

“HE HAD THE WORDS”:  
THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN THE FICTION OF BRUCE BROOKS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
JEROME FOXWORTHY: POWER THROUGH WORDS.....	9
BIX RIVERS: POWER DESPITE WORDS.....	20
ASA: WORDS AND SILENCE RECONCILED.....	34
CONCLUSION.....	44
WORKS CITED.....	48

## ABSTRACT

Bruce Brooks, an award-winning author of adolescent literature, is most often classified as a writer of adolescent sports fiction. Critics like Chris Crowe tend to regard his works as typical of adolescent literature and, therefore, expect Brooks's main characters to reconcile with authority. Although Brooks does focus on characters who are in conflict with authority, he does not always show these characters as finally accepting their prescribed roles. In The Moves Make the Man and What Hearts, Brooks creates two similar narratives in which his main characters seek to find truth through their control of discourse. As Roberta Trites says is typical of adolescent literature, both books depict adolescents who are exploring their ability to exert power. Applying the philosophical theories of Michel Foucault to The Moves Make the Man and What Hearts shows that the characters in these novels are conflicted by their desire for power and their need for freedom. They attempt to attain freedom through confession but find that freedom is not available without submission. In The Moves Make the Man, narrator Jerome Foxworthy depends on his use of words to overcome the oppressive authority of institutional discourses while Bix Rivers exercises control of the discourse through his silence. Although both boys are searching for freedom, neither is willing to relinquish authority. While these characters need to exert power, that power is dependent on their relationships with others. In What Hearts, Asa Hill uses discourse to structure his world and to create his identity. Asa comes to understand that he must use words and silence; and he recognizes that while he can assert power, he does not necessarily want to do so. His final acceptance of a less authoritative role within the institutional discourse of the family fulfills the established expectation of adolescent literature.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the eighth grade students of Tabor City Middle School (1994-2003).

## INTRODUCTION

In 1984, Bruce Brooks stepped into the world of adolescent and children's literature with the publication of his first novel, The Moves Make the Man. Like many other authors of adolescent literature, Brooks intended his first work for an adult audience. However, after reading the manuscript, an insightful editor at Harper and Row chose to refer the book to the children's division, which quickly accepted it for publication. Within a year of its debut, the novel had received numerous awards including the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award and being named as a Newbery Honor Book. As for Brooks, he was being hailed as a rising star – and already being identified as “a sports writer for young adult boys” (Crowe, “Bruce Brooks” 178).

Surprised by the immediacy and the specificity of such labeling, Brooks adamantly refused to be restricted by that identity. He followed the success of Moves with Midnight Hour Encores, a novel that features a female musician as its protagonist. Garnering even more widespread awards than his first novel, Midnight Hour Encores solidified Brooks's position as a writer of merit and indicated the range of his talents. Proclaiming to write about what interests him, Brooks has proceeded to broaden his scope to include short stories, nature writings, and biographies. Despite the variety of his topics, critics are most quick to note his ongoing interest in sports, and they continue to consider Brooks primarily a writer of adolescent sports literature. However, Michael Cart has asserted that it is not the recurring interest in sports that best characterizes Brooks's fiction; it is instead his continued attempt to examine, define, and perhaps even manipulate the truth (79).

Just as Brooks retains the reputation of a sports writer, The Moves Make the Man has remained his most frequently discussed work. Indeed such attention is justified, for Moves well illustrates the complexity of Brooks's writing. The book can understandably be classified as a sports novel. The novel's events focus on two talented athletes, Jerome Foxworthy and Bix Rivers. Narrator Jerome loves the game of basketball so much so that he fails to appreciate the merits of other sports until he sees Bix playing baseball. Jerome is immediately drawn to Bix because he recognizes in this shortstop an athlete of equal skill. Unfortunately, Bix's stepfather does not share this admiration for Bix's talent. Once his stepfather stops him from playing baseball, Bix must learn a new game. As Jerome teaches him to play basketball, the boys develop a tense yet binding friendship.

Sports are important to Moves in that they provide the means of drawing together these two central characters, but the novel's focus is these characters, not their game. Jerome and Bix face challenges greater than winning on the court or the playing field. A black seventh-grader living in Wilmington, North Carolina during the 1960's, the academically successful Jerome is forced to be the first black student to integrate the town's white junior high school. There he faces blatant racism and the isolation of being an "only" (82). As he struggles to adjust to this unwelcoming school environment, Jerome's security is even more seriously shaken by his mother's life-threatening accident. Because his father had died before he was born, Jerome has grown up being totally dependent on the unwavering support of his mother. After her accident, he has to tackle life on his own, and he begins to assert his independence. However, as his mother recovers, Jerome understands that her influence and love offer him renewed strength.

Life is even more difficult for Bix. While Jerome yearns for security, Bix searches for stability. Like Jerome, he too is a fatherless child who desperately loves his mother, but Bix's mother possesses none of the inner strength that characterizes Jerome's mother. Instead, Bix's mother is a mentally ill woman who seeks reassurance from Bix. Now remarried, she is the source of constant conflict between Bix and the stepfather; both compete for her attention, and each seeks to prove he is the one she loves most. Following her second suicide attempt, she is hospitalized, and Bix is left to live alone with the stepfather he hates. Fighting against his own mental fragility, Bix must find his source of strength within himself.

Thus The Moves Make the Man seems to fit perfectly into that category of adolescent literature that Chris Crowe has termed the sportlerroman. Crowe defines the sportlerroman as "a form of the traditional Bildungsroman apprenticeship novel, where the protagonist is an athlete struggling to maturity" (More Than a Game 21). Emphasizing that the "central conflicts of the sportlerroman lie beyond athletics," Crowe uses Moves to exemplify just such a novel (21). Crowe's argument hinges on his belief that Moves is the prototypical Bildungsroman. His classification of the novel as sportlerroman serves merely to distinguish that Jerome is an athlete.<sup>1</sup>

Crowe's analysis of Moves neglects the novel's greater complexity. Yes, it is an adolescent novel, its main characters are athletes, and it is a novel of development. But The Moves Make the Man is not necessarily the prototype of adolescent literature nor of the Bildungsroman. According to Roberta Seelinger Trites, the typical adolescent novel is "predicated on demonstrating characters' ability to grow into acceptance of their

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<sup>1</sup> Crowe identifies Jerome as the narrator and the protagonist. Hence he limits his discussion to Jerome's coming of age and does not question whether and/or how Bix undergoes a similar process of growth.



environment” and “teaches adolescents how to exist within the (capitalistically bound) institutions that necessarily define teenagers’ existence” (19). Trites also argues against the use of the term Bildungsroman as it is broadly applied by Crowe and many of the critics. She stipulates that the Bildungsroman is specifically a work that depicts a protagonist who “[matures] into adulthood” and points out that in most adolescent novels “the protagonist . . . is rarely an adult by the end of the narrative” (13, 14). She, therefore, stresses that most adolescent novels should be classified as Entwicklungsromane or novels of development. She believes such a distinction to be necessary for the effective analysis of the “relationship between power and growth that shapes adolescent literature” (13).

Other scholars of adolescent literature, however, accept and advocate the broader application of Bildungsroman. In Novels of Initiation: A Critical Guidebook for Teaching Literature to Adolescents, David Peck writes about the Bildungsroman as a novel of initiation and defines the term as “a ‘novel of education’ in which the central character learns about the world as he or she grows into it” (xi). He further defines the process of initiation as taking characters “from the protected and ideal world of childhood into the real and often discouraging (at least for adolescents) world of adulthood” (xix). Peck believes that the initiation process allows characters to “gain a realistic recognition of those goals [they] can achieve as adults and conversely those values and modes of behavior that [they] should discard” (xix). By the simplest application, Moves cannot fit Peck’s definition of the Bildungsroman as a novel of initiation because by the novel’s end, neither Jerome nor Bix has made the transition into adulthood; moreover, while

these characters may have begun a process of outgrowing their childhoods, neither of those childhoods has been ideal.

As Michael Cart has suggested, Brooks's most common theme is the search for truth (79). This theme is central to Moves as the novel focuses on characters who are not only seeking the truth, but who believe they can define truth through their use of words. As this theme develops, it becomes clear that The Moves Make the Man departs from the traditional construction of the adolescent novel. In its exploration of truth and its relationship to discourse and power, this novel does not bring its main characters to a reconciliation with authority nor to an acceptance of institutional discourses.<sup>2</sup>

In order to understand the novel's quest to define truth, it is helpful to examine the novel in relation to Michel Foucault's theories of the relationship of truth, power, and confession<sup>3</sup>. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault analyzes the nature of power and maintains that it cannot be a force of subservience, subjugation, or domination (92). Instead he says that power "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (93).

Thus Foucault says that people cannot view power as an external force that acts upon them. They must instead see it as an internal force that naturally exists within them and within all of their interpersonal and institutional relationships. Understanding power in such inherent and relational terms voids the belief that power can be "acquired, seized, or shared" and enforces the principle that "power is exercised from innumerable points"

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<sup>2</sup> Institutional discourse refers to the language and practices of a given social institution.

<sup>3</sup> In Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature, Roberta Trites draws from the work Foucault and other philosophers to frame her discussion of power within adolescent literature.

(94). Existing within these societal and institutional relationships, power helps to shape their internal structures.

Since power is not a force that can be possessed and does not originate from an external source, authority can be claimed only by attempting to control the power relationships. For Foucault, power and knowledge are inextricably linked. Those in authority have historically sought to claim power by controlling the discourses of society. By regulating what is spoken, society is able to control what is known.

Confession is one way in which society has attempted to exert such a control of discourse. Explaining that “Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth,” Foucault again highlights the connection between power and knowledge (59). Even as one who confesses does so with the intent of discovering truth, the confessor is yielding within the power relationship. Relinquishing the most private knowledge, the confessor allows the one receiving the confession to be in the position of dominance.

Therefore, Foucault’s theories rest upon the premise that society has been erroneously taught to believe that confession liberates even as it empowers. He believes that the two functions do not coexist; instead “confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom” (60). Consequently, Foucault points to the power of silence.

Within The Moves Make the Man, the main characters are engaged in more than a quest for truth. Each is overwhelmingly concerned with how he can find – or perhaps even create – truth. Both boys are searching for freedom and power through truth, and each has concluded that language will provide the route to discovery. Jerome, the novel’s

narrator, treasures the expressed word and believes that he can find truth only by telling the story, not just his story but Bix's also. In this way, he hopes to liberate himself while exerting power. Because Bix also recognizes the value of words, he carefully monitors his use of use of them. Just as Jerome is motivated by his desire to share the words, Bix looks for freedom and power through their concealment. Jerome speaks, but Bix remains silent. The fundamental question of the novel is whether either of the characters can have freedom and power. Can these characters find truth through their control of language?

This search for truth in The Moves Make the Man can also be better understood through comparison with What Hearts, a work Brooks published almost ten years later. Here he employs a series of four short stories to construct the narrative of Asa Hill, another young boy who strives to understand his relationship to truth. Using a limited third-person point of view, Brooks seems to be restructuring the narratives of The Moves Make the Man. He gives Asa the same troubled background as Bix. Both characters must face the loss of a father and an unsettling move from Washington, D.C. to eastern North Carolina. Both characters struggle to deal with a mother's mental illness and a stepfather's volatility. And they both seek refuge through sports.

However, Asa is not merely another version of Bix; he is the merging of Bix and Jerome. While he does share Bix's background, he is not threatened by Bix's mental instability. Instead he possesses the intelligence and the self-confidence of Jerome. More importantly, he possesses Jerome's appreciation for the expressed word. His search for truth brings him to understand the relationship of words and silence. His complete narrative, while technically not a novel, comes far closer to being the typical adolescent

work since in depicting his development, What Hearts brings Asa to an acceptance of authority and institutional discourses.

## JEROME FOXWORTHY: POWER THROUGH WORDS

As the narrator of The Moves Make the Man, Jerome Foxworthy begins his narrative by posing the question, “Now Bix Rivers has disappeared, and who do you think is going to tell his story but me?” (Moves 3). Immediately Jerome establishes the core beliefs that seem to guide him through this work. First is that Bix not only has a story, but also a need for that story to be told. Second and perhaps more important is Jerome’s insistence that he should be the one to tell Bix’s story. Yet his intent is to do more than simply relate a series of events. As he explains, Bix’s stepfather and other members of the community have already assumed that task. However, Jerome deems their versions of the events to be “creepy jive,” and he has become “angry at the lies being told” (4). While he acknowledges that there is a degree of accuracy to these other accounts of Bix, Jerome explains that these stories are insufficient because “those people did not understand worth a penny” (4). Repeatedly asserting that “I can tell you,” he distinguishes his narrative by declaring, “It’s me gets to tell the truth” (3, 4, and 5). With this statement, Jerome implies that truth is based not in accuracy but in understanding.

Just as it appears evident that his real purpose is to expose the truth, Jerome points to the complexity of his narrative by suggesting that Bix may not be the primary figure in this story. In fact, he cannot clearly delineate his story from that of Bix. He writes: “That is when and why I decided to write this story of Bix. Of Bix and me, mostly, I guess it has to be” (5). For all his intentions to share the truth about Bix, Jerome indicates that his concern with truth is deeply personal. Although he claims he can “tell the truth,” he also says, “I may not understand it all yet myself” (5). He believes he can do so by “writing this out” (5). Jerome’s free admission of confusion and his expressed

faith in his story to bring understanding reveal his confidence in narrative. He looks to “narrative as an ordering principle in a disorderly universe” (Lindner 2). Through his narrative, he intends to pull together his fragmented knowledge and construct a coherent understanding. Jerome hopes to be empowered by the telling of this story; if he is successful, this process will lead to an understanding of not only Bix but also of their strange friendship. What Jerome is really seeking to do is use words to uncover the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Jerome’s act of narration should not be read as merely an exercise of self-exploration. Jerome is not writing this story for himself; he is keenly aware of an outside audience. In his opening sentence, he addresses his reader as “you,” and he maintains this awareness of audience throughout the novel (Moves 3).<sup>5</sup> His audience is a key element of his successful telling of the story. Having already explained that he is entering a larger discourse that centers on Bix, Jerome wants to reveal what only he can tell; his narrative functions much like a confession. Jerome seems to be illustrating Foucault’s notion that society has been conditioned to believe truth can be attained through confession.

No one has asked for either Bix’s or Jerome’s story, yet Jerome is compelled to write. According to Foucault, such a compulsion is predictable in Western societies where confessions are often “spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative” (History 59). Indeed, Foucault says confessions often reveal “the things people write books about” (59). Jerome chooses to write his story and regards this undertaking as an

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<sup>4</sup> In “Structuralism: Decoding Signs in The Moves Make the Man,” John Noelle Moore analyzes Jerome’s construction of the narrative. Moore also cites the importance of truth in Jerome’s narrative, but his focus is on how Jerome uses words to help the reader discover truth.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome’s narration is extradiegetic in that he speaks “to a reader who exists outside of [his] own story” (Trites 71-2).

assertion of his authority. He will prove the stepfather and other adults wrong about Bix, thus the importance of his audience. However, in responding to what Foucault calls an “imperious compulsion,” Jerome’s narrative can be seen as placing himself in a constrained position within the “confessional discourse,” for confession gives authority to “the one who listens and says nothing” (62).

Within his narrative, Jerome describes two particular points at which he finds it necessary to confess; both of these confessions take place within the structure of the family. The first follows shortly after Bix’s emotional breakdown in the home economics class. Having witnessed his new friend’s mental instability, Jerome describes the event by saying “I didn’t know too,” and he insists that he “hardly knew” how deeply the incident had affected him (Moves 105, 112). Although Jerome “did not even know [he] was hiding anything,” he finds relief by confessing to his mother (112). Through “telling her all about Bix,” Jerome determines that he is “okay” (112). This confession allows him to express his overwhelming concerns for Bix, yet it also frees Jerome. Having recognized her son’s need for distraction, his mother instructs him to spend more time playing basketball. Jerome has then relinquished his worries about Bix and accepted his mother’s instructions to play. She assumes the weight of his knowledge while urging him to be the unknowing child. At this point, he unquestioningly submits and welcomes her authority in their relationship.

Jerome’s second confession occurs after he returns from going with Bix and the stepfather to visit Bix’s mother in Duke hospital. Once more, Jerome has been forced to face mental illness; this time he sees the great change in Bix’s mother and is horrified to realize that she “looked like she belonged” in a mental ward (237). Even worse, Jerome



hurts for Bix when his mother doesn't recognize him, and he suffers a personal loss when Bix runs away. Returning home to Wilmington after a nearly violent argument with the stepfather, Jerome confesses to his oldest brother, Maurice, what he has witnessed and his worries over what his friendship "had given Bix and where it was likely to get him" (250). Maurice does little but listen, yet afterwards Jerome is able to "get calm" (250). He accepts Maurice's authority to decide when he has said enough and when it is time to go home. He even allows Maurice to determine what their mother should know about his trip to Durham. Again, Jerome seeks freedom through confession.

In both instances, Jerome defers to the established power structure of the family; he understands his position within the familial discourse and accepts the role of submissive youngest child. In effect, he conforms to his family's idea of a truth that is based on the older members possessing more knowledge than he. His confession confirms his established role in the discourse of the family.<sup>6</sup>

Despite his apparent willingness to confess within his family, confession is not the course Jerome pursues in his search for the truth. His narrative should not be read as a confession to the silent reader, nor should Jerome be seen as acquiescing to this reader's idea of the truth. Comparing Jerome's confessions within his family to his larger narrative reveals a distinct difference. With his mother and Maurice, he reveals only the most immediate events and does so when he is consciously seeking comfort. In these moments, he wants to be a powerless child; he is frightened by his knowledge and shares it with the hope of giving up its hold over him.

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<sup>6</sup> Although Trites devotes much attention to the role of adolescents within the family, she focuses on those adolescents who rebel against that family structure. Jerome does not fit her model because he remains consistently submissive within the family.

In writing his story, Jerome is motivated by the conviction that the truth will be revealed through his telling of the complete story. Although he will be exposing his secrets and moving toward a better comprehension of himself, his primary objective is to understand Bix, and this desire compels him to tell Bix's story. Admitting that "there was some bad growing in Bix," he refuses to back away from any unpleasant details because they are necessary to his complete account (4). Vital to his full understanding, these details become essential to his attainment of truth.

Proclaiming noble intent, Jerome almost appears to be confessing for Bix. He appreciates the value his friend has placed upon truth; therefore, he will honor that friend by assuring that everyone knows the real reasons why Bix ran away. Jerome equates truth with understanding and understanding with complete knowledge. If confession were only the transferring of intimate knowledge, then perhaps Jerome could confess for Bix. However, confession is by nature more complex and is intrinsically tied with power relations.

Jerome cannot confess for Bix. Confession requires submission, which is not characteristic of this narrative. Jerome cannot submit in place of his friend. In attempting to assume Bix's voice, Jerome lays claim to Bix's knowledge. Foucault explains that because power exists within a relational network, knowledge is the catalyst that can incite changes in this power network. As Jerome attempts to assume Bix's voice, he virtually claims the authority of Bix's knowledge, authority that Bix has not willingly relinquished.

Jerome says he is speaking on behalf of Bix, but his real desire is to enter the discourse that centers on Bix. As Jerome's narrative unfolds, he clearly communicates

that as a member of institutional discourses, he has been repeatedly denied an active voice. Simply by virtue of his age, Jerome is limited. As a young adolescent, he is expected to submit to the authority of his mother, older brothers, coaches, teachers, and other adults. This submission often represses Jerome's voice while allowing the authoritative voice of the adult or older sibling to dominate.

Even while Jerome's role is defined by his youth, he also exists within other institutional discourses that expect his quiet complicity. Although Jerome loves his family and feels safe within its boundaries, he knows that his authority is limited. His mother offers welcome and wise guidance, but she also defines Jerome's role in the family and his course of action within the larger world. An obedient child, Jerome continuously turns to her for permission; therefore, his mother determines his direction. In fact, she bears responsibility for positioning him to become involved with Bix. Jerome's mother forces him to go to the baseball game where he first sees Bix; she lets him keep the lantern and play basketball in the woods where he discovers Bix playing alone; and she encourages him to go to Duke hospital, where he sees Bix run away. Even his mother's accident, while not a conscious act, places Jerome in contact with Bix because it results in Jerome's being assigned to Bix's home economics class.

Jerome's family provides a prescriptive discourse, but his position as a black adolescent in the segregated South is far more oppressive. When the Wilmington school system faces a government mandate to integrate, it opts to evade the ruling by transferring one black student to its all-white Chestnut Jr. High. Jerome realizes that he has been chosen specifically because of his intellect, and he sees that the school board's actions are "a mockery of the equality the law was trying to put over" (48). Although he

resents being “Mister One Constitutional Negro among all the palefaces,” Jerome also recognizes his inability to resist this authority (46). His mother makes angry phone calls and verbalizes her emotions; Jerome says nothing and keeps his dismay to himself. After his mother gives up her fight and decides not to “talk anymore about the big deal,” he willingly complies and follows her example of “preparing for school like every September” (49). The school system dictates Jerome’s action; his mother dictates his response; Jerome is silent.

The power structure of the school further represses Jerome’s voice. He responds to the first round of “nasty names and such” by fighting and proving himself physically (52). Afterwards he faces only “a few Nigger! calls,” but he quickly finds that the students do not talk to him at all (53). His race isolates him. Having always felt empowered by his basketball ability, Jerome hopes that by playing on the school’s team, he can again rely upon his physical skills to make himself heard. However, the coach also greets him with racism and refuses Jerome’s requests to try out for the team. He finally agrees to let Jerome compete against two of his experienced players. If Jerome wins, then the coach will let him participate in the tryouts. Unfortunately, the coach has no intentions of giving Jerome such an opportunity, and he calls the game so unfairly that Jerome has no chance of winning. He declares Jerome the loser: “Five-nothing, white takes it” (70). The coach has complete authority; he controls every word that is spoken and every physical movement made in his gym. Using the discourse of racism, he completely excludes Jerome from the school’s organized sports program. Jerome learns that his physical strength cannot silence racism. Left with “no fuss, no fights, no friends,” Jerome becomes a marginalized member of the school community (71).

As his relationship with Bix develops, Jerome becomes increasingly impatient with his silent status. His argument with Bix indicates his growing need to express himself. When Bix refuses to learn basketball fakes, Jerome cannot dismiss the refusal as another of his friend's unexplained quirks. He is tired of acceptance, weary of allowing others to dictate the terms of his behavior. Eager for a friend, he has let Bix determine the boundaries of their relationship. Jerome senses the depth of Bix's pain and determines that the problem directly relates to Bix's mother. Yet he cannot guess what could be so horrible as to cause his friend's breakdowns, nor can he comprehend why Bix is so unwilling to discuss the problems. Despite his urgent curiosity, Jerome finally decides to "let go of a lot of [his] questions" (154).

Nevertheless, Jerome sees Bix's stubborn unwillingness to fake as the final unanswered question. Jerome voices all of his frustrations when he cries out, "What is your problem, dude?" (160). Jerome wants to understand Bix, but he also wants Bix to hear his demand to understand. Bix's repeated assertion that he cannot fake because it would be dishonest is not enough because Jerome cannot understand this explanation. If he again accepts what he cannot understand, then he once again agrees to let others determine his actions. Jerome is content as long as their basketball lessons are mutually silent; together they have played equally with neither talking. Although Jerome's role as teacher might suggest authority, Bix's intense desire to learn and his quick mastery of the skills have given him equal power. The game has been their discourse in which power was equally shared. Thus when Bix rejects fakes, his refusal translates into a restriction of the discourse. Unwilling to let Bix dictate the rules of the discourse, Jerome ends their basketball lessons.

When Jerome and Bix later reconcile, Jerome continues to become more confident of his right to be heard. Accompanying the stepfather and Bix on their trip to Durham, Jerome once again comes face-to-face with institutional racism when they stop at a whites-only diner. His confrontation with Jeb, the racist owner, is even more significant than his resistance to Bix. Because Bix is his age, Jerome sees him as an equal to whom he has not been taught to submit. However, as an adult, Jeb is free to exercise authority over Jerome. Immediately recognizing Jeb's racist attitude, Jerome first yields by offering to "wait in the car" (229). But when Jeb throws Bix out of the diner for being a "nigger lover," Jerome no longer consents silently (230). His loyalty to Bix compels him to speak. Returning inside to face Jeb, Jerome directly resists his expected role as submissive black boy, and although he speaks in defense of Bix, his growing belief that he has the right to speak enables him to challenge the older man.

After Bix runs away, Jerome feels an even greater urgency to speak. Hearing the "creepy jive going around town and school," Jerome desperately wants to speak in Bix's defense (4). While Jerome may be obligated to speak for his absent friend, he speaks for himself also. His desire to defend Bix makes him feel more strongly his need to be heard. Defending Bix also involves asserting Jerome. He wants the power of his voice, and his experiences have taught him that such power bears with it authority. Unfortunately he wants to enter a discourse that will not accept the authority of his voice. The town and the school are the very institutions that have continually silenced him. Jerome contemplates speaking out in the white church but later admits that "it would not have done any bit of good" because "people are set to hear bad things" (4). He is not in

the position to command their attention and change such mindsets. He now faces the dilemma of proving he has the authority to speak.

Limited by his age and race, Jerome is, nonetheless, determined to be heard and concludes that the written word is his most promising outlet. As a reader and a writer, Jerome values written words. He knows that these words are difficult to dismiss, for they continue to remain as a lasting record of the expressed knowledge. In preparing to write his story, Jerome remembers that Bix “kept a notebook” and immediately determines that he “had to have this notebook” (6, 7). As evidence of Bix’s thoughts, it speaks for Bix just as Jerome hopes his book will for him. People who chose to ignore Jerome’s spoken words will be unable to deny the existence of his written words. Writing gives Jerome his most effective means of entering the discourse.

Thus Jerome’s intense awareness of his audience becomes even more logical. He is not confessing to this reader; he is proclaiming. Jerome can experience the power of his voice when he finds a listening audience. He opens his narrative with the commanding assertion, “You just listen to me and you’ll be getting the story, all you want” (3-4). He is quickly working to establish his credibility, for he needs his reader to commit to reading the entire narrative. Ending with the declaration, “you have the story,” Jerome is actually reminding the reader of having listened to him (250). When Jerome follows by saying, “But I have something, too,” he is literally referring to the blank postcard he has received from Bix. Yet he is also speaking to and about his reader, for he has gained something from having this reader follow him through this story. Jerome has been heard.

Ultimately Jerome's writing of Bix's story is his greatest act of defiance. He refuses to be silent any longer. Others may dismiss his voice, but they cannot deny its existence. His written story is evidence that he has spoken and that he has power. Throughout the narrative, he emphasizes his role as witness; he has firsthand knowledge of Bix, and, therefore, the power of such knowledge. However, Jerome cannot appreciate the power of unexpressed knowledge. As someone who has been repeatedly silenced, he seeks power through the assertion of his knowledge. Now his book serves as testimony of his knowledge and power.

Recognizing Jerome's narrative act as an attempt to acquire power does not diminish his stated goal of revealing the truth. For Jerome, truth and power are linked. He writes with the intent of fully exploring his knowledge so that he might better interpret it. Jerome believes he will find truth by fully understanding Bix Rivers. By the end of his narrative, he is perhaps disappointed, for he realizes that he does not completely understand Bix. He instead ends by emphasizing what he has learned: "There are no moves you truly make alone" (252). Jerome now sees how interrelated his story and Bix's have become, and he begins to grasp that to understand Bix, he must first understand himself. He begins by claiming to seek truth – and power—for Bix and ends by realizing that his quest has been for his own gain. Yet his final conclusion proves Foucault's theory that all power is shared.



## BIX RIVERS: POWER DESPITE WORDS

Unlike Jerome, Bix Rivers strives not to attain, but rather to preserve truth. As Jerome narrates the interconnected stories of these two characters, he establishes that they both share a fascination with truth, but he also reveals fundamental differences in their personal conceptions of truth. Although both of these characters view truth as being related to an inner understanding of experience, they differ in their perception of how that understanding is shaped. Jerome believes that truth lies in the thorough comprehension of his experiences. His knowledge must assume the form of expressed words or else he is unable to assess its value. Hence Jerome perceives that discourse produces truth.

Knowledge is also integral to Bix's definition of truth. He associates truth with the accuracy of the fact. Only he can understand how thought, action, and reaction combine to form his truth. Bix senses that discourse shapes reality. While he believes that he possesses his truth, he sees that it is vulnerable to interpretation. If he shares his knowledge, if he expresses that knowledge in words, then he risks its misinterpretation or its loss. And so Bix fears that discourse distorts truth.

Bix's concern for accuracy suggests a belief in an absolute truth, but his fear of truth's vulnerability negates such a belief. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosophical forerunner of Foucault, truth is directly related to the manner in which humans use language. In "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche contends that truth is a concept created by humans and, as such, is completely dependent upon discourse. He explains that because humans cannot absolutely capture the complete essence of an object, idea, or person, they are dependent on using metaphors as substitutions for perception. Language, a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, [and]

anthropomorphisms,” is simply an illusion of perception (878). Through the desire for consensus and assimilation, humans have accepted a standard illusion as truth. As a result, they employ the “legislation of language” to safeguard this understood truth. Bix’s fear that his expressed truth will be distorted is, in effect, a fear that Nietzsche’s philosophy is correct. If Bix exposes his truth, then he submits it to the legislation of a dominant discourse. Others, whether they be Jerome, the stepfather, or the members of the white church, will attempt to assimilate Bix’s truth so that it will fit their concept of truth. If they are able to align his expressions to their illusion, then they have altered Bix’s truth. If they are unable to make his expressions fit, then they will legislate by deeming his word untrue – a lie.

Preserving his truth has become Bix’s obsession. His mock apple pie breakdown is the first indication of the intensity of this fixation. When the home economics teacher leads the class to believe they have deceived the male teacher who samples their pies, Bix and Jerome are the only students who recognize the deception. While Jerome is disgusted by how easily their female classmates are tricked, Bix’s response is far more serious. Hissing, “Please, no, it’s too much, too bad,” he climbs into a chair in the back of the room (Moves 101). He becomes increasingly upset to the point that he’s scratching himself and bleeding. His actions suggest a mental breakdown, yet his focused anger signals a degree of retained control. He yells out, “NOBODY IS TELLING THE TRUTH” (105). He points to the series of deceptions: “It’s us tricking him and him tricking us back and tricks and lies, and soon it’s gone . . .” (105). Bix recognizes that the students’ understanding can be manipulated by the teachers and that

as everyone contributes to the discourse of the class, the truth of the individual becomes lost – “soon it’s gone.”

The home economics incident also reveals how closely Bix’s mental stability is linked to his protection of truth. The apparently harmless ruse of the mock apple pie completely alarms and unnerves him. He and Jerome have been scornful of their female classmates, so it seems odd that he would now be horrified at their being tricked. Indeed, he is not reacting in their defense. Despite being able to see through the deception, Bix feels personally threatened. As he grows calmer, he speaks more coherently and tells Jerome, “nobody knows the truth and you can go crazy in there” (105). Bix’s desperation to protect his truth is actually a fight for self-preservation. His security, his identity, and his sanity depend on the purity of his truth.

Consequently Bix must protect himself by shielding his knowledge. Just as Jerome struggles to be heard, Bix defies all those who would force him to speak. While Jerome is working to assert his voice within the network of power relations, Bix is becoming increasingly resistant. According to Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance (History 95). Foucault also stresses that resistance is part of the relational nature of power. Although seemingly different from Jerome’s fight to be heard, Bix’s refusal to speak is also a natural result of the ever-shifting power relations.

Like Jerome, Bix’s age stipulates his set role within institutional discourses, and he must work to establish the authority of his experience. He does not face the discourse of institutional racism that challenges Jerome, but the discourse of his family is severely limiting. Family offers no security for Bix; in fact, even his role within the family is one of contradictions. He loves his mother desperately, but her mental illness prevents him

from finding comfort in their relationship. Instead of being dependent upon her, he finds that she depends on him, and he has to be “more adult than she” (Moves 22). Bix must compensate for the “something she was straining to have or make up for,” and he feels constantly oppressed by the responsibility he bears in their relationship (23). His mother is incapable of directing her son and instead looks to him for guidance. This reversal of the typical power structure of the family creates confusion for Bix. His intense loyalty to his mother makes him want to submit to her, yet his fierce need to protect her causes him to assume an authoritative role.

Bix’s stepfather further creates tension within the family structure. He and Bix vie for the mother’s attention. For the stepfather, Bix represents a constant reminder that “she ran away and married [Bix’s] father in college” (192). Bix is equally threatened by the stepfather, whom his mother has chosen to replace his father. The relationship between Bix and the stepfather is precarious; they are united in their desire to protect the mother but divided in their resentment of one other. She is the source of their problem while at the same time, her presence limits the discourse. Neither can express his hostility nor his resentment. Yet Bix retains the ultimate claim to her. He believes it is because he “came out of her body”; the mother-son bond is stronger than marriage (192). The stepfather recognizes her preoccupation with Bix but not the strength of the bond. He attributes her attention to the boy’s weakness. He explains to Jerome, “She worries about him because he’s a little strange, a little messed up sometimes” (195).

However, when Bix’s mother becomes seriously ill and is hospitalized in Durham, the power shifts drastically. With the mother no longer there to temper the hostilities, the stepfather hopes to dominate Bix. He assigns chores that consume all of

the boy's free daylight hours, he forbids Bix from playing baseball, and he refuses to take the son to visit his mother. Bix is unwilling to submit to the stepfather's authority, but his age limits his ability to resist. He still depends on the stepfather for his home and other physical necessities, so he uses discourse to agitate the man. Constantly challenging the stepfather, Bix knows that by arguing over the mother he can "get him really smoked" (173). He angers the stepfather to the point that the man "popped" him, but Bix feels empowered by being hit because he has forced the stepfather to react (186). Despite the stepfather's authority, Bix seeks to control the relationship.

Obviously Bix is not an absolutely silent character. He yells in class, he yells at the stepfather, and he even yells at Jerome. He speaks when he wants to produce a reaction in other people, and he speaks to defend truth. Bix fully recognizes the power of the spoken word and is, therefore, quick to appropriate language as his weapon. It is this understanding of the power of discourse that most influences Bix's concept of truth and prevents him from using words to frame that truth.

As Bix and Jerome develop a relationship through their nighttime basketball games, Bix faces Jerome's overwhelming dependency upon words. In his need to understand their friendship, Jerome asks, "Do you like me enough to be best friends?" (153). Bix responds by attempting to explain to Jerome that there are some feelings that can be shown "without any stupid words" (153). Jerome's insistence that actions are "not like words" cannot force Bix to say what Jerome wants to hear (153). Instead, Bix passionately insists that "all this talking crap is stupid, stupid, stupid . . . it can drive people CRAZY" (154). Earlier Bix has associated craziness with deception; now he

connects it to talking. The only way Bix can protect truth from being twisted by deception is to avoid its expression.

By attempting to force words upon Bix, Jerome is actually trying to coerce his friend into confession. Assuming the role of the “authority who requires the confession,” Jerome begins to initiate a change in the power relations between the boys (Foucault 61). Bix resists and exercises his power to withhold his words. By rejecting Jerome’s call for confession, Bix chooses not to comply with a “specific form of extortion of truth” (97). The sincerity of Jerome’s motivation is not at issue. Because “power is exercised from innumerable points,” his efforts to be heard and to understand do not have to detract from Bix’s power (94). However, if Bix were to submit to a confession, he would be relinquishing his knowledge. This knowledge could then incite changes within the power relations. More importantly for Bix, it could become the subject of discourse and as such could be shaped – or distorted – by that discourse.

In his relationship with Jerome, Bix repeatedly exerts control over the discourse. By refusing to speak, he limits the knowledge that is available to Jerome. When Jerome accepts that they “had things happening” that they “did not need to think or talk out,” he complies with Bix’s regulation of the discourse (Moves 154). Ironically, Bix’s restriction of the discourse ultimately serves to increase Jerome’s curiosity. Therefore, the discourse of Jerome’s narrative centers on the mystery of Bix; Jerome works to understand what he has not been allowed to discuss.

The stepfather also tries to regulate what is spoken. He accepts Bix’s challenge to a basketball game and agrees that if Bix wins, he will take the boy to visit the mother. Bix plays without fakes, and the stepfather easily dominates the game until Jerome calls

on Bix to stop and “think about [his] momma” (192). At this point, the stepfather wants to assume control of the discourse. He commands Jerome never to “mention that woman” (192). Bix, however, will not allow the stepfather to set the boundaries; he accuses the stepfather of trying to prevent the others from discussing her so that the stepfather might fully possess her.

For Bix and the stepfather, the mother is the unspoken axis around which their lives revolve. She has brought these two unrelated people together to create a family structure in which no one feels secure. Her love and her illness determine the course of their lives, and yet each character seeks to prohibit the other from speaking of her. They will discuss neither their feelings about her nor their feelings for each other. Each sees such a discussion as a concession of his rights to her. Thus their discourse is ordered by their avoidance of the mother. Even her absence intensifies her importance. The stepfather controls Bix’s access to her; and by keeping Bix away from the hospital, he strengthens this restrictive discourse. As the prohibited subject, Bix’s mother remains the constantly unspoken center of their discourse. Every word they utter is influenced by their attempts to avoid speaking of her or by Bix’s demands for access to her.

In the basketball game, the stepfather finally yields and decides that “maybe this IS the place and company to bring all this up” (193). He wants Bix to talk; he is now the one demanding a confession of Bix. The stepfather tries to force the boy to discuss his relationship with his mother and admit he may have been responsible for her recent suicide attempt. Bix resists; he stands “frozen” as the stepfather urges him to speak (193). When Bix refuses, the stepfather assumes the narration: “Let me tell you a story . . . About Bix’s momma” (194). He proceeds to construct a disturbing narrative of how

Bix's insistence upon always telling the truth desperately hurt his already troubled mother. When his naked mother approached him in the middle of the night with a knife and asked him if he loved her, Bix responded in the fear of the moment and answered honestly, "No, Mother" (197). He spoke the truth, and his mother reacted by first slitting her wrist and elbow. Then when her weakened hand made her unable to slit the other wrist, she forced both arms through the bedroom window, continuing to slash her wrists against the broken glass.

The stepfather intends for this narrative to be an accusation and a condemnation of Bix. He presents this story to demonstrate the faults of Bix's allegiance to truth and to prove his own right to protect the mother. The subtext of this narrative, however, is filled with Freudian implications. The mother's nudity and questioning of Bix's love are suggestive of the Oedipal complex while Bix's immediately fearful reaction indicates his fear of castration. That the stepfather witnesses this event and later uses it against Bix supports the Oedipal nature of their struggle over the mother. After his father's death, Bix should have become the sole object of his mother's attention. Instead, the stepfather "took that father's place with his mother" (Freud 923). By never expressing his fear that the stepfather has replaced his father and usurped him, Bix denies the existence of that truth. As a result of having been present when Bix questions his love for his mother, the stepfather is triumphant and empowered. His need to tell Jerome is a move to share that knowledge and to demonstrate his power.

The stepfather's story shows that Bix has not always refused to verbalize his truth. In fact, his previous philosophy has been always to speak truth. But Bix's experiences with his mother have taught him that truth is complex. He spoke in the sincerity of the



moment, but that truth was not necessarily the truth. He has learned the risk of exposing his truth to the interpretation of others, and, therefore, decides to withhold his knowledge. Still refusing to deceive, Bix chooses silence when pressed to expose his deeper understandings. In this way, Bix controls the discourse that surrounds him because he determines how much others may know about him.

Bix's withdrawal from the discourse of the stepfather is similar to what Trites describes as "an internal dialogue, an identity discourse of consensus" (49). Trites writes of this concept within her discussion of adolescents who are confronting the institutional discourses of identity politics; however, the concept can be applied to Bix. Characters who feel repressed by institutional discourse such as race, gender, and religion, often retreat from the dominant discourse of the Other. By doing so, they engage in an internal dialogue "that allows them to self-affirm even though the Other refuses to legitimize them" (49). Bix's silence is also an act of self-affirmation. The stepfather's telling of Bix's story functions as an accusation, and Bix recognizes if he engages in the conversation and argues against that story, he is exposing his truth.

So even as it appears that the stepfather has exposed Bix's most private secrets, Bix exercises power by not discussing the stepfather's story. He neither disputes nor supports the stepfather's version of the events; he challenges the man to resume the basketball game. By not speaking out to voice his version of the events, he restricts the discourse. Jerome now knows what happened, but he knows only the stepfather's reality of the events. Jerome can accept, reject, or distort this version of the facts. He can use his words to capture the story for other audiences. But he cannot access Bix's knowledge of that night. Bix's silence preserves his truth and his control.

Bix has power, control, and an overwhelming sense of truth, but he lacks freedom. The knowledge which he so closely guards imprisons him. Even as he refuses to expose his knowledge to Jerome or the stepfather, Bix longs to free himself from its restrictions. This desire fuels his need to see his mother. Bix never verbalizes why he wants to visit her in the hospital. Jerome needs no explanation, for he believes it to be a natural desire and insists that “you can’t keep a dude away from his momma” (Moves 172). The stepfather suspects that Bix needs more than a simple visit. He tells Bix, “You think you can make up for everything by seeing her, telling her you love her now” (198). Bix neither argues nor agrees with the stepfather.

The stepfather correctly senses that Bix is motivated by the need to speak to his mother. Indeed Bix’s urgency is fueled by his belief that he can be freed by confessing to his mother. He is willing to submit his control, relinquish his knowledge, and offer his truth. Typically, characters in an adolescent novel rebel against the absent parent, but Bix’s desire is to submit.<sup>7</sup> Confession to his mother does not contradict his rigid value system because his entire fight to preserve truth has been focused upon her. She already shapes his discourse, and her earlier interpretation of his truth has created the reality in which he now lives. He must confess to her all and hope that she will then restructure his reality into a more stable world.

In order to confess, Bix must be able to see his mother. The basketball game with the stepfather offers him access to her, but he must win the game. He has been insistent to Jerome that he will play this game without any moves or fakes, for he wants this basketball game to be completely honest. He has called it “the game for the truth,” but

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<sup>7</sup> In Disturbing the Universe, Trites terms the phrase in logos parentis to describe the tendency of teenage characters to “transform an absent character into a presence against which they can rebel” (56).

Bix finally realizes that the only way to defeat the stepfather is by faking (178). Bix faces a philosophical crisis. If he fakes, then he accepts and willingly uses deception for his gain. The implications of such a compromise are overwhelming. If Bix accepts deception now, then he acknowledges that he could have chosen to lie to his mother on the night she asked if he loved her. Faking now means admitting responsibility for the past. Even as he makes his choice, Bix fears that “it [will] break him in two and shatter everything to bits,” yet his need for freedom is too great to be ignored (198).

After using moves to defeat the stepfather, Bix gets his opportunity to see his mother and discovers the secret that the stepfather has hidden from him. In refusing to discuss the mother’s condition, the stepfather has shielded Bix from the seriousness of her condition. Even after agreeing to the basketball game, the stepfather warns Bix, “Believe me, you don’t want to see her” (198). Bix perceives such insistence only as evidence of the stepfather’s determination to keep him from his mother; in actuality, the stepfather’s restrictions have protected Bix. Once in Durham, the painful reality is exposed to Bix and to Jerome. The mother does not know Bix; she no longer remembers that she has a son.

Bix has sacrificed his absolute devotion to truth in order to confess to a mother who is unable to receive that confession. Once again Bix finds that he has more power than his mother, for he is the one who knows. He realizes that if he tries to force his knowledge upon her that he may jeopardize her well-being. Unlike the night of her suicide attempt, he weighs the price of truth against the possible harm to his mother. He measures her welfare against his need to relinquish truth, the need that has driven him to this painful trip to Durham.

Afraid he will hurt his mother by telling her that he is the son she does not remember, Bix chooses to lie and to “pull the fastest and completest fake possible” (240). He is already in the mental ward, and it is obvious to all patients that he is there for one of them. His mother recognizes that he must belong to one of the patients and asks, “Whose little boy are you?” (239). It is too late for Bix to leave quietly. Instead he walks by his mother to hug the woman in the next bed and pretends to be her son. Bix, the stepfather, Jerome, and Jerome’s reader all feel the painful irony when Bix’s mother exclaims, “Look . . . he loves his mommy” (241). She has now found the truth she sought the night she approached Bix in his bedroom, but it is meaningless to her. That truth will neither save her nor liberate Bix.

Bix’s fake with Hazel, the woman in the next bed, cannot function as a substitute confession. Bix does not speak his truth; he utters only one word in the mental ward: “MOTHER” (241). He never reveals what he had intended to say to his mother; he never confesses. Bix’s choice to protect his mother keeps him in a position of authority and preserves his silence. Jerome and the stepfather are free to assume what he might have said, but they cannot know. Bix still controls the discourse; thus he retains power.

By faking in the basketball game and again in Durham, Bix has apparently modified his values to allow for deception, but he has not abandoned his fierce guardianship of truth. He is instead learning that truth and deception can coexist. Through his journey to reach his mother, Bix has learned that his ideal of truth must encompass more than accuracy of fact. He is beginning to adopt Jerome’s belief that truth is related to understanding. His basketball fakes were necessary because they brought him to his mother. As a result, Bix gains the knowledge that robs him of the

ability to confess. This expanded knowledge leads to a more thorough understanding of his experiences, his connection to his mother, and even his relationship to the stepfather. Thus the trip to Durham must alter Bix's truth. When Bix fakes in the mental ward, he is deceiving his mother and every other patient, but he does so "to save everyone some pain" (245). Bix now understands that the truth about his mother must include an understanding of her needs. While he may be lying to her, he understands that a lie can be another form of silence.

Although Bix's has not yet come to the point of completely adoption Nietzsche's idea of truth as an illusion, his belief in truth as an absolute has been shaken. When Bix determines that he must shield his mother from the pain of his confession, he demonstrates "[hostility] towards truths which may be harmful and destructive" (Nietzsche 876). Faced with the likelihood of hurting his mother, Bix guards his words and does not verbally express his truth. His silence is a deception, but his choice to be silent results from the intense desire to protect his mother. If he has indeed come to Durham to communicate the truth of his love for his mother, he finds deception to be his most powerful means of expression.

Unwilling to face the collapse of his absolutes, Bix leaves and retreats into his silence. Previously he has relied on his refusal to speak as his means of isolating his truth from others. By running away, he completely removes himself from the discourse. He knows that he is incapable of stopping the conversation that will result from this experience in Durham, but he can isolate himself from that discussion. He will have no knowledge of what is said, and, therefore, escape the influence Jerome and the stepfather may have over his own understanding of these events. Watching Bix walk away, Jerome

senses that this escape is necessary for Bix's well being. He explains, "Maybe the only place for Bix was away" (Moves 248).

Bix speaks through his silence. His refusal to express his knowledge unmistakably communicates his need for control and ownership of his experience. He uses silence in the same manner that Jerome uses words. His blank postcard illustrates this fact. When Jerome receives the blank card, he realizes that Bix is speaking to him. He understands as clearly "as if it was written in ink right there where it says MESSAGE HERE" that Bix is okay on his own (251). He also understands that Bix can and will continue to "make sure of his secrets every step" (251).

## ASA HILL: WORDS AND SILENCE RECONCILED

As the main character of What Hearts, Asa Hill matures from an innocent first-grader into a wise yet hopeful young adolescent. He is as equally concerned with truth as the main characters of The Moves Make the Man, but because these short stories follow him over the course of five years, his understanding of truth evolves. He initially sees truth as the reality of his life but eventually comes to accept truth as inseparable from understanding and love.

In the first two stories of What Hearts, Asa has already learned that life is structured by the discourse of the adults in his world. In “As If,” he is a first-grader who knows that his age causes adults and older children to discount him. All the same, Asa wants to be heard, and he believes that the quality of his message will determine the receptiveness of his audience. Rushing home on the last day of school, he expects that “today would be different” because he “had something to talk about, today” (8). He is proud and eager to share his school treasures – a perfect report card and radishes grown in the class vegetable garden. He knows his parents will be surprised, and he feels empowered by the “generous superiority of knowing exactly what [he was] about to give” (10). Unfortunately, Asa quickly loses that promise of power. As soon as he reaches home, his entire world is restructured by his mother’s announcement that his parents are divorcing. Listening to her carefully planned words, Asa must “[assemble] the fragments of sound . . . into a summary of facts” (12-13). In the same way that he assembles her meaning, these words reassemble his life.

Understanding that “his mother was speaking her own language,” Asa sees that her words have the power to take away his home and his father (15). Although he longs

to talk to his father, he realizes that his mother will not allow him because “there were things he could not be trusted to keep quiet about” (32). Asa sees that he can no longer be “just a boy talking to his father” (32). Ironically, his parents’ separation increases the importance of his spoken words. His parents are far more willing to listen to him, but they are listening for the message they want to hear. Asa’s words are completely open to their interpretation, and he is powerless to alter their construction of his meaning. Never again will Asa be able to speak in childlike innocence because he knows his parents will always be waiting to claim his words for their purposes.

When Asa’s mother introduces him to Dave, his soon-to-be-stepfather, she brings yet another change to the discourse. This man who “yelled at Asa” and “called him a sissy and other things” now stands between the boy and his mother (31). Dave’s language isolates Asa. As the adult and later as the stepfather, Dave has the authority to yell, but Asa is unable to respond equally. Dave’s negative name calling not only conveys dislike, but also shows Asa that Dave sees him as different. The gulf between the two seems unbridgeable, for Asa knows “there was nothing to say to Dave” (31).

At this young age, Asa regards truth as a correct assessment of his role and his limitations. He knows that his mother’s account of the broken marriage has omissions, but he is more concerned with the discourse that structures his present life. He needs to determine her expectations of him, but he also senses that a better understanding of his situation would give him a more complete truth. Realizing that “a feeling, an object, a person could seem like one thing but be another” Asa knows that he must assume this task of interpretation (36). Complete knowledge will empower him because “if he could understand, he could figure out what he could do and what he could not” (28).



In “Not Blue,” Asa learns to adjust by becoming a chameleon. Life in his new home is unstable; his mother and Dave’s constant moves repeatedly force Asa to change homes and schools. He depends upon words to help him fit into his changing environments. He listens to his classmates to find “ways into and out of [their] needs and enthusiasms” (44). He realizes that “everyone had an opening” and that “finding it only [takes] alertness” (44). Asa longs for the acceptance of these other children; he needs to belong, so he constructs his identity to fit their social demands. He understands that each school he enters has its unique discourse and that he must learn that language before he can be accepted. He becomes so immersed in this process that he is “unable to think of himself doing something alone” (47). He has no concept of himself as separate from the influence of others. Whether it be the exclusion in his home or the desperately earned inclusion of the classroom, Asa’s identity is completely shaped by institutional discourses.

Even as Asa takes advantage of “the chance to create himself in the eyes of the strangers,” he does not intend to deceive these new classmates (42). Paying attention to the personalities and needs of the other students, Asa means to give them what they need, not to be “artificial or even artful” (44). Unfortunately, he too has been taken in by this “illusion of naturalness” (45). It is only when his fourth grade teacher asks him what he would like to do in the class variety show that Asa realizes his inability “to think of himself doing something alone” (47). He has been so busy becoming the person others want him to be that he has no idea who he really is. He is confident of his power to please others, but he lacks the awareness Bix and Jerome have of their individual identities.

At this point Asa begins to look for a deeper understanding of himself and so also begins his pursuit of inner truth. Certain that “he could figure it out in time,” Asa almost immediately links truth to love. He senses that “from insight to love was not a big step” (52). But Asa is trying to understand himself, and he wonders how “anyone could be expected to know what he was” because “he was alone” (52). Despite his efforts to fit in with everyone else, Asa is isolated and “operating alone” (52). He connects this sense of being alone to a silence that exists within him. Regardless of his constant chatter and his apparent willingness to share himself with others, he reserves a part of himself and keeps it far away from the influence of anyone. It is that part of himself that is silent and that part of himself that Asa must understand if he is to find truth.

While Asa has been depending on his ability to use words for his gain, he has not fully comprehended the power of discourse. Discovering that he is “a singleton, not a showman” makes Asa aware that words are manipulative (53). He contemplates this element of discourse while he prepares for the variety show. At the teacher’s suggestion, he agrees to join his classmate Joel Prescott in a recitation of Eugene Field’s poem “Little Boy Blue.” After reading the poem several times, Asa is angry at the “heavy sadness the poem labored so shamelessly to create” (53). It reminds him of his mother’s favorite song and how he hates “every stinking word” because these words are “designed to suck the easy stupid sad feelings out of people” (56). Since Dave has previously contributed Asa’s dislike of the song to his “heartlessness,” Asa fears that admitting his dislike of “Little Boy Blue” will again reveal him to be insensitive (57). Just as he feels doomed by the enforced sadness of the poem, he discovers “The Highwayman,” a poem that thrills and excites him. Asa recognizes that this effect is also created by the words.

While exploring the manipulative possibilities of language, Asa still appreciates the importance of being included in the larger discourse. His experiences with entering and adapting to new schools have enabled him to understand the difference in being included and excluded. As a result, he struggles with his desire to exclude Joel from the poem recitation. A weak student, Joel has been working all fall to learn “Little Boy Blue,” and after Asa convinces him to change to “The Highwayman,” the boy is unable to memorize the new poem. Asa, the teacher, and Joel’s mother all plot to trick Joel into missing the variety show. The teacher and Joel’s mother hope to spare Joel from embarrassment, but Asa’s motives are more selfish. He wants to perform alone.

Asa has become a fully empowered member of his school class, and the variety show affords him the opportunity to display that power. He has chosen a poem that will arouse his audience, and in reciting it alone, he can exercise total control over the words and their effect on the audience. Yet when Joel appears in the school auditorium and forgivingly acknowledges that Asa has deceived him, Asa is struck by Joel’s “full acceptance of himself and the strategies necessary to get around him” (81). No longer being deceptive, Asa is unable to exclude Joel. Asa’s decision to call Joel onstage to recite “Little Boy Blue” does not signify an appreciation for the poem but for the boy. With his “lips moving confidently over remembered words,” Joel is once again fully included in the class’s production (82). Asa, who has been so intent on claiming power, now realizes that power can be shared. He also proves that he is not the heartless child Dave has accused him of being. His better understanding of Joel and of himself has allowed him to act benevolently. Understanding has led to love.

When Dave and Asa's mother remain in the same home for almost three years, Asa finally finds a place to belong, but while school becomes a safe environment, home remains unstable. Here Asa is engaged in a complex power struggle. Asa is a recurring source of tension between his mother and Dave. His mother alternately relinquishes and reclaims authority from Dave. Dave senses that her love for Asa offers the child power within their home, and he is angered and threatened by this power. Thus he attempts to restrain Asa's power. Yet the more harshly he treats Asa, the more loyally Asa's mother defends him. It is a cycle that illustrates Foucault's theory that power can be neither repressed nor arbitrarily claimed.

Just as in the relationship between Bix and his stepfather, Asa and Dave cannot move beyond the mother who stands between them. Again there is a competition for her love and loyalty. However, they are aware that their dislike of each other extends beyond her. In "Out," Asa begins to realize that he and Dave have "natural tendencies that brought them into tight-lipped contention" (100). Dave's authoritarian attitude allows no room to acknowledge Asa's intelligence. Neither of them is willing to compromise, and so their relationship is characterized by Dave's constant bullying and Asa's unrelenting need to show-off. Both are weary from the continual strain of being "fake father and fake son" (100).

When Dave begins to teach Asa to play football, it seems that the two have finally discovered one shared interest. Although "they both knew the terms of their life together," Asa finds that "sports, it appeared, was different" (101). On the playing field, they get along so well that Asa almost suspects "it was not really a part of life" (101). There Dave's bullying becomes teaching, and Asa's intelligence allows him willingly to

learn from his stepfather. Football gives way to basketball season, and still the two continue to get along. Asa appreciates this “cooperative neutrality,” but he also questions it (102). He needs to know why they are able to get along while playing sports, and he finally concludes it is because “sports – clearly a male domain – never brought Asa’s mother into play between them” (101). When playing ball, Asa and Dave are willing to share power because they have “liberty from putting anything on the line” unlike at home, where each is always fearful of losing Asa’s mother (102-103).

The peace of the sports lessons fades when Asa decides to try out for little league. Calling baseball “not much of a game,” Dave discourages Asa but finally gives in and agrees that they will prepare for tryouts (105). Now that Asa has identified a goal and has something to win or lose from these lessons, the relationship changes. The competition returns. They play silently, but Asa knows that “the absence of words did not mean they had nothing to say” (118). When Asa celebrates a particularly powerful hit, Dave responds by intentionally hitting him with the baseball. Their truce is over; Dave and Asa have returned to open warfare.

Asa’s sports lessons with Dave cause him to expand his understanding of truth. When he had first begun to see himself as alone and silent, he immediately knew that this silence was important. During his evening games with Dave, he experiences shared silence. His fear of silence gives way to appreciation. He values this time with Dave because there are no words between them, and he senses more strongly than ever that silence is essential to understanding. Even when the silent baseball lessons become filled with tension, Asa, like Bix, knows that words are not needed for these moments. Yet like Jerome, he also struggles to understand what this silent communication means.

Asa's understanding of silence and its relationship to truth deepens through his experience with confession. He first confronts the need to confess after the baseball incident. Initially he tries to keep secret from his mother what happened on the baseball field. Because of her frequent breakdowns, he sees her as vulnerable and wishes to protect her while also wanting to be protected by her. When she sees his bruised ribs, he surrenders to an inner need to confess. Oddly enough, he begins by defending Dave, but as his mother refuses to accept his flippant dismissal of the bruise, Asa continues talking about their troubled relationship. He never reveals exactly why Dave threw the ball at him; instead he explains that he understands why Dave does not like him. Saying that he "ought to be different," Asa exposes his insecurities (132).

Asa's confession brings him only a temporary freedom. His mother responds to this shared knowledge by condemning Dave and apologizing. Asa has given over his knowledge and more or less reminded his mother of her responsibility for his unhappiness. Because of its effect on his mother, confession cannot liberate him. After receiving his confession, she tries twice to kill herself. In this case, the stepfather places no blame, and Asa appears to feel no guilt. His mother's actions bind Asa in a more subtle manner. Because he must go with Dave to take her to the state hospital in Butner, he misses the little league tryouts. Little league had offered Asa the opportunity for a normal childhood, but there is to be no such existence for Asa.

In "What Hearts," the last of the four short stories, Asa both gives and receives a confession of love. Having had a crush on Jean since fifth grade, the now seventh grade Asa is no longer satisfied to love her silently. As his affection for her grows, so does the need for "his feeling to emerge," (152). Asa distinctly senses that this feeling should be

expressed by words; he is compelled to “declare something” (152). He thinks of this love he has nurtured in silence but believes he must now bring it “out of the silence, and put it to work” (156). When he asks his mother what he should do with this love, she comments upon the urge to speak it: “Well, most people talk. . . . You don’t necessarily have to talk. There are other ways to communicate” (159-60). Asa is confused by her answer, but she goes on to explain, “Something as fine as love . . . knowing about it means a lot. It can mean everything” (163).

Asa confesses. He speaks only one sentence: “I love you, Jean” (168). He understands that he is giving away a part of himself, but he also feels freed by his confession. It is a confession given with no demands. He does it not for absolution, but for liberation. Walking away from her, he “[feels] for the first time the uncanny strength he held in his body” (168).

Asa’s confession to Jean is immediately followed by his receiving a confession from Dave. After talking to Asa about love, his mother decides to end her marriage to Dave. For the second time, Asa returns home from an exciting school day to be told that he and his mother are leaving. His mother structures the world with her words. Dave is silent, but Asa realizes that they are again sharing the silence. He understands that “in silence” they “were feeling at least one thing the same: surely they were both relieved” (171). After he has packed his belongings, he wanders outside where he finds Dave sitting alone. For the first time, Dave admits to Asa that he loves him. He submits the words and waits for Asa’s acceptance. When Asa does not willingly receive them, he robs Dave of the liberation he is seeking. Instead, Asa emphasizes the problems in their relationship. As his anger returns, Dave seems to abandon his confession, but then he

completely submits to Asa. Pleadingly, Dave openly asks, “Then you do, Asa? You love me?” (180).

Asa draws on his understanding to determine an answer. His instinct is to “snap the obvious answer at Dave and leave him in pain” (180). Asa hesitates because there is no obvious answer. He realizes that “he was not so certain” (181). It is a defining moment because “for the first time in his life Asa did not want to know an answer” (181). He has absolute power. With one simple word, he can either destroy or redeem Dave. Contemplating Dave’s question, Asa wonders “if love could take such liberties as to fasten onto stepfathers,” but still he does “not want to know” (180). And so, “quietly, without a word,” he walks away (181). Asa chooses silence.

Asa comes to relate silence to stillness and acceptance. Being silent does not mean that he is rejecting the words. Silence is necessary for his understanding of them. His life with Dave has been so painful that he does not want to love his stepfather, yet he has come to understand this man. And for Asa, understanding leads to love. He is not yet ready to grant Dave absolution, but he will not condemn him. Withholding his love would also condemn Asa. He appreciates the gift Dave has offered, and he has learned that “to explore, to accept what was being given, one would have to join the silence, find the stillness, stop moving” (185). Their moments of silence have been their times of greatest understanding. By not answering Dave, Asa does his best to return the gift of love and truth.



## CONCLUSION

In The Moves Make the Man and What Hearts, the main characters believe that their primary purpose is to search for truth. However, their goal is not simply to find or protect truth. What they are actually hoping to discover is how to possess truth, power, and freedom. Jerome, Bix, and Asa believe in truth, and all three know that it is directly related to their use of discourse. The great dilemma for these adolescents is to determine if they can exert power while also enjoying freedom.

By Foucault's standards, freedom cannot be separated from power relations. In the end, these characters must choose; freedom is available but at the price of power. When these characters repeatedly strive to control the discourse, they not only limit others; they constrain themselves. Exerting power over the discourse cannot free these characters, for it binds them more tightly to the other members of that discourse.

In The Moves Make the Man, Jerome and Bix learn that power cannot exist in isolation. Jerome's entire narrative is his means of asserting power, but his need to do so indicates his dependency on others. He believes he has been repressed, but repression, like power, always occurs within a network of relations. Jerome's intense need to make himself heard is a direct response to his relationship with other people. He links control to the act of expression but realizes that expression is empty without an audience.

By the final chapter of his story, Jerome has abandoned all attempts to isolate Bix's narrative and refers to his writing as "this whole story of Bix and me" (251-2). His inability to separate his narrative from Bix's shows that Jerome cannot remove himself from the relational network. His ongoing struggle to understand Bix, to find the truth about Bix, has really been about exploring the connection he shares with this troubled

friend. After Jerome angrily tells Bix, “You are too screwed up for words, man,” he knows that his words cannot sufficiently define this character, yet his narrative demonstrates that he is committed to doing just that (217). Jerome cannot disconnect himself from Bix, so just as his telling of the story exerts his voice and power, it illustrates the strength of their bond.

Bix’s passionate obsession with truth results from his painful and complicated relationship with his mother. His bond with her has completely shaped his character. The silence that protects his truth from being distorted by discourse is in actuality shielding his understanding of her from being altered by the influence of others. Bix’s silence directly results from this need to protect their bond. Once he knows that the stepfather has been right in keeping him away from her, he cannot continue living with the man, for he is now vulnerable to the stepfather’s influence. Bix’s going away demonstrates his power, but power is dependent on the network of relations. When Bix sends Jerome the blank postcard, this symbolic silence conveys two messages. One is that he is in control, but the other is that he is still connected to Jerome. In order to demonstrate control, Bix too must have an audience.

Bix’s final attempt to communicate with Jerome and Jerome’s narrative are both evidence of the book’s theme: “There are no moves you truly make alone” (252). Neither of the boys has discovered the reality he had hoped to find, but they have both accepted the truth that their stories – and their lives – are forever linked. It is possible to be alone and still feel the other’s presence just as it is equally possible to speak through silence. In effect, there is no alone.

As Jerome and Bix face their ties to individuals, they also struggle within the confines of institutional discourses. Through their experiences, they become increasingly resistant to those authorities that would regulate their use of discourse. Instead of accepting that they must reconcile themselves to such authority, Jerome and Bix become more confident that they can resist by exercising control over their use of discourse. This need for control means that neither character is willing to relinquish his authority, so neither is able to rely on confession for liberation. In the end, Jerome and Bix find the power to make themselves heard – Jerome by his words and Bix through his silence – but both characters are bound by that power.

In What Hearts, Asa discovers what neither Jerome nor Bix can quite grasp in The Moves Make the Man; silence should not be the rejection of words but rather their acceptance. Asa knows the realm of his power, and he understands that he is not free. His silent response to Dave is evidence of how strongly he is bound to this man. When Dave asks whether Asa loves him, Asa is silent and gives no answer. He chooses not to reject his stepfather. Asa understands that they are forever tied; and although he does not want to love Dave, he fears that he may. While not openly admitting his acceptance of Dave's love, he does accept the relationship. He realizes that they are forever connected because they have understood each other. By his silence, Asa submits to that relationship.

Asa's use of silence illustrates that like Bix, he knows it is possible to speak through silence; but Asa also understands the power Jerome finds in the expressed word. His narrative ends hopefully because he knows "he had the words" (194). He values words, for he believes they have the power to "rise away from circumstances" and to

‘move right along with you’ (194). But Asa’s most important discovery is that some words have more power than others. Now that “he had the words, I love you” (the same words Bix longed to give his mother), Asa understands that they bear the promise that “surely, these words would be made good” (194). However, their real strength lies in Asa’s newfound understanding of “silence and stillness,” for he has discovered that “to explore, to accept what was being given, one would have to join the silence, find the stillness, stop moving” (185). To understand truth, Asa needs both the words and the silence.

Asa’s submissive acceptance of the restrictions of love brings him to reconciliation with authority. He understands the power of these words of love, but he decides to exercise that power within an accepted role. His conclusion fulfills the expectations of adolescent literature. He sees that his identity has been defined by this relationship with Dave, and he no longer needs to resist that influence. Jerome and Bix never come to such an acceptance.

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