WORD-SHAPES, TIME AND THE THEME OF ISOLATION IN THE MOUNTAIN AND THE VALLEY

by
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In his recent article on *The Mountain and the Valley* Douglas Barbour[1] lays heavy emphasis on David Canaan's isolation and the personal weaknesses which caused it, something Claude Bissell spends little time on in his "Introduction" to the NCL edition of the book. Barbour even feels justified in claiming that the ". . . novel *is* a study of human isolation."[2] As Barbour points out, his announcement contradicts Bissell's earlier criticism that "The study of human community threatens to become a study of human isolation"[3] toward the end of the novel. Yet, if Bissell seems to ignore isolation, Barbour ignores the sense of community in the novel. Barbour's emphasis on isolation is so exclusive, in fact, that he loses the balance Bissell achieves — and Bissell does discuss "isolation" but considers it as "separation", a term which accounts more accurately than Barbour's for the tone of the greater part of the work. I would like to carry Bissell's distinction further in what follows here and consider not just the "isolation" of David but the sense of separation which is a part of the experience of all the characters. Given the clarification of the idea of "separation" it will then be possible to distinguish the more profound sense of a personal and cosmic isolation which is, as Bissell sensed, the final state of all the characters, even if Bissell felt the theme of isolation to be detrimental to the artistic unity of the book.

The major difficulty in Barbour's article seems to be a failure to look beyond David or to see him as one of a number of characters, all of whom have significance to the theme he is discussing. Not everything in the novel is mediated through David — Chris and Charlotte, Martha and Joseph,

[1]Douglas Barbour, "David Canaan: The Failing Heart," *Studies in Canadian Literature* I (1976), 64-75.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

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

Anna and Toby, Ellen all have separate scenes to themselves. Bissell's statement that ". . . 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) accounts more validly for the dual emphasis on community and individuals in the novel than does Barbour's exclusive obsession with David's isolation. Bissell's argument has two points of emphasis: "human beings living in separate worlds" and the possibility of their being made "one with each other." It is both the sense of separation and the possibility of unity which give a fundamental human pathos to the relationships in the novel and which finally make David's struggles more than those of a mere failure, of a cruel, vengeful, inept artist manqué, as Barbour would have us believe.

It is from Barbour's exclusiveness that the following unfortunate suggestion comes:

> On one level Martha and Anna are surrogates for David, revealing facets of his character in situations he never experiences personally . . . 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.[4]

To dismiss the other characters as surrogates or as literary extensions of "David's possible behaviour", or even as "background"[5] is to miss Buckler's more profound insight into the human condition in a novel which attempts to understand the individual characters by the fact of their difference in *kind* rather than in their difference of opportunity or morality. They are all seen as distinctly individual, separated into their own worlds, not by different, more, or fewer experiences, but by different modes of perceiving themselves and their world and of reacting to it.

There is another way in which Barbour's "failure hunting" (the same thing he accuses Margaret Atwood of doing at the first of his article), distorts much of the dramatic tension in the novel. He says of Martha and the Canaan family:

> 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 Dr. Bissell would have us believe in his introduction.[6]

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[4]Barbour, 70.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

There are two problems in this passage. First Martha does not use her silences as "weapons" and is as bewildered by them as Joseph is. Her silences are part of a larger pattern of characterization and perception which we will explore shortly. The second problem lies in the implications that there is some evil lurking under the surface of the family, which Bissell thinks is idyllic, and that the unity of the family is merely hypocrisy. Barbour seems to assume a uniform cruelty in all the characters, with the apparent change in relationships merely a stripping away of a superficial unity.

Buckler does not portray his characters as failures from the beginning of the novel, and although there is a strong sense of separation even at the beginning there are positive as well as negative aspects to that separation. As the Valley changes in the post-war period David observes that ". . . the knitted warmth between its people had ravelled, until each was almost as alone in his own distraction now as the city people were . . ." (261), but the earlier "knitted warmth" was still genuine, not hypocritical, and the changes which take place in the novel are not just ". . . the first real signs that this family is not quite as Dr. Bissell would have us believe in his introduction."

The "separation" of the characters is a sign of their strength and individuality at the first of the novel and must be distinguished from the isolation of alienation which is so much a part of Canadian prairie or urban novels. It is only as Buckler's novel progresses that the fulness of a separate and individual existence takes on the qualities of being cut off, adrift, alone which characterize the isolation so typical of much Canadian writing.

Buckler defines his characters through their peculiar modes of perception and thought and distinguishes them into two major groups — the articulate and the inarticulate. The earlier "knitted warmth" and the later isolation of the characters are directly associated with their modes of apprehension. Beyond that Buckler sees his characters in a wider context of "Time" where time becomes an almost tangible determinant in the relationships between characters. But before considering the importance of time and isolation let us first look at the distinctions Buckler draws between his characters and at the positive elements of their relationships. We will then be in a position to examine the fundamental why of their isolation beyond the superficial fact of their being cut off from each other.

Martha and Joseph are inarticulate but whole. Martha is identified usually with the home, where she thought ". . . the slow thoughts that come and go silently when you are working alone *without speech*" (23): Joseph works in the fields: "He was a slow man, but his life beat was no less varied than Martha's for being *inarticulate*" (25) [my italics]. In these two quotations Buckler defines the positive aspects of the lives of his inarticulate characters in terms of the negation of speech. When he compares Joseph and David he does the same thing:

> He was a quiet man. But that didn't mean that the things of the day passed through him unaffected . . . His feelings *weren't word-shaped,* like David's. There was no page in his mind or heart where their tracery was legible to himself. But they made a tune in him just the same. (156) [my italics]

David's feelings are "word-shaped" and abstract: Joseph's are like a tune, undefined but immediately real. The immediacy of Joseph and Martha's perception is different from David's. They feel at one with the home and field without having to depend on the medium of words for their experience. Their relationship to the farm is basically the same, and they are united by it. For Joseph ". . . none of it was word-shaped and clear, but he felt the earth he owned contained in the touch of his feet" (115). Martha also felt ". . . without word-shaped thought, the same contentment as he. As if it were a garden they had planted together" (115). One is even tempted to see their world of intimacy and unity with the land as a kind of Garden of Eden, undefiled by knowledge or abstraction.

David, on the other hand, seeks word-shaped knowledge. In his continual analysis of relationships and experience through the abstraction of words he is able to observe the event from a distance. But his abstract view of reality prevents him from having, except occasionally, the type of experience which the inarticulate characters enjoy. Even with something as basic as the development of the sexual instinct the difference of perception becomes obvious. When Chris reaches puberty he is conscious of the changes within him; "He felt something new and secret. There seemed to be an extra voice inside him now, that he heard only when he was alone" (47). But when David reaches the same stage his awareness is transmuted immediately into words and expectations: "You knew you'd be doing it sometime for sure, but it was among those things that went with 'older' — it seemed like something not quite real" (100). Chris experiences powerful instincts as internal and secret: David views them as something external to himself, something with a distant meaning beyond himself and only incidentally related to him.

David does however have some of the same experience of the land as his parents. He is conscious of his difference from Toby's city-bred dullness in this regard:

> He knew that if Toby found himself alone in the country, it would have no language for him at all. Toby would never understand how the country spoke to him strongest when no one else was there. (140)

But on the whole the abstractions of the analytic approach to life keep David from the immediate apprehension of experience which gives Joseph and Martha their ability to "permeate" each other. It is not until Toby visits the farm late in the novel that David is able to give himself to an

experience. Then he discovers why it had been so wonderful: ". . . there hadn't been any *thinking* about it. He hadn't thought about the way it was, at all, all the time" (259). Words, and the thoughts which words make possible, continually come between David and his experience.

Although David's type of perception tends to dull the intensity of his bodily senses, and even suggests the "isolation" which Barbour speaks of in a pejorative sense, it opens up new areas of experience to him. At the cemetery he even achieves a quality of transcendence — "The lake lapped gently, and all the stain of the word 'ago' was suddenly in that spot. It made a rushing stillness that spoke to some other sense than hearing" (91). Even the death of the young, through its word associations, carries him into realms of speculation beyond the ordinary: "They had made the stain brightest of all by their very unconsciousness of having put together the shiveringly matchless words 'died' and 'young'" (93). David is beginning to develop his own individual world of word-shaped awareness which is distinct from the world of nature and the instinctive communication of his parents and Chris.

Joseph builds his inner world around his wife and land while David constructs a life of words and ideas. When father and son fight they bring two distinct worlds of perception into conflict:

> [Joseph] felt struck, sick. Not by David's anger, but by the words he'd used. He'd known that David possessed words like that; but he'd thought they were Sunday things, like the gold watch fob of his own that lay in the drawer. He thought now: They really belong to him. He's using them against me. He's not just tired or quick. This place is no kin to him at all, the way it is to me. (165)

Joseph thinks of words as objects, not as expressing consciousness: his consciousness is in the place. David's consciousness, Joseph realizes, is in the words, beyond the farm and the rhythms of nature and labour, the awareness of strength and body. But Joseph's realization is only partial. David's tragedy is that he is attracted by the concrete, secure world of the farmer and feels a kinship to it, while living almost entirely in the world of words and abstractions. He cannot run away from home because his roots are there, yet he cannot stay because he is removed beyond it by his "word-shaped" awareness: "He sobbed because he was neither one thing nor the other" (171).

Chris seems like his father, often more limited than his father. Most of Chris's consciousness in the novel seems to be centered in his body, yet he transcends the body in flashes. There are times ". . . when Chris came out with that odd perceptiveness you'd never suspected in him. You wondered suddenly how much he understood about everything else" (191-2). We see him later working outside Rachel's house:

> It gave [David] a sudden pang to see *Chris* thinking that way as he worked. It reminded him of someone who had never gone to school, trying to trace out the letters of his own name. (201)

One has the feeling here that Chris has half perceived something important about himself but, figuratively, he can only "trace out the letters of his own name," he can only follow the outline of his life without seeing the central significance of his perception. The pathos of his situation is that he is perceptive enough in an abstracting sense to be discontent, without having the ability to rise above his discontent through understanding.

The characters finally find themselves limited and alone in the inner worlds their perceptions have created. They try at first to reach out to others and so to set up relationships which will extend their worlds and help them overcome their separation. Some of them succeed in finding meaning, or joy, or pleasure, or contentment in their relations with the others, but the possibility of being forced into isolation in the self is always present and is the final state of all the characters.

Chris and Charlotte founder on their inability to understand the forces which divide and unite them. They have little power of communication except the physical, and that soon loses its unifying sense of mystery. They try to articulate their relationship, but from the very beginning are unable to because they cannot command the necessary words:

> Speech between them was always halting. It was as if they thought in one language but had to speak in another, choosing only those words their clumsy mastery of the second language could translate. (48)

The only way Chris knows to communicate is through touch. Both he and Charlotte lack intelligence in the abstract realms of words in which David moves, and they also miss the subtle depths in which Joseph and Martha live. Whereas David is torn between his awareness of the extremes of the abstract and the deeply human, Chris is suspended in unknowingness between the two. He sees dimly the possibilities in each but can achieve neither. Buckler even describes him and Charlotte in animal terms, something he never does with Joseph and Martha. Chris and Charlotte seldom get beyond the animal, beyond the touch of flesh.

The sexual relationship between Chris and Charlotte would seem to be set in deliberate contrast to that between David and Effie to illustrate the limits of the purely physical and the purely intellectual.

Chris and Charlotte begin their relationship in the novel with their clumsy use of words but soon abandon those for the communion of bodies which is more congenial. Their movements together in the wagon on the way to the cemetery are described as being ". . . like the steady night

feeding of animals in a pasture" (88); in the cemetery communication is on the level of accidently touched hands and the smell of sweat; their first sexual encounter at the spring is described entirely through references to flesh, the body, the physical, and the complete absorption in the act itself. Afterwards "There was a kind of steaming closeness between them. The tantalizing flesh-secret, discovered together, was deposited safe beyond the need of watchfulness now, one in the other" (99). The communion of bodies here supercedes and makes extraneous the halting separation in the words.

At the other extreme, the relationship between David and Effie has nothing of the animal quality of a union of bodies. Their relationship begins in the novel with the shared secret of the *words* of the school play. The idea that they might marry is expressed as a common understanding of a word — "The word 'marry' filled them both. It was like a *place* . . ." (47). When David discovers that Chris has "done it" with Charlotte, he feels he must prove himself. But he must prove himself because he thinks of sex as ". . . among those things that went with 'older' . . ." (100). He wants to show that he too is mature, "older", and he wants to know the reality behind the word "sex." At the moment of sexual encounter Effie becomes merely a medium through which David hopes to gain knowledge of abstract concepts. "When Effie moved toward him, of herself, he tried to fix her in his *thought* (not even then completely swamped), like someone trying desperately to *see* through the clamour of sudden blindness" (111) [my italics]. David was not ready for the intensity of the experience, the "sudden blindness" through which he tries to see, but he still struggles desperately to transform the experience into thought.

The experience changes David and Effie's relationship as it had Chris and Charlotte's, but in a different way. Instead of "steaming closeness," David feels a sense of responsibility for Effie, a fear that she may be hurt without his "knowing" it, or that she might get ". . . beyond the cure of being brought back inside and thoroughly apprehended" (113). David has made Effie part ofhis conceptual world, not a partner in a union of bodies or souls. Their relationship becomes increasingly one of "knowing" and "apprehending" abstractly, and Effie is finally merely an instrument for the destructive and often cruel urgency of David's lust for conscious, word-shaped knowledge of everything around him, even if he does feel guilt for his betrayal of the intimacy they do manage to achieve. On the other hand Chris and Charlotte's physical knowledge brings them to an empty marriage where they cannot establish intimacy because the physical communion finds its limits in satiety, and they cannot get beyond the physical.

Joseph and Martha do not even feel the need to translate their feelings into words — their communion is too intimate and delicate for that: "But their thoughts seemed to hum together in the cidery light. . . . Speech broke, rather than forged, the quiet contact between them. The silences between speech spliced it together again" (126). They

have achieved a sense of oneness beyond the physical contact of Chris and Charlotte or the abstract knowing of David and Effie. The parents' world is based on the rural patterns and awarenesses which for them are undisturbed by the new forces which affect David and Chris. But even the elemental relationship of Joseph and Martha carries the seeds of its own destruction in its failure to understand the conditions under which it exists. It, like the rural life generally, depends on the "climate of the day" and so changes with even the smallest disruptive force. Martha's silences (which Barbour sees as mere weapons of jealousy) are caused by the very failure to transmute experience into words which gave rise to their sense of harmony in the first place:

> Her mind ceased to work sensibly before she could examine the cause and discard it. She felt the instant sense of isolation, forsakenness. Her perceptions converged inwards. The fascination of speechlessness settled on her like a weight. (212)

Since she cannot abstract, recognize and discard the irritant in their relationship she forces separation and complete isolation on them both. She feels forsaken, as if Joseph has withdrawn from her, and her "perceptions converged inwards." She withdraws into her own world and ceases to perceive outward, to reach out beyond herself even in simple speech, and the inexorable movement of time carries them beyond the point where she can reach out to him again.

Martha, like the others, is thrown into the condition of separation which hangs close to all the characters in this novel when their tenuous connections with others break down. Separateness is ultimately the only sure ground of their experience. They reach out of their inner worlds in their various ways, in words, or touch, or the spiritual union which Martha and Joseph feel at times, yet their efforts are only temporarily successful at best. They all return ultimately to the loneliness of the self.

So the concern with language, apprehension, and communication points ultimately to the isolation which is the universal condition of the human soul in this novel. Buckler's rural characters are finally the same as his city people, "alone in their own distraction," except that the city people never move beyond themselves, and one must never undervalue the communication which the honesty of the rural characters make possible: the novel would be unbearable without it.

The analysis of "word-shaped" experience must bring us finally to David, the man whose world is words, and who is the most isolated of all the characters because his world is so far beyond the ordinary life of the Valley. He is conscious of his isolation and his need to identify with others, but ironically his ability to identify with all levels of men, and his conscious attempts to learn more about his fellows so that he will be able to come closer to them, sets him off from the others, and makes his isolation more intense. His desire to impress Toby and to become his equal leads David to

destroy the love and tenderness in his relationship with Effie in a gratuitous act of cruelty, but he comes no closer to Toby. Buckler emphasizes the possibility of complete aloneness from the beginning of the novel with the presence of Old Herb who becomes an emblem of the condition which awaits David (and all the characters). David himself becomes another "Old Herb."

David sees his vision at the end of the novel as a way out of the isolation which his abstractions have forced upon him, but his vision is ambiguous:

> He caught his breath. He felt like the warm crying of acquittal again. Even my mother and my father and all the others who are gone will know somehow, somewhere, that I have given an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves or each other — *hurts that were caused only by the misreading of what they couldn't express.* 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) [my italics]

In his writings David plans to give an "absolving voice" to his guilt and to the hurts of others by revealing the context in which action, which appeared to be betrayal or cruelty, was really a "misreading of what they couldn't express." He will, in effect, set right their inability to abstract and articulate, but David's assumption that all problems can be solved by "saying" them accurately is only partly valid. The absolution he plans takes place on the level of words and the abstractions which they represent, even if those words become art. Words (and art) are shadows of the reality, and they cannot touch the hurt of those who are dead or gone away. David's expression, "somehow, somewhere," with its note of hopeless urgency, gives the clue to what seems to be his final misreading of his circumstance. His theory about an absolving voice is half vision but also half self-pity and loneliness. He reaches out pathetically with words, the only communication he knows, for relationships which have passed irretrievably beyond him. He cannot bear his isolation so he attempts a final gesture of reconciliation to bring his family and the lost Eden back to him.

Because he fools himself in some ways does not mean that David's vision or his art are futile as Barbour suggests, however. As always with David the futility lies, not in his ideas or words, but in his attempt to reach out to others. The ambiguity of his final thoughts is the ambiguity of the artist's position as an interpreter of life. David, as man and artist, is caught between the desire for spontaneous, reconciling action, and the inability to act because he must observe, understand, and transmute his experience into art. He sees art as grappling with the stuff of life in an attempt to pierce beyond the surface misunderstanding to the reality beneath. The irony is that he knows the deepest realities through his vision, yet he does

not see that his art cannot be used as a substitute for the life of instinct and love which he never knew fully as his own experience. Even in his final vision, then, he is torn between the world of ideas within himself and the world of harmonious life which he envies in his parents, but now his ideas are the only world he has left and they have brought him to a complete and irrevocable isolation. Even an understanding of the *reasons* for loneliness cannot deliver him from the *reality* of the confines of his inner world.

Buckler accentuates further the impossibility of establishing a lasting communion beyond the self by examining his characters through "Time," the second "beam of light" (299), which he uses to illumine the dark corners of their lives. The emphasis we have just explored on the nature of the characters' perception and communication suggests levels of consciousness and separation within the confines of the self; time moves us beyond the self and reveals the isolation of the characters within the great forces of change in the universe.

Words and language are fairly concrete things, and the communication which takes place without words is also something within the range of most people's experience, but to characterize in terms of time, to have characters self-conscious about time, and to see the lives of the characters as features of time is getting into a much more abstract realm. However, although time is abstract, Buckler does build his references to time into a sort of palpable texture. Perhaps the best way to approach this seemingly obscure part of our discussion, then, is to look at several examples of its use and the various effects Buckler achieves through it.

On a simple level Buckler defines his characters as they are related to the passing of time. He speaks of Toby's ". . . instant abandonment of the now for the next" (142), and embodies in that short phrase Toby's insensitivity to the subtler nuances of significant moments, his willingness to go from one action to the next without fully savouring the present, and also his lack of the memory and guilt which immobilize David.

Buckler's observation about Rachel is vivid as well as amusing: "Time was something captive in that room always; something she wore away bit by slow bit, with each movement of her rocker" (71). Here she is a sulky jailer of time and her old rocking chair is the torture instrument. With her harsh, self-pitying piety and her disruptive gossip and insinuations she wears her way through the wearying moments of her miserable life.

Talking of Joseph and David, Buckler comments that Joseph "wasn't drawn to the moment ahead as [David] was, but pushed to it by the moment behind" (56). One wonders at this point if perhaps Buckler shouldn't have said merely that David lives in expectation of the future, while Joseph has resigned himself to performing the labour of each day as it comes along. However, I think we can begin to see here the nature of the world which Buckler is creating through his references to time: he is putting in universal terms what might have been expressed, in a limiting way, in psychological terms. So Joseph and David, as well as Rachel and

Toby are characterized at least partly through their relation to time. They are caught up in a great movement of change in which they have only partial freedom, toward which they take different attitudes, and in which they must act with only an imperfect awareness of the consequences of their action.

There is hope in time at the beginning of the novel, as there is hope at the beginning of life, but this quickly turns to apprehension and finally to fear, as time reveals itself as the great destroyer of happiness and expectation. Whether the moments are worn away or pulled or pushed, they pass irresistibly and cannot be recaptured. The characters are swept through events with no possibility of turning back. They are stamped by an impersonal, mechanical time which cannot be subjected to human will or emotion.

David is caught in the flow of time when he decides that he must have sexual knowledge of Effie: "He had the cold sensation he always felt when the time was now for a thing . . . which had hitherto been left to lie in the comfortable realm of the any-moment-he-chose" (106). Later, when Effie is dead he wishes desperately that he could ". . . reach back through the transparent . . . partition of time, to switch the course of their actions . . ." (148). Yet he cannot do this. They have been carried irrevocably beyond the point in time where they could have made a change.

Anna becomes conscious of the movement of time toward destruction at the end of Toby's stay at the farm, before he leaves for his ship. Anna feels that "The time was going fast now, and there was no way to stop it" (270). She feels desperation at the tyranny of the unavoidable movement of events toward separation, death, and isolation. Time's inevitability gives one a "cold sensation," the feeling of being caught in a totally unemotional and sinister movement in which the human being nonetheless has to work out his relationships in terms of emotional attachment.

We have already seen how Martha and Joseph's last quarrel was affected by their inability to articulate and their consequent separation. Buckler also describes their quarrel in relation to the movement of time. One is made conscious of the inevitability of events when Martha feels "The moment for reply slip away" (214), something which David often feels, and she moves through time to some unknown destination. Her perceptions close inward, as we saw earlier, and she withdraws into her private world. Joseph gets angry because he has been shut out and takes the oxen up the Mountain to cut the keel. Of course he plans to come back and reshape their intimacy. His feelings "borrowed ahead from times when somehow . . . this thing now would be resolved and passed" (219), and he suspends his emotion until that time. After Martha's slight heart attack she also forgives Joseph and prepares his favourite meal in anticipation of his return. They have both assumed that they can borrow ahead in time for their intimacy — it has worked before. They are not prepared for the events which separate them during the period when their

emotions are suspended. Joseph is killed, cut off short in his expectations. Martha loses all sense of time after his death because the moment of reunion never comes when time would have released her from her suspended emotions and carried her again beyond her isolation. She, like David and Anna, has been carried by the cold physics of time beyond the point where communion can be re-established.

After Joseph's death Martha is described as looking "as if verbs had lost their meaning, because the only language that beat in her was description (of one thing), spoken in the heartless key of the wind" (225). Buckler's grammatical metaphor is interesting, if strained. The description spoken in the wind is the memory of the sight of Joseph lying dead under the tree. Verbs have lost their meaning because verbs are actions which carry one forward in time, but Martha has stopped moving forward. She lives in the memory of one event because the hope and reconciliation which would have pulled her forward have been destroyed. Buckler has combined in Martha the two streams of his method of characterization in order to emphasize the nature of the total aloneness which completely destroys her. She is the victim of a double isolation — the isolation of being unable to articulate, of having destroyed the major bond of communication which took her beyond herself, and the isolation which results from her inability to move forward in time and so to set up new relationships. She is completely alone, even more isolated than David ever becomes, and lives only in the memory of one event, with no link to the world outside her memory, nor to any other memory within.

David also tries to suspend time after his parents' deaths. He seems, in fact, to be trying to pit his will against the flow of events. The years after their deaths ". . . were like a kind of suspension before time became really, movingly now again" (227). He tries to maintain the farm as it had been in his father's day, in the belief that he can suspend time and take up living when he wants to, but when he suddenly discovers that time has changed both him and the world beyond his farm, he has a ". . . desperate urge to leap back through the years, physically . . ." (230), the same as he had earlier wanted to change what had happened between him and Effie after Effie died. But time does not wait for suspended emotions to come to fruition.

David, like Martha and Anna, feels cheated by time, as if he has been carried through events before he is ready for them. They have been forced to act without having sufficient space or knowledge to consider the implications of their action. The tragic irony of their situation is that the knowledge which would have guided them comes only after the action has gone astray, when the knowledge is no longer of use to set things right again. But more often they are not even aware of the reasons for their hurt, just that time has cheated and isolated them.

It is not much wonder, when time is the destroyer, that the happiest periods of the novel are childhood and the pauses in time which occur too seldom. "The essence of childhood," writes Buckler, "is that the past is

never thought of as something that might have been different" (152). The child has no cause to desire a change in his past so does not feel that time has been unjust to him.

One feels a sense of peace and hope also in the first child's Christmas in the novel. The period of calm before Christmas is described as "a parenthesis in time," and in the quiet security during the snow-storm after Christmas, when the family is all together, "The afternoon was totally safe, because the storm kept them all in the house together." "It was as if the cable of time had been broken and they were magically marooned until its strands were spliced together again" (74). There can be no destruction when time stops, when actions are suspended — hence the sense of security at these moments and hence also the desire to recapture the childhood state.

The pause in time, although secure, is always seen as illusion, however, and even childhood cannot escape the background of change and death. David's childhood opens in the novel with the double drowning. On Christmas Day David and Chris check the rabbit snares and David is conscious of the possibility of rabbits "strangling somewhere in the moonlight" (69). During the war with its terrible urgency of time and destruction, Anna and Toby escape for a few days on the farm. They are able to pause in time, to close it off from the destruction around them: "This seemed like the shut-in time of a dream. It didn't seem real that in three days someone would be trying to kill him" (265).

The pause in time cannot last. Time hurries on to carry Effie, Joseph, Martha, Toby, Bess, and David to death, to take Chris and Anna away from the security of the family group, to bring change and isolation to the members of the community, and to fling the whole world into the ravages of war. Time seems ultimately to lead to a complete negation of all human hopes in destruction, separation, and death.

The final pause or cessation of time is death. It may be for some like Ellen "the one sure spot" where her husband is gathered "unchangeably ended" (90), or it may be violent and painful as it is for Joseph and Martha who are "on the cliffs [of time] still" (91). Even if it is a deliverance from pain too great to bear, as in Bess's case (295), death appears still to be a negation of all that man strives for. Above all it destroys what man is in himself and what he has created beyond himself, and it denies the possibility of setting right what has been wrong in the past. In spite of David's attempt at absolution through words there is no forgiveness. Death is the final tyranny of time in the lives of all the characters.

If there is no forgiveness in the novel there are at least two alternatives to the complete negation which seems to arise from our reading of the novel. Ellen is the first alternative, David's vision is the second, but neither is complete affirmation.

Ellen is not bound by time, she does not fear death, and she accepts whatever life brings:

> She still found enchantment in the day itself. The days of the year did not change. (The day was always an added one, in whatever company; it shaped the climate of the mind as surely as a word or a smile or a touch.) (121)

She has achieved a oneness with her surroundings which does not question, which accepts the conditions of the day, and which submits to whatever happens without fear or guilt. Buckler sees this as a characteristic of the country, of those who live close to the natural rhythms of life: "In the country the day is the determinant. The work, the thoughts, the feelings, to match it, follow" (53). Yet this is not a triumph over the tyranny of time; it is a submitting to that tyranny as the rest of the natural world submits. There is no room for any kind of human permanence in such a framework — all striving beyond the natural rhythm is negated by change and death. But although Ellen's alternative to negation is in a sense to stop trying, she does recognize time not as tyranny but as necessity. This resignation delivers her from the frustrations of trying to live as a permanent part of an impermanent world, and the rugs she weaves from the discarded clothes of the family are an important image of her acceptance of the temporal nature of the family of which she is a part.

David's vision is the second alternative but it is an ambiguous one as we have already seen. Its ambiguity lies as well in its relation to time as in its relation to the abstractions of art. The vision itself is an affirmation of life and of purpose. It sees all human striving as having significance in the context of a great unity of interdependence. In a sense it makes explicit and universal what is implicit in Ellen's personal perception of her part in the web of nature. But David's vision seems to allow more than submission. The vision is not bound to the movement of time: "It was as if time were not a movement now, but flat. Like space" (287). David can walk out into time to consider all acts at all times, and all possible actions at all times that might have been, without being pushed on to the next moment. In fact he achieves his wish of leaping back through time:

> It was not a memory of that time . . . you are there for the first time, immediately . . . nothing behind you is sealed, you can live it again. You can begin again. . . . (289)

Of course he cannot "begin again" in time, he cannot bring Effie or his parents back to life, but David doesn't seem to realize that the vision cannot touch the actual physical past. He wants to see the significance of the vision which is beyond time translated into terms which his life in time understands. He wants it to absolve guilt, to prove to the world that he can be a success as a writer although he has failed in the past, to recreate the Eden of understanding and security which is gone. He wants to substitute the world of permanence in the vision for the world of impermanence in time.

David is caught in Keats' dilemma. The vision and art, like the Grecian Urn, offer beauty and permanence in an ideal world of "slow Time," an image peculiarly appropriate to Buckler's novel. But there is something inhuman about their "Cold Pastoral." David finds the emotions of art appealing because of their eternity, but they have nothing of the warmth found in his family. He is thus torn between the promise of the eternal in art and the passionate involvement which he craves in life. He does attempt a synthesis in his mind where everyone "seemed suddenly radiate with a neglected warmth" (299), but he does not achieve the union of art and life and his condition remains the same as after the fight with his father — he is still neither one thing nor the other.

Finally David returns from the vision into the world of time which he had transcended for a short time. He cannot bear the isolation which his vision, like his position on top of the Mountain, forces on him. He wants so badly to belong, to have Anna home from Halifax, to have Chris back on the farm, to be accepted by the community in which he lives. David is not strong enough to bear the spiritual isolation of the artist and so he dies defeated. He has had a chance to go beyond time, to see time and change whole, but since he is unable to live in his vision, time closes over him again. Even the imagery describing his death emphasizes his unity with the passing of time. He is covered in the soft flakes of snow like the fallen tree beside him. Time starts again and his striving and vision are lost in the natural processes and the landscape.

The core of meaning which the novel finds in man and the universe is not finally complete negation, in spite of David's failure to give artistic expression to his vision. As Barbour points out, "Ernest Buckler *has* written the novel,"[7] has given a voice to the vision which seemed to die with David. Through the vision and through Ellen the novel finally presents man as part of a life force which can give significance and meaning, if not permanence, to life. The possibility of transcending is still there if one is able to accept the isolation — the giving up of the self, really — which is a necessary condition of the vision. But man is never seen as entirely free, although he has a certain range of freedom. Man is never free of his own nature which Buckler has explored in this novel through language and perception, nor can man ignore time or strive against it or he will be destroyed. He must discover the basic nature of his being and his proper relationship to his environment if he is to survive. The artist (which David isn't, finally) can show him these if he lives according to the dictates of his vision. But in any of the alternatives which Buckler has presented in the novel, isolation is necessary, it is basic to the experience of all the characters.

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[7]*Ibid.*, 74.

The Mountain and the Valley presents a view of man beyond the conventional superficialities of the psychological analysis of character which is what Barbour's article tends to stress at the expense of the large themes. The novel also transcends the usual portrait of the developing sensibility of the young artist. One is taken into the basic substance of the world from which the artist will have to wrest his vision, and shown wherein the artist and his world are inseparably joined. The artist's fate is the same as his fellows, and his art must deal with the realities of their common condition. The novel also gives a voice to the modern, and universal, sense of isolation, of man being lost in the Valley of the world, struggling through time to achieve some significance and happiness, and seeing death as the destruction of all his striving. The promise of deliverance on the Mountain is deliberately ambiguous: although there are overtones of Christ's transfiguration here, there is no absolute assurance of a divine presence which might deliver man from his loneliness.

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