Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy Study Guide

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy by Gary D. Schmidt

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This novel for young people, inspired by historical events and situations, is the story of how the life of a young white boy is changed by his friendship with a young black ("colored") girl of the same age. As Turner Buckminster and Lizzie "Bright" Griffin get to know each other, their friendship becomes the trigger for a series of racism-defined confrontations. Meanwhile, as the narrative chronicles these confrontations, it explores themes related to the power of nature, the power of connection, and the tension between freedom and imprisonment.

The story takes place in the early years of the 20th Century in the north-eastern United States, only a couple of decades after the American Civil War which was fought over, among other things, issues of black / white race relations (more specifically: slavery). Lingering tensions from that war fuel the conflict between the conservative white citizens of the coastal town of Phippsburg, Maine and the poverty-stricken "colored" inhabitants of Malaga Island, a small community across the water from Phippsburg.

In the middle of those tensions an unexpected friendship develops between white Turner Buckminster (the son of a new local minister) and "colored" Lizzie Griffin (the granddaughter of a preacher living on Malaga). The relationship begins when the lonely Turner, recently moved from the much more sophisticated and much more populated city of Boston, has his first ever encounter with a "colored" person (Lizzie). He likes Lizzie so much (who, to Turner, seems freer and more natural than anyone else he knows) that he continues to pursue their friendship in spite of the disapproval of both his father and the town, disapproval that manifests in punishment from the former and, from the latter, an increased determination to move Malaga's inhabitants off the island to make way from a hoped-for tourist resort.

Meanwhile, Turner seems unable to avoid getting into trouble. After a particularly bad misstep, his stern (but occasionally open-minded) father sends him to read to the elderly, angry Mrs. Cobb. Later, after yet another transgression, he is instructed to play the organ for her. Eventually, Turner and Mrs. Cobb develop a grudging friendship, to the point where Mrs. Cobb actually allows Turner to bring Lizzie into her home. At the same time, pressure continues to build on Reverend Buckminster to go along with the intention of powerful and wealthy citizens of the town to destroy the Malaga Island settlement. Bullied by several of the town's important citizens, the Reverend struggles to keep them happy, while at the same time both disciplining Turner (who keeps breaking the rules and sneaking over to Malaga) and encouraging to continue developing a mind of his own. That development intensifies when, as Turner is trying to find help for an injured Lizzie, he encounters a whale; looks deeply into its eye; and finds himself both changed and curious about the meaning of that change.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Cobb dies and leaves her home to Turner. The enraged citizens of Phippsburg try to force Turner to sell the house to them so they can use it for their resort development. Turner, supported (perhaps surprisingly) by his father, refuses, a choice that intensifies the determination of the wealthier members of the town to clear

the inhabitants of Malaga Island away. Their determination results in a confrontation between the two communities, which in turn results in Reverend Buckminster's accidental death and in the members of the Malaga community, including Lizzie, being sent to an asylum for the insane, where Lizzie and many others die.

In the aftermath of Lizzie's death, Turner feels lost and confused, uncertain about being able to continue to live a life defined by the changes inspired in him by Lizzie. Nevertheless, he is able to take a stand against the members of the community and keep Mrs. Cobb's house for himself and his family. Finally, another encounter with a whale reinforces his belief that he has done the right thing, and he resolves to share his experience with a former rival who has since become a friend.

Chapter 1

Summary

Teenaged Turner Buckminster arrives in the coastal town of Phippsburg, Maine, in the company of his pastor father and his mother. At first, Turner enjoys the festive welcome they all receive, particularly the food. Later, however, when he's invited to participate in a pickup baseball game, he enjoys himself less: accustomed to being a success at playing regular baseball in Boston (where he and his family came from), he is unaccustomed to the different style and speed of slow pitch baseball as played in Phippsburg, and feels humiliated when he not only strikes out, but is perceived as being too small to hold a bat properly. His departure from the field marks the first of several occasions when he fantasizes about heading west, to "the Territories".

These thoughts occur again the following day when, after failing to jump from a cliff into the incoming tide, Turner is taunted by the same group of boys that taunted him at the baseball game (including Willis Hurd, the son of the church's deacon). Turner goes into town without pulling on all of his clothes (having removed them prior to his attempted jump) and vents his frustration by throwing stones at a nearby fence. He is rebuked by the uptight Mrs. Cobb, the owner of the fence (which, she says, was built by her grandfather) who promises to complain about him to his father. He feels as though he is about to cry, but he is interrupted by the appearance of the frail Mrs. Hurd (whose house is painted in different colors than every other house on her street). She tells him to not worry about Mrs. Cobb, surprises him by saying that sometimes she too wants to head west to "the Territories", and asks him a question that takes him even more by surprise: "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?"

Focus then shifts to 13-year-old tomboy Lizzie Griffin, who is "a year older than the century" and supposed to be chopping kindling for her uncle, Preacher Griffin, but is instead climbing trees and watching the tide come in. From her perch atop a cliff-side tree, she looks out at her beloved ramshackle home, and then watches a group of dark-suited men (and a white-shirted boy) as the men seem to pass remarks about her and her home, with one man, at one point, pulling a gun, which makes all the other men laugh.

Analysis

This opening chapter introduces several key elements. Some define one or more of the novel's basic premises and/or themes (i.e. Turner's struggle to fit in in this new and different environment and/or find his own identity). Others introduce characters that begin relationships with Turner that will become increasingly important as the novel progresses (i.e. the very different characters of Mrs. Hurd and Mrs. Cobb, Willis Hurd) or characters whose connection with Turner is at this point undefined but which will

become important later (i.e. Lizzie). There are also elements of action that have significant narrative / metaphoric value here and throughout the book: the most notable of these is baseball, defined throughout the narrative as a fundamental aspect / manifestation of Turner's identity. In this chapter, baseball essentially fails him (i.e. fails to reinforce a positive self-image), but in later chapters, baseball manifests both success and courage for Turner. His relationship with baseball is, in fact, one of the primary ways in which the book manifests its central thematic interest in the development of individual identity.

This chapter also introduces a pair of important motifs that, every time they occur, illuminates an important aspect of Turner's struggle to both define himself and to fit in. The first is the reference to "the Territories", a term that, at the time and place in which the novel is set (America in the early 1900's) was used to refer to the far west – the plains or prairies where, as Turner believes, a person could be free to live their own life. For much of the book, "the Territories" represent what they do in this chapter – an opportunity to escape. Later in the narrative, however, as Turner's journey of transformation continues, there are fewer references to the Territories, which represents a key aspect of that transformation: the fact that he is freer in himself, and doesn't need to be in a different place to have that experience.

The second repeated motif introduced in this chapter is the related idea of Turner being imprisoned – or, more specifically, his identity being imprisoned as a result of being his father's son. Mrs. Hurd's reference to the "prison bars" associated with Turner's name (a comment that works better on paper, where the III can be seen rather than spoken, than it probably would in actual conversation) is the first of several references that, throughout the novel, suggest that in many ways Turner feels trapped by the circumstances into which he was born, circumstances that, by the end of the novel, have changed to the point where he feels free to define who he is on his own terms. This tension between freedom and imprisonment is the second of the two major themes introduced in this chapter.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the metaphoric significance of the fact that Mrs. Hurd's house is painted different colors? What does this, combined with what she says to Turner, suggest about their potential future relationship?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the sketch of Mrs. Cobb in this section, as well as its suggestion about Turner's possible future relationship with HER, contrast with the sketch of Mrs. Hurd?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is the connection between what Lizzie sees from the top of the tree and what has happened in the chapter to this point?

Vocabulary

resin, buoy, parsonage, reprobate, unison, boysenberry, aggravate, mollusk, granite, finesse, aerial, meander, stratosphere, convenient, dignitary, outcropping, pirouette, steeple, tribulation, reprieve, seethe, sluice, hatchet, kindling (n.), dory, shanty, hovel, eke

Chapter 2

Summary

Conversation between the men seen by Lizzie in the previous chapter (some of whom are here identified as Reverend Buckminster, Deacon Hurd, Mr. Stonecrop, and Sheriff Elwell) reveals that Lizzie is “colored” (i.e. black, African-American). Conversation also reveals that Lizzie belongs to a small community of poor black people living on Malaga Island, and that the white citizens of Phippsburg (led by the wealthy Mr. Stonecrop) want that community to move so the town can build a resort to generate tourist income for the community. Turner (who is the boy in the white shirt referred to at the end of the previous chapter) makes a perceptive comment about the local tides that triggers both grudging admiration and a pointedly judgmental comment from Deacon Hurd, which leads Reverend Buckminster to tell Turner to go for a walk, which he does: narration describes his walk along the beach. When he returns, he finds Mrs. Cobb has joined the men, and has evidently told his now-angry father about their encounter. While walking home, Turner sees the elderly Mrs. Hurd, but is warned away from her by her son (Deacon Hurd) who says she’s crazy.

That night, Turner receives punishment from his father: he is to go every day for the summer and read to Mrs. Cobb. The next day, a very hot one, Turner begins his punishment in the dark, airless, very hot home of Mrs. Cobb, who surprises him by talking about death, refers to imagining her last words, and asking him to think what his last words might be. He contemplates how sad and lonely she must be and then reads poetry to her until she falls asleep. He takes advantage of this and goes outside for some air, where he is taunted by Willis Hurd and his friends. He resolves to face them all down and throws the first punch in a fistfight that results in his shirt and pants getting bloody, not to mention getting knocked to the ground by Willis. Preserving his dignity as much as possible, he stands and goes back into Mrs. Cobb’s house, where he tries to rinse the blood out of his clothes. He is discovered by Mrs. Cobb, who retreats upstairs in shock, leaving Turner to wonder how it’s possible that God could treat him so confusingly.

In a shift of focus, narration describes Lizzie wondering the same thing, particularly after a small crab that she had just named is eaten by a gull. As she cries, she notices that the same men who had been chatting the day before are coming over to the island. She runs away to warn her grandfather (Preacher Griffin), who greets the men as they arrive. As Lizzie listens, waiting for her grandfather’s powerful preacher persona to take over, the men (including Reverend Buckminster) tell her grandfather that it’s time for him and the rest of the community to move on. He argues with them, making Biblical points that Lizzie sees affect Reverend Buckminster, but the men don’t change their minds, even when Preacher Griffin shows them what he says gives them the right to be there – the graves of their ancestors. Buckminster promises to gather a collection to support the community as they move on, and the men leave, telling Preacher Griffin that he and they others have to move on by fall. Lizzie watches them all go, feeling powerfully

connected to the animals and nature of the area that she and the others now have no choice but to leave.

Analysis

A key element appears in the first few paragraphs of this chapter: the definition of Lizzie's race which, it must be noted, is not mentioned at all during the section of the first chapter in which she is introduced. Here it's interesting to note that this essential aspect of her identity is introduced in juxtaposition with the introduction of a key new character (Mr. Stonecrop) who eventually turns out to be one of the novel's key antagonists and whose obstruction of the plot is defined to a significant degree by his racist attitudes. At the same time as these elements are introduced, a related and brand new plot element also appears: the idea that there is a movement in Phippsburg to move the black settlers of Malaga Island out of the area as part of the community's pursuit of potential economic gain. Mr. Stonecrop's pursuit of this particular goal continues throughout the book, and is a defining element in both its narrative and the character development / transformation of protagonist Turner and Lizzie, Turner's new best friend. At the same time, Mr. Stonecrop and his agenda / plans for the citizens of Malaga also manifest one of the novel's central themes: its consideration of racism, and its portrayal of the ways in which both whites (i.e. Turner and others) and blacks (i.e. Lizzie and others) eventually transcend the tensions brought into the situation by racist attitudes and actions.

Other important elements introduced and developed here include Turner's "punishment", which performs a similar function in terms of both narrative and character here and throughout the story as his relationship with Mr. Stonecrop: both plot elements / relationships play key roles in his thematically-central struggle to define his individual identity. Other elements in this chapter that develop this thematic / narrative element include Turner's sympathetic contemplation of Mrs. Cobb, which illustrates his capacity to re-consider aspects of his attitude and/or other people that he may not have considered. Yet another development of this element (Turner's search for his own identity) shows up in his fistfight with Willis, which foreshadows later developments in THAT relationship at the same time as it develops the novel's thematic interest in Turner's fight to define is own identity, here in an actual physical confrontation.

Still more important elements: Mrs. Cobb's reference to both her and Turner's "last words", significant for two reasons: she repeatedly makes similar references throughout the narrative in a way that becomes almost comically obsessive; and each reference foreshadows the moment later in the story when a character's last words turn out to be almost trivial, compared to what Mrs. Cobb seems to think such things should be. Finally: Deacon Hurd's reference to his "crazy" mother foreshadows significant developments in their relationship in future chapters; and the glancing reference to Reverend Buckminster's perhaps surprising respect for Preacher Griffin's arguments, a moment that foreshadows moments later in the story where Pastor Buckminster, like his son, finds himself changed as a result of new consideration of the circumstances around him.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author chooses to withhold information about Lizzie's race in the first chapter? Why do you think it's first revealed here?

Discussion Question 2

What incident in this section evokes the novel's thematic interest in the power of nature? How does this particular incident metaphorically reflect other narrative elements of this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think are the reasons why Reverend Buckminster goes along with the plans of Mr. Stonecrop and the others? What do you think are the reasons why he offers to take up a collection for the people of Malaga?

Vocabulary

blight, aspiration, portico, mummify, pharaoh, suffocate, necromancy, canter, uproarious, cascade, clamber, mica, sprig

Chapter 3

Summary

That afternoon, Turner receives even more discipline from his father, who has heard from Mrs. Cobb about Turner's latest transgression: not only does he Turner have to read to Mrs. Cobb, but he also has to play the organ for her. That night, in spite of being afraid of what watchful neighbors might say, Turner hangs out his window and looks at the stars.

The next morning, Turner (again in a clean, starched white shirt) goes exploring, walking with perfect care so that no-one will see him and again complain to his father. He finds his way to the coast, where he clambers down a cliff, looks out at an island, and then starts trying to hit stones with a piece of driftwood. He's unable to get his form and misses all the stones, much to the chagrin of Lizzie, who has been watching. Unable to keep silent, she calls out and startles him, the rock that he had just pitched upwards landing on his nose and causing it to bleed. As Turner struggles to keep both his shirt and trousers free of blood, Lizzie tells him to lie down and put his head back: that, she says, will stop the bleeding. Turner, who has never spoken with a "colored" person before, finds himself immediately comfortable with Lizzie: "She had lit out for the Territories and found them, he thought." As he recovers, Lizzie gives him tips on improving his form, and gives him lessons in both hitting and pitching, helping him to improve. At one point, conversation leads them to reveal their middle names (Turner's is Ernest, Lizzie's is Bright), and to Lizzie exclaiming, at one point, that she sometimes thinks she can swallow the world whole. "And she held her arms out wide, as if she would gather it all in. And for a moment, Turner had no doubt that she could."

The morning passes quickly, and Turner realizes he's late for dinner. He hurries home and is once again harangued by his father who, in the middle of the meal, becomes absorbed in what he's saying – so absorbed that Turner thinks he's talking to the angels, and for the first time, wonders not only whether either he or his father believe anything he (his father) is saying. The intensity and passion of Reverend Buckminster's preaching ends when Mrs. Buckminster angrily tells him to stop.

Turner flees to his room, where he discovers that "a shirt and trousers that would never have marked him as a minister's son" have been left on his bed. He changes into them and then goes out, noticing an incoming storm. He races for a nearby hay-meadow and waits for the storm to roll in, eventually standing in the middle of it with his arms open, happily getting soaked by the rain.

Analysis

The first point to note about this chapter is the development of several of its key themes – most significantly, its vividly portrayed references to the power of nature. The primary

manifestation of this theme occurs in the final moments of the chapter – specifically, in Turner's embracing of the thunderstorm that rolls in. This incident functions on a couple of levels: to illustrate the connection between Turner and nature (a connection that manifests several times throughout the narrative), a connection directly related to his discovery of his own identity; and to foreshadow the "storm" of conflict that erupts around Turner when he defiantly and purposefully continues his friendship with Lizzie (again, a manifestation of his own identity). That friendship begins in earnest in this chapter and, very intriguingly, begins because of baseball which, as noted earlier, was defined in Chapter 1 as a fundamental aspect of Turner's self-worth, and which continues to be portrayed as such here and throughout the book. Meanwhile, the fact that Lizzie plays such a key role in developing Turner's baseball skills foreshadows events later in the narrative in which she plays a similarly important role (both deliberately and inadvertently) in other developments in Turner's self-worth.

Other important elements in this chapter include a glancing reference at the theme of racism (i.e. Turner's reaction to meeting Lizzie) and the reference to "the Territories". Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the reference can be seen as a metaphoric representation of the concept of freedom – specifically, the freedom to be oneself and to enjoy being that self. This, in turn, can be seen as another example of how the novel explores the theme of the pursuit of individual identity: in this moment, Turner clearly sees Lizzie as someone who both knows herself and enjoys that self. In this moment, she becomes an example for him, an inspiration that he follows and lives by until the novel's final moments … all of which, in turn, is the primary component of the novel's thematic contemplation of the power of connection. Finally, there is the reference to Turner's new clothes, which again manifests the theme of the pursuit of individual identity. There is also an echo here of Mrs. Hurd's earlier comments about Turner's identity: with this change of clothes, Turner is, on a symbolic level, changing out (at least for a while) of his identity as his father's son, a foreshadowing of how later in the novel he changes his moral identity as well.

Discussion Question 1

What are the implications of Lizzie's and Turner's middle names? Why is it significant, metaphorically or otherwise, that Turner's middle name is "Ernest"? That Lizzie's middle name is "Bright"?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways do the events of this chapter develop the novel's thematic interest in the pursuit of individual identity? Consider developments in the lives of other characters as well as Turner.

Discussion Question 3

The novel never explicitly identifies the source of Turner's new clothes. At this point in the narrative, who do you think is the most likely supplier of those clothes, and why?

Vocabulary

infallible, orthodoxy, heresy, compendium, sect, debase, perdition, sonorous, thicket, manic, vertical, solidity, charitable, spurt, contour, rebellious, seraphim, intone, dawdle

Chapter 4

Summary

Narration describes how both Turner and Lizzie lay in their beds and listened to the rain and the storm that continued the entire night. The next day, Turner leaves the house with his baseball bat and glove, heading for the beach. On the way, he sees Mrs. Hurd who, to his surprise, gives him instructions on how to win his next fight (the implication being that she heard about Turner's fight with her grandson, Willis). After they banter playfully with each other for a while, Turner heads down to the beach, where he meets Lizzie and teaches her how to catch with a glove. They play catch most of the morning, and then Lizzie teaches Turner how to dig clams. Around noon / dinner time, Lizzie takes Turner over to Malaga Island in her father's little boat.

Lizzie leads Turner across the island to her grandfather's house, where Turner is momentarily tongue-tied in the presence of a man that, he thinks, looks like a Biblical Prophet. They formally introduce themselves to each other, and then Preacher Griffin tells them to go and play while he makes them some lunch. Lizzie takes Turner's hand and takes him down to the beach, where they play with the Tripp children, at one point pretending to fly like birds. Later, they go back to Preacher Griffin's, where they eat the fresh chowder he has made. Afterwards, Turner and Lizzie play with the Tripp kids some more, and then Lizzie takes Turner back to the mainland.

Turner walks home, feeling happier and lighter than he has for a long time, but being careful to walk like a preacher kid is supposed to walk. When he gets home, he finds that the men of the town are having a meeting at the Buckminster house, and that the "coloreds" on Malagar Island are the subject: the men are trying to convince Reverend Buckminster to join their efforts to get them out. Mr. Stonecrop manipulates Turner into admitting that he had spent the day with Lizzie and the other "coloreds" on Malaga. As Turner becomes increasingly angry, Mr. Stonecrop uses what happened to him as an example of why Reverend Buckminster has to join the plan: his son is being corrupted, Stonecrop says. Reverend Buckminster says that he sees the hand of the Lord in the arrival of the men, and Stonecrop sees this as agreement that he will join their cause.

At that moment, Turner realizes what's "being plotted. And there wasn't a thing he could say without helping the plot all the more."

Analysis

The predominant element in this chapter is its exploration of the racism theme, but from two sides. The most obvious is the portrait of the negative sides of racism, manifest in the attitudes and actions of Mr. Stonecrop and the other men, including (the perhaps unwilling) Reverend Buckminster. It's important to note, however, that the book's thematic consideration of racism also includes consideration of its opposite: a situation

in which race doesn't matter at all, the development of the relationship between Lizzie and Turner. This is the mirror image of the dark side, the reverse – a powerfully vivid contrasting element of brightness and light that makes the darker, more judgmental negative portrait even more apparent and more disturbing.

A related point has to do with how the relationship between Lizzie and Turner informs the latter's developing beliefs about himself, about race, and about the way society (in terms of the two societies with which he interacts, Malaga and Phippsburg) functions – in other words, Turner's developing self-identity, itself another of the book's key themes.

Finally, the concluding moments / narration of the chapter foreshadows further, profoundly significant events in the story's primary plot line, which in turn influences / are influenced by developments in the Turner / Lizzie relationship which, here as elsewhere in the book, is connected to the book's thematic exploration of connection.

Discussion Question 1

What point about their relationship / individual identities is the narrative making when it suggests that both Turner and Lizzie listened to the storm all night?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the metaphoric significance of Mr. Stonecrop's name? How does his name reflect his character / function in the story?

Discussion Question 3

What does Turner understand is "being plotted"? Why does he think there's nothing he can say that would change things?

Vocabulary

amethyst, lavender, preliminary, conspirator, begat, cavort, sepia, mottle, eloquent, squalor

Chapter 5

Summary

Narration describes how, over the next several days, Turner and Lizzie continued to meet on the beach – playing catch, catching clams, just playing and talking. One day, however, while they're climbing a cliff, Lizzie slips and cuts her head open on a rock. She drifts in and out of consciousness as Turner carries her back to the boat, gets her in, and starts rowing towards Malaga Island. He shouts at her to stay awake as he struggles against the tide, eventually finding it too strong for him and drifting out to sea. Lizzie occasionally regains consciousness enough to give him directions, but soon falls completely silent. Eventually, Turner manages to get into a quiet area of the mainland, where he is surprised and humbled by a whale surfacing alongside the boat. Turner is almost close enough to touch it, and at one point looks into the whale's eyes. "Turner wished with a desire greater than anything he had ever desired that he might understand what it was in the eye of the whale that shivered his soul." He reaches out to touch the whale, but it slips away and goes under the surface. Turner gets Lizzie's eyes open, and he tells her about the whale. She says "they only let you touch them if you understand what they're saying," adding that he'll only know "when they let you touch them."

Turner continues to try to get to the island, but still has difficulty. By now night is falling, and the light from the moon is silvery. It's by this light that the boat is found by another boat being piloted by Deacon and Willis Hurd, who get a rope onto Turner's boat and tow it to shore, telling every boat they pass (there are several out searching) that Turner has not only been found, but that he's in the company of a "Negro" girl.

Back on shore, Lizzie is embraced by her grandfather and taken away to have her cut seen to. Turner is taken home by his father, who confronts him about being in the company of a "colored" girl who, like everyone else on the Island, is not fit for "decent minded folks to be around". Turner stands up for both Lizzie and the others on the island, noting as he does so that his father seems smaller. Their conversation is interrupted by the angry arrival of Mr. Stonecrop who, in spite of the efforts of Mrs. Buckminster to keep the situation calm, insists that Reverend Buckminster do a better job of controlling his son: the congregation, he says "will tell you what it thinks, and what it wants you to think." He eats half the pie brought by Mrs. Buckminster, repeats himself a few more times, and goes, leaving Reverend Buckminster quite thoughtful. He comments on how big Turner seems to be getting and then sends him to bed.

Turner doesn't seem to mind: "on that very same night, [he] had almost touched a whale."

Analysis

In the same way as the previous chapter was primarily defined by considerations of racism, this chapter is primarily defined by developments in two of its other key themes. Turner's struggle to get Lizzie back to safety, and in particular his encounter with the whale and its aftermath, are key manifestations in the novel's thematic interest in the power of nature, both to create tension and to inspire, to trigger strong feeling. The glimpse of the whale is particularly important, in that here and elsewhere in the book, Turner's instinctive emotional and spiritual reaction to looking into the whale's eyes is portrayed as both profound and transformative, inspiring and humbling – a deeply affecting aspect of the novel's interest in the power of connection. On many occasions the narrative progresses, Turner's reaction to his connection with the whale becomes a measuring stick by which he gauges encounters with other characters, as well as his own actions. His encounter with the whale here affects him so profoundly that he is haunted for the rest of the book both by what he saw and what he believes the encounter was meant to tell him about himself: it becomes an important key to his search for his own identity. Finally, the encounter is also an important piece of foreshadowing - of Turner's repeated search for the encounter's meaning, and of the moment late in the narrative when circumstances conspire to reveal that meaning.

The other significant element in this chapter has to do with the contrasting perceptions of each other held by Turner and Reverend Buckminster. Meanwhile, a contrasting element emerges at the end of this chapter, as Reverend Buckminster comments on how Turner seems to be growing. There is clear contrast here with narration's earlier comment that Turner saw his father as being smaller: neither has physically grown or shrunk, but both have changed, in the eyes of the other, in non-physical ways: their mutual awareness of the changes in each other is masked here by references to physical change. While Turner sees his father's morality as smaller and slighter, Reverend Buckminster seems to see his son's independence of mind and spirit as a growth, an expansion. This is the first of several instances in the novel where characters behave in unexpected ways: the reader would probably be justified in finding the Reverend's remark surprising, given that up to this point, there has been very little sense that he seriously registers anything at all about his son. Later in the narrative, other characters (including Mrs. Cobb) similarly reveal unexpectedly supportive, perceptive, affirming, vulnerable sides to themselves in the same way as Reverend Buckminster does here. While it's not clear at first glance what thematic or narrative purpose these moments serve (other than to take both Turner and the reader by surprise), on further consideration they can be seen as connected to either the power of connection (i.e. connection between characters on deeper levels than the initial, or the superficial), the power of nature (i.e. characters connecting with each other's inner natures), or both.

Discussion Question 1

What is the metaphoric significance of Turner being carried away by the ocean's currents? What other "currents" present in his life is he being carried away by?

Discussion Question 2

Have you ever had an experience with nature that felt similar to you as Turner's does to him in this chapter? What was that experience? How did it feel? How did it change you?

Discussion Question 3

What is the metaphoric implication of the narration's reference to Turner's father seeming "smaller"? What does it suggest about how Turner views his father in the bigger picture of their relationship?

Vocabulary

capsize, benediction, maelstrom, gargantuan, profane, perseverance, impertinent, omnipotent, quaver

Chapter 6

Summary

The next morning, Turner is “forbidden” from going anywhere near Malaga Island. He daydreams in church as his father preaches a sermon about how important it is for a God-fearing community to do what it can “to blot out spoil and contagion from among us”. Turner wanders around the house in boredom and frustration until his mother tells him to go outside. He begins to wander towards the route to Malaga, when he’s interrupted by Mrs. Cobb, who demands that he come in and play for her. As he settles down by her old and dusty, unused organ, she tells him to take down her last words, if she should happen to die while he’s there. He agrees, and starts playing, becoming happier to do so as she starts to smile, sing along, and eventually clap.

After he leaves Mrs. Cobb, Turner heads down to the beach and looks out at Malaga, but sees no sign of Lizzie. Heading back into town, he encounters Mrs. Hurd, who compliments him on his playing and explains that she doesn’t go to church because she listens for God in her heart. Turner tells her that whenever he plays a particular hymn, he’s playing it for her. When he gets home, he is slapped by his father for disobeying and going out to Malaga: Turner is told that he has to stay indoors for two weeks, only going out to go to church. He also says that everything Turner knows, has heard, or believes about Malaga Island and the people who live there is a lie. Turner talks back to his father, revealing what he has experienced and come to believe about the people of Malaga. Reverend Buckminster doesn’t seem to know how to respond.

Eventually, Turner’s allowed to leave the house to go and play for Mrs. Cobb, which he also sees as a chance to play for Mrs. Hurd. One day after going and playing, he goes for a walk and feels the breeze trying to lead him down to Malaga: he refuses to follow it, saying instead that the wind should “go find Lizzie”. That night, Lizzie comes to find him, calling to him quietly from his yard. Turner sneaks out to see her, and they confront each other about what they’ve each been told about the other: Lizzie’s been told by the Sheriff that Turner only went out to the island on a dare, and that he doesn’t care about her or any of the island’s inhabitants, while Turner’s been told that Lizzie and the others are all liars, thieves, and crooks. They each assure each other of the truth, with Lizzie also assuring Turner that she and her grandfather will never, ever leave the island. They also talk about what they’ve been doing, Lizzie reacting with surprise when Turner tells her he’s been playing the organ for Mrs. Cobb. He invites her to come listen – the next day, at high tide. She agrees.

That next day, bad weather delays Turner’s departure for Mrs. Cobb’s, but he eventually leaves just before high tide. When he arrives, Mrs. Cobb feels that the weather is an omen of her impending death, and asks that Turner not only start with something happy, but that he pay particular attention in case she really does say her last words. Mrs. Cobb is interrupted by a knocking on the back door, which Turner answers: it’s Lizzie, who is amazed that only one person lives in Mrs. Cobb’s big old house. When they go

into the parlor where the organ is, Mrs. Cobb is completely shocked. “Oh my sweet Jesus,” she says. “A Negro girl standing in my house.”

Analysis

The novel’s thematic emphasis on racism is the most noteworthy element in this chapter, developed as it is both indirectly (i.e. the implied focus of Reverend Buckminster’s sermon at the beginning of the chapter, the Reverend’s comments to Turner about what he believes about the residents of Malaga Island) and directly (i.e. Mrs. Cobb’s undisguised shock at the appearance of Lizzie in her home end of the chapter). Here it’s interesting to note how Lizzie’s arrival at Mrs. Cobb’s house functions on two additional levels: metaphorically, it can be seen as a symbolic representation of the black citizens of Malaga “knocking on the door” of the white homes of Phippsburg to seek shelter, respect, and support;, at the same time, it can also be seen as foreshadowing of later events in the novel in which Lizzie comes close to actually being invited to the house to live. Other foreshadowings include Mrs. Cobb’s reference to her last words (here as elsewhere foreshadowing events later in the narrative in which last words, both spoken and written, play a defining role later in the action) and Lizzie’s reference to her grandfather never leaving the island, a comment that foreshadows the eventual revelation of what happens to him (not to mention the other citizens of Malaga).

Several other themes are also developed in this chapter: “’the power of nature” is one such theme, while the “freedom vs. imprisonment” theme is another. This theme is quite powerfully developed, manifesting as Turner is first “imprisoned” in his own home (and, on another level, imprisoned within his father’s morality) and then struggles, to the point of breaking the rules and being physically punished, to both build on the tenuous, exhilarating freedom he has achieved to this point and go even further into what amounts to his own personal version of “the Territories”. Meanwhile, the theme of “pursuit of individual identity” is simultaneously developed in this sequence of events, given that Turner’s breaking of the rules is driven by his increasing understanding of who he is as a person independent of his father’s rules, will, and wishes.

Discussion Question 1

How is the novel’s thematic interest in the power of nature developed in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

In this chapter, Mrs. Hurd explains why she doesn’t go to church. This comment is an echo of what circumstance of her life referred to earlier in the novel? Which of the novel’s themes is developed by both these incidents?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the Sheriff say what he does to Lizzie about Turner? What is the Sheriff trying to accomplish?

Vocabulary

sanctuary, disdain, listless, rosette, prominent, contagion, melancholy, rollick

Chapter 7

Summary

This chapter picks up at the moment the previous chapter left off: with Lizzie and Mrs. Cobb facing each other in Mrs. Cobb's house, Turner watching. There is a long, tense, silence – and then Mrs. Cobb tells Turner to start playing: she doesn't tell Lizzie to leave. After a while, and after several songs (some of which Turner sings) Mrs. Cobb relaxes, eventually allowing Turner and Lizzie to leave – but not before telling Turner to never sing again, a request Lizzie later echoes. Lizzie's visits continue for a week or so, with Mrs. Cobb starting to leave the door open for her but never actually saying anything to her. The day always ends with Turner walking Lizzie to the shore, and both of them waving goodbye to Mrs. Hurd as they pass her house.

One day, however, the rhythm is broken: Turner, on his way to Mrs. Cobb's, notices that the paint on Mrs. Hurd's house is a different color, and that the house itself is empty. Upset and concerned, his playing for Mrs. Cobb and Lizzie isn't as good as it usually is, with both Lizzie and Mrs. Cobb commenting on it. That night, around the usually silent dinner table, Turner gets up the nerve to ask whether his father knows what happened to Mrs. Hurd. Reverend Buckminster says he does, but that it's not a fit subject to discuss. Mrs. Buckminster, however, reveals that Mrs. Hurd has been taken to a home for the insane; that the papers allowing this to happen were signed by Deacon Hurd, Mr. Stonecrop, and one other person whom she doesn't name; and that it's very "convenient" that Deacon Hurd, once he sells his mother's house, will have money to invest in Mr. Stonecrop's new hotel. Turner then leaves the table and goes to his room, feeling both lonely and sad for Mrs. Hurd.

Shortly afterwards, as fall starts to make its presence felt, Turner starts home-schooling. First, his father makes him translate The Aeneid (the story of a lost sailor named Aeneas) from Latin into English and summarize what he translates from different points of view, telling Turner it's important to learn how to value different perspectives. He also gives Turner assignments in reading and analyzing theological texts, which Turner finds much less interesting than working on The Aeneid. Finally, at the end of a long week of schooling, Turner is given an afternoon off, and in spite of Malaga Island still being "forbidden", he goes down to the shore (guided by the breeze), hoping to see Lizzie. Instead, he sees a makeshift raft, topped with a ramshackle house, just off the shore of the island. On board is the Tripp family, who wave to the other inhabitants of the island (including Lizzie and her grandfather) who have gathered on the shore. As the Tripps set sail off down the coast, Lizzie's grandfather sings a hymn.

The other islanders return to their homes, leaving only Lizzie and her grandfather to watch as the Tripps' boat disappears. Turner calls out to them, but Lizzie they don't respond: Lizzie, covering her face with her hands, runs up the beach, while her grandfather, after looking at Turner briefly, follows her.

Turner feels very alone, narration drawing a parallel between his feelings and those of Mrs. Hurd as she was taken away.

Analysis

This chapter begins with the answer to the implied question posed at the end of the previous chapter: what is Mrs. Cobb going to do in response to Lizzie's appearance in her home? While the narrative answers that question clearly, it raises another one: why does Mrs. Cobb let Lizzie in? Up to this point, there has been the sense that Mrs. Cobb is very much like the other citizens of Phippsburg: judgmental, conservative, intolerant. It must be noted, however, that notwithstanding the reference to "Negro child" at the end of the previous chapter, Mrs. Cobb says little if anything that can be interpreted as being racist. In other words, the reader's surprise at her choice here is the result of their likely interpretation of her character, rather than anything that has been specifically revealed. This does not explain why Mrs. Cobb does what she does: however, because it is another of those moments in which characters behave in surprising ways, it reinforces the idea that as part of Turner's development of his own identity, it's significant that he discovers there is more to people than they perhaps want other people to believe.

The next important event in this chapter is the reference to the new paint on Mrs. Hurd's house, and the subsequent revelations of what happens to her. While the latter is significant in terms of plot (although the question of the third signature on the document remains unanswered), the former (i.e. the reference to paint) is more thematically significant. Earlier in the narrative, there was the sense that the color of the paint (different and more vibrant from the colors of the other houses in the town) metaphorically represented both Mrs. Hurd's own individuality and Turner's drive towards a similar sort of independent individuality himself. The changing of the paint color suggests that Mrs. Hurd's individuality is being suppressed in the same way as attempts are being made to suppress Turner's. By the same token, the revelation that Mrs. Hurd has essentially been imprisoned can be seen as a development in the novel's thematic interest in freedom vs. imprisonment, and as such as a metaphoric echo of Turner's own struggle for freedom. Important elements related to Mrs. Hurd's disappearance include the reference to Mr. Stonecrop's hotel (which foreshadows later events in the narrative in which the prospect of that same hotel being built plays an important role); and the reference at the end of the chapter to Mrs. Hurd's feelings in response to being taken to the asylum, which foreshadows events later in the narrative when another character is taken away, in the same manner and to the same institution.

The third and final significant element in this chapter is the introduction of "The Aeneid" into Turner's life. "The Aeneid" is one of several so-called "epic" poems written and first performed in Ancient Greece, poems that combined centuries-old history and ancient myth into stories of heroes, wars, and the creation and destruction of entire societies. "The Aeneid" is focused on the Greek warrior/hero Aeneas, who fought in the Trojan War, wandered the ancient world in the war's aftermath, and eventually settled in Italy where he became the founder of Rome. The central connection, metaphoric and otherwise, between "The Aeneid" and Turner seems to relate, on one level, to Turner's

search for meaning, truth, and identity, which can be seen as paralleling the search by Aeneas for a place that he can settle into and call home. On another level, historical analysis of “The Aeneid” suggests that it itself was composed as a metaphor for the shifting, troubling societal changes in play in Greece at the time, changes and shifts that have echoes, it seems in the change in racial attitudes / perceptions at work in Turner here. On a third level, there is the sense that the juxtaposition of the departure of the Tripp family from Malaga Island is itself an echo of “The Aeneid”: in the same way that Aeneas departs by sea on a search for a new life, the Tripp family is doing exactly the same thing. Finally, and as the narrative itself eventually suggests, there is the sense that in the same way as Aeneas was a warrior, Turner becomes a “warrior” in the cause of what he believes to be true justice towards both himself and the inhabitants of Malaga Island, including Lizzie.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Mrs. Cobb allows Lizzie to stay?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that Reverend Buckminster refer to the importance of having different perspectives?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Reverend Buckminster refer to the importance of having different perspectives?

Vocabulary

missionary, drunkard, temperance, vibrato, morbid, accommodate, peninsula, barnacle, conflagration, finery, ministerial, heft (v.), exasperate, tutelage, protrude, ominous, imperious, ornery, malice, divinity, passable

Chapter 8

Summary

This chapter begins with an early morning, very angry conversation between Mr. Stonecrop and Reverend Buckminster, overheard by Turner, in which Mr. Stonecrop reacts badly to a story in the local newspaper about the Tripp family's hardships on their boat. Mr. Stonecrop tells Reverend Buckminster to use his connections in government to hurry the community's plans to empty Malaga Island so the new hotels in Phippsburg can be built. He then hurries off, and Reverend Buckminster seems to think he has no choice but to do as he's asked. Meanwhile, he gives Turner a new assignment for home school: to read and summarize "The Origin of Species" by Charles Darwin which he (Reverend Buckminster) says is the sort of book that can cause "fire" in people. Turner starts reading it, and immediately starts feeling an "emotional" fire inside him.

That fire builds as a result of several events. First, Mrs. Cobb comments on Lizzie's not having been at her house to hear Turner play for several days, saying that she (Mrs. Cobb) misses her and adding that Turner shouldn't let what she or anyone else thinks influence his decisions about what is important. She also reveals that she shares the same theory as Turner's mother about why Mrs. Hurd was sent to the asylum, and suggests that it's time for Turner to realize there's more to being him than just being his father's son. This makes Turner "burn" with even more desire to live life on his own terms. Then: Turner, driven by this increasing fire inside, goes down to the beach in hopes of finding Lizzie. When he does, they dig clams together and Lizzie tearfully confesses that her grandfather is very ill. Turner holds her hand to comfort her, and then goes with her back to the island, where they make a clam chowder; feed it to Reverend Griffin (who is very glad to see Turner and who, Turner discovers, is very thin and frail); and enjoy each other's company.

The final manifestation of the new fire in Turner shows up when he's told to play in the last community baseball game of the summer. When it's his turn at bat, Turner hits every single ball pitched to him so far and so high that they all disappear into the woods that ring the ball diamond. This time, narration comments, no-one laughs at him. After all the balls but one have been lost, Turner faces the last pitch (Willis Hurd has been the pitcher the whole time). The pitch is perfect and easily hittable, but Turner instead steps away from the plate and allows himself to be struck out. The crowd seems disappointed, but Turner notices that Willis is smiling. He leaves the field, and after the game, his mother tells him that he might have embarrassed his father – admitting, also, that sometimes "the Reverend Buckminster" needs embarrassing. Noticing that Turner wants to be by himself, she leaves him alone outside, telling him to not be too long.

Restless and unwilling to go in, Turner goes for a walk, and discovers Willis Hurd at his grandmother's house, painting her shutters yellow. Turner offers to help him, and Willis accepts, acknowledging Turner's newly revealed skill at hitting baseballs and respecting his choice to leave the last ball so the game could continue. Turner and Willis then

continue painting Mrs. Hurd's shutters the color they used to be. "… behind him," narration comments, "the stars glittered for all they were worth … and every single one of them held its place in this night's sky without falling."

Analysis

The first point to note about this chapter is the ironic, and in some ways unlikely, juxtaposition of two important elements: the visit from Mr. Stonecrop, with the accompanying pressure he puts on Reverend Buckminster; and the Reverend's decision to give Turner "The Origin of Species" as his next book of study. The juxtaposition is noteworthy because the first element is defined by conservativism, close-mindedness, and lack of individual thought (that is: Mr. Stonecrop is asking the Reverend to not think for himself and do as he is told), while the second element is defined by the book's groundbreaking, and controversial essential purpose - to ask readers, scientists, and ultimately the world to look at the science behind human existence (that is: the science of evolution) instead of defining human existence in terms of what faith and religious teaching dictates. There is, in addition, an even more powerful point being made by the Reverend's giving Turner the book: the Reverend seems to be both recognizing and acting on the fact that his son is starting to think for himself and, instead of squashing those thoughts, is in fact encouraging them. Here again, a character acts in a way that seems surprising to the reader, and perhaps even out of character.

A second, and related point to note has to do with the introduction of the "fire" metaphor to describe the (passion? determination? independence?) building inside of Turner. Meanwhile, a third important point, and one that is similarly metaphorical, is the reappearance of baseball: more specifically, Turner's return to playing baseball in Phippsburg after his practice sessions with Lizzie. On first reading, it may seem like Turner, with all his foul balls, has learned nothing from his time with Lizzie. Upon further consideration, however, and after recalling both the skill he acquired while working with Lizzie and the passion for justice / being himself that has been developing (not to mention becoming even more powerful in this chapter), it becomes clear that Turner is making the balls go foul on purpose. His skill is such that his hits can send the ball high and long: there is the sense that his inaccuracy, because of its consistency, is just as deliberate. He is literally knocking the baseballs out of potential re-use: in hitting them out of play, in essentially making them disappear, he is teaching the people of Phippsburg a lesson about being judgmental, about bullying, and about respect. This theory is supported by four things: the reference to nobody in the crowd laughing at him (because they know he's doing it on purpose); the reference to Willis smiling at Turner (which suggests that Willis knew exactly what Turner was doing); the reference to Mrs. Buckminster essentially telling Turner that she too knew what he was doing, and that it was the right thing; and, perhaps most importantly, the moment at the end of the chapter where Willis and Turner work together on repainting Mrs. Hurd's shutters.

Discussion Question 1

Several times in the narrative, characters behave in surprising and unexpected ways. What are some of the other examples of this? How do these incidents relate to the book's themes?

Discussion Question 2

To expand the metaphor of fire introduced in this chapter: a fire requires fuel, oxygen, and a spark to set it going. What incident in the narrative up to this point might be considered the spark that started the fire that grows within Turner in this chapter? What might be considered the fuel? What might be considered the oxygen that feeds the fire? Think both literally and metaphorically.

Discussion Question 3

Given what the narrative has previously revealed, metaphorically and literally, about Mrs. Hurd's shutters, what would you say are the implications, again metaphoric or literal, about Willis' choice to help Turner repaint them?

Vocabulary

humiliate, adjudicate, conflagration, smolder, evolutionary

Chapter 9

Summary

As the weather turns colder and the light from the moon becomes more brittle and silvery, Turner continues the routine of playing for Mrs. Cobb. Sometimes Lizzie is there, sometimes she isn't: either way, Mrs. Cobb repeatedly urges them to remember her last words, as she seems to be becoming more and more frail. One night, when Lizzie is present, Mrs. Cobb actually seems to die, her last words (seemingly chosen carefully) referring to a Bible verse. Bickering between Lizzie and Turner over what exactly she said, however, seems to wake her up: she hadn't died after all, and because she's thirsty, she asks for a ginger ale. Lizzie and Turner go and fetch it for her, but when they come back, she truly is dead. They dutifully write down her last words, but Turner suggests that he might actually tell everyone that her last words were the first set. Lizzie tells him not to lie. Later, at Mrs. Cobb's funeral, at which everyone is waiting to hear the last words, Turner writes the true last words down and gives them to his father to present as part of his sermon. When it comes time to read them, however, Reverend Buckminster lies, and presents the words of a Psalm as the last words.

A few days later, at church, Mr. Stonecrop angrily announces that Mrs. Cobb's will has been read, and that instead of doing the right thing by the town (which, he says, could have used her house and property as part of its plan to bring in tourism), she willed her house to Turner. Mr. Stonecrop tells Reverend Buckminster to be very careful when it comes to helping Turner decide what to do with the house, but walking home from the funeral, Mrs. Buckminster tells Turner (who has an idea of what he wants to do with the house) to go ahead and do what he wants with it, whether it upsets Mr. Stonecrop or not. Turner then runs down to the shore and, even though it's snowing, waits for a glimpse of Lizzie. He's waiting for a long time, but is eventually taken over to Malaga Island by Mr. Eason, another of its residents. Turner notices that there is no smoke coming from the chimney on the home of Lizzie and her grandfather, and suddenly feels both ill at ease and uncertain.

Eventually, Turner arrives on Malaga, where he discovers that Lizzie's grandfather has died. He finds Lizzie, and she takes him to the cemetery where her grandfather is buried. She tells Turner that her grandfather died in his sleep, and the two of them stand holding each other's hands. They are suddenly startled when a pine tree, heavy with fresh wet snow, suddenly crashes to the ground. After a moment of silence, Lizzie comments that "nothing stays the same", and Turner agrees.

Analysis

Aside from the juxtaposition of the description of moonlight and the increasingly frail Mrs. Cobb (a glancing manifestation of the novel's thematic interest in the relationship between nature and humanity), the first part of this chapter is notable less for the

revelation of Mrs. Cobb's actual last words (a darkly funny situation, given how obsessed she seems to have been with making the last words SIGNIFICANT) than for the choices characters make around the issue of what to do with those words. Turner chooses, on Lizzie's insistence, to tell the truth: his father, the Reverend, chooses to lie. There is the clear sense here that Turner's choice of the truth is connected to / part of his journey of transformation towards personal integrity and a clear sense of identity and/or justice. As such, it foreshadows events later in the narrative when he again tells the truth in the face of the sort of circumstances that, here, his father faces and gives in to: the pressure of congregational and community expectation that Mrs. Cobb's words have a certain quality and content about them. He gives the congregation what they expect, something that amounts to a lie: his son, by contrast, gives him what he doesn't expect, which is a truth … a clear echo (and foreshadowing) of other situations in the book in which characters do what isn't expected but in fact do what the novel seems to contend is a true, right thing.

Other important elements in the first part of the chapter include the surprising revelation of what Mrs. Cobb wants done with her house; Mr. Stonecrop's reaction (which foreshadows later incidents in which the conflict over the house intensifies); Turner's almost instantaneous decision about what he wants to do with it (which the narrative does not explicitly identify); and Mrs. Buckminster's quiet, but firm, support for what she suspects is his idea.

The second half of the chapter is taken up with the chapter's second death: that of Lizzie's grandfather, Preacher Griffin. Here there are several important points to note. First, there is the contrast between the lengthy narrative of Mrs. Cobb's death and the simple, small narrative of Preacher Griffin's, which can be seen as metaphorically evocative of the book's view of the racism-defined attitudes of the time (i.e. the white woman's death is a big deal: the black man's death is less so). Then there are the descriptions of Turner's journey to the island and of Turner and Lizzie at Preacher Griffin's gravesite, both of which reinforce the deepening importance of their friendship to Turner (a manifestation of the book's thematic interest in the power of connection). Finally, there are the chapter's final moments: the falling of the tree, and Lizzie's response. Both these elements function on several levels: as evocations of the novel's thematic exploration of nature (the tree falls because of natural, not man-made circumstances: meanwhile, nature is nothing if not constant change); as a metaphoric echo of a number of events that have taken place, both in this chapter and earlier in the book; and as a metaphoric foreshadowing of future events (i.e. forthcoming circumstances in which lives, values, and hopes "crash" to the ground).

Discussion Question 1

Consider Quote 9, which is taken from the chapter of the novel that describes Turner's journey, in a snowstorm, across to Malaga Island to find Lizzie. In what ways does this quote metaphorically (suggest? echo? illuminate?) Turner's state of mind at this point in the story? What other circumstances might it symbolically be referring to?

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the story, what do you think Turner intends to do with Mrs. Cobb's house?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the (perhaps surprising) choices made by characters in the book that the narrative thematically contends are true, right things?

Vocabulary

resolute, frailty, opaque, pallbearer, casket, committal, tithe, connive, prosperity, ingratiate

Chapter 10

Summary

As they get their breath back after being startled by the falling pine, Turner tells Lizzie about inheriting Mrs. Cobb's house, and about his plans to have her and other residents of Malaga Island live there. Lizzie tells him it will never be allowed to happen because she's black, and he protests that "it won't make a bit of difference", a phrase he keeps repeating to himself all the way home, but believes less and less the more he repeats it.

When Turner arrives home, he discovers that Mr. Stonecrop is there, and has been talking with Reverend and Mrs. Buckminster about plans for Mrs. Cobb's house: it is to be sold, with a portion of the proceeds being set aside to pay for Turner's "ministerial education". Turner tells him he won't agree, and reveals his true plans. Mr. Stonecrop erupts in anger, saying he will never let "a Negro" live in Phippsburg and accusing Reverend Buckminster of being a lax parent. Reverend Buckminster surprises everyone by standing up for Turner, and Mr. Stonecrop leaves in fury, shouting to everyone that he will see to it himself that no Negro will ever live in Phippsburg.

Over the next few days, Turner keeps trying to convince Lizzie that his plans for her will happen, and she keeps trying to convince him to be realistic. Meanwhile, attendance at church drops off drastically, and Deacon Hurd reveals that the parishioners are going to have a meeting to which Reverend Buckminster is not invited. At the end of church, Willis Hurd whispers to Turner that something is going to happen that night, and Turner believes that there will be something done to Mrs. Cobb's house. He sneaks out in the middle of the night to guard it, letting himself in with keys left behind by Mr. Stonecrop. Spooked by its emptiness, silence, and coldness, Turner fears that Mrs. Cobb's ghost is there with him. He hears sounds and investigates, but is eventually locked into the attic by someone who tells him that he's reached "strike three".

Turner manages to escape onto the roof, where he sees bright lights on Malaga Island. He makes his way down to the shore, where he sees how beautiful the island is in the winter moonlight. His thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of the Sheriff, who fires a shotgun near him to give him a sense of what he (the Sheriff) experienced when faced with Mr. Eason, violently determined to defend his property. The Sheriff then tells Turner that Lizzie, Mr. Eason, and everyone else on Malaga have been taken "down to Pownal", the insane asylum where Mrs. Hurd was sent. Turner erupts in anger and attacks the Sheriff, eventually being pulled off by Reverend Buckminster. An argument between the Sheriff and the Reverend about whether keeping Phippsburg white is the right thing to do results in a physical conflict, which ends with Reverend Buckminster falling over the edge of the cliff. Turner sees something in his eyes, but doesn't quite know what.

Analysis

Narrative momentum begins to build in this chapter as the book moves towards its climax. Conflict intensifies (particularly the conflict between Mr. Stonecrop and Turner) as Turner, in events that follow up on foreshadowings in the previous chapters, asserts and acts on what he believes to be true in the face of powerful opposition from Mr. Stonecrop and other members of the town and, in her own way, from Lizzie. It's interesting to note, however, that Turner also receives support, again from an unlikely place: here it becomes very clear that Willis's respect and almost-friendship, won in the aftermath of the Chapter 8 baseball game, was not a one-time thing, his hint to Turner indicating to both Turner and the reader that he (Turner) is not entirely alone in his struggle to change / live his own life.

This idea leads, in turn, to consideration of the novel's other themes. In addition to exploring and documenting Turner's continuing, intensifying pursuit of an individual identity defined by a truth, there are clear and vivid manifestations of the novel's exploration of racism; and a glimpse of the freedom vs. imprisonment theme, manifest glancingly in the moment of Turner's being trapped in Mrs. Cobb's attic. Here it's important to note that in the same way as he is struggling to break free of the constrictive attitudes of the town, Turner manages to break free of the literal imprisonment imposed upon him by people holding those attitudes.

Other significant elements in this chapter include the revelation that the inhabitants of Malaga Island (including Lizzie) have been sent to the Pownal home. This functions on two levels: to illustrate how merciless Mr. Stonecrop and the people of the town are in pursuit of their goals; and to set in motion later events in the narrative that motivate further important events on Turner's journey of transformation. Then there is the conflict between the Sheriff and the Reverend (which foreshadows later, defining conflicts and which shows just how far Reverend Buckminster has come in terms of defending his son); and, finally, Turner's look into his father's eyes as the latter falls off the cliff, an experience that haunts him throughout the novel's final three chapters.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do Lizzie's comments to Turner function as opposition to him?

Discussion Question 2

Who do you think is the person who whispers "Strike Three" to Turner while he's trapped in Mrs. Cobb's house?

Discussion Question 3

What are the metaphoric parallels between both Mrs. Hurd and Lizzie being sent to Pownal? How does each of these incidents relate to Turner, his journey of transformation, and the relationship of these two characters to that journey?

Vocabulary

discreet, percentage, equitable, homicide, tendency, lackadaisical, qualm, cupola, luminous

Chapter 11

Summary

The church decided to go ahead with the planned meeting. Turner attends, much to Deacon Hurd's resentment, but supports his attendance by referring to the bylaws of the church. Deacon Hurd makes his case for removing Reverend Buckminster from the church, saying he behaved inappropriately for a pastor and in a way that went against the wishes of the town. A parishioner named Mr. Newton (last seen in Chapter 1 as a member of the church's welcoming committee) tries to defend both Reverend Buckminster and Turner (who tells the meeting that he and his mother are planning to move into Mrs. Cobb's house), but Deacon Hurd rejects his arguments and calls for a vote on a resolution to remove the Reverend from his post, a resolution that ultimately passes.

Days pass, and Turner helps his mother move their things over to Mrs. Cobb's. Narration reveals that Turner is spending time on the shore with Willis Hurd; that Mrs. Buckminster is sad and thoughtful; and that Malaga Island has been cleansed of its inhabitants, the cemetery emptied (leaving Turner to wonder about Lizzie's grandfather's body), and the houses burned, blowing ashes all over Phippsburg – and over Reverend Buckminster's grave.

Narration describes the funeral for the Reverend which, because Mrs. Buckminster refused to allow Deacon Hurd to have any part in it, is conducted by a visiting minister. At the end of the service, the Minister asks if anyone wants to say any words, and Turner stands up, speaking about the compassionate actions that led to his father's death and about how, if the town was truly doing God's work, they would go up to Pownal and retrieve Lizzie and everyone else from Malaga. When he's finished, a few people stand to support him and in respect of the Reverend: Mr. Newton and his family, and Willis Hurd. In the silence that follows, "It was as quiet as if the roof had been lifted off and the new snow falling outside had blanketed them all in soft down." The whole while, Turner's thoughts have been repeatedly returning to the sight of his father's eyes as he fell from the cliff.

Snow continues to fall in the days after the funeral. Turner helps Mr. Newton shovel out his house and store, while Mr. Newton acknowledges what he sees as Turner's motivation for helping: getting Mr. Newton to take him up to Pownal to see Lizzie. During their conversation, Mr. Newton reminds Turner that no matter what he will always be a minister's son – but that he (Mr. Newton) will help Turner get to Pownal. Eventually, the weather clears enough to make the trip possible, but after a long and sometimes uncomfortable journey, Turner and Mr. Newton arrive to find that Lizzie died ten days after arriving. Turner feels that "he would never see anyone he loved again, never see the ocean waves again. That he would always be cold, and the cold would be in him more than around him."

Analysis

In the aftermath of the narrative and emotional intensity of the previous chapter, things seem a little calmer in this chapter – at least on the surface. The confrontation in the church is relatively polite and restrained, but there is still the sense that Turner is feeling the effects of the "fire" lit in him by his father earlier in the narrative, a fire that continues to drive him to tell the truth and do what he believes to be the right thing. Here it's important to pause for a moment – think back to the beginning of the narrative – and question whether the Turner from the beginning of the story (frightened, nervous, unhappy) would have been able to do what the Turner in this chapter does. Events in this chapter indicate, perhaps more than any other, just how far Turner has come on his journey of transformation – or, to be more specific, his search for his own identity.

Other important elements in this chapter include the way in which the narrative reveals the death of Reverend Buckminster (the reference to the ashes falling on his grave is the first time that his death is explicitly referred to); the increased importance of Mr. Newton, a character only lightly glimpsed earlier in the story but who plays a very important role here; the continued support of Willis Hurd (which foreshadows developments in the Willis / Turner relationship in the following chapter); the metaphoric presence of nature (i.e. the blanketing effects of snow / winter associated with various aspects of death; and the continuation of Turner's being haunted by the image of his father's eyes. The resolution of this particular lingering narrative element occurs in the following, and final, chapter.

The final element of significance in this chapter is the revelation that Lizzie has died. There is the sense in the aftermath of this moment that because Lizzie has, for much of the novel, represented hope, possibility, courage, and nature for Turner, that all those aspects of his newly discovered identity have also died. The presence of winter, which represents death, reinforces this idea. But as the events of the next chapter reveal, there is still more for Turner to learn.

Discussion Question 1

The end of the chapter gives the reader the information that Lizzie has died, but she has been physically absent from its earlier events. She might, however, be described as being emotionally, morally, or spiritually present in what ways? How is her presence experienced? What has she left behind that affects the action of the chapter?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the narrative's thematic exploration of connection manifest in this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the metaphoric relationship between winter or snow and death as developed in this chapter.

Vocabulary

tribulation, prosperity, philanthropic, patina, dirge, vestibule, loll, talisman, paltry, expanse, wispy

Chapter 12

Summary

Narration moves somewhat quickly in the first part of the chapter, describing how Turner and his mother returned to the church (mostly ostracized, except for the company of the Newton family); how Turner and his mother finally moved fully into Mrs. Cobb's house (Turner keeping both "The Aeneid" and "The Origin of Species" handy); and how Turner refused an offer from an increasingly angry Mr. Stonecrop to buy the house. That refusal, narration reveals, was fueled in part by Turner's realization that what he saw in his father's eyes on the cliff and in the whale's eyes was the same thing: he just doesn't know what that was.

Narration also reveals how, suddenly, Mr. Stonecrop's business failed; how the shocked town gossiped about it; how, in the middle of it all, Turner and his mother returned to church permanently; how Deacon Hurd and his family were ruined after losing their investments in Mr. Stonecrop's schemes; and how the Hurds were shunned at church until Turner and his mother joined them in their pew, and eventually invited them to also live in the large, mostly empty house left by Mrs. Cobb.

Narration then describes how, in the summer that follows, Turner and Willis both got jobs on a lobster fishing crew; how they became good friends; and how Turner's strength and sailing skills both improved. One day, he decides to visit Malaga Island on his own. He takes a boat purchased from the Hurds and rows over, walking past the emptied graves and destroyed houses, and sitting for a long time on the shore. Eventually he leaves, letting the tide take him out to sea. On his way back, he encounters a pod of whales, getting close enough to them to both touch them and see into their eyes – and he finally realizes what he saw there initially, and in his father's eyes on the cliff edge. He grieves – for Lizzie, for Mrs. Hurd, for Mrs. Cobb, for his father, and for everyone on Malaga Island.

Eventually, Turner makes his way back home, unsure of who he'll ever be able to share his whale stories with … but then, as the night deepens, and as the first star appears in the sky, Turner tells Willis about the whales.

Analysis

This chapter contains both the book's climaxes – its narrative climax (the confrontation with Mr. Stonecrop in which Turner stands his ground, does not give way on his hard-earned sense of individual identity, and stands up for what his journey of transformation has led him to believe is the truth) and its thematic climax. Here it's important to note that while the book's theme relating to the search of individual identity does climax in the Turner / Stonecrop confrontation, the moment at which Turner has his second encounter with a whale is thematically even more significant. In fact, this climax

entwines two of the book's themes: its exploration of the power of connection, and its parallel exploration of the power of connection, both manifesting in the whale's eyes / presence and in Turner's realizations about his father and the connection between what he saw in his father's eyes and what he saw in the whale's eyes. Ultimately, this realization (the one that occurs when Turner is looking into the whale's eyes) enables Turner to reach out and at least try to connect with Willis: there is the sense that even if Willis doesn't fully understand what Turner has experienced, he will at least understand that Turner has had something important to him, and respect that. This is a key example of both the narrative's thematic interest in the power of change, and how the themes of connection and nature intertwine. It could be argued, in fact, that in his attempt to communicate with Willis, Turner is doing just what Lizzie did for him: here, the reader can also see in play the novel's thematic interest in the power of connection, or in the possibility of connection.

Other significant elements: the revelation of just how nasty Mr. Stonecrop actually is; the second-last moment of hard-won truth and courage for Turner (i.e. his standing up to Mr. Stonecrop one more time); and the last moment of such courage, his choice to share his insight about the whales with Willis. Then there is the compassion shown by the Buckminster family to the Hurd's (which is, arguably, more of the sort of true "Christian" compassion than had been shown to them); and Turner's release of grief for all those whose deaths he has lived through.

In the middle of all this, it's important to note how much page time, or narrative time, is given over to the description of Turner's visit to Malaga Island, and to his encounter with the whales, particularly since the events of the days, weeks, and months since the deaths of Lizzie and Reverend Buckminster are, in effect, summarized. This sense of a shift in storytelling pace draws attention to the climax: things move quickly, narrative wise, until the story gets to the situation that defines the thematic point it wants to make about the relationship between nature and humanity.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Turner keep both "The Aeneid" and "The Origin of Species" when he moves from one house to the other?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the metaphoric or symbolic connection between Turner's decision to tell Willis about the whales and the narrative description of the context of that decision (i.e. night, under the light of the first star)?

Discussion Question 3

Given what has passed in the story to this point, and given what the story has shown us about the change in Willis, what do you think his reaction to Turner's story about the whale will be?

Vocabulary

abscond, haggard, contagious, postlude, behemoth

Characters

Turner Buckminster

Turner is the book's central character and protagonist. As the story begins, Turner is in his early teens, newly arrived in the community of Phippsburg, on the north-east coast of the United States (i.e. New England). He is the son of the recently appointed minister at the First Congregational Church, and despite what narration suggests was a relatively significant degree of success establishing his own identity in the much larger, much more cosmopolitan city of Boston, Massachusetts (from where his family moved), Turner's identity in Phippsburg is primarily defined by his relationship to his father. This set of circumstances, along with other jarring aspects of his new life (including having to learn to play a different kind of baseball from the sort at which he was successful on Boston), establishes Turner's central struggle over the course of the narrative, one that simultaneously defines events of plot and important elements of theme: his struggle to re-establish his own identity.

Turner is portrayed as sensitive and thoughtful (several times in the narrative, his musings about people take him beyond consideration of their external characteristics and into wonderings about what their inner lives are like); simultaneously athletic (manifesting in his interest in baseball), (he plays the organ), and physically uncoordinated (he has difficulty learning to row a boat). Perhaps the most important aspect of his character (aside from the above-referenced determination to develop his own identity) is his curiosity, his interest in learning about people and situations on their own terms. This characteristic defines his relationship with the character whose name is prominent in the title; whose actions and character play important roles in shaping Turner's journey of transformation and identity; and who comes across, in the novel, as very much a child or force of nature (as opposed to Turner, who is a child of society): "colored" girl and outcast Lizzie (Bright) Griffin.

Lizzie Griffin

Lizzie is one of the book's two main characters. Lizzie is smart, outspoken, and honest; loving to her family (which consists solely of her grandfather and members of her community (i.e. the small, poor community of "colored" people living on Malaga Island, across the water from white, ambitious Phippsburg); and, in clear and vivid contrast to Turner, very much attuned to nature. This aspect of her character is important for two reasons. As an embodiment of nature, she is one of the most significant representations of one of the book's key themes (The Power of Nature). As such, she is a powerful and important catalyst for Turner's transformation from well-intentioned but naïve city kid into a young man who has come to understand truths both difficult (in terms of how humans treat each other) and inspiring (the relationship of nature to humanity).

There are several intriguing aspects to how Lizzie is portrayed in the book. In her first appearance, her ethnic background is not identified: she is just a girl exploring the water-side world around her. It’s not until the next chapter, when her race is portrayed as an issue for the prosperous white establishment of Phippsburg, that her race is even identified. It may be that the author wanted the reader to identify with Lizzie as a character – as a girl, curious and clever and sensitive – rather than immediately identifying her by her race. Whatever the reason, the choice to not identify Lizzie’s race off the top is an important component in the novel’s thematically and narratively central explorations of race.

Other important elements of Lizzie’s character include her wisdom (she makes several insightful observations about Turner, about the people of Phippsburg, and about nature), her adventurousness (i.e. coming to the conservative Mrs. Cobb’s house when she knows that chances are good it will not go well), and her tragic death which, in spite of causing Turner deep pain, is nevertheless an important, lingering element of his ultimate enlightenment and/or transformation.

Reverend Buckminster

The Reverend Buckminster is Turner's father, the newly appointed minister at the First Congregational Church in Phippsburg, Maine. Passionately faithful and a strict father, he is initially conservative and somewhat weak-willed, revealing himself to be easily led by stronger, more powerful personalities such as Mr. Stonecrop. As the narrative progresses, however, he reveals unexpectedly broad-minded aspects of his personality (allowing Turner to read Charles Darwin's controversial book on evolution) and a growing, deepening respect for his son that eventually results in the confrontation that ultimately leads to the Reverend's death later in the book.

His transformation can be seen as paralleling that of his son: while the Reverend Buckminster never becomes as open minded towards Lizzie and the other "colored" residents of Malaga Island, he does develop more compassion for them than the other, more actively racist members of the Phippsburg community, simultaneously affecting, and being affected by, the growing sensitivity to racism evidenced in his son.

Mrs;. Buckminster

Turner's mother, and the wife of Reverend Buckminster, is a relatively minor character. Her influence on the males in her life (her son and her husband) is very much in the background, but every once in a while the narrative brings her to the forefront, where she makes pointed, insightful comments and/or observations, or takes actions that suggest she is far from being an entirely passive minister's wife.

Deacon Hurd

Deacon Hurd is a junior minister at First Congregational, established in his position when Reverend Buckminster arrives. Hurd is clearly aligned with the powerful and wealthy members of the congregation: when his efforts to move Reverend Buckminister in the same direction end up failing, Deacon Hurd is in the forefront of the movement to have him removed from his position. He is affected by the downfall of those with whom he was aligned, but at the end of the narrative, is on the receiving end of the transcendent compassion displayed by the widowed Mrs. Buckminster.

Willis Hurd

Willis is Deacon Hurd's son, and initially a rival of Turner's, primarily on the baseball field but also on the streets: a fistfight between the two young men results in Willis getting a broken nose and Turner being humiliated. Eventually, however, Turner earns Willis' grudging respect, and the two become allies, eventually becoming friends.

Mrs. Hurd

Mrs. Hurd is mother to Deacon Hurd and grandmother to Willis Hurd. She is elderly, playful, and somewhat eccentric: most importantly, though, she is very much her own person, with her own thoughts, ideas, and ways of experiencing / practicing faith. She is an unexpected ally and/or inspiration to Turner: her forced removal to a home for the insane (a move engineered by her son) upsets him deeply.

Mrs. Cobb

Mrs. Cobb is an elderly, conservative, outspokenly opinionated resident of Phippsburg. At first she has a difficult relationship with Turner, catching him in what she sees as several acts of misbehavior. As the narrative progresses, however, and as Turner works through the punishment he receives for that misbehavior, Mrs. Cobb allows herself to be more vulnerable around him and to open herself to new possibilities. Obsessed with her own death - specifically, making sure her last words are recorded - Mrs. Cobb is initially a comic, somewhat vengeful character, but eventually becomes one of several characters in the book whose unexpected transformations add fuel and inspiration to Turner's.

Preacher Griffin

Preacher Griffin is Lizzie's grandfather and has been responsible for raising her ever since the death of her parents. Wise, compassionate, and possessed of a great power of personality and will when he is preaching, he is in many ways the leader of the

Malaga Island community, standing up for all the people there when they are confronted by the greed and ambition of the white citizens of Phippsburg.

Sheriff Elwell

The Sheriff enforces the law in Phippsburg - the law, that is, as laid down and defined by the town's more powerful citizens, particularly Mr. Stonecrop. The confrontation between Elwell and Reverend Buckminster, as the former is trying to enforce the law on Turner and the latter is determined to resist him, triggers the Reverend's eventual death.

Mr. Stonecrop

Mr. Stonecrop is a wealthy, powerful citizen of Phippsburg. He is ambitious for the town and for his own status within the town, determined to bring prosperity to both the community and his own businesses. He is portrayed throughout the narrative as greedy, insensitive, racist, and ultimately corrupt, disappearing from the town with money invested in his business proposals by several citizens, including Deacon Hurd.

The Tripps

The Tripp family lives with Lizzie and Preacher Griffin, along with several others, in the all-"colored" community on Malaga Island. In their first appearance, the youngsters in the family become playmates for Lizzie and the visiting Turner. Later in the narrative, as the pressure on the Malaga Island community to disperse intensifies, the Tripp family embarks on a dangerous, unpredictable journey to find a new home.

Mr. Eason

Mr. Eason is a minor character, an elderly citizen of Malaga Island whose determination to stay provides a moment or two of drama when he pulls a rifle on the white citizens of Phippsburg come to evict him and the island's other inhabitants.

Mr. Newton

Mr. Newton and his family are enlightened, liberal members of the Phippsburg community and of the First Congregational Church. The Newtons are virtually the only people in either community (the town or the church) who stand by Reverend Buckminster and Turner in the confrontations over what to do with / about the black citizens of Malaga; he also stands with Turner when the latter tries to face down Mr. Stonecrop in the battle over what to do with Mrs. Cobb's house; and he helps Turner search for Lizzie after she has been taken away.

Symbols and Symbolism

Baseball

Throughout the narrative, the game of baseball is an important metaphoric illustration of where Turner is situated on his journey of transformation. In the beginning, his inability to get used to a new way of playing (i.e. slow pitch instead of fastball) establishes him as an outsider in his new community; his practicing with Lizzie illustrates his capacity to learn new techniques of both the game and of friendship; and, eventually, his newly acquired skills reveal themselves in conjunction with his newly-acquired sense of compassion, insight, and sense of justice.

Mrs. Hurd's House

This house, with its shutters painted a defiantly different color from those on the other houses in Phippsburg, symbolizes the sense of freedom of its inhabitant (the elderly, widowed Mrs. Hurd). Both the house and the person who live there inspire thoughts of independence in Turner, and action taken to realize those thoughts.

Mrs. Cobb's House

In contrast to Mrs. Hurd's house, Mrs. Cobb's house is portrayed as dark, airless, and barely lived in by its owner - except, that is, when its apparently very significant place in the town's history (not to mention Mrs. Cobb's family) is inadvertently damaged by Turner. Eventually, however, Turner's taking possession of the home (after Mrs. Cobb leaves it to him in her will) and its eventual transformation into a manifestation of compassion (the destitute Hurd family is invited to live there by Turner's widowed mother) both symbolically echo Turner's own personal transformation into a broad-minded, compassionate young man.

The Civil War

The novel takes place in the early years of the 20th Century, only a few decades after the American Civil War which was fought over, among other things, the continuing presence of slavery in America. There are several references to the War in the book, primarily in relation to time: places or traditions that have, for example, existed since the War. More significantly, however, the references to the war awaken echoes of its being grounded in issues associated with racism, itself a key issue in the book's plot and themes.

Granite

Several times throughout the narrative, there are references to the presence of granite in the ground around Phippsburg and the coast. Granite is one of the hardest rocks on earth, solid and difficult to cut. There is the sense that the presence of so much granite is metaphorically representative of the moral solidity and immovability of the moral views of the people of Phippsburg: their attitudes, the novel seems to suggest, are as unmovable as the rock upon which it's built.

The Territories

Several times in the narrative, particularly in its early chapters, narration describes Turner as wanting to "light out" (i.e. travel to) The Territories, the unsettled (at the time) western part of the United States. For him, the Territories represent freedom and opportunity. Mrs. Turner makes a reference to the Territories in a similar light, while Lizzie is referred to as having been to the Territories and found her own sense of personal freedom and identity there.

Nature

Throughout the story, the presence and activity of nature plays an important role in triggering or defining Turner's discovery of his own sense of identity, his own sense of freedom, and his own sense of compassion. Two important specific manifestations of this thematically central narrative element are listed below, but perhaps the most significant nature-related element of the book is Lizzie (Bright) Griffin who, in many ways, is a personification of nature.

The Breeze

As part of its thematic contemplation of the power and influence of nature, there are several references in the book to characters (particularly Turner) being moved from place to place (particularly forbidden places) by the breeze, which seems to know where Turner wants to go and takes him there, even though he knows he's not supposed to. In a related incident, Turner actually speaks to the breeze, and it obeys his instructions, bringing Lizzie to him. The breeze is, by definition, an element of nature: therefore, its relationship to Turner can be seen as clearly, and symbolically, showing how Turner's transformation is defined by and shaped by nature.

Whales

The most significant manifestation of nature in the narrative is the presence of whales at two key points: when Turner is trying to find help for the injured Lizzie; and at the end of the novel when, after weeks of contemplating what that first encounter with the whales

actually meant, Turner has a second encounter that shows him exactly what it meant. His encounters with the whales, symbolic embodiments of the power of nature, take him further into his own relationship with the nature of the world, as well as into his own relationship with the best, compassionate side of human nature.

The Aeneid

The Aeneid is an epic poem first written and performed in Ancient Greece. It tells the story of the warrior Aeneas: first of his participation in the Trojan War, then in his wanderings and travels as he tried to get home from the war, and finally, after his return, his becoming the founder of Ancient Rome. The poem is the first text given to Turner by his home-schooling father, its hero and aspects of the story being seen, by Turner, as reflecting his own life and experiences.

The Origin of Species

This book, by ground-breaking evolutionary scientist Charles Darwin, is the second text given to turner for study by his father. Revolutionary at the time it was first written and published (and in some circles still controversial today), the book proposed (among other things) that human beings evolved from ancestors shared with apes and monkeys. The idea was initially met with both disbelief and skepticism, particularly by the Christian church and most particularly by conservative branches of that church such as the church to which Reverend Buckminster is minister. This means that for him to give Turner the book is a huge risk, and simultaneously revelatory of a surprising liberal side to the Reverend.

The Pownal Home for the Feeble Minded

This is the institution (today called a psychiatric hospital, in the past often called a mental hospital) to which several characters are sent: first Mrs. Hurd, and later Lizzie and the other inhabitants of Malaga Island. There is the sense that the Pownal Home, for the characters and therefore for the novel as a whole, represents a kind of imprisonment for being different, strong-willed, independent, or all the above. As such, it is a key symbolic element of the novel's thematic exploration of freedom vs. punishment.

Settings

America

The United States of America, with its violent history of race-defined conflict, is the broad strokes setting for the events of the story.

1912

Most of the action in the novel is set in the early years of the 20th Century - specifically, in the year 1912. This period in American history, only a few decades after the Civil War (which was fought over, among other things, the existence of slavery), saw the very earliest beginnings of a societal and/or cultural shift towards acknowledgement of the value of so-called minorities, including both "colored" and female citizens.

Phippsburg, Maine

This small coastal community, in one of the most north-easterly of the American states, is the main setting for much of the story. The community is portrayed as conservative, economically struggling, traditionally Christian, and in some ways morally corrupt. It is against these aspects of the town's identity against which Turner and Lizzie struggle to live and define their own, more openhearted and open-minded individual identities.

Malaga Island

This small, rocky island, just off the shore of Maine and across the water from Phippsburg is, as the novel begins, home to a small, poor community of "colored" settlers, some of whom are survivors of the American Civil War. While there is really nothing on the island that could be economically exploited (other than some rich clam beds), the citizens of Phippsburg are determined to claim Malaga as the property of the town: they want to expand its potential to attract tourists, and clearing the Malaga community will, in the eyes of the people of Phippsburg, increase the likelihood of the fulfillment of that potential.

On the Water

Several of the book's key encounters (including Turner's pivotal encounters with whales) take place on the water - specifically, the water between Malaga and Phippsburg, which in turn leads to the open sea. This use of water as a setting can be seen as a manifestation of the book's thematic interest in the power of nature: some of the book's most significant events take place on the water and away from any real civilization - in other words, in an entirely "natural" environment.

Themes and Motifs

Racism

Racial tensions between whites and “coloreds” form the backbone of much of the book’s plot and relationships. Specifically, the wealthy and ambitious white, citizens of the New England town of Phippsburg (where most of the book’s action is set) resent the presence of a group of “colored” settlers who live on a small island just off the nearby coast. The whites make an attempt to disguise their racist attitudes in 'concerns' about how the people of Malaga live (i.e. in poverty verging on squalor), but as tensions between the two communities intensify, the disguise disappears almost entirely, to the point where the de facto leader of the Phippsburg side, businessman Mr. Stonecrop, says in no uncertain terms that there will be no “Negro” living in Phippsburg, implying that the “Negroes” living on Malaga Island have to go simply BECAUSE they’re Negro.

Mr. Stonecrop’s sentiments are echoed in the attitudes and actions of other Phippsburg citizens, but not Turner, whose beliefs and choices manifest a contrasting, opposite side of racism that defines both his affectionate relationship with the “colored” Lizzie and his conflict with Mr. Stonecrop and the others: the idea that race doesn’t matter at all. This contrast, between Turner’s compassionate race-blindness and Mr. Stonecrop’s blinkered race-prejudice makes the latter more distasteful or vivid to both the reader and to the characters in the book. Awareness of the fact that, as the author notes, the story is based on actual events and circumstances makes the portrait of Mr. Stonecrop and his cronies even more compelling and, in a significant way, more relevant to contemporary readers: issues of racism still exist in America and around the world, meaning that the message of compassion as practiced by Turner continues to have resonance and will continue to do so as long as those of any race continue to see themselves as superior simply because of the color of their skin

The Power of Connection

There are several ways in which this theme manifests throughout the narrative. There are immediate and defining connections between Turner and characters like Mrs. Hurd, Preacher Griffin, and Mr. Newton; there are connections that are at first based in hostility but which eventually evolve into something more positive and compassionate (like those between Turner and Mrs. Cobb, as well as that between Turner and Willis Hurd); and there are connections that are immediately powerful but mysterious, such as Turner’s connection with the whales. This latter is particularly important, in that it also relates to another of the book’s themes and, as such, seems to make the thematic statement that change resulting from connection is a natural experience and/or state of being.

Meanwhile, the connection between Turner and the people who might reasonably be expected to have the strongest connection to him, his parents is initially something of a

negative one, particularly in the novel's early stages and particularly when it comes to his father. The negativity that exists between them results from a degree of hostility from the Reverend and his son, who each seem to resent the dominant characteristics of the other. Later, though, there are moments of unexpected positive connection, made at first through books (i.e. the books the Reverend gives Turner to study) and then through a shared recognition that Turner is going to do what he believes to be right no matter what. The mysterious, non-verbal aspects of their connection appear in the final moments of Chapter 10 as the Reverend is falling off the cliff, but it isn't until the very end of the novel, at the point when Turner has a long awaited second encounter with a whale, that Turner understands the transcendent qualities of that connection, and is forever changed.

By far, however, the most significant connection in the book is in the relationship between Turner and Lizzie, whose connection when they first meet is immediate, strong, and mutual. The development of their relationship and its effect on Turner in particular is, again, a vivid example of how connection triggers growth and change, a circumstance that manifests in both fairly obvious ways (i.e. through Lizzie's teaching Turner how to be a better baseball player) and in more subtle ways (i.e. Lizzie's introduction of Turner to the possibility that race can be a non-issue). The biggest changes in Turner also result directly from his connection with Lizzie: this is his awakening to the power of honesty, the need for respect for fellow human beings, and the need to have, and live according to, one's own individual identity. This last is a central element of Turner's book-long journey of transformation, and as such forms the backbone of the novel's third major theme.

The Pursuit of Individual Identity

In the book's early chapters, Turner's personal identity is primarily defined by being his father's son – or, more specifically, the son of the new minister. He feels there are particular ways that he is expected to act, ways that don't necessarily agree with how he feels or who he wants to be. He has, at this point, little or no identity of his own. This begins to change early on, when the eccentric but perceptive Mrs. Hurd speculates shrewdly on how it must feel to be the minister's son, and the third male in his family in a row to have the same name.

Mrs. Hurd's implied recognition of his need to have his own identity is the first step in Turner's journey of transformation, from someone who has no idea who he really is to someone who has made important discoveries about what he does and doesn't believe; what he does and doesn't value; and how he does or doesn't want to live his life. Over the course of the narrative, Turner becomes more and more of his own person, more and more clear about who he is and how he wants to live, and, perhaps more importantly, more and more determined to stand up for himself and protect his newly found, hard won individual identity.

Here it's important to note the contrast between what happens to the similarly independent, similarly individual Mrs. Hurd, and what happens to Turner. The former is

seen by her son and the town in general as inappropriate, unpredictable, and as someone whose lack of conformity is both something to be ashamed of and something to suppress. Hence, she is sent (albeit for other reasons as well) into what amounts to a life-ending exile. Turner, on the other hand, has a very different ending: he survives the pressures of several of those around him to conform, survives and thrives, perhaps because he is younger, stronger, and more resilient than Mrs. Hurd, or perhaps because he has more allies and supporters (primarily Lizzie, but eventually both his father and mother). Whatever the reason, Turner's story is, on a major level, one of a triumph over the pressures to conform: as he becomes increasingly sure of himself, he becomes increasingly free, which allows him to be more sure, which allows him to be more free, and so on.

Freedom vs. Imprisonment

The ability for an individual to be free also plays an important, thematically significant role in the story, while the struggle for characters to be free is a defining element in the book's plot and/or action.

There are several examples, images, and references to imprisonment throughout the narrative: Mrs. Hurd's reference to the III at the end of Turner's name (i.e. Turner Buckminster III); Turner being "imprisoned" (i.e. grounded) in his home as a consequence for breaking his father's rules; Turner being locked into the attic of Mrs. Cobb's house on the night of the white raid on the "colored" settlement on Malaga Island; and the imprisonment of those who won't conform to rules of behavior set for them (i.e. Mrs. Hurd, Lizzie and the other Malaga inhabitants).

There are also references that are and more metaphorical: Turner being "imprisoned" by how people expect him to behave; and, in a similar vein, Lizzie and the other inhabitants of Malaga being "imprisoned", in terms of what they're allowed to do and where they're allowed to live, by the attitudes and actions of the white citizens of Phippsburg. What all these references to imprisonment suggest is that the development of a strong, secure, independent sense of identity is dangerous and worthy of punishment – unless someone develops a strong enough sense of identity, entwined with a similarly strong drive to be free, that enables the taking of a stand against imposed control and rules (i.e. imprisonment). In other words, a sense of freedom, the novel suggests, is a fundamental component of a strong sense of individual identity, and the capacity to live according to that identity.

It could be argued that Lizzie achieves a sense of identity in spite of being "imprisoned" by the racism-defined attitudes of the white people of Phippsburg. It's important to note, however, that as strong a personality as she is, Lizzie is only as free as she can be within the boundaries imposed upon her by racism, poverty, and her gender: a bird in a cage is only very slightly free, to fly from perch to perch. In a similar way, Lizzie is only slightly free, a circumstance that inspires determination to make her more free and become more free himself.

The Power of Nature

All the above-referenced themes are related to, and defined by, the novel's exploration of the power of nature. For example, considerations of racism, and more specifically the mirror image of it as defined by the Lizzie / Turner relationship, are defined by the fact that that relationship is transcendent of race, ultimately being defined by their natures as curious, open-hearted young people who just see in each other qualities they want to be around more often. The relationship is one of human nature, rather than societal nature. The power of connection, meanwhile, and as previously discussed, manifests most significantly in connections between individuals and nature – specifically, between Turner and the whales (with which Lizzie has also had encounters, encounters that, in turn, inform her relationship with Turner).

At the same time, Turner's search for an individual identity is, in the book's narrative perspective, defined and shaped by nature: narration draws a number of connections between Turner's independence of spirit and hunger for truth and the raw, unpredictable power of nature (i.e. stormy weather, watery currents, whales, snow). These experiences of nature, in turn, help Turner draw closer to a stronger, clearer sense of individual identity: here again, being pushed along by the breeze equals being pushed along by his drive for the truth, a drive fueled both by compassion and curiosity … the breeze is a metaphor for, and an externalization of, both. Finally, and in terms of the theme of freedom vs. imprisonment, the relationship to nature is simple and clear: nothing is freer than nature, in spite of humanity's constant, eons-old attempts to conquer it. Turner's allowing himself to be moved by the breeze, drenched by rain, steered by currents, and inspired by an animal (i.e. a whale) that the book suggests is uniquely attuned to nature indicates not only his desire for freedom, but his awareness (at times conscious, at times instinctive) that that freedom comes from acknowledging nature's power, embracing it, and going along for the ride it provides.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the third person limited point of view – that is, the storytelling focuses on the experiences, perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and reactions of a single character without exploring those of other characters. It's important to note, however, that for the first couple of chapters, until Turner and Lizzie meet for the first time, this point of view shifts between the two of them. Approximately three quarters of Chapter One and a half to two thirds of Chapter Two are told from Turner's point of view, with the remainder of each chapter focusing on Lizzie. As the narrative moves into Chapter Three, however, the shifts in point of view cease, and from then on the story is told from Turner's perspective alone. This allows the reader to connect more thoroughly and deeply with his journey of transformation, and to identify more strongly with him at the story's key moments.

In terms of thematic point of view, there is the clear sense that, as referred to in "Themes", the book's commentaries on racism, the power of connection, the search for individual identity, and freedom vs. imprisonment, are all connected to a single thematic thread: the book's portrayal of the subtle, inescapable, ruthlessly truthful power of nature. This is the book's central point of view in terms of theme: that nature in all its manifestations (human nature, animal nature, weather, the sky, the stars) is ultimately and inevitably more powerful than any human prejudice, any human failing, and perhaps even any human dream or ideal. Nature, the book's action and themes contend, is the one inescapable, reliable source of truth in human existence, and a truer life is lived as a result of reaching for, attaining, and respecting connection with it.

Language and Meaning

The first point to note about the book's use of language is its vocabulary, which is fairly straightforward and somewhat contemporary in tone: even though the story is set in the early 1900's, there is little or no attempt to give the characters any sort of "old fashioned" style of talking. There is an almost contemporary feel to the conversation between Turner and Lizzie in particular: neither slangy nor stuffy, there is the sense that when it comes to the way the younger characters talk, the author has carefully shaped the language to enable the greatest possible opportunity for connection with contemporary readers. The language of the older characters is a little more formal, a little more "old fashioned", but there is little or no sense of disconnect between the two styles.

A related point has to do with the terms used to identify Lizzie's race - specifically, "colored" and "Negro". Here it's important to note the novel's setting in time, the early 1900's, a period in which the terms "black" and/or "African/American" had not yet come into common usage. Both "colored" and "Negro" were, at the time, derogatory terms

that have since fallen out of usage for exactly that reason: their connotations of racism-defined attitudes. The use of them here, however, is appropriate for the historical period, the situation, and the subject matter.

A related point has to do with the book's occasional poeticism, which occurs almost exclusively in narration. There are places in which the imagery, emotion, and visual descriptions, particularly when it comes to the book's exploration of nature, are written with a concentrated intensity, vividness, and specificity that reads almost as a poem, rather than as prose. This functions in two ways: it somehow reinforces the narrative's thematic emphasis on nature, evoking its power without going into too many technically minded specifics of what exactly is happening; and second, it creates just the slightest feel of magic about the piece, a shimmer of fairy tale that contrasts with, but never softens, the more harsher aspects of, for example, the racist attitudes of some of the characters.

Finally, there are points in the narrative at which language restrains the truth of an event or an experience just slightly, holding it back, concealing it until a moment when that truth can be revealed for greatest impact. The most significant example of this occurs late in the narrative, when descriptions of the airborne ashes drifting from the burning Malaga Island gently lead the reader into the revelation that Reverend Buckminster has died. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, the technique is used to particular effect, sharpening the edges of reader / narrative surprise just slightly.

Structure

For the most part, the book's structure is linear and straightforward. Action leads to reaction leads to action; cause leads to effect leads to the next cause; Event A moves into Event B into Event C, and so on. There is also a clear sense of overall structure, what some might call traditional structure: a beginning (in which circumstances, characters, and conflicts are established); a middle (in which all the above move through a period of intensifying complication); a climax (a point of greatest emotional, narrative, and/or thematic intensity); and a denouement or falling action, in which the final questions raised by the narrative are answered; in which the aftermath of the climax is experienced; and in which the characters come to the end of this particular chapter in their lives, preparing to move on to the next.

Here it's important to note that while other stories embed the narrative and thematic climaxes in the same moment, this book does something slightly different: it places the two climaxes at slightly different points. As noted elsewhere, the book's narrative climax (that is, the climax of its plot, which also has a climax in one of its themes) is in the final chapter confrontation between Turner and Mr. Stonecrop. The thematic climax, on the other hand (which brings to a close two of the work's major scenes) occurs a few paragraphs later: Turner's encounter with the whale. In this moment, both Turner and the reader realize what all the events, all the relationships, all the disappointments and successes that have gone before have led to and actually mean: the insight that the greatest gift or power in existence is that of connection with nature, and the insight into

what it means to be alive that springs from it. That connection, that relationship with nature, manifests here with an animal, but throughout the book also manifest in connection with people and with acts of nature itself – rain, snow, currents in the ocean.

Quotes

Turner Buckminster had lived in Phippsburg, Maine, for almost six whole hours. He didn't know how much longer he could stand it. ... 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.
-- Narration (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote clearly sets up the central character (protagonist) at the beginning of his journey of transformation: the story that follows defines how this strong, vividly defined perspective changes, and what causes it to change as Turner develops an identity defined more by who he is than by who he is expected to be.

Mrs. Cobb was so alone, sitting in a dark room as hot as Beelzebub and waiting for Death's dart to come so that she could say the one thing people would remember her for - knowing all the while that there would be no-one there to hear it.
-- Narration (chapter 2)

Importance: This is the first of several of Turner's humanizing insights into the initially frightening / judgmental people of the town, evidence of his awakening ability to make connections with the inner lives of the people he encounters.

I am not my own, he thought, but belong body and soul to every parishioner in Phippsburg who might have a word to say about me to my father. And there seemed to be plenty of words and plenty of parishioners to say them.
-- Narration (Turner) (chapter 3)

Importance: Here Turner reflects on his status as a watched and judged son of a preacher - one who, at least in his own mind, is desperate to be free of that watchfulness and judgment. There is a sense here of metaphoric imprisonment, and again, a longing for both freedom and an independent identity.

...they followed the curve of the beach past the schoolhouse ... past more shingled one-room homes, where there was always someone at the window to wave to Lizzie and nod to Turner - the kind of nod you might give to someone who didn't belong but might, in time, come to belong ...
-- Narration (chapter 4)

Importance: This quote describes part of Turner's first visit to Malaga Island, its reference to belonging foreshadowing the deepening of Lizzie's and Turner's friendship and the eventual, increasingly desperate attempts made by Turner to keep that friendship alive.

He knew that he was in the middle of something much larger than himself, and not just larger in size. It was like being in the middle of a swirling universe that could swamp him in a moment but had no desire to. He might put out his hand into the maelstrom and become a part of it.

-- Narration (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote is both literal (in the sense that it describes Turner's experience of calm with whales in the aftermath of Lizzie's accident and his struggles with the tide) and metaphorical (in the sense that it symbolically refers to the struggle for freedom that he and Lizzie are both facing, each in their different ways).

Turner stood, and it suddenly seemed to him that his father was much smaller than he had been before. There simply wasn't as much of him as he remembered.
-- Narration (chapter 5)

Importance: Once again, Turner experiences an insight into larger experiences of humanity that he hadn't had before: he sees his father in a way that up to this point in his life and in the novel, he would never have thought possible. He is making a connection with his father's inner identity at the same time as he is developing a connection with his own.

Turner wondered if his father had ever played baseball, had ever hit a fly into air so blue that it hurt his eyes to look at it. He wondered if his father had ever joked around, out-loud lied, gotten into a fight and pushed another kid's nose off to the side, jumped off a cliff about as high as a middle-sized pine into an oncoming froth of wave. Probably not.
-- Narration (chapter 7)

Importance: As Turner starts to ask questions of himself about who his father was and is and what relationship they actually have, narration lists some of the things he (Turner) has done that he sees as defining his own identity. The juxtaposition suggests that Turner is wondering how much alike he and his father really are.

You don't have to be a minister's son all the time ... Turner had never thought he could ever, at any time, be anything else. The thought shivered him - as if he had almost touched a whale.
-- 8 (chapter 8)

Importance: The pieces of the puzzle of who he is and can be start to come together more strongly for Turner with this quote, which comes in response to a surprising comment from Mrs. Cobb and which, along with other events in Chapter 8, awaken Turner more strongly than ever to the idea that he isn't just his father's son

Turner felt that he was hovering in some unearthly place. With the snow and the spray from the waves wafting against the boat, they seemed to be in neither air nor water, or maybe in both, and the queasy, uneasy feeling came upon him that he didn't know where he belonged - and wasn't sure he could find his way.
-- Narration (chapter 9)

Importance: Here the description of Turner's experience while crossing the water to Lizzie on Malaga Island can be seen as metaphorically commenting on his emerging deeper perceptions at this time in the story. There is also a powerful presence of nature

here, as there is throughout the novel, that presence providing symbolic insight into the experiences and transformations of the characters.

'What would you have me say, Mr. Stonecrop? That my own boy shouldn't find shelter for someone in need? That my own boy shouldn't care for the outcast? ... By God, that my own boy shouldn't stand up - as his father should have stood up - against the money of the town when it set about to destroy a community that never harmed it, merely for the sake of tourists from Boston? Is that what you'd have me say to him?
-- Reverend Buckminster (chapter 10)

Importance: In this quote, Reverend Buckminster defends Turner's choice to give the house to Lizzie and others from Malaga Island to Mr. Stonecrop, a gesture that indicates just how much he (Reverend Buckminster) has changed over the course of the story.

...Turner did not even pause. Not for a second. He was on top of the sheriff, pounding at anything he could pound at, leaping back when the sheriff brushed him off, battling like Aeneas, knowing that the battle he fought was a hopeless one, and crying, crying, crying at the hopelessness.
-- Narration (chapter 11)

Importance: In the aftermath of his discovery of what has happened to Lizzie and the other residents of Malaga, Turner attacks the sheriff. Here the narrative draws tight metaphorical parallels between Turner and Aeneas, the legendary and mythical Greek hero whose story Turner has both been studying and been inspired by.

He had come to the last heady page of 'The Origin of Species'', had felt a thrill crawling up his back and into his gut with the closing sentence of praise and wonder: 'From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.' His father had looked up as he closed the book ... 'Who knows where these ideas will take us,' he had said. '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.
-- Narration (chapter 11)

Importance: Narration here describes Turner's excitement at coming to the end of Darwin's "Origin of Species", and the perhaps surprising connection he experienced with his father as they shared their reaction to its challenging conclusion.

The world turns and the world spins, the tide runs in and the tide runs out, and there is nothing in the world more beautiful and more wonderful in all its evolved forms than two souls who look at each other straight on. And there is nothing more woeful and soul-saddening than when they are parted. Turner knew that everything in the world rejoices in the touch, and everything in the world laments in the losing.
-- Narration (chapter 12)

Importance: This quote sums up both one of the book's mysteries (i.e. what is the

meaning of the whales?) and two of its primary themes (i.e. the power of nature, the power of connection).