# *DAVID CANAAN: THE FAILING HEART*

*by*
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It is my impression that most of the critical comments on Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* have tended to evade the central question of the presentation of the protagonist, that sad artist-manqué, David Canaan. In his "Introduction" to the NCL edition, for example, Claude Bissell emphatically states "it is a novel written in praise of the family."[1] He does admit that the "praise" is not unmitigated, for the novel, "another portrait of the artist as a young man" (xi), deals with "the familiar conflict" (xi) between the young artist figure and his family. Buckler, however, is, according to Bissell, "conscious of subtler conflicts. *The Mountain and the Valley* is a study of human relations as they work themselves out in the family, separated by deep personal differences, and yet united by love and affection" (xi). Bissell seems to feel that this "love and affection" finally conquers all: "this is a study in the power of the group, of the way in which human beings living in separate worlds are yet made one with each other" (xii). Thus he is led to the rather odd conclusion that "the last section of the book [is] something of an anti-climax. . . . The study of human community threatens to become a study of human isolation" (xii).

In contrast to Bissell, I wish to argue that this carefully structured novel *is* a study of human isolation, and that Buckler uses his Prologue to initiate a series of scenes which reveal with great clarity just why and how much David is isolated from his community throughout his life. Even in Part One, "The Play," Buckler begins to prepare us for David Canaan's failure as a writer; from Part Four, "The Rock," to the end, the inevitability of that failure — as both artist and man — becomes the focus of the narrative.

In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood briefly discusses David Canaan as a failed artist figure, pointing out that his name suggests that he should be a "redeemer" to his people, redeeming their ordinary lives through his artist's imaginative vision. "As in Tennyson and the Bible, 'mountain' is the

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[1]"Introduction," Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1961), p. xi. All page references will be to this edition.

place of vision; 'valley' the scene of ordinary daily life. David's people are in exile, unredeemed, because they have no language equal to the full expression of life and emotion," she says, adding, "with his gift of speech he might perform the function of artist, 'articulate' the community so it could become visible to itself."[2] This cannot be: characteristically Canadian, "the champion fails."[3] He "is unable to escape, join the larger world of cities and wars where he dreams he might achieve self-realization; and the mountain accords him its vision only at the moment before his death (at the age of thirty, of a mysterious seizure)."[4] The question we must ask, of course, is why is David "unable to escape"? In Ms Atwood's view, it is an inevitable concomitant of the Canadian imagination that people will fail: they cannot escape, they even die, whether or not the story demands such an ending. "A great writer, an artist of any kind, is not imaginable in Entremont."[5]

While Ms Atwood is correct in claiming that David Canaan fails to give voice to his community, to "redeem" it in art, this does not mean that such acts are impossible. Elsewhere in *Survival*, she admits that, *while they are writing*, Canadian writers escape from the basic victim position of our culture.[6] And, in fact, Entremont *is* redeemed, as much as anything can be redeemed by art, in the very novel which explores David Canaan's failure to become an artist/redeemer in all its complexity. For it seems to me that one of the most important aspects of *The Mountain and the Valley* is that, in it, Buckler successfully does what David conspicuously fails to do while showing us, with precision and clarity, why David fails. That failure is not ordained by the community but by something inside David: it is *not* the inevitable outcome of a life lived in a small town in some region of Canada

[2](Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), p. 186. It is possible to argue, in fact, that the people of Entremont are *not* unredeemed, or at least do not require this kind of redemption; cf. *Ox Bells and Fireflies.*

[3]*Survival,* p. 186.

[4]*Survival,* p. 186. It is *not* a "mysterious seizure" at all. He has always been weaker than his fellows; and we are informed very clearly that he has a heart problem (246), while on his last walk up the mountain we are shown that the others of the town know of it: Steve thinks, "Wonder how his heart is these days" (284).

[5]*Survival,* p. 187. Nor in Jubilee, nor in Manawaka? Come now, Ms Atwood, too many of our best writers prove the opposite is true.

[6]The question of whether or not Ms Atwood's paradigm of Canadian cultural attitudes is correct is too vexed to be dealt with here. I will say only that I find it too narrow and limited to be of much use in dealing with a wide variety of work ignored in her study.

so much as the inevitable outcome of a particular approach to life which Buckler investigates throughout the novel. (Although it is in many ways an extra-literary point, nevertheless it is worth pointing out that Buckler lives on a farm, and wrote this novel there, though he also went to college as David does not. A small farm in rural Nova Scotia is not *necessarily* inimical to the artist's life.[7])

As I have already suggested, I think the structure of *The Mountain and the Valley* is important, and that the final sections of the novel do not appear anti-climactic if the novel is read as a study of David's self-imposed isolation as man and artist. The novel is obviously carefully structured, with a Prologue and Epilogue, set on the day of David's death, and six Parts, three associated with the valley, three associated with the mountain, in between.[8]

In the Prologue, Buckler presents a powerful image of David's alienation from the life around him: "Detail came clearly enough to David's sight; but it was as if another glass, beyond the glass of the window pane, covered everything, made touch between any two things impossible" (14). This comment about the older David occurs at the beginning of the novel, thus planting an awareness of David's potential for alienation before presenting David's early, and in some ways nearly Edenic, youth. The impossibility of "touch between any two" entities suggests the precise nature of David's artistic failure: he sees all things and people as *dis*-connected by this time, whereas a writer, a novelist especially, should accept as one of his major artistic purposes Forster's command: "Only connect" (a later reference to Forster (244) tends to support this interpretation). David is unable to connect as he stands at his window in pain; and his life is a series of scenes in which he misuses his power to do so, thus slowly but surely severing himself from the life and people around him.

David possesses the power to pull a group together, whether it be the boys at the swimming hole (103), his own family, Toby, Anna and himself, or the men getting ready to slaughter a pig (185-7); he can "connect" people this way when it suits his purposes, although to do so he often "betrays" (Buckler's word) some other person he is close to (Effie, with the boys; Bess, with the men). Such betrayal is disconnection of the worst sort. At one time or another David selfishly betrays just about everyone close to him. A small example is his refusal of Chris's unstated request to accompany them when he, Anna and Toby are setting off to climb the

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[7]See, Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel," in G. M. Cook, ed., *Ernest Buckler* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), pp. 22-27.

[8]See, D. O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was," *Ernest Buckler*, p. 100.

mountain, a trip they later abandon because of Toby's lack of interest (144). David is all too willing to use his ability as an artist to "speak" his peoples' lives and to speak to them with full understanding as a weapon against them. Each time he abuses his talents in this way he cuts himself off more from others.

Buckler explores this aspect of David's behaviour in the context of the life of the community as a whole and especially in the context of his family, each member of which is presented in complex detail. David's willful failure to mature as a man and artist is illumined against the full background of his family, society and place. In the Prologue, Ellen, his grandmother, continues to call him "Child" although he is thirty years old. While she is old and forgetful, I believe the repetition of the term indicates that we are to view him as still childish in important ways.

David's failure to connect in the Prologue is the result of two behaviour mechanisms which he adopts early in his life and which he never outgrows. One, associated directly with his talent, is his tendency to plan extraordinarily subtle psychological revenges upon anyone he imagines has hurt him. The other, often combined with the first, is a tendency to fantasize, to jump the present to an imagined future (beyond the period during which he would have to study and practice to achieve excellence in anything) where he is the "best" mathematician, fiddler, writer, or whatever, in the world. Natural dreams for a child, perhaps, but not for a man of thirty, or even twenty.

The first major example of this double response in action comes during the play, when David tries to kiss Effie and knocks the crown off her head. The whole long scene (79-82) reveals how David's thoughts and actions are both selfish and, when things go wrong, vindictive. Before he makes his mistake he is carried to the future by his sense of power in acting and he thinks, "humbly" and "proudly" at once, reveling in the power to move others that he feels he now commands, "I will be the greatest actor in the whole world" (82). Though he is fantasizing here because he feels good, he is only thinking of himself, as usual. When Jud Spinney shouts "gleefully, 'That's it, Dave. Slap em *to* her!' " (82), after he has muffed his attempt to kiss Effie, he is suddenly flooded with rage. With no thought for her, or the others, he runs out of the school and home through the snow, thinking how he will "get" Jud, and everyone else too "as if their hearing the guffaw had made them accomplices. A great surge went through him to leap ahead into time, into the strength that was coming" (83). As he plans how he will revenge himself on them all in that good time to be, Buckler shows us just how potentially talented David is, for he has a subtle knowledge of just *how* to hurt those he knows (84).

David's unwillingness to make plans, to recognize that he will have to work hard to achieve any future, is first revealed near the beginning of the novel as he, Chris and his father prepare to walk to the top of the

mountain: "Always that: Would you be hungry, or tired, or warm enough? If he could only make them see how meaningless the possibility of being hungry later on was" (24). As a revelation of a child's eager desire to go out into life and explore, this nicely suggests a childish ignorance of how the future (like lunchtime) will quickly catch up to one (David is surprised at how hungry he is at the bridge (28)).

There are many reasons for "escaping" to fantasy futures; the most basic is disappointment in the now. As Joseph and his sons turn back from the mountain to accompany the group bringing the two dead men back to the village, someone mentions how "Pete went all through the war, without a scratch" (41), precipitating David into the trenches of his imagination: "And suddenly, like waking from a muddled dream, he knew exactly what he was going to be. He was going to be the greatest general in the whole world" (41). This is one way of muffling the impact of the disappointment he feels at not having the day go as he wants it to, but there is a kind of selfishness at work here, too. David is really quite unconcerned about what the deaths of the two men mean to their families and friends; he knows only that they have spoiled his day. In a child, this kind of response is understandable, but when David continues to think in such terms as he gets older, the psychological implications of such thinking appear in darker and darker tones.

David is a dreamer, not a doer. He seldom acts to bring about the futures he so ardently desires, but when he does the results are often bitterly unlike what he imagined. The dreams, too often, are his characteristic response to imagined slights. David takes pleasure, when imagining revenge, in the finality of time's inexorable forward movement. Later in his life, when he looks back and wishes to change the past, he will hate time, too.[9]

The reader, then, soon comes to expect David to act in what can only be called a characteristic manner: to strive to hurt those closest to him whenever, often unwittingly, they do something to offend or hurt him. Often David will make far too strong a response to the slight directed at him. When Chris first begins to get interested in Charlotte and asks her along on the annual visit to the cemetery, he is naturally overly defensive about it and replies sharply to one of David's questions:

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[9]John Moss, the only critic I know who has said anything about David's failure similar to what I am arguing in this essay, is especially good on David's relationship to time. See, *Patterns of Isolation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 232-235.

> David didn't say anything. He inhaled his anger. The instant fascination of hating someone he loved caught him. Later in the day, he thought, when Chris had forgotten these words and maybe would say, "Let's go around the cove for a swim where the girls can't see," he'd say, "No, I don't think, you go if you like." Not as if he were sore, but as if swimming with Chris were a little tiresome. Chris's face would look as if he'd run into something in the dark. And when Chris saw that through all the years, never, never again . . . . (87-88)

David knows where those he wishes to hurt are weakest, and he always goes for the jugular, at least in imagination. Of course, he doesn't do this to Chris this day, and in fact Chris first makes love with Charlotte that very afternoon, never thinking to go swimming where the girls can't see. David even forgets his plan, but he's stung to a new one that evening when he realizes that Chris has "done it." He will show them all, he'll do it too!

David uses others, even as he entertains and communicates with them. And even when he knows that he is doing wrong he feels he *has* to do it, as in the first time he makes love with Effie (110 ff.). Once he has so shyly boasted of his (as yet unreal) conquest of Effie (he doesn't name her, but the boys all know he's referring to her), he feels he must, immediately, prove himself by doing it in fact. On another level he only wants to push her so far, for he is young and scared: he's sure she will say no, and then he will be able to give up the attempt for now. But Effie is not like David; loving him, she is unselfish in the extreme and says yes. Loving her, David is still essentially self-centred. The long passage where he considers the meaning of her acquiescence (110) subtly renders just how much his thoughts and feelings focus on himself: recognizing the depth of her love, he considers how *he* feels, not how she feels. He does tell her she doesn't have to go through with it, but once he sees her naked all thought of anything but his gratification is gone. Effie gives herself wholly, but Buckler renders even that fact in a manner which reveals that David's recognition of it only serves to further feed his pride. Meanwhile, the boys having quite naturally, if cruelly, followed David, David and Effie are forced to run through brambles and bushes trying to escape them; Effie is scratched and her skirt — with which she had taken such care when disrobing for him — torn. David's thoughts are once again full of hatred for the others: "He'd like to kill every one of them, coldly, inexorably. They'd beg for mercy and plead that it was only a joke — unable to believe till the very last that he could do it to them, remembering who they were — but he'd be merciless and unreachable *as a stranger*. The pride he was to have felt before them never came into his head" (112). This is one of the few cases where David does achieve the dreamed-of future rather quickly; but it isn't at all the way he dreamed it would be. Perhaps Buckler's finest touch in this long and complex scene is the loss of Effie's "kittle." David

tells Effie he won't tell anyone, which proves to be a double-edged falsehood for he has already implicated her beforehand with his boasting, and he will readily betray her to Toby. He wonders as he looks at her with what he thinks is love what he can give her in return for her gift of self, but the answer eludes him, and the final paragraph of the chapter follows: "They searched and searched for the kettle. They couldn't find it anywhere" (113).

At the beginning of the next chapter he and Effie meet Anna on the road. She is bringing David the first letter from Toby: Effie is suddenly elsewhere, left out, "the complex magic a letter held for him erased the simple magic of what he'd done with Effie almost utterly" (114). As always, David's thoughts focus on himself (admittedly in relation to a variety of other people: here "Effie and Anna suddenly shifted places in his mind. Anna was let in again, and Effie left out" (114)).

It is especially interesting, therefore, that Buckler chooses this chapter (XVI, the last of Part Two), immediately following the episode of the letter, to reveal Martha's capacity for self-inflicted jealous pain, and her ability to use her silence as a weapon against Joseph (117). This is the first real sign that this family is not quite as perfect as Dr. Bissell would have us believe in his Introduction. But Buckler's purpose here (as again later when he shows us the various ways in which Anna relates to Toby with a jealous love) is to create a fuller background for our understanding of David's character. On one level, Martha and Anna are surrogates for David, revealing facets of his character in situations he never experiences personally. Moreover, Martha is the person from whom he inherited his predilection for selfish and wounding behaviour. Anna is perhaps more important, for she, unlike David, gets to the city and learns to live in this new and different environment thus implying how David might have acted had he ever escaped the farm. All the scenes of disjunctive behaviour between Martha and Joseph, and between Anna and Toby in the second half of the book, provide insights into David's possible behaviour had he left the farm or married. For David's life in the second half of the novel is basically one of non-action beyond what is required to survive on the farm.

Before David is brought low by his fall from the rafters, however, Toby comes to visit him at the farm. In the chapters which cover the visit, Buckler provides the deepest and clearest revelations of David's characteristic dream-mechanism yet. The whole of Chapter XX, where the boys lie in bed and talk to one another for the first time, brilliantly evokes David's psychology (140-143). He *knows* how to tell Toby things from his own background: "He had to transmute them in the telling. He had to make them discardable as anything but a basis for fun." This (perhaps slight) betrayal of his own heritage, a betrayal David feels is necessary because, at this moment, Toby is the centre of his personal universe, prepares us for the far greater betrayal of Effie later on. Of course, when it

happens, David's shabby treatment of Effie in front of Toby gains him only what he deserves: a sense of guilt and of smallness beside this not really important — just ordinarily human — person whom he has failed to impress (146). But by the time he figures this out it is too late, and he has already demeaned himself in his (and our) eyes.

The major syndrome revealed in Chapter XX is David's propensity for dreaming great futures. For every suggestion Toby makes about the city, or their becoming sailors together, David provides the running fictional — and sentimental — commentary in his head: he will be, in the space of three pages, a great singer, sailor, swimmer, tennis player, explorer and lover. As always, he does not think of how to achieve these pinnacles but of the glory of *having achieved them.*

The other revelation of Toby's visit concerns both David and Anna. Both are attracted to Toby, and Anna is convinced she will marry him one day, but both recognize their ability to hurt him, singly or together, if they ever wish to, because they know his fear of isolation (145). This power of insight that David possesses is never understated in the novel. Buckler makes it very clearly a central facet of his character. If David is an artist-manqué, it is not because he lacks innate qualities of vision, but because of some moral flaw in his character. Scene after scene of betrayal, revenge, or just plain cruelty to others, clearly reveals the nature of this flaw. He is too selfish to ever look to others for their own sakes: he sees everything in relation to his own selfish needs. Even the pain and loss he feels at Effie's death is self-centred. And his self-destructive urge to make love with Bess in Effie's bedroom (151), "to shock back the immediacy of the death-sadness by the very shame of defiling it," reveals how full of human failure his methods of action are: "Afterwards David cried; but the film was still there." He has accomplished less than he desired, failed to shock himself back to death-sadness but defiled it anyway. The one lesson Effie's death teaches him is peculiarly selfish as well: "It taught him that secrecy about anything (even a hateful thing like this) made it a possession of curious inviolability, and tempted him to collect more" (152). This statement comes at the end of Part Three. From the beginning of Part Four, especially from the time of his accident, on, he gives in to that temptation more and more often, cutting himself off from other people to a greater and greater degree, until by the end of the novel, his lonely death on the mountain, he is completely isolated from his fellow human beings.

David always chooses the most powerful weapon at hand. When he gives into his almost totally self-created anger at his father (165), he uses

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[10]David reveals, in a number of small ways, his assumed superiority to those people he lives with and among. See, for example, his choice of the attic — separate, above, apart — for his room when the Canaans move into their new house (121).

the language his father would never expect to make the wound of the content of what he says all the deeper. Then when Joseph strikes him, we see the revenge syndrome at work: "And then the fascinating whisper told him not to move . . . to let the blow dry on his face like the muddy water. It was more grindingly sweet than anything he'd ever known." But David's capacity for revenge is blunted by his own dichotomous nature (perhaps even a form of cowardice): when he tries to leave the farm he finds he cannot go through with it. "He began to sob. He sobbed because he could neither leave nor stay. He sobbed because he was neither one thing nor the other" (171). But he can, and has, destroyed the joy in the accomplishment that the day was to have held for Joseph. His inability to leave at this point, to strike out *on* his own rather than merely *at* others, points towards his future failures as man and artist in the rest of the novel.

The scene which leads up to David's fall (his final fall from potential grace?) is a very full presentation of both the good and bad sides of his particular character and abilities. He is the one who can unite all the men into a laughing group, the one "who could twist Freem's phrasing to make a story out of a fact" (186). But he is also the one who uses Bess to make another dirty joke: "He felt a stab of betrayal, the minute he spoke about Bess like that. Suddenly he despised Ben's sly smut. But he couldn't help saying what he did — not if it made them laugh" (187). Here again we discover David's ability to project his own guilt, to avoid facing the truth of his actions. He despises the others, he *cannot help* saying these things: it's not his fault, not his responsibility. His immature reaction to the others' attempts to help him, and his great anger at Chris's statement that he doesn't like to see anything killed, lead him to act irrationally and to hurt himself. Buckler brilliantly portrays the psychological feedback here (all internal — David's alone): everything David does increases his pain and anger, causing him to make more mistakes which cause him pain and further anger, leading up to his angrily climbing up to the rafters. It is interesting that during all this he recognizes Chris's extraordinarily humane attempts to make up for his gaffe and bring David down from his anger. He recognizes them yet wills himself to ignore them *because* the pain and anger are so "grindingly sweet." After the fall, after Chris has carried him to the house, after he has revived the next day, he realizes he should tell Chris that it was his own fault, that it wasn't what Chris said: "He wanted to answer, 'What . . . ? Oh, *that* . . .' and smile. But he couldn't. He didn't smile" (194). A moment later he realizes, as always too late, that the opportunity "to fix this thing up between them" is forever lost. "This thing now must go forever unresolved" (194).

In terms of the lyric presentation of the family in the novel, this is just one incident of irresolution among many which reveal this family to be as flawed as any. David's parents and siblings are fallen human beings: they do not live in Eden. Their home must eventually fall apart. It is no accident

in this novel that Joseph dies on the day he and Martha are so bitterly *un*-reconciled. Nor that Martha feels he has forsaken her (222). Of course the great love of these two people is made clear throughout: it *is* great, but it isn't perfect. In a similar manner Buckler reveals great potential for good, and even many good acts, on David's part. But the basic movement of the novel is to reveal how fully that good is flawed, and how specifically his many human failures make the artistic ones inevitable.

Although David's desire to be an artist is clearly indicated throughout, the only glimpse we get of him attempting to write comes during Toby and Anna's visit early in the war, and he makes all the basic errors: he is sentimental, writes not out of experience but out of imagined heroism, and he fails to render speech or images with any accuracy.[11] He does recognize his failure finally — though only when suddenly confronted by Toby, reality catching him off-guard — but his first feelings are euphoric: he is sure (now) that he will be a good writer (260-264).

David's long, overwhelming revelation of what he must write, his moment of vision on top of the mountain in the Epilogue (287 ff.), is the other major evocation of his potential as a writer in the novel. It is a brilliant piece of writing, precisely suggesting the incredibly difficult nature of the art he would practice. But, despite the exaltation of the moment — an exaltation captured by Buckler in the rich movements of his prose at this point — David dies of a heart attack, and the potential artistic redemption (to use Ms Atwood's term) of the people of Entremont dies with him, a cruel stroke of fate.

But is this, in fact, the case? I believe not. Buckler chooses to go beyond the exalted moment to reveal for one final moment the willful nature of David's failure before allowing him to die. David does realize that the burden of his art will be to tell it "exactly the way *it* was" (291), but he quickly moves beyond this recognition to a fantasy future of imagined public success:

> He didn't consider *how* he would find it. . . . Nor how long it might take. (If you took a hundred years, then — though neither this thought was explicit nor reason's denial of it, for the swelling moment to transcend — he would live a hundred years.) He knew only that he would do it . . . It would make him the greatest writer in the whole world.
> . . .(They had all read his book now. He felt that wave of pride and humbleness both, as they looked at him and thought: he understands everything . . . ) (299)

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[11]He fails, essentially, according to the tenets of psychological realism, by which Buckler has written the novel.

Oh, David is exalted all right, but he is also beyond reality. In his exaltation he even absolves all the others, and himself, of the hurts they gave each other ("They will see that anyone who must have loved them so well, to have known them so thoroughly, could never have denied them once, as sometimes they may have thought I did . . ." (300)), planning a lovely future for them all. The finest future is reserved for himself, of course:

> He could hear his voice saying to her on the phone, "What do you think, Anna — my book won the prize?" Then the line would be still, because they'd both be crying; then they'd both be laughing at each other crying . . . Oh, Anna, Anna. . . .
> And then he felt the beating of his heart. (300)

Well, at least he dies happy.

Here, as always, David ignores the harsh truths of the situation. He dreams of the praise and the prizes he will receive, not of the joys and anguish of craftmanship which are their own rewards. David's essential selfishness always wins out over everything else in his character.

There are at least two major ironies in this conclusion to the novel. The first concerns Ellen, who throughout has both told good, true stories and woven her rugs out of the lives of the people she loves. Those rugs, tangible works of craft scattered about the house, are works of art, however primitive or crude they may be. Ellen, through her rugmaking, gives form to the lives of the Canaan family as David never does. Within the novel, she is the artist David fails to become. Time and again, moreover, she is shown as being selfless in her relation to others, as well as having a profound and generous intuitive understanding of them.

The other irony is purely structural; it underlies every word in the novel. After all, Ernest Buckler *has* written the novel, *has* found the language, that will redeem in art the people and the place of Entremont. In rendering the totality of David's failure, the whole complex situation of his life in this place, in this time, with these people, Buckler achieves what David can only dream of, and this is a major achievement, indeed.

Moreover, in another structural irony, Buckler has made clear, in his celebration of that place, time and people, that David has always suffered a great loss by not participating in what was happening — now — around him. By dreaming of what would happen in the future he failed to do very much in the present. David has missed out on life — as well as art — because "the unquestioned premise all his calculations had been built on was false" (274). David recognizes this that one time he watches Toby's train disappear, but, as the Epilogue makes clear, he refuses to acknowledge this "toppling moment of clarity" (274) and goes on dreaming fantasy futures for himself, or at least dumbly ignoring the now painful present of his final years.

Thus I am returned to my beginning: *The Mountain and the Valley* is more than just a flawed paean to the virtues of the rural family, more than just another example of the victim syndrome in Canadian literature. It is a far subtler achievement: the representation of a potentially great character who fails to achieve his potential for the most human of reasons — willful self-love. The story of David's failure to mature, of the failure of heart which continually dis-connects him from those near to him, is told in the context of a complex presentation of a whole community. It is because this strand of the novel is only one of many, albeit a central one, that *The Mountain and the Valley* is quite correctly judged by critics to be one of the best novels of the post-war period.