THE PROGRESS OF DAVID'S IMAGINATION

Marilyn Chapman

In Chapter Two of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley,* David tells his brother, Chris, about the dream he has just had:

> "I dreamed," David said, "you and Dad and me was on the log road, only it was funny" — he laughed — "all the trees was trimmed up like Christmas trees. And then it was like there was two of me. I was walkin with you, and still I was walkin by myself on this other road that *didn't* have any trees on it. I saw the camp on this other road and went and told us on the log road, but when we come back to the other road the camp was gone . . . and we walked and walked, and I guess that's all, we didn't get to the camp."[1]

"And then it was like there was two of me," David says. And indeed there do seem to be two Davids, not only in the dream but throughout the novel. There is the David who loves to be with his family in the "close house-safeness" (p. 74) of his own home and the "other" David, the loner, who would not part with his "secret extra senses" (p. 28) for anything.[2] The whole novel may be seen as David's unconscious, and largely unsuccessful, attempt to bring these two selves (or two roads) together. In the dream, one of David's selves is with his family on a road where all the trees are Christmas trees,[3] while the other self is on a totally barren road; but the barren road seems to be associated with David's "extra senses," for it is on this road that he has his vision of the camp. However, when David attempts to bring his family over from the tree-lined road to the barren road so they can share in his discovery, the camp vanishes. David's dream is not only a foreshadowing of the fact that he and his father and brother will never get to the camp that particular spring morning but also proleptically symbolic of the

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[1]Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley,* New Canadian Library (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 21. All page references will be to this edition of the novel and will appear in parentheses following quotations.

[2]In a letter written to Dudley H. Cloud on May 15, 1951, Buckler speaks of David's "whole history of divided sensitivities" and the way in which it shaped his actions. See Alan R. Young, "The Genesis of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley," Journal of Canadian Fiction,* No. 16 (1976), pp. 89-96.

[3]The road lined with Christmas trees appears again in the dream David has on Christmas Eve, but in this dream Herb Hennessey is cutting down the trees (p. 66). Although David does not realize it at the time, he is destined to become a Herb Hennessey figure before he reaches his thirties. His dream of Herb's cutting down the Christmas tree ("the tree of hope") seems then to be symbolic of the fact that David is in some ways responsible for cutting down the "tree of hope" in his own family.

kind of situation that keeps occurring throughout the novel: whenever David attempts to bring his two worlds — his family and his mind's "shining population" (p. 20) — together, something seems to go wrong. The imaginative world of the vision and the social world of family and friends cannot coexist.

Although David seems to have been aware of his extra sense since he was a very young child, he is eleven years old before he discovers that there may be a way of sharing it with other people. When he first begins to study his part for the school play, the words separate him from his family because they are "something no one else [has]" (p. 55); but when he actually speaks them before the audience, he begins to see them as something more than a private possession. It seems now that they have the power to reach out and influence others:

> Now they all listened as if to someone who had come home from glory in a far place — not in envy, but endowed with some of the glory themselves, because that one's knowledge of his own wonder before them had no pride in it. . . . . He was creating something out of nothing. He was creating exactly the person the words in the play were meant for. (p. 80)

In his dream David was unable to bring his imaginative vision (the camp) and his family together; but now, miraculously, he seems to be able to unite the two for the first time. In an almost magical way his extra sense and the words of the play combine to create a new shining world that radiates outward from David until it envelops the whole audience in a kind of "glory." This, he realizes suddenly, is much better than "saying the words to himself" (p. 80). Although his parents are vaguely aware that some kind of metamorphosis has taken place and that David "*is* some kind of prince" (p. 81), not everyone in the audience is as sensitive. Jud Spinney's crass remark, "That's it, Dave. Slap em *to* her!" (p. 81), destroys the visionary moment for David. The "shine" instantly goes out of everything: the gold becomes merely cardboard, the ermine becomes rabbit, the diamonds become glass, and the love he had felt for the audience suddenly turns to hate. It is a crucial moment in the novel because David is offering his "mind's shining population" to the community for the first time, but the community rejects that offering. Chris's talents (physical strength and endurance) are understood and appreciated by the community, but David's talents (intelligence and imagination) have been tried and found wanting. Feeling himself rejected by the "god" of public opinion, David becomes, for the rest of the novel, a scarred, Cain-like wanderer who feels at home neither in the external world of the valley nor in the internal world of his own imagination.

Minutes after Jud Spinney makes his remark, David expresses his hatred for the "foolish treacherous part of himself that [listens] to books" (p. 83) and for all the "jeezless bastards" (p. 83) in the auditorium. Racing

home in a blind fury, he rushes up to his room and slams the door. Then he notices that the "orange he'd taken from the tree, to eat after the concert, [is] lying on the bureau," and that its skin is "beginning to shrivel" (p. 85). The orange, "incarnate of tomorrow" (p. 61), is not the only thing in the room that is beginning to shrivel. So too is David's belief in the beauty and inviolability of his extra sense. Until this moment David has lived in a rather Edenic world: whenever external reality proved to be threatening (as it did when his trip to the camp was arrested by the news of the deaths of Pete Delahunt and Spurge Gorman), he always had the extra safety of his "mind's shining population" to rely on. But Jud's words revoke the security of that world forever. And so, after David bitterly denounces his inner sense because it has exposed him to ridicule, he begins to plot his strategy in the external world: "When he grew up they'd *see* what he was like. A great surge went through him to leap ahead into time, into the strength that was coming. Oh, they'd be surprised. . . . They'd see" (p. 83).[4] Not only will he have great physical strength, he thinks gloatingly, but also his prowess with women will be phenomenal; why he'll "ride girls the minute he come up to them, whether anyone [is] looking or not" (p. 84). But David's strengths are not physical ones, and all his efforts to prove that they are meet with disaster: he is physically scarred when he attempts to climb across the beam in the barn and psychically scarred when Effie dies shortly after he "rides" her in the field in order to impress Toby.

Although David is never able to unify his external and internal worlds, there is a kind of reciprocal dependency between the two. When David's imagination is active, his relations with his family are warm and congenial (and vice versa), but when his imagination is inactive — when he rejects its demands and denies its promptings — he either quarrels with his family or shuts them out of his life all together. During the five years that follow the school play, years when David gives his imagination little opportunity for creative expression, he becomes increasingly estranged from the people he loves. When his imagination is active, a "shine" seems to reach out from his inner being and irradiate everyone and everything around him; but when it lies dormant, his warm, loving self atrophies, and what remains is nothing but the exacerbating, self-centred egotist that David is in his teens, or the lonely, introspective recluse that he becomes in his twenties. In both instances part of his soul seems to turn inward and "stoke his frustration with bitter and bitterer self-destruction" (p. 151).

After his quarrel with his father and Chris and his subsequent fall from the beam in the barn, David is forced to spend several weeks in bed; and it is during this time that he returns, for the first time in five years, to the world that

[4]These words take on an ironic cast when we realize that when David does reach the longed-for future, all he wants to do is to go back to the past in order to reshape and explicate it — to see it as it "might have been" (p. 297). For a detailed analysis of the function of time in this novel, see J. M. Kertzer, "The Past Recaptured," *Canadian Literature* No. 65 (Summer 1975), pp. 74-85.

words create. Glancing through some of the books that Dr. Engles leaves for him, he is amazed to discover how closely the written word can capture the precise quality of certain human experiences: "And then his eyes fell on one sentence: 'He turned back to the empty house and his heart bent forward against a wind.' He caught his breath. That's exactly the way *he'd* felt when anyone had gone away" (p. 195). Fascinated by this discovery, David begins to experiment with words himself in an unconscious attempt to come to terms with the events that preceded his quarrel with Chris:

> He wrote quickly, "Roger was angry with his brother." He hesitated. When he did, a listening seemed to spring up in everything around. It stiffened him. But he forced himself to go on. "He didn't want to climb the ladder, but something made him. His brother's face looked . . ." He thought: sad! . . . sober? . . . hurt? . . . *struck.* Yes, sure. "His brother's face looked struck." (p. 196)

Having taken the first step, David feels the "cleansing cathartic" (p. 196) of getting something that had been devouring him outside and down onto the printed page. He is not creating an imaginative world for its own sake now but creating one that will help him to comprehend his relationship to other people in the external world. Able to understand now how Chris felt ("struck") when he started to climb the ladder, David is on the verge of discovering his own culpability and turning the fall into a *felix culpa.* But his thoughts are interrupted.

If Rachel, who functions in this episode much as Jud Spinney does on the night of the play, had not visited Martha at this particular moment, David might have progressed to the point where he could have asked his brother's forgiveness for his own stubbornness; but her arrival subverts whatever progress David has made. Even though Rachel is totally unaware of the fact that David is writing a story, she radiates a kind of general disapproval to which David is very sensitive. What Rachel disapproves of this time, of course, is not David's activity, but Chris's. David, however, is feeling particularly close to Chris at this moment, and any attack on his brother is felt as an attack on himself. Just as David's anger had singled out Jud Spinney and then turned back on himself before it finally spread outward toward the members of the audience, so now it directs itself initially at Rachel ("Oh, you stinkin old bitch"), then turns back on his own "pale and indeterminate" features, and finally, compounded by a Cain-like and irrational envy, focuses itself on his brother:

> The things that happen to Chris had blood in them. They were newslike. They complicated him, changed him. People looked at him differently afterward. The things that happened to himself were pale, and narrative only. He stayed the same.
>
> Suddenly, hurtingly, he was *glad* he had withheld annulment of this soreness between them. He was desperately glad that he *hadn't* thrown away his only equalizing weapon. (p. 199)

Instead of using his imagination to get inside Chris's head to understand how his brother feels, David uses it to justify his own resentment.

A less dramatic, but somewhat similar, situation occurs several years later when Toby and Anna come back to visit David on the farm. Having lived with his grandmother ever since the deaths of his parents, David has become a recluse whose loneliness is "an unattended tune in his bloodstream" (p. 245) — a tune, he keeps telling himself, that is not "unpleasant *at all* now" (p. 245). Since communication with almost all other human beings has ceased, news of Toby's and Anna's impending visit leaves him feeling vulnerable and, again, envious: "The war had gone around David. It was like all the rest of the things that happened to the others. . . . Toby had been in the thick of the invasion, right there in the Channel the day of the big morning. Toby was free" (pp. 246-47). What, he wonders, will Toby think of him?

Although the visit is a disturbing one for David (moments of security being so frequently undermined by moments of insecurity), it is, in some ways, a valuable experience. Forced out of his introspective moodiness as much by Toby's blithe unawareness of it as by Anna's sensitivity to it, David begins to feel like a new person. Although he finds it difficult to explain the difference, he senses that everything "in his life had been black and white before. Now, for the first time, there was colour" (p. 259). As "colour" comes back into his relations with his family, so it begins to return to his imagination. When Toby and Anna are away visiting Ellen, David realizes that he is now "alone the *good* way" (p. 259), and he begins to be aware of something "formless" taking shape in his mind, something he "must be delivered of . . . by seeing its shape projected onto the scribbler page" (p. 260). One of the things that David has to be "delivered of" is the negative feeling that he keeps harbouring for Toby. Why does he envy Toby's way of life? The only way that he can find out is by exploring the problem on the printed page. And so David begins to write. Just as his story about Roger was an attempt to come to terms with the disruptive elements in his relationship with Chris, so his story about the two soldiers (thinly disguised substitutes for himself and Toby) is a way of trying to get to the root of the present problem. After a while David begins to sense that the solution has something to do with "how another can have *for* you the things you might have had for yourself" (p. 263); but before he can explore the implications of this discovery, his writing is interrupted. He does not see Toby and Anna until they come in the front door, and then he feels a sudden "instant denuding" (p. 263) as if he had been caught committing some heinous crime. Their unexpected arrival functions in much the same way as the intrusions of Jud Spinney and Rachel Gorman do in the earlier scenes. In all three episodes a disapproving, unsympathetic figure intrudes suddenly on the secure imaginative world that David is busy constructing with words, and he is left feeling exposed, ashamed, "denuded." And always these guilt feelings are associated with

mirror and scar imagery. He responds to Jud's raillery on the night of the play by throwing his cape on the floor "as one smashes a mirror that reminds [him] of some hateful scar" (p. 82). In the next episode David catches a "glimpse of his face in the mirror" after Chris leaves the house and notices the "sickle-shaped scar" that catches up "one corner of his mouth" (p. 199). When Toby and Anna enter the house unexpectedly in the third episode, the "mirror of [David's] consciousness [is] stripped of everything but the reflection of his own face: pale, tentative, and struck with the long burning scar" (p. 263). In each succeeding episode the mirror and scar imagery seems to become more closely associated with David's inner world. On the night of the play, the image is used simply as a vehicle to describe David's actions; in the next episode the mirror is on the wall of David's bedroom, and the "sickle-shaped scar" that he sees in it is a reflection of the cicatrice on his own face; by the final episode the mirror has become internalized ("the mirror of his consciousness"), and the scar that he sees in it is both physical and spiritual. In a somewhat similar manner, the intruding figures (Jud, Rachel, and Toby) become more closely associated with David's personal reality. Jud is the town reprobate, and his attack on David's imaginative creation occurs on neutral ground (the school auditorium); Rachel is a family acquaintance, and her "attack" occurs in the family kitchen; Toby is not only David's best friend but also "a reflection of himself" (p. 142), and his "attack" takes place in David's own home. All of this internalizing and personalizing seems to suggest that what should have been nothing more than a brief confrontation between David and Jud Spinney on the night of the play has, in fact, become a psychomachia that occurs over and over again throughout the novel as one part of David's psyche repeatedly turns on the other part and accuses it of doing things that are "utterly shameful" (p. 263).

Although the validity of the story he wrote about the two soldiers begins to return to David later in the evening when he and Toby and Anna are sitting around drinking beer, his feeling of contentment is short-lived. The fact that Toby neglects to turn and wave to him when his train passes the field two days later reconfirms all of David's fears; and the self-destructive, self-pitying thoughts return with a vengeance. "A hollowness sucked suddenly against his breath. . . . All the thinking came back in a rush. But the panic wasn't only that the one friend he'd ever had had gone away. It was more than that. *It was always someone else* that things happened to, that was the panic of it" (p. 274). David's "thinking" is a kind of negative introspection that becomes increasingly self-indulgent each time he lapses into it. The more he "thinks" about Toby's departure, the more he comes to the conclusion that his whole life has been wasted and that his feet "must go on their present path, because all the crossroad junctions [have] been left irretrievably far behind" (p. 274). Finding his own pastimes "sickly and foolish" (p. 263), he begins to romanticize Toby's and to persuade himself that Toby has somehow absconded with a part of his own life:

> He heard Toby's voice, as clearly as if he were there, singing the sailor's hymn that morning clear and strong above all the other voices. A blind hatred of Toby went through him. It seemed as if that were a part of his own life he was seeing — his life stolen before his eyes, and drawn away just fast enough that he was always a step behind when he gave chase. It wasn't fair. (p. 277)

What David is "seeing" is not, of course, a part of his own life, but a part of Toby's; and if David's imagination were functioning properly, it would be content to record what it "sees" instead of envying it. Perhaps if he had been able to continue working on his story about the two soldiers, he would have begun to understand how someone could have something for you that you did not have yourself: Toby could have certain adventures *for* him, and he in turn could give these adventures permanent form by writing about them for Toby and for the rest of the tribe, but most of all for himself.

One of the things that interests Buckler in *The Mountain and the Valley* is the conflict between the imagination's tendency to over-determine the external world and the external world's tendency to confound the creative power of the imagination. During the first ten years of his life, an equilibrium is maintained in David's psyche between these two forces, but on the night of the play something happens to destroy the balance. David is never able to re-establish it. As long as David's inner world remains a private one, David's universe is secure; but once he opens it to public scrutiny, as he unwittingly does on the night of the play, he puts both worlds in jeopardy. Before the play, David could see little connection between the external world and his internal one — the latter being primarily a place of retreat when "the moment was bare" (p. 57) — but during the play he is seduced by the idea that his imagination may have the power to transcend objective reality and create a new world in which he can give his people a true understanding of how everything is (p. 81). The fragility of his vision, perhaps of any vision, is directly proportional to the extent to which it excludes objective reality. And David's vision excludes it with a careless rapture: "Oh, it was perfect now" (p. 80). Since a perfect world is unable to bear the intrusion of any discordant element, Jud's remark completely shatters David's vision and plunges his psyche back to the cheerless uncertainities of the mundane world. A similar upheaval — writ large — occurs in the last twenty pages of the novel; only this time the order is reversed. Instead of plunging from the heights to the depths as it does on the night of the play, David's imagination begins in the depths and soars to such heights that mortal flesh can no longer contain it. It is at this point, on the top of the mountain, that David is finally able to bring his family and his mind's "shining population" together in one grand apocalyptic vision. But the ironic and tragic elements attendant upon this vision leave the reader with a mind-numbing sense of loss — a howling, voiceless emptiness that is both personal and mythic in its dimensions.

After Anna's departure, David finds himself "outside" everything: he is not only separated from everyone in his family, but also unable to establish contact with the natural world. Staring out the window of his farmhouse, he finds that although detail comes "clearly enough to his sight, . . . it [is] as if another glass, beyond the glass of the window pane," was covering everything, making "touch between any two things impossible" (p. 280). Attempting to get away from this nightmare, David walks out into the cool, fall air, but he is unable to find relief. Like the landscape, his imagination is "frozen" — so frozen that David soon finds it impossible to distinguish between internal and external reality:

> Even the sensations of his own flesh had become outside. The inside was nothing but one great white naked eye of self-consciousness, with only its own looking to look at. The frozen landscape made no echo inside him. There was no tendril of interaction.
>
> And then . . . as he looked at the frozen landscape it was as if the outline of the frozen landscape *became* his consciousness: that inside and outside were not two things, but one — the bare shape of what his eyes saw. (p. 281)

This last image does not, of course, suggest any romantic unity of subject and object, but rather a negation of the power of either one. The landscape is symbolic of, but inimical to, the state of David's psyche; and it is only the appearance of Steve on the log road that forces David out of his predicament. Since David cannot pass Steve without acknowledging his existence, he is forced to accept the fact that he and Steve are two separate entities — that subject and object are not permanently locked in some kind of meaningless singularity. When David tells Steve that it is going to be so cold that he will need "a mitten for the old thing" (p. 284), he is already taking his first step (albeit a small one) towards affirming his role in life as articulator for the tribe. Steve would like to have made this comment about the weather himself, but he did not have the words for it; David has the words, and his use of them at this time not only pleases Steve ("His thoughts were defined, now" [p. 284]), but also satisfies something deep within himself; it is just a few minutes after this encounter that he notices the "blood" stealing back "into the day's flesh" (p. 285). What is really happening, of course, is that the blood is creeping back into David's "frozen" imagination. Since any increase in imaginative activity is invariably accompanied by an increase in his love for his family, it is not surprising that David's thoughts turn immediately to his home and grandmother: "The way his grandmother and the fields had seemed to him struck him with a kind of penitence; as if they had been docile before some wounding on his part" (pp. 285-86). For the first time David begins to recognize his own culpability in the events that separated him from each member of his family. It is at this point, appropriately, that he begins to climb the mountain. Paralleling David's physical climb is his spiritual ascent

toward a final vision of a union between his family and his "mind's shining population."

After he has climbed a short distance, David suddenly becomes aware of a kinesthetic power linking all the various parts of creation: "There seemed to be a thread of similarity running through the whole world. A shape could be like a sound; a feeling like a shape; a smell the shadow of a touch" (p. 287). This increased imaginative activity is immediately followed by warm reminiscences of happy times with his family: "He looked at the high blue sky and he heard again the first sound of his father's sleighbells coming home from town. . . . He felt again the touch of the ground under his feet as he ran inside to tell Chris and Anna" (p. 287). As David continues to climb, his imagination begins to relive various scenes in the past until it seems as if "time were not a movement . . . but flat. Like space" (p. 287). Moving from "room" to "room" in this new "space," he feels again "the touch of the log road under his feet" (p. 287) and smells again the "incarnate" orange on the Christmas tree as it was before it had begun to shrivel on his bureau after the play. Throughout this part of the climb, David's imagination seems to be searching for something in the past: some incident, some face, some sound — it knows not what — something that will calm the mutiny within and give meaning to the chaos without. Although David's ability to look back on the past seems, at this point, to have little significance, it prepares us for the two periods of "translation" that occur later. David is able to hear, smell, touch, and taste various things that are part of the past, but he is not yet a part of them.

After David passes the "safe wall of spruces" (p. 289), he steps into a small clearing from which he is able to look down (not on time now, but on space) and see "far-off and beneath him and in every sharp detail the whole stretch of the soundless valley" (p. 289).[5] It is at this point, half way up the mountain, that David experiences his first moment of "complete translation":

> It is not a *memory* of that time: there is no echo quality to it. It is something that deliberate memory . . . cannot achieve at all. It is not a returning: you are there for the first time, immediately. No one has been away, nothing has changed — the time or the place or the faces. The years between have been shed. There is an original glow on the faces like on the objects of home. It is like a flash of immortality: nothing behind you is sealed, you can live it again. You can begin again . . . .
> (p. 289)

[5]Describing a time when some of the men in the village came to help Joseph "shoe the bad ox," David says that he sat in the haymow and watched the deed — "in it, but above it and outside it at the same time" (p. 59). David always seems to be most comfortable when he is observing life from this position: "in it, but above it and outside it." When he and his father and brother went fishing, David fished "by himself, a little upstream; so he could hear the others but not see them" (p. 28). His moment of vision during the play occurs when he is "above" and "outside" the others, and his final vision on the top of the mountain is associated with the fact that "everything [is] beneath him" (p. 298).

And that is what David most desperately wants and needs to do: to go back to a time when nothing behind him was sealed — when the crossroads had not all been passed or the impenetrable walls erected — back to a time when everything is still possible, when he can still choose what he wants to be.

The time back into which David is "translated," or absorbed, is "that clean April morning" (p. 289) when he and his father and Chris are going up the log road to the camp. He seems to sense that he has been translated back to this moment in order to make some kind of discovery about his future, but David has no clear idea what his vocation should be. Everything is possible. He can still be the best "fiddle player," "mathematician," "dancer," or "sailor" (pp. 290-91). The first moment of translation passes almost as quickly as it comes, but the glory of the vision is confounded by a kind of accusation in everything around him:

> Even if you listened thoroughly, they [the objects] seemed to wait, with that awful, chiding stillness, for something more. The mere *presence* of the objects about him was like a kind of accusation. It was as if you'd been given eyes for the first time; your first sight was met by the teeming insatiable hunger to be seen, of everything there was. The swarming multitude of all the voices it was physically impossible to attend to gave him a sense of exquisite guilt. (p. 291)

David, however, is not yet fully aware of the true nature of his "transgression," and it is some time before he realizes that he cannot redress the wrong simply by *seeing* all the objects; he must also become them: "He must *be* a tree and a stone and a shadow and a crystal of snow and a thread of moss and the veining of a leaf. He must be exactly as each of them was, everywhere and in all times; or the guilt, the exquisite parching for the taste of completion, would never be allayed at all" (p. 292).

Pursued by the demanding faces and voices of all created things, David begins to run. At first he runs toward the voices as one runs towards the voice of his "frightened child" (and in a sense these *are* David's children, abandoned long ago perhaps when he denied his instinctive urge to describe them, but still his children), but then, as the demands become more insistent, he turns and runs as if "in escape" (p. 293). All of this running is, of course, a dreadful strain on David's congenitally weak heart. The more he tries to escape from these voices, the more they pursue him with the "relentless challenge" (p. 293) of exactly how each one is. As the vision turns to nightmare, the ascent becomes sharper and the demands on his imagination (and on his heart) more intense. Not only must he "see" all the faces of everything, not only must he try to "become" them, but also, he discovers, must he find a way to "give the thought" to exactly how each of them is. But how can he do that? Although he tries to fend off the increasing demands of these creatures of his tortured imagination, he has no way of controlling them. Having been ignored or repressed for so many years, they now begin to assume a life of their own, and, like Acteon's hounds, seem to

be intent on destroying their "father and their prey."[6] Pursued by the swarming multitudes, David is unable to find relief until he reaches the top of the mountain: "He heard the crushing screaming challenge of the infinite permutations of the possible . . . the billion raised to the billionth power. . . . He screamed, 'Stop . . . Stop . . . Stop . . . STOP . . .' And then he raised his head and saw that he was at the very top of the mountain" (p. 297).

With "everything . . . beneath him now" (p. 298), David suddenly feels the "taut" air relax, and once again, without warning, he is translated back to that "clean April morning" when everything was still possible. His first moment of translation was incomplete because he had the experience but missed the meaning, but this time the meaning is gloriously clear, and David suddenly realizes how he will be able to "give the thought" to everything: "I will *tell* it, he thinks rushingly: that is the answer" (p. 298). "I will *tell* it" and become "the greatest writer in the whole world" (p. 299). If this sounds remarkably like the eleven year old who, on the night of the play, decided that he would be "the greatest actor in the whole world" (p. 82), the echo is intentional. In a sense David *is* a child again, and all the potential that existed on the night of the play before Jud Spinney made his crass remark exists now during this second period of translation. Once again the imagination is "free" to see the world in its own terms.

But because David's imagination has been suppressed for so long, its power, once released, knows no bounds. Now David begins to feel, just as he did on the night of the play, that he "understands everything" (p. 299), that he possesses the single beam of light that will "light all the shadows" and illumine "their single core of meaning" (pp. 298-99). There is, of course, a degree of madness shaping these thoughts, but it is not the madness that arises from the soul of an egomaniac (although it may sometimes sound that way), but the madness that arises from the belief that one is destined to be the vehicle through whom an important miracle will take place: the miracle of "finding the words for it" (p. 298), of finding the words that will absolve all the hurts that the people in the valley have caused each other, of finding the words that will prove that they are really "the best people in the whole world" (p. 300), the words that will make David and these wonderful people "fluid together" again. It had happened that way once before, he recalls, when he was still in school:

> He had composed a petition from all the men in the village, asking the government for a daily mail. When he read it back to them they heard the voice of their own reason speaking exactly in his. Their warm wonder at his little miracle of finding the words for it that they themselves couldn't find . . . made him and them so fluid together that it worked in him like a kind of tears. (p. 298)

[6]Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Adonais," Stanza 31.

As Margaret Atwood has pointed out, David, like his biblical namesake, was destined to be a giant slayer; and the giant he was meant to slay was the inarticulateness of the tribe.[7] Those who had never before been able to define or defend themselves would then have a champion, one who knew that there was more to them than the side that showed. But David believes that his book will do more than explain the inner reality of the people of his tribe; it will also, he hopes, function as an absolving voice for all the suffering that they have inflicted on each other and that he has inflicted on them:

> Even my mother and 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. (p. 300)

For of course David *did* deny his family many times; most obviously, perhaps, he denied Chris after the incident in the barn. It is appropriate, therefore, that Chris is the first person in his family to come to his mind now: "I will ask Chris to come live with us," he thinks, and "he'll know that I forgave him long ago" (p. 300).

The last member of the family that David denies is Anna. Throughout the novel, David's relationship with Anna is an intense, complicated one: not only does she have that deep intuitive understanding of David's psyche that we usually attribute only to an identical twin, but she is the one person whom David could "bear to have watch him try anything in which he might fail" (p. 72). Everything is always better when Anna is there. Related closely to David's special inner sense, she is also a "second safety" for David, "a place he would still have — to go to, if his secret thoughts ever failed" (p. 56). But when his secret world does fail, Anna is away with Toby, and when he and Anna are finally alone together, it is too late. After Toby's departure, David becomes aware of a constraint that has arisen between himself and his sister and realizes that "even with Anna now . . . he [is] outside" (p. 279). It is not until he is almost at the top of the mountain, however, that he begins to see his own complicity in the events that separated them: "feeling the most awful blankness he'd felt yet, for knowing that he didn't really mind that Anna didn't want to stay" (p. 294). Anna. His mind races now over some of the memories they shared — "the Christmas tree, the blindman's bluff . . . the skates" (p. 300) — and then concentrates on the way in which she will react to the publication of his book: "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

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[7]See Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 186.

heart" (p. 300). For the first time since the night of the play, David's two roads, or two selves, are coming together — at least in his imagination. On the night of the play, internal and external worlds are linked together for one brief shining moment, and something similar occurs here on the top of the mountain. Significantly, the last two pieces that Ellen hooks into her rug are related to these two events: the penultimate piece is "scarlet," a bit from the cloak David wore "the night someone laughed at his piece in the school play" (pp. 300-01), and the final piece is a "scrap of fine *white* lace" (p. 301, emphasis mine). For the vision that finally allows David to bring the most beloved member of his family in touch with his mind's "shining population" is more than David's already overburdened heart can bear. First there is the rapid beating of his heart, then the stabbing pain, and then the enveloping blackness that turns to grey and then "to white: an absolute white, made of all the colours but of no colour itself" (p. 300). And then the large white flakes of snow begin to fall.

On the night of the play David's imagination begins a twenty-year period of self-inflicted exile from the idyllic world of his "mind's shining population." During that period it wanders without direction or purpose through a desert of spiritual and imaginative sterility until it begins its ascent up the mountain. The apocalyptic nature of David's final vision suggests certain parallels with Moses's vision on the top of Sinai (both men believe they are destined to explain how it is "with everything" to their chosen people), but in other ways it has more in common with Moses's vision on the top of Pisgah. It is on the top of Pisgah that Moses dies shortly after having seen the vistas of the promised land. Had he lived to descend into the valley, he would have discovered, as the Israelites did, that there were innumerable difficulties to overcome before they could settle safely in "the good land" beyond Jordan. The "promised land" that David sees from the top of his mountain would be even more difficult to attain: not only is his vision founded on the child-like and misguided belief that he is destined to become the "greatest writer in the world," but the glory of his vision could never be reduced to fit the narrow Procrustean beds that the Rachel Gormans and Jud Spinneys in the valley would fashion for it. Just as David excluded the realities of the mundane world on the night of the play in order to make everything "perfect," so now he excludes spatial and temporal reality as he envisions himself, Steve, and Anna living blissfully together in a "promised land" where he is the best writer in the world and his neighbours are the best people in the world. Since a return to the valley would only becloud this vision, it is, perhaps, inevitable that his imagination moves "directly, intensely, exactly" to its new home "over the far side of the mountain" (p. 302).

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