwin in *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*

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Senior Seminar

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When thirteen-year-old Turner Buckminster moves to Phippsburg, Maine in 1912, he has no idea how he will spend the small, seemingly pious, seaside town, but as the new minister's son of First Congregational, the eyes of Phippsburg are watching him. He must wear a starched white shirt, keep his hands at his sides, walk-not-run, play baseball the same way the other boys do, and never, under any circumstances, associate with the mixed racial community of Malaga Island. But as the church and its members box Turner into an undesirable definition of himself, he finds his only solace and friendship in Lizzie Bright, a black girl from Malaga Island. The town erupts at the audacity of the new minister's son, and Turner's father sides with his congregation in scolding Turner for his heathen ways. But one day, Reverend Buckminster introduces his son to a revolutionary book, *On the Origin of Species*, a work condemned by even the most morally inept parishioners, and father and son bond over these heretical writings. In the midst of ingrained racial injustice and corruption in the church, Turner makes a stand for equality and justice at the expense of his family's reputation and well-being. In *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, Gary D. Schmidt uses Darwin to allow his young protagonist to question the mindless acceptance of organized religion and to force his readers to engage difficult conversations, come to their own conclusions, and apply truth to their lives.

Authors of children's literature are in the unique position of being able to influence kids without the medium of an adult. By creating characters with whom young readers can relate, authors wield a power otherwise often left untapped, one that can influence the next generation for the good or the bad. Many of the most influential children's books are powerful because their characters or situations are subversive, and the books force their readers to question their beliefs instead of blindly following where the adults lead. Alison Lurie, author of "Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature," discusses how child characters can

take advantage of their age and “make fun of honored figures and piously held beliefs;” she praises the child’s ability to “view social pretenses with clear-eyed directness” (Lurie 4).

Because adults in children’s books do not tend to take kids seriously, the author, in the voice of the child, can put forth “opinions and attitudes that are not currently in style in the adult world” and “[take] the side of the child against his or her parents, who are portrayed as at best silly and needlessly anxious, at worst selfish and stupid” (Lurie 9). Most children’s authors write with that certain audience in mind and with the goal of creating a better future filled with avid readers who learned to think for themselves in their elementary and middle school libraries. By depicting difficult and relevant situations via unmediated literature, children’s books can touch a child apart from their parents and other adults and allow them to form their own opinions and act on them.

In *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, Gary Schmidt brandishes this power, aiming the book toward middle-school children, a group about which he is passionate because, as he says, “adolescence is a critical time in life when you really do make decisions that develop who you are” (Klamer). He is particularly interested in the middle school age because “in many ways...your life is determined by your parents or by older adults,” however, he continues, “at the same time, you’re... moving to a point where you say, well I believe this because I believe it, not because my friends believe it, not because my parents believe it or my neighbors or my culture but because I believe it” (amazon). He is intrigued by this fork in the road because the decisions these kids make “matters economically, aesthetically, spiritually, [and] politically” (amazon).

In *Lizzie Bright*, the adults constantly warn thirteen-year-old Turner about the dangers of the people from Malaga Island, forbidding him to return to the island or associate with any of the racially mixed people: “You’re a child, Turner. You don’t know how they can take you in, make

you think what they want you to think” (Schmidt 86). The more Turner compares the kind-hearted, free-spirited, hard-working people from Malaga with the hard-hearted, prejudiced, and controlling people from Phippsburg, he begins to wonder “if it’s only the folks on Malaga Island who can make you think what they want you to think” (Schmidt 87). In the face of this injustice, Gary Schmidt gives his young characters a will and a voice in his mission to cultivate hope in the midst of troubled times.

Schmidt reaches his audience with relatable characters like Turner and Lizzie who see the world as it is and base their interpretations of it on their own experiences, thoughts, and studies, rather than on the ideals of the adults in their town. It is because they are not like the adults that they can understand each other apart from their skin colors, and they are bold in proclaiming their opinions, if not always to an older audience, then to each other, upholding their beliefs despite opposition. In so doing, Schmidt addresses both historical and ongoing discourses on religion, evolution, race, and nature, therein allowing his young readers to witness these discourses and come to their own conclusions. Schmidt wanted to set the stage for discussion among children who are in the process of transitioning into adults. Little did he know, his book would reach a wider audience.

*Lizzie Bright* has won much critical acclaim since its 2004 release, the most prestigious of which are the Newberry and Printz honors. The book is listed in articles like “Remembering Gems: Books that Deserve Conversations in Children's Literature Classes,” “Top 10 Historical Fiction for Youth,” and the Editor’s Choice section of the *Kirkus Review*, proving it has clearly gained traction in the world of middle school literature. Because it is a relatively new book and because its popularity lies mainly within the smaller population of junior-high students, it has not

yet attracted much scholarly analysis, however, one article provides a solid basis for additional study.

In “Crossing the Water: Spiritual Growth in *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*,” Trudelle Thomas builds that foundation for further analysis of *Lizzie Bright*. Thomas begins with an overarching declaration: “Novels written for children and adolescents are a tremendous resource for those interested in supporting children’s spiritual growth” (Thomas 233). She says that even though modern day juvenile novels tend to shy away from religious topics as a sort of taboo and that many only approach religion through corrupt preachers, determined readers can find novels that address children’s spiritual growth and experiences without “oversimplifying the role of organized religion” in young peoples’ lives (Thomas 234).

To prove this, Thomas compares spiritual growth in *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* to a subtler spiritual growth in the 1977 children’s novel *Bridge to Terabithia*. While she acknowledges the existence of spiritual growth in *Bridge to Terabithia*, she says the growth is limited by the characters’ ages and the lack of religious scenes and terms. She concludes that, though the two main characters are not “particularly religious,” their friendship and imagination lead them to a deeper sense of spirituality (Thomas 235). Thomas then points to Gary D. Schmidt, author of *Lizzie Bright*, as being able to “convey more fully the spiritual growth of children approaching puberty” (237).

Both novels portray “friendship and loss,” but Schmidt “adds the further dimensions of religious authority, religious music, race relations, and alternative metaphors encountering the Divine” (Thomas 234). Thomas cites several examples from the text that prove her thesis, pointing to grief, tragedy, and “deep love for another person” as a few of the main forces that

propel the thirteen-year-old protagonist Turner Buckminster to spiritual maturity and “a deeper and more authentic love for the Holy and for other people” (238). Because of these events and relationships, Turner begins to understand religion as “more than tradition or ‘belief’ in God; it requires a relationship – a genuine encounter and response” (236).

Thomas mentions that Turner, a minister’s son, and his father, the new pastor at First Congregational in the small town of Phippsburg, Maine, “begin to secretly study the works of Charles Darwin, whose ideas would have shocked his congregation,” but Thomas glosses over the implications of this sub-plot in favor of presenting Turner’s encounters with “the Holy” and Schmidt’s employment of minor characters who demonstrate the pros and cons of organized religion (Thomas 238). Since her goal is to trace Turner’s spiritual growth throughout the novel, Thomas emphasizes both the earthly and supernatural forces with which Turner interacts, specifically the people of Phippsburg, the sea breeze—a minor character in and of itself—and the whales.

Thomas argues that the townspeople in Phippsburg illustrate the ironies of religion by portraying both spiritual hypocrisy and authenticity. Mr. Stonecrop, for instance, is a perfect example of a hypocrite, a businessman who employs scripture to push his own agenda. The elderly Mrs. Hurd, on the other hand, is an authentic believer, a nonconformist who recognizes the corruption in the church and chooses to listen to God speak to her heart rather than through the mouth of a dreary preacher. Old Mrs. Cobb stands somewhere in the middle: though her deeply ingrained racism initially stands in the way of true fellowship with Lizzie Bright and Turner, she eventually overcomes that obstacle and learns to love the children, albeit outside the influence of organized religion.

The sea breeze and the whales suggest powerful, solemn, and vast interaction with the Holy on an everyday basis. According to Thomas, these forces transcend humanity and influence Turner for the better, leading him to a deeper understanding of “the Holy,” something Thomas suggests cannot be “contained by authority figures, church people, or ecclesiastical structures” (Thomas 240). Eventually, Thomas asserts, these interactions lead Turner to trust his own experiences instead of automatically believing the typically hypocritical words of the parishioners at First Congregational. However, despite nature’s guidance and his own experience, Turner does not attain specific answers. Instead, he chooses to live and love in the midst of uncertainty and without assurance.

While I would agree with Thomas to the extent that Turner learns from experience and determines that the Holy is not limited to organized religion, I would suggest that she does not probe deeply enough into *why* Turner distrusts organized religion and instead turns to nature as a guide. It is true that he witnesses and experiences severe injustice, but instead of turning to the Bible, a source many readers could assume would be an automatic answer for the son of a minister, Turner clings to a different power: *Origin of Species*. As mentioned above, Thomas glosses over Charles Darwin’s influence on young Turner Buckminster, a detail, I believe, is critical to Turner’s eventual dismissal of organized religion and reliance on nature. While it is clear that Turner does indeed mature because of his experiences, I propose that it is not necessarily spiritual growth in the traditional sense of drawing closer to the Creator of the universe. Turner begins to mature and make decisions on his own, apart from religion, guided by nature, and influenced by Darwin. The question is: Why?

Religion has been a consistent point of discussion in literature since long before Gary D. Schmidt began writing, so in addressing a controversial topic like religion, especially in a

children's book, Schmidt joined the ranks of thousands of writers before him. In "Honouring the Questions: Shifts in the Treatment of Religion in Children's Literature," Ann Trousdale discusses religious changes in the culture and how they have been reflected in children's literature, a relevant backdrop to the religiously-motivated children's novel, *Lizzie Bright*. Trousdale begins by noting the highly religious tone in early American children's literature. She references *The New England Primer*, a text that taught children everything from the alphabet to the Ten Commandments, stories of Christian martyrs, and catechisms. However, religion would not always be treated so reverently in literature, as proven by the shifts throughout the next four centuries.

In the twentieth century, reading material published for children tended to take on a more secular attitude, an attitude Trousdale correlates with the increasingly secular culture. Children's books echoed the ideas that "religion was no longer assumed to have definitive answers, nor were religious leaders necessarily held up for emulation or respect" (Trousdale 220). As opposed to the puritan days of *The New England Primer*, in which literature presented answers to religious questions, twentieth-century books that dealt with religion tended to emphasize the questions themselves and the people who asked them. Literature began to assume that religious people were not automatically more virtuous than others, and that, in spite of widespread corruption in the clergy, lay people could still find God. Trousdale refers to works in which characters prefer to interpret the mysteries of life and the universe rather than study the Bible, and though she does not specifically mention *Lizzie Bright*, Schmidt's book falls nicely into this category because the characters themselves, thirteen-year-olds in 1912, reflect the questioning attitude of the early twentieth century to which Trousdale refers.

Not only do the characters themselves reflect the time period in which the book is set, *Lizzie Bright*, despite its hundred-year-old setting, is still relevant to the market today. Like many modern day children's books, *Lizzie Bright*, published in 2004, "[casts] a critical eye on religious leaders and institutions and...[respects] the questions young people have about God and about religion" (Trousdale 230). According to Trousdale, most twenty-first-century books from mainline publishing companies do not provide absolute answers to the questions their characters pose, especially through religion, though they often end on a hopeful note in order to provide a resolution for both the character and the reader. Characters may turn or return to faith, but they will discover that the answers to their questions lie within themselves, not within their religion. Trousdale considers this to be a positive turn since it provides young people with a sense of comfort and companionship and encourages them to ask hard questions without the fear of offending God's presence in the process.

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* follows children's literature trends for the times in which the story was both set and published. The characters reflect the early twentieth-century shifting of religious ideologies that Christianity and its spiritual leaders may not have all the answers, and the storyline follows the contemporary trend of respecting the young characters' questions and search for truth outside organized religion. However, this shift in religion did not happen in a vacuum. Many factors influenced the general departure from faith, but one of the inciting and enduring factors, both in reality and in the book, was Darwin's theory of evolution.

In the introduction to a collection of essays about Darwin, Tina Gianquitto and Lydia Fisher, the editors of the collection, provide a history of Darwin's influence on America and a synopsis of the effects his theories have had on American writers throughout the years. In June of 1861, Darwin penned a letter to his American friend, Harvard botanist Asa Gray, in which he

discussed readers' responses to *On the Origin of Species* and then requested Gray's observations on the topic. Letters like these allow Gianquitto and Fisher to credit Gray with "paving the way for evolutionary theory in America" (Gianquitto 1-2). Because Darwin's plant studies were pivotal in his evolutionary theory, Gray, esteemed botanist that he was, was in the perfect position to "argue for their relevance as proof of evolutionary theory and to explain that relevance to a larger audience" (3).

However, even with Gray's official, though measured, affirmations of Darwin's theories, Gianquitto and Fisher note that common descent was a deeply problematic concept for many Americans because it challenged their long-held belief in creation by a divine being. Claire McKechnie and Emily Alder echo these sentiments in their introduction to "Literature, Science, and the Natural World in the Long Nineteenth Century." They suggest that increased literacy levels and school attendance contributed to the spread of scientific advancement and curiosity. At the same time, they acknowledge that these eye-opening scientific discoveries, like those relayed through books like *Origin of Species*, forced philosophical questions and doubting, especially as it pertained to Christian doctrine and humanity's relationship with animals.

Individuals had to learn to reconcile supposed scientific advances with their ingrained beliefs and to deal with the wide-spread implications for daily and eternal life. Darwinian evolution upset the stability of nature and its meaning, replacing that stability with uncertainty and debate about the truth of humanity's existence, and Americans had to respond accordingly. Despite the provocative nature of the theory and the doubts about whether or not it could encompass America's unique narrative, Gianquitto and Fisher suggest that writers and philosophers channeled this powerful controversy into their works to achieve the larger end of discovering truth.

Many philosophers believe the evolutionary theory and its implications freed Americans from their entrenched, even antiquated, Victorian institutions, providing Americans the opportunity to redefine themselves and explore options outside what they had always assumed to be true. People began to accept that, like the ever-changing process of natural selection, truth was mutable, adaptable. Therefore, if one way of life no longer seemed to be effective, it could change with its environment. Gianquitto and Fisher point to early twentieth-century literature, authors like John Dewey, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton, Herman Melville, and T.C. Boyle, as proof for the broadening notion of culture's adaptability and nature's place within the literary canon.

Interestingly enough, McKechnie and Alder point to children's literature as being "a genre that particularly lent itself to the didacticism of science in the mid-nineteenth century" (McKechnie 2). Because nature, especially in the nineteenth century and beyond, was and is such a flexible concept, authors are able to easily integrate nature studies into their works and bind it within larger cultural constructs like technological advancement, religion, and education to pull their readers into the world around them and allow young people to interact with big issues (2). "Science," they say, was "seen to be morally and spiritually improving and, in literary form, it provided a moral compass for both adults and children" (2).

Ruth Murphy builds on McKechnie and Alder's claims about science's influence on children's literature. In her study, "Darwin and 1860's Children's Literature: Belief, Myth or Detritus," Murphy analyzes three pieces of children's literature that were published immediately after Darwin released *Origin of Species*. She describes how her respective authors used children's literature as a means by which to interact with Darwin's theory, thereby educating both children and adult readers about the roles of nature and children in the wake of *Origin*. The

world was changing, and its authors had to adapt to Darwin's theories and the resulting uproar, acceptance, and questions.

Addressing relevant and inflammatory topics in children's literature allows writers to educate and influence their young readers, to provide options for what they will believe and how they will live their lives. Murphy points to literature as providing a "popular arena where scientific debate flourished, both about the truth and implications of a given theory, but also about the nature of science and fiction, and what was appropriate for each" (Murphy 6). Nature studies were recommended for children as a way to interact and understand their environments through personal exploration and scholarship. Children's authors in the post-Darwinian era firmly believed they could create a better future by educating the children of their day.

In McKechnie and Alder's essay, they conclude that children's writers who explore nature studies and its effects on young people use imaginative literature to negotiate contemporary changes in ideology. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many children's authors dealt with issues that arose from groundbreaking books like *Origin of Species*, leading kids to grapple with assumed truth and come to their own conclusions. However, before they could address important issues, these writers first had to attract their desired audience to their books.

Seth Lerer, in his history of children's literature from *Aesop* to *Harry Potter*, claims that authors, children's and otherwise, are enslaved to evolutionary terminology in literary and historical discourse, therein acknowledging Darwin's far-reaching influence on language itself. However, he adds that the influence is not clearly cut and stamped onto the pages outright, instead it is woven within the works, subtly hinting at the evolutionary ideologies that govern the

world and its works. In fact, he would attribute the bulk of Darwin's popularity, not merely to the theories themselves, but to the adventurous way in which Darwin told his story.

According to Lerer, not only were Darwin's ideas fascinating and highly controversial, not only did they effect social change and cultural development, but the imaginative writing itself was beautiful and captivating, drawing audiences from every tract of life, including adolescents. Darwin provided the basis for teaching the science of change, discovery, and understanding, all while dazzling his readers by bringing fantasy to reality. Lerer says the theory of evolution functions much like imagination in that it "lets us see how things turn into other things," and evolution and imagination together "explain the fascination we have with wonder, splendor, and beauty in nature" (Lerer 187-188).

This idea, that Darwin's theory itself was not only revolutionary but that his writing enchanted his audiences in the same way a fairytale captures the imagination, has significant implications for *Lizzie Bright*. Reverend Buckminster homeschooled Turner. Turner's lessons consisted of translating the *Aeneid* from Latin to English and summarizing it line by line, after which, he had to read and summarize "Robert Barclay's *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers*" whose mere cover "proclaimed to all the world that it was about as dull a book as could ever have been written by any one human being" (Schmidt 122). In the *Aeneid*, at least there were hurricanes and ships and characters fighting for their lives, but Barclay's book was nothing but "long propositions that didn't seem to want to go much of anywhere and that were taking their time not wanting to go there" (123).

When Reverend Buckminster covertly handed a copy of *On the Origin of Species* to Turner, he told his son that "books can be fire," and this particular one was "a conflagration"

(Schmidt 129). When Turner “opened the book and began to read, he was Jim Hawkins at the captain’s chest, Sinbad opening his eyes in the Valley of Rubies, Huck himself waking up to a brand-new bend in the Mississippi” (130). Compared to everything else he was reading, how could young Turner not be enchanted by Darwin’s adventures? *Origin* temporarily removed him from Phippsburg, a town that hated him as much as he hated it.

Darwin’s writing obviously appealed to Turner at an aesthetic level, but Turner did not read *Origin* purely for entertainment. He was truly fascinated by Darwin’s theories, and he valued the book on a philosophical level. But why? Darwin’s theories are clearly unbiblical, and the town rejected anything the Monkey Man had to say. Yet Turner, even after abandoning the town, the church, its people, its teachings, and all that it stood for, was still committed to Darwin. The conundrum becomes all the more puzzling when taking Schmidt’s religious upbringing into account.

In her short biography on Gary Schmidt, Myrna Anderson, a staff writer at Calvin College, provides some background information on the award-winning children’s author. Schmidt was raised Baptist but attended a school where all of his friends were Irish Catholic or Jewish. He spent his summers working at a Baptist camp for inner-city youth and was only a few miles away from a camp for Hasidic youth. Currently, he is a professor of English at Calvin, a Christian liberal arts college in Michigan. His fellow Calvin English professor compliments Schmidt for “adding to the culture and creating things for the culture — not just taking the Reformed view, sitting back and taking the culture apart and viewing it.” Another colleague says his writing “doesn’t avoid suffering and sadness, but it’s always looking for the goodness of the world, the abundance of kindness and love and beauty” (Anderson).

Schmidt's personal website reveals his love for nature, as evidenced by a short biographical blurb in which he reveals that he "lives with his family on a 150-year-old farm in Alto, Michigan, where he splits wood, plants gardens, writes, and feeds the wild cats that drop by" ("Gary D. Schmidt"). Further probing revealed his study is located in an outbuilding away from his house and warmed by a woodstove. Most fascinating, however, was the list of books on his desk. Alongside his dictionary, thesaurus, and some Tolkien, are books by Darwin.

Why Darwin in *Lizzie Bright*? Why Darwin on Schmidt's desk? Was he merely researching for *Lizzie Bright*? Is he just fascinated by Darwin as a historical figure? Is he taking Darwin's theories seriously? The existence of Darwin's books in the author's study, on his desk no less, proves that Schmidt has more than a passing fascination with Darwin. Schmidt has read Darwin. He understands Darwin's claims. Therefore, Darwin's existence in *Lizzie Bright* is not an accident or happenstance. As his colleagues said, Gary D. Schmidt is purposeful in his writing.

In a short interview in the "Random House Educators Guide to *Lizzie Bright*," an unnamed interviewer asked Schmidt how he chose "Buckminster" as Turner's last name. Schmidt replied that "Buckminster is taken from Joseph Stevens Buckminster, one of America's greatest preachers in the early 19th century," which makes sense in light of Turner's father's position as pastor in Phippsburg. But in the next breath, Schmidt says Joseph Stevens Buckminster "broke new ground in his writing by using science and history in his theological work. He would have been fascinated by Darwin" (Educators Guide). Even Turner's name is connected to a man who would have been fascinated by Darwin. Nothing in *Lizzie Bright* is an accident.

However, to better understand Turner's fascination with Darwin, one must look to the character himself. At age thirteen, his parents moved him from Boston to the "God-fearing," ocean-side town of Phippsburg in Maine (Schmidt 13). After fifteen minutes in his new town, Turner "didn't know how much longer he could stand it" (1). Within the first day, he made enemies of half the population of Phippsburg because he could not play baseball the way they did. Within two days, all the boys his age mocked and bullied him, and old Mrs. Cobb complained to Turner's parents about him. Only Mrs. Hurd, a rebellious old woman who painted her house the wrong colors, and Lizzie Bright, a black girl from the island of Malaga off the coast of Phippsburg, befriended him. Turner's parents and the rest of the town absolutely forbade him from interacting with any of the "squalor on Malaga" (68).

One more thing: Turner's father was the new pastor of First Congregational, and in Phippsburg, "being a minister's son mattered a whole lot" (Schmidt 1). An article announcing the Newberry honor for *Lizzie Bright*, Schmidt described Turner like this: "He is a preacher's kid with all that brings" (Calvin). Turner, for all intents and purposes was imprisoned in Phippsburg, subject to the corrupt governing authorities. Minor infractions led to extreme punishment, but no matter how badly Turner wanted to light out for the territories, he, as a thirteen-year-old boy, did not have the option to leave Phippsburg. He did, however, have the option to rebel against injustice and redefine himself within the town.

Michel Foucault, famous French philosopher, historian, structuralist, professor, etc., of the twentieth century, had a lot to say about power and its effects on the individual. In the first place, he claimed to be "the most radical enemy that one can imagine of the idea of power" (Gordon 106). He hated the concept of power and claimed that "it is not to be defined because it does not exist" (106). Instead, he was of the opinion that power is actually the "different

instruments, tools, relations, techniques, etc., that allow for domination, subjectification, constraint, coercion, etc.” (106). Power is about one person or one group of people dominating another; it is about how and why the subjects dominate and how and why the objects respond to the domination. Without these two parties, any concepts of power do not exist, and as it is, power cannot be defined.

As proof for his theories, Foucault addresses the idea of an omnipotent sovereign, because, he asserts, if a divine being were truly omnipotent, his decrees would be followed by all of his subjects without variance. However, Foucault believes that humanity at its substance is merely a result of being thrown into a vortex of power vectors to which it must respond. If God existed then evil would not. If God existed, then His laws would be obeyed, and humanity would not be subject to its own establishments and relations of powers.

Ideas like these surely passed through Turner Buckminster’s mind as he contemplated the annihilation of a mixed community in the name of “the Lord’s work” and for the sake of tourism (Schmidt 68). Indeed, even in the face of an unfortunate fist fight, Turner “figured that if things got bad through no fault of your own, then God should stand up and do something about it” (29). Both he and Lizzie found themselves in situations in which they had to “wait and wonder why God hadn’t handled things a little bit better” (30). Everything from his family’s initial move, to the bullies in Phippsburg, to the racial injustice screamed to Turner of a God who did not have the ability or inclination to reach down and set things right in Phippsburg.

Of course, it is unfortunate that the men responsible for the injustice, the “frock coats,” use their church, their Bibles, and their God as a perfect excuse for evil. Even when Lizzie’s Grandfather Griffin, the reverend of Malaga Island, uses the Promised Land of the Old Testament as an example of God-given land that is worth fighting for, Reverend Buckminster

flips Reverend Griffin's analogy on its head and applies the story of the battle of Jericho to the Island of Malaga. Just as God called the Israelites to "blot out spoil and contagion...so also should we blot out what is not wholesome, what is not good, what is not pleasing, and take up our own promised future" (Schmidt 92). His sermon wins a hearty "amen" from the congregation.

Only Turner seems to recognize the injustice, and since the town looks to the Bible to motivate their evil works, Turner blames the Bible and its God for Phippsburg's sins. He associates the voice of Deacon Hurd, one of the most racist and demeaning members of First Congregational, with the voice of God, and he views the Sabbath as "dreary and miserable" (Schmidt 93). The more time he spends with Lizzie on Malaga Island, understanding her grandfather, her community, their simple ways of life, the more he contrasts it with the people of Phippsburg who laugh and drink and play baseball and attend church functions while "getting ready to turn Lizzie and her granddaddy off Malaga Island" (137). The unfairness prompts him to wonder how "God could let such a thing be" (137).

As Turner's father lectures Turner about decency in the town, encouraging Turner to befriend the boys who bully him and apologize to the offended Mrs. Cobb, "his face [takes] on a kind of faraway look," and he transforms into "The Minister" (Schmidt 50). As the Reverend's voice grows, ascending to imaginary church rafters, "Turner had a thought that had never occurred to him before: he wondered if his father really believed a single thing he was saying" (51). In the next second, Turner thinks his first heretical thought, wondering "if *he* believed a single thing his father was saying" (51). In an instant, Turner's mind takes, what Foucault believes, is the natural course: recognizing the injustice, hypocrisy, and struggle in the world, and deciding a good, sovereign God cannot be a part of it.

Though he hated the concept, Foucault conceded that the idea of power could be used as an analytical grid by which to “reconstruct the way possible objects of knowledge are constituted, and on the other hand how the subject constitutes itself” (Gordon 110). Foucault fleshed out these ideas in one of his most popular studies, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Though Foucault’s emphasis on power seemingly contradicts his assertion that power is nonexistent, he nonetheless was able to effectually apply the concept of power and its effects on its objects and subjects to penal systems throughout the ages. Because power produces reality and “domains of objects and rituals of truth,” we can gain a better understanding of the individual and the knowledge that comes from this production by studying the powerful institutions that create them (Discipline 194).

Foucault details the history of the punitive system, starting in ancient times and arriving finally at the modern day arrangement which he terms the “carceral” system. He describes how ancient discipline tended to focus on physical torture, but modern day discipline focuses on mental rehabilitation. Rather than creating a spectacle of punishment with instruments and events like the stocks and public executions, society today has created a system that reaches outside government-sanctioned discipline and into the souls of their citizens. Instead of striking fear into the hearts of their people through public torture, governments today have normalized law-abiding by writing strict laws and instituting police forces and camera systems that ensure their citizens obey.

People are subconsciously aware that they could be watched at any given moment of the day—the cop could be in an alley with a speed gun or the ATM camera could be hidden. This concept of constant supervision constitutes Foucault’s idea of the Panoptic, a mechanism “that [makes] it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately” (*Discipline* 200). Originally

attributed to a prison situated in a circular building with a guard tower in the middle, Foucault extended the idea of the Panoptic into society as a whole. Inmates have no way of knowing if the guard or the cameras are pointing to them at any particular moment, but they *could* be, so prisoners adjust their actions accordingly. Drivers do not know if there is a hidden camera at the intersection, but just in case, they will not run the red light. Shoppers do not know if that other customer is a plain-clothed security guard, but just in case, they will not steal that bracelet. The “major effect of the Panopticon” says Foucault, is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201).

Under interrogation by Mr. Stonecrop, a businessman intent on the destruction of Malaga and its inhabitants, Turner feels “the eyes of the room come upon him” (Schmidt 69). This is a familiar sensation to young Turner, who is constantly under the weight of the Phippsburg Panoptic. From the front row of the church, he feels “the eyes of every member of First Congregational staring at the back of his starched neck” (90). From the pulpit, Turner’s “father watched him carefully,” and Turner never “knew if Mrs. Cobb might...be watching him from some murky spot where dark things lurked,” (42, 90). He is even worried about opening his bedroom window lest someone accuse him of “being a bad example for younger children” (40). Turner is all too aware of the eyes that could, and probably will, at any moment look his way.

Because of this fear, Turner conditions himself to dress, behave, and speak in a certain manner in certain places. For instance, after their fight, “Turner didn’t look to see if Willis was watching him, but he figured he was, so he walked slowly, as unbent as he could,” and when he walks through town, he walks reverently, silently, and wears a “startlingly white shirt, [so] not a soul whom he passed on the street or who eyed him through a parlor window—and there were plenty of souls who eyed him—could find a single blessed fault” (Schmidt 28, 42). Any misstep

could have sent a townspeople “off to tell the new minister that his son hadn’t the sense God had given him” (52). Any hope of privacy disappears because there is always a “crowd of people watching” (84).

The problem with the Panoptic is not the eyes in and of themselves, rather, it is the way both the people watching and the people watched react to the watching. In the case of Phippsburg, the town is on the lookout for Turner to make a mistake. Unfortunately for Turner, he does not yet understand the standards to which he is supposed to adhere and therefore often crosses invisible boundaries of propriety. Mr. Stonecrop, a wealthy businessman, subtly threatens the Buckminsters to sway their decision concerning a house left to Turner in Mrs. Cobb’s will: “I suspect that your congregation—indeed, every soul in Phippsburg—will be watching what you do with it” (Schmidt 160). Turner’s father assures Mr. Stonecrop that they “will do what is good and honorable in the Lord’s eyes,” but Mr. Stonecrop is quick to remind them “to do what is good and honorable in the town’s eyes as well. I think you may find, Reverend, that they are the very same thing.” Eventually, Turner, fed up with Phippsburg Panoptic, “picked up a hymnbook and thought he might fling it at the next set of peering eyes” (202).

Criminality has been specified and encoded into a nation’s inhabitants. People not only fear imprisonment, they fear the psychological effects of being shunned from society as someone who has broken the codified law. Incarceration is a constant threat, and the delinquent is in the middle and at the mercy of the vast carceral mechanism that operates within the “entire social body” (*Discipline* 298). This gradation from carceral institutions to carceral society made it possible to “pass naturally...from a transgression of the law to a slight departure from a rule, an average, a demand, a norm” (301). The power to punish becomes “natural and legitimate” by

decreasing the threshold of tolerance to punishment (301). Turner, had to learn how to navigate this prison-like society that placed over “the smallest irregularity, deviation or anomaly, the threat of delinquency” (297). The slightest deviance forced him to the shameful fringe of Phippsburg society where he was worthy of punishment, scorn, and rejection.

Reverend Buckminster told his son that he “should be up doing whatever the other boys of the town are doing...instead, you’re down on the shore with a Negro girl” (Schmidt 86). Turner had tried to befriend the boys in his town, but the boys had done nothing but mock and deride, even beat Turner for his efforts. His father knew Turner could not get along with his peers, especially Willis Hurd, but he still begged his son to try to fit in rather than stand out because the “eyes of most of the communicants of Phippsburg’s First Congregational were on him” (85). Mr. Stonecrop’s words echoed the tone of the whole community: “A minister’s house in order, a church in order. A minister’s house in disorder, a church in disorder” (88). The whole Buckminster family was under Phippsburg’s magnifying glass; with every infraction Turner “felt guilt move toward him like a thickened fog...and it whispered, ‘You are not one of us’ (85).

Every misstep had its consequences. Malaga Island and contact with its inhabitants was forbidden to Turner half a dozen times, and if he dared break that rule or any other regulation, he would inevitably be found out and punished with private and public scolding, bed without dinner, reading and playing the piano for the elderly, and confinement to his house, the church, or the “imprisonment of [Mrs. Cobb’s] house” (Schmidt 94). In Phippsburg, town norms were law, and since the Buckminsters were employed and boarded using church funds, they were at its mercy: “The congregation, Minister, will tell you what it thinks, and what it wants you think” (88).

If Turner or his parents dared to defy the town, the deacons would congregate at their house to scold the minister for his irresponsibility and to humiliate Turner for his sins. When Reverend Buckminster finally decided to stand up for the people of Malaga, accusing the sheriff and the rest of Phippsburg of acting in their own self-interest instead of for the sake of the town, the sheriff fired back, “We are the town. Everyone here seems to understand that except for you” (Schmidt 183). Those who disagreed with the Phippsburg consensus would hear the same maxim: “What is fit is what is good for the town,” an excuse to turn out any people who made its inhabitants feel uncomfortable (187).

Mr. Stonecrop’s words even echo Judas Iscariot’s in John 12 when Judas complains that the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus’ feet could have been sold and its proceeds given to the poor. However, John explains Judas actually wanted to line his own pockets. In the same way, Mr. Stonecrop complains to Turner’s father when Mrs. Cobb wills her house to Turner: “This house, which might have been left to the town to fund a coming prosperity, was left instead...to your son” (Schmidt 159). Everyone claims loyalty to Phippsburg’s well-being, but each person is actually selfishly preserving his own comfortable lifestyle, a hypocrisy to which Turner is not willing to submit and for which he is punished by exclusion and humiliation. In his last interaction with Turner, Mr. Stonecrop threatens the young man: “You’ll regret living in a town where no one wants you” (207).

Not only are law-breakers outwardly affected by the Panoptic, the carceral system penetrates to the soul “produced permanently around, on, [and] within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished” (*Discipline* 29). General supervision, training, and correction are panoptic microcosms that influence madmen, the colonized, factory employees, and, most significantly in regards to *Lizzie Bright*, children both at home and at

school. Everyone's soul is subject to the powers that surround it, and Foucault even goes so far as to contrast the biblical soul—one “born in sin and subject to punishment”—with his idea of the soul, one born “out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint” (29). To Foucault, “the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (30).

Turner experiences these soul-aching effects of the Panoptic within his first fifteen minutes of being in Phippsburg when he realizes that “here, being a minister's son mattered a whole lot, and pretending that it didn't matter to him was starting to peck at his soul” (Schmidt 1). The contrast between Foucault's idea of the soul and the biblical concept of the soul have an interesting bearing in *Lizzie Bright* since the people of Phippsburg refer to the soul in the biblical sense, but Turner is affected in a way that would reconcile more with Foucault's definition. For instance, in order “to improve his own soul,” Turner's father made him ask Mrs. Cobb's forgiveness for his indecency and “play the organ for her at least three times a week as well” (39). Turner exaggerated the church's view of his soul as he navigated Phippsburg with the resolve to “avoid the one misstep that might send his soul down to perdition” (40).

In actuality, though, Turner felt that his soul, rather than working its way toward heaven or hell, was trapped in Phippsburg, behind the bars of his own reputation. But even though “he was trapped in the dark pit of the world, but he would not cry” (Schmidt 28). It struck him as being achingly relevant when Mrs. Hurd asked him, ““So, Turner Buckminster III...when you look through the number at the end of your name, does it seem like you're looking through prison bars?”” (15). Phippsburg, the church, its people, and their regulations strangled Turner's soul: “I am not my own, he thought, but belong body and soul to every parishioner in Phippsburg” (42).

In the midst of something as vast and intrusive as the Panoptic, one might think that personal identity would become vital in establishing oneself apart from power vectors. Foucault, to an extent, would agree. For him, subverting the omnipresent Panoptic was a matter, not of fixing one's identity apart from the structure, but of constantly redefining oneself within the system. In reference to the many titles attributed to him (philosopher, historian, structuralist, Marxist) Foucault said, "I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (Martin 9).

He wants to expose people to the freedom that exists beneath the surface, to stress "that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (Martin 10). He does not believe in universal truths but in the flexibility of those ideas certain people view as truth. He wants to prove that institutions are arbitrary and change is always possible, that thought is related to tradition rather than absolute truth. He believes in diverse actions and reactions, "in the freedom of people" despite and within the Panoptic and its power vectors. Even in his own writing, he acknowledges that his text stumbles, "stands back, measures up what is before it gropes towards its limits, stumbles against what it does not mean, and digs pits to mark out its own path" (*Archeology* 17). It rejects the identity it has not yet defined and enters into a discussion that, in order to exist and grow and advance, must be allowed to be redefined and reformulated for eternity.

In Phippsburg, Turner was identified only in relation to his father's occupation. When people watched and interacted with Turner, they did not view him as an individual with his own personality and convictions but as the minister's son and a rebellious one at that. Townspeople

constantly admonished him to “find something to do fitting for a minister’s son,” and any time he was scolded for visiting Malaga, the reason was because “no one on that island is fit company for a minister’s son” (Schmidt 13, 86). He was watched and judged down to every detail, to the point of Turner being aware that “Minister’s sons do not keep their hands in their pockets” (93).

Because everyone in Phippsburg labelled him so definitively, Turner was forced to respond accordingly. He traveled through town always worried that he was doing something inappropriate, constantly measuring all of his actions against the town’s expectations and wondering “if there was some new rule for a minister’s son that he hadn’t come up against yet” (Schmidt 70). However, even as he complied with all of his limitations, he “hated himself for playing the minister’s son. He desperately wanted to pull out his collar, or to run, or just to holler. But he couldn’t” (42). At the end of the book, after his father dies, Mr. Newton refers to Turner, yet again, as a minister’s son. Turner finally denies the label out loud, but Mr. Newton tells him, “You’ll always be a minister’s son. You’ll be a minister’s son until you take your last breath on God’s sweet world” (198).

Turner is his own person. He likes baseball and “a shirt and trousers that would never have marked him as a minister’s son” and adventure stories, and he prefers friendships with outsiders like Mrs. Hurd and Lizzie Bright to relationships with hypocritical parishioners at First Congregational (Schmidt 52). However, everything he has ever been taught and all of his interactions with the townspeople tell him he cannot be the boy he wants to be, instead he must conform to others’ expectations for his life and actions. Then one day, when he is supposed to be playing the organ for Mrs. Cobb, she tells him, “You don’t have to be a minister’s son all the

time” (131). The words echo in his mind: “Turner had never thought he could ever, at any time, be anything else. The thought shivered him” (131).

But how can Turner redefine himself within such a strict and far-reaching Panoptic? He wants to light out for the territories, but his age limits him. He maintains his friendships with Mrs. Hurd and Lizzie Bright, but the town ships them off to an insane asylum, and Lizzie dies. He repaints Mrs. Hurd’s door and shutters to her preferred, though unconventional colors, but they are repainted by the next morning. He does not submit to Mr. Stonecrop’s wishes for Mrs. Cobb’s house, but the town forces the people off of Malaga Island before Turner’s plans for the house can come to fruition.

Then, one day after Turner’s routine classes with his father, Reverend Buckminster hands Turner a book that strays from their normal curriculum, one that would never be part of Phippsburg’s public school’s reading list.

“Should a minister’s son be reading this?” Turner asks.

“Who better?” his father replies. “Whatever would Deacon Hurd say if he knew you were reading Charles Darwin?” (Schmidt 129).

Apart from his father mentioning Darwin in passing once before, Turner had never heard of him, but he “hoped Charles Darwin wasn’t a minister” (Schmidt 73). Turner wanted nothing more than to escape Phippsburg and the stigma it placed on being a minister’s son, so imagine his delight when he began reading *Origin of Species*, and “he knew that what he was reading was fire, all right. It was almost like lighting out for the territories” (130).

The rest of the town, especially Mr. Stonecrop, defies Darwin and his theories. In his conversations with Turner, Mr. Stonecrop blames Darwin for Turner's problems and attitude: "And you're still reading this tripe... You won't learn much from a fellow who thinks we came from monkeys" (Schmidt 206). And in his last showdown with Mr. Stonecrop, Reverend Buckminster turns to *The Descent of Man* and *The Origin of Species* instead of to the Bible to promote justice among the races and to stand against the town. Quoting Darwin, the Minister says, "my slight variation, induced by general and complex laws: I will not stand with you at the destruction of Malaga Island. I will instead stand with my son" (171).

Turner redefines what it means to be the minister's son in Phippsburg, even using the label to his advantage when he joins the deacons' meeting concerning his injured father's employment: "'Don't you begin with prayer?' asked Turner, as sweetly and innocently as if he were a minister's son right out of a Sunday school book" (Schmidt 185). By anchoring to Darwin instead of to the Bible, Turner subverts the label and expectations placed on him by the corrupt town and embraces a theorist who believes in beauty, adventure, and equality, someone who broke the norm and dared to defy traditional thinking.

When he thinks of his family's break from First Congregational, Turner thinks of reading Darwin with his father: "His father had looked up as he closed the book, and he had smiled. 'Who knows where these ideas will take us... But won't it be exciting to find out.' They had nodded together, not only father and son, but two people with an open world in front of them" (Schmidt 188). Turner Buckminster, with Michel Foucault, might say, "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same" (Archeology 17).

In *Lizzie Bright*, the supposed Christians of the First Congregational Church of Phippsburg, have their own ideas about God and morality and what a minister and his family is

supposed to look and act like. When the parishioners welcome in their new pastor's family, they label the Buckminsters before knowing them, especially young Turner Buckminster, who does not fit their ideal mold for a minister's son.

Throughout the book, Turner tries to fit his thoughts and wishes, mannerisms, demeanor, location – everything – to how he thinks a minister's son is supposed to act. If he veers off course, he knows someone like old Mrs. Cobb will scold him because, "You're supposed to set some kind of example. Don't you know that?" (Schmidt13). He conforms to the label to appease the townspeople, even slowing his running and skipping to a reverent walk when he travels up the main road "to become the Minister's Son again, stared at from every parlor window" (65).

He is trapped in the Phippsburg Panoptic, every eye on him waiting for him to break the rules of the minister's son. But according to Foucault, the only way Turner can upend this label is by breaking the rules, redefining what it means to be a minister's son. And when Turner witnesses the political, religious, and racial injustice in Phippsburg, he assures himself that he does not want to fit the mold assigned to him by the townspeople. He has already determined to continue visiting the racially "impure" people of Malaga Island, ignoring the town's and his parents' protests. Despite tragedy and heartbreak at the hands of the town that loathed him, Turner still finds his delight and defiance in Darwin and the nature Darwin so highly esteemed. Indeed, the book does not end with Turner finding comfort in his relationship with God or Willis or even his mother—but in his relationship with the whale he touched.

Foucault's theory of the Panoptic and societal labeling enlightens Turner Buckminster, providing motivation for his committal to Darwin instead of to the church and its God. The phrase "minister's son" is in the book over forty times and not once in a positive light. If Foucault's theory holds any weight, Turner would try to redefine this label he so loathes. But

how can he anchor himself to a God who allows so much heart-ache? The God of First Congregational justifies racial inequality and condones so much evil. Phippsburg's God drives a wedge between Turner and his father. Darwin brings them together.

Turner and his father do not connect or even hold a civil conversation throughout the entire book – until Reverend Buckminster introduces *On the Origin of Species* to his son. It is over Darwin that father and son bond. It is on Darwin's authority rather than God's that Reverend Buckminster takes a stand against racial injustice. It is Darwin who shows a respect for nature the same way Turner respects the sea breeze and, more importantly, the whales. The whales occupy Turner's psyche, encourage him when he's unhappy, and anchor him to a sense of something transcendent, unspeakable. He appreciates nature the way Darwin did.

What better way to subvert the “minister's son” stereotype than by adhering to a belief that blatantly defies a Creator and the image-bearing nature of His creatures? Darwin provides answers and adventure, delivers Turner from his prison-like label, draws him closer to his father, his friends, and nature, while at the same time disconnecting him from the self-righteous town, its corrupt church, and its unjust God. Phippsburg was a prison; Darwin is freedom.

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