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Creation, Incest, and Individuation: The Ritual Underpinnings of *The Mountain and the Valley*

Structured in a theatrical form (with a “Prologue,” an “Epilogue,” and a first chapter entitled “The Play”), *The Mountain and the Valley* features a protagonist who takes on a variety of roles. Indeed, dramatic concepts inform the entire narrative. Because David is a would-be writer, critics usually read Buckler’s use of these concepts in terms of the protagonist’s literary aspirations, and approach the novel as a *Kunstlerroman*. My purpose here, however, is to suggest that dramatic concepts work within *The Mountain and the Valley* at a much deeper, less purely literal, level. I wish to argue that the narrative is concerned with the ritual origin of drama (Creation in the archaic sense) and that Buckler’s depiction of David’s development, or lack thereof, can be read in terms of the individuation process.

The relationship between drama and ritual reflects the evolution of the classical Greek theatre. According to Jane Ellen Harrison, *drama*—the thing observed—developed out of the *dromenon*—the thing done. Originally, actors and audience participated in drama to induce the return of food supplies, for example, or to recall Spring. When direct participation in this ritual act ended, the physical separation of stage, chorus, and audience took place in the theatre; the *dromenon* became an end in itself: i.e., *drama* (Harrison 138).

An end in itself, *drama* nevertheless retained the vestigial elements of its beginnings: the ritual forms of the *dromenon*, which continue “to haunt and shadow the play whatever its plot, like ancient and traditional ghosts” and “underlie and sway the movement and speeches like some compelling rhythm” (Harrison 138-39). Due to its ritual underpinnings, *drama* is, by definition, a complex integration of the profane and the sacred in which the profane’s imitation or repetition of the

archetypal or sacred act “confers reality on events” (Eliade, *Cosmos* 90).

In Buckler’s novel, life in Entremont perfectly illustrates the twofold nature of reality expressed by the drama of the classical Greek theatre. The underlying seasonal rituals of farming, the planting and harvesting, shape the Canaans’ lives, while their behaviour is compelled by the traditional ritual at work in the valley: marriage. In a place which is literally made up of mountains and a valley, the connotations of the word, “marry,” appropriately remind us that the sacred sanctifies the profane, because the marriage ritual’s primary consideration is “the union of heaven and earth” (Eliade, *Cosmos* 24). Buckler chooses to use the image of the house, a symbol of the Sacred Mountain, to symbolize matrimony: like “a house. You could go in and close the door” (46).

Marriage is most clearly illustrated as the human expression of “the union of heaven and earth” by Martha and Joseph’s union. Participating in the rituals of married life, Martha and Joseph are so completely joined that “any other person who came into their thoughts, even one of their children was like a second person, not a third” (126). Distance does not separate them from one another, for, with the exception of Joseph’s death, one always knows what the other is doing. In even the most mundane tasks, their relationship expresses its sacred underpinnings: picking up potatoes on their knees in the acre field, Martha and Joseph look “as if they are praying” (125).

Related to the concept of Creation as “the union of heaven and earth” is the hierogamous round—the union of male and female. On a broader scale, the hierogamous round underpins the valley’s process as a whole, because as the children in the valley mature and marry, they symbolically re-unite heaven and earth with each ceremony. Thus Entremont perpetually creates and re-creates itself, and the mechanics of living weave individuals into the fabric of life in the valley in much the same way that Ellen weaves her rugs into rugs.

The effect which the valley’s ritual impulse has on Entremont’s inhabitants is so powerful that the children in the valley act in an archaic manner. When David is delirious with fever, for example, Anna practices the sympathetic magic of the *dromenon*. She stays outside the house, because “nothing could happen to him as long as she kept the sun and the fields and the mountains in sight for him” (271). Like primitive man, Anna does not distinguish between subjective and objective realities. For her, the ritual of keeping the valley in sight establishes David’s connection with the processes of Creation and

guarantees his well-being, because she assumes that he is part of the gestalt of the valley. Like all *dromenon*, her actions re-represent or pre-present life "with a practical end in mind" (Harrison 135).

Governed by the Creation process, the mechanics of living in Entremont are cyclical and self-contained. Having no beginning or end, their essential nature is uroboric. Thus it is not surprising that family units in Entremont inherently resist change to their own self-contained structures. Martha sits down and weeps when she realizes that Anna's impending departure to Halifax to continue her schooling will inevitably break the family circle.

Adultery, therefore, is an unforgivable crime in the valley, because it separates husband from wife—marriage's expression of the hierogamous round. As a result, Bess, of whom adultery is merely rumoured, is unwelcome in every woman's house in Entremont. So severe is Bess's persecution that her defiance wilts, and she can "scarcely answer for tears" (79), when Martha speaks to her at the school play and includes her in the community. Even though she remarries, Bess cannot escape the stigma of the adulteress. Still isolated by her community, she eventually commits suicide.

Clearly, Bess is a victim of social convention. Her victimization is a perfect example of what happens when the drama's sacred underpinnings no longer confer reality on the ritual form: the ritual form is mistaken for the sacred act itself. Separated from the sacred act, the ritual becomes an end in itself, like *drama*—with one crucial distinction. Because the sacred act no longer confers reality on the ritual, the ritual is only a convention or, in dramatic terms, an illusion.

When the family unit, as the social expression of the Creation process, becomes an end in itself, the result is uroboric incest. Uroboric incest, according to Neumann, is the desire to be absorbed and dissolved, an expression of self-surrender and regression into the mother which stands in sharp contrast to later and other forms of incest, because the emphasis on pleasure and love is in no sense active (16-17). The most explicit example of uroboric incest in Entremont is found in the Gorman household. After her father's death, Charlotte spends more time with Rachel and finds herself less inclined to go out with Chris. Although she has married Chris, this marriage has taken place for purely social considerations. Her real relationship remains the one with her mother. Expressed in her physical transformation after she marries, this relationship negates the principle of the hierogamous round. Like the men of her community, Charlotte becomes fallow after marriage. Even "the small black hairs at the corners of her lips

become more evident" (204). Absorbed by her mother, her relationship with Chris fails, and she goes to live with Rachel elsewhere.

In Entremont, no mother really wants her child to marry. When Rachel bitterly informs Martha that Chris is responsible for Charlotte's pregnancy, Martha is obviously just as unhappy as Rachel that their children will have to marry: she even makes "it sound as if Charlotte were entirely to blame" (198). Martha resists the breakdown of the family unit, because once the children leave home, they cannot be re-absorbed on their return. When Anna returns to the farm on vacation, "all the familiar things seemed to slant away from her in a funny perspective, as if she were getting used to new glasses" (138). Buckler painstakingly illustrates her alienation when she receives a gift of tenderloin from home: Anna feels "like crying because she'd been so long away that she wasn't as touched as they'd believe. She felt like crying as for a kind of guilt: that she had a kind of evening dress but didn't think of it as a 'good' dress now; that she said 'the show,' instead of 'the moving pictures'; that the sight of strangers no longer sealed her into the family unit as it used to do" (211). Anna does not leave her cultural inheritance behind her (she still needs to transform her apartment into a house and her relationship with Toby into a marriage), but psychologically, she has developed into an individual, and a city-dweller.

Significantly, the most problematic figure of the novel is sealed into the family unit. Unlike Anna, David never leaves the valley, and, as Douglas Barbour points out, he fails "to mature" (75). Undoubtedly, he is deeply affected by the processes of Creation and incest at work in Entremont. After Pete Delahunt's funeral, David feels "somehow to blame that Effie cried more lonelily than he" and proposes to her, because "she will know whatever happens will happen to us both" (44). Seeking to re-establish the uroboric balance which the "death-sadness" has disrupted, David's compensatory response to Effie's tears is appropriate at the age of eleven, because existence in the uroboros is "the symbolic selfrepresentation showing the infancy of both mankind and the child" (Neumann 11).

Marriage maintains the hierogamous constitution in Entremont, but David mistakes the ritual form for the sacred reality that it represents. For him, the expression of perfection is the pastoral vision of Entremont during his fourteenth summer when time seemed to stand still: "in the stuporous trancelike afternoons the tools of planting—the spade against the wall or the harrow with the earth of spring caked on its comma-like teeth—lay as if their work would never have to be re-

peated" (109). In short, David fails to mature, because he mistakes the completeness of childhood for the completeness of the mature Self. As a result, his relationships with the other members of his family are marked by uroboric incest: he will not tolerate any change on their part.

David cannot stop the inevitable breakdown of the Canaan family unit, but his hysterical outbursts at the news of Anna's departure for Halifax and Charlotte's pregnancy indicate that he would like to very much. To make matters worse, David himself begins to change as the breakdown of the initial uroboric state around him leads to duality; as the uroboric constitution divides into subject and object, David begins to grow up. As elsewhere, narcissism is a normal state of affairs in Entremont during adolescent development. David is accepted by both younger and older boys at the Baptizing Pool because of "a kind of narcissism" (104). Because he is always acting, he seems "forever, by the twist of essentiality he gave to whatever they did to be disclosing and illuminating a part of themselves they'd never recognized before" (104). At the age of fourteen, David, not surprisingly, finds himself a divided being. Because he still functions incestuously, however, he does not realize how lonely he is until Toby arrives.

Toby and David do not look alike, but there is a "curious identification between the two boys" which stems from David's recognition of a part of himself in Toby: "he was like this city boy too. He pictured himself in Toby's clothes. They'd look like a part of him too, even when they lay over a chair" (135). When Toby falls asleep in the attic that night, David realizes that "what he'd been missing all his life had been a reflection of himself anywhere. Now he had discovered it at last" (142).

A necessary transitional phase during the consolidation of the ego, narcissism is marked by its excessive egocentricity, self-complacency, and self-absorption (Neumann 122). As such it diametrically opposes the union of the male and female opposites. Incapable of loving anyone different from himself, David's narcissism assumes mythic proportions. When he discovers that Effie loves him, "everywhere he looked mirrors threw back and complicated his image" (110). Poor Effie plays only an Echo to David's Narcissus. Before his first sexual experience, he even wishes "he could do it with Effie if somehow she wasn't there" (107). Like Echo, Effie cannot catch the person whom she loves, because "no matter how many quick steps she took to his one," she feels David leave her (114). Finally, like her prototype, Effie's voice becomes "an echo" after her death (150).

Ironically, Effie does not die for David's love as Echo did for Narcissus, but David believes that she does. Because of his guilt, David tries to pretend by sheer will power that he can "switch the course of their actions at some place or other" (148). For the first time in his life, he discovers that he has the power to shape the course of events: he discovers that he "is participating all the time in History, he is fundamentally a historical being" (Eliade, *Myths* 238). David's discovery of history leads him to exaggerate his own position and importance regarding Effie's death. If he had known that she had died of leukemia, he could not have so over-valued his ego and fallen into a phenomenon complementary to narcissism: *Weltschmerz*.

According to Neumann, the over-valuation of the ego is compensated by a depressive self-destruction, which often culminates in suicide. An analysis of *Weltschmerz* discloses a feeling of guilt whose source is transpersonal: the World Parents—heaven and earth (122-23). Because David believes that he killed Effie, he finds himself responsible for symbolically separating the World Parents: with Effie dead, there is no longer a marriage, a house, waiting for him when he gets older. Consequently, David is not only engaged in struggling against the breakdown of the uroboros in terms of his family, but is also struggling against the breakdown of the uroboros in his psyche; if he separates the World Parents, he is condemned to loneliness. Ironically, the result of his struggle is a self-destructive pattern of incest and narcissism which isolates and finally kills him.

David's struggle to return to and repair the damage done to the uroboric fabric in his psyche is clearly illustrated in his dealings with mother and father figures after Effie's death. In a frenzy of self destruction, "to stoke his frustration (as always) with bitter and bitterer self-destruction," he has intercourse with Bess on Effie's bed (151). Shortly after, he prompts his father to strike him during their quarrel. The blow "was more grindingly sweet than anything he'd ever known" (165). David attempts to run away to Halifax, but caught in an orbit of self-destruction, he returns home. His self-destructive tendencies climax when he helps his father slaughter the pig.

When expressed in mythological terms, the individuation process—the struggle of the consciousness against the uroboric unconscious—is represented in the hero's fight with the dragon. This fight is expressed symbolically by killing, dismemberment, castration, and sacrifice (Neumann 124). For David the killing and dismemberment of the pig re-represents the hero killing the uroboros dragon. Furthermore, because he invests reality in the ritual form itself, David mistakes the

killing and dismemberment of the pig for the sacred act itself. Obviously unhappy at being present, he cannot willingly participate in the slaughter: to do so would involve separating the World Parents. Nevertheless David does want to be a hero. Therefore, ashamed of his own weakness, he works himself into a blind fury when Chris tells Steve, "Dave don't like to see anything killed" (189). Helping to dismember the pig, David symbolically participates in his own self-mutilation. Because the "primitive mind has always regarded killing, even the destruction of animals and plants, as an outrage upon the world order that cried out for expiation" (Neumann 124), David must expiate his guilt. His self-destructive tendencies drive him up to the rafters and leave him to fall twenty feet to the barn floor. Not surprisingly, he carries the psychic as well as the physical scars of this incident with him until his death.

When one considers the rather horrible consequences of expiating one's guilt and being re-absorbed back into the uroboric fabric, David's choice not to individuate seems inexplicable until one notices the alternative that the development of his consciousness holds for him. Accompanying David's discovery of history is his discovery of its terror. David's anguish stems from his realization that "man is a being destined to death, issuing from Nothingness and on his way to Nothingness" (Eliade, *Myths* 239). Because David invests reality in the ritual form, death, for him, is not the Great Initiation. It is emptied of its religiosity: by Fall, the only thing that separates Effie's grave "from the rest of the field was the visible border of sod" (152).

Like modern man, David is paralyzed before Nothingness. He cannot individuate. To do so would be to die. Like the individuation process, Death is a "passage to another mode of being; and for that reason is always referred to in relation to the symbolisms and rituals of initiation, rebirth, or resurrection" (Eliade, *Myths* 233). Unable to kill the uroboric dragon, David cannot be reborn. Nor can he reunite the halves of the hierogamous round, because he cannot marry, having killed Effie. Therefore, he chooses to remain a child, an uroboric composite of his family: "David is a good boy...he's like his father...yet I can see Martha in him too...and sometimes Christopher, and sometimes Anna. He's like them all" (224).

Retreating to the world of his childhood after his parents' deaths, David does not lose "the valid stamp of the indigenous" as his neighbors do (229). Dressed in his made-over clothes, he continues to order his life ritualistically: "the turnip tops exactly filling the number of bags gauged for them...two apples eaten at eight o'clock each

night...the alternate day's shave falling on this week, on Sunday...straightening the perimeter of the woodpile...each day, though he'd be disturbing the pile again the next morning" (229-30). His rituals, however, are meaningless; they do not reconnect him with the Creation process or the communal: David's ritualistic fussiness is the most "intolerable stigma of all, the stigma of the solitary" (230).

Only with Toby can David, as an adult, capture a sense of wholeness: "walking back to the old house again with this other who was like him, David felt the man-fibre they both shared, even with his pain, and the man-togetherness" (256). Unfortunately, his sense of Self is still completely narcissistic: "there was less loneliness in a way than if he were walking here with a woman; for though a woman you might love, your love was only possible because she was different" (256).

Literally an end in himself, deluded and living in a world of illusion, David is unable to see the two-fold reality of the drama re-enacted in Entremont. He retreats to the illusion of his childhood because of his terror of history. Looking down from his ridge at the top of the North Mountain, his utter translation of life in the valley is the novel's supreme cosmic irony. David sees the human drama, but he does not recognise its twofold reality. He makes what the Hindus call the "wrong action," and believes that nothing exists outside of time. He does not see that the human drama, like the world, is an illusion, because it is in a state of continual becoming. Consequently, he cannot see the "sacredness of the world," because he does not discover that "it is a divine play" (Eliade, *Myths* 242). Unable to see the sacredness of the world, David also fails to recognise the two-fold reality of his own nature. Like the world, he too is in a state of continual becoming, but because he invests reality in time, he does not understand the nature of the illusion in which he participates. Thus he does not "remark his face in the brook; or how, when his lips touched the water, its image wobbled and disintegrated" (288).

Trying to "create something out of nothing," as Narcissus did with his reflection, finally kills David. His death is "timely" indeed, for the pattern of incest and narcissism has resulted in megalomania. At the end, David grants himself divine status: he will absolve everyone, alive and dead, of all the "hurts they gave themselves or each other and his book will win the prize" (300). In the final analysis, Buckler's concern with the ritual origins of drama clearly demonstrates that *primitivism* rather than *pastoralism* is the informing idea of this novel, for the nature of reality in the valley is two-fold: marriage reunites the valley's hierogamous constitution, but its inhabitants do not live in a Golden

Age. Cyclical and self-contained, the mechanics of living in Entremont confer reality on the day-to-day actions of the community's inhabitants, but only because these actions imitate a sacred event. Furthermore, as David's personal tragedy illustrates, mistaking the *primitive* for the *pastoral* in Entremont involves mistaking the *dromenon* for the *drama*. By privileging the word over the deed, David effectively alienates himself from the process of Creation. Unable to "create something from nothing," he comes from Nothing and goes to Nothing. Thus the dramatic world of illusion in which he lives is nothing more than a state of limbo where a pattern of self-destruction is played out to its logical conclusion. Paralyzed before the immanent reality of history, David, unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth, cannot see that "life's but a walking shadow," and "a tale...signifying nothing" (V,v,24, 26-28). David's personal tragedy is compelling, because it represents the tragedy of modern man, but we need not be paralysed before the reality of David: the ritual underpinnings of Creation, incest, and individuation in *The Mountain and the Valley* reveal a complex integration of the profane and the sacred. In Entremont, all the world may be a stage and "the men and women merely players" (*As You Like It*, II, vii, 140), but the novel's two-fold reality reminds us that "we are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (*The Tempest*, IV, i, 156-58).

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