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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/3416>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.3416

ISSN: 1760-7426

This article is a translation of:

L'ascension de l'artiste dans *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) d'Ernest Buckler - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/3408> [fr]

Publisher:

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine, UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Electronic reference

André Dodeman, "The Ascent of the Artist in Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952)", *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 104-2 | 2016, Online since 05 October 2016, connection on 08 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/3416> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.3416>

This text was automatically generated on 8 December 2022.

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The Ascent of the Artist in Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952)

André Dodeman

- ¹ In his biography *Ernest Buckler Remembered*, Claude Bissell extensively discusses the importance of Buckler's first novel entitled *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) in contemporary Canadian literature. Even today, the novel stands as an example of modernist literature in the 1950s and is still deeply tied to its author. *The Mountain and the Valley* owes its success to the various critical responses by scholars who were surprised by a novel which, at first reading, merely aspired to stay true to a pastoral tradition that sought to aestheticize the everyday life of the countryside as opposed to the threatening and alienating life in the city. Born in the Annapolis Valley in the province of Nova Scotia, Ernest Buckler did not define himself as a writer who worked on a farm but as a farmer who wrote.¹ Small town Canada provided the groundwork for his fictional universe known as Entremont and its people whose lives revolve around the passing of the seasons. The novel tells the story of David Canaan, a young artist whose artistic ambitions separate him from the rest of the community. As in most *Künstlerromane*, the protagonist is a salient character who stands apart from the rest of the fictional world while standing out in order to better represent the development and doubts of the writer-to-be. In this article, I will use the definition of salience given by Frédéric Landragin who has studied the phenomenon in the field of linguistics. He writes that salience consists in the foregrounding of an entity that subsequently stands out from a given background (Landragin, 2011, 67). Salience will not only be associated with the relief formed by the mountain, but also with the foregrounding of a protagonist who desires to be a writer and a text that aspires to encapsulate the world. As its very name suggests, the small town of Entremont is enclosed by two mountains, the North and the South Mountains, and the novel concludes with the character's ascent of the South Mountain and his subsequent death.

- 2 This article will attempt to explore the relation between the mountain, the novel and the act of writing itself which remains at the heart of Buckler's ontological quest. Not only does the mountain determine the novel's plot, but it also gives meaning to writing as an act made salient through contact with the landscape. To begin with, this article will deal with the narrative function of the mountain in the novel along with Buckler's use of parenthesis, for if the mountain is more importantly central to the prologue and epilogue of the novel, it overshadows the valley below and permeates the background. The next part of this work will discuss the mountain as a matter of perception instead of a mere obstacle to overcome. Both mountains are less than a thousand feet high, but this height is enough to make the distinction between the fragmented nature of human existence in the valley below and an idea of unity that only the mountain can offer. The mountain discloses a liminal and interstitial space that calls for further study, along with the various stylistic devices used by the writer to represent it. Finally, the mountain enables the writer to rethink the very meaning of language and the paradoxical position of the writer who strives to represent presence while resorting to a language that defers meaning.

The Parenthetical Mountain

- 3 In terms of plot, the novel opens with a prologue entitled "The Rug", followed by six central parts pertaining to David Canaan's development from childhood to adulthood in the 1920s and 1940s and ends with an epilogue entitled "The Mountain" which relates his ascent and death on the South Mountain at the age of thirty. Buckler's description of Entremont is in keeping with the traditional idyll associated with microcosms steeped in the quotidian, the cyclical nature of human existence and self-sufficiency. Bakhtin writes that the idyll depends on traditional connections between characters and the space they inhabit: "Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world" (Bakhtin, 1981, 225). As this definition suggests, family is crucial to the idyll. At first, the readers discover David's grandmother Ellen knitting a rug in the prologue; then his parents, Joseph and Martha, two hard-working inarticulate farmers and finally his elder brother Chris and his twin sister Anna. Unlike his family, David has a way with words; he looks for the most appropriate terms to express feeling or sensation and finally becomes one of the brightest pupils of his school. The protagonist is always salient in the *Künstlerroman* in that his consciousness is meant to stand apart from others and surpass them in order to better interpret the world. Very much like David Canaan after him, Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist in James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* – an epitome of the genre – stands out because of his difficulty reconciling his experience with the experiences of others. When his father finds him in a pub, Stephen Dedalus realizes how lonely he is:

He had known neither the pleasure of companionship with others nor the vigour of rude male health nor filial piety. Nothing stirred within his soul but a cold and cruel and loveless lust. His childhood was dead or lost and with it his soul capable of simple joys and he was drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon. (Joyce, 1916, 96)

- 4 In this passage, the repetition of negatives defines the artist as an isolated and incomplete character who is tormented by absence and the desire to run away and never look back. In both cases, the salience of the character is conveyed by the onomastic significance of his family name. While Stephen Dedalus evokes the artist as well as the architect, David Canaan suggests the dawn of a better world by referring to the biblical Promised Land. As a result, Buckler chooses to represent the artist as a character who hesitates and focuses more on the throes of consciousness than on the process of making decisions and taking action.
- 5 The salience of the character is all the more emphasized by the use of the third-person narrative as it enables the narrator to stage the character and assess his decisions and moods. The narrator highlights the particularities and idiosyncrasies of his character so that the highly critical portrait he draws of him can elicit the various flaws of his personality. In his article published in 1976 entitled "David Canaan: The Failing Heart," Douglas Barbour argued that David Canaan was flawed by selfishness, resentment and the need to retreat to an imaginary world (Barbour, 1976, 2). Marta Dvorak, whose seminal work on Ernest Buckler will be quoted several times in this article, argues that ironic distance is necessary in the text so as to illustrate how difficult or even how impossible it is for the artist to entirely comprehend and explain the world.² However, Buckler constricts the distance between character and narrator by resorting to internal focalisation to describe David Canaan's hopes and dreams. In the prologue, David Canaan is described at home, looking through the window and contemplating the two mountains that tower over the valley below:
- He stood at the kitchen window now, watching the highway.
The highway was irregularly noduled with whitewashed wooden houses. It cut through the Annapolis Valley; and on either side of it lay the flat frozen fields. [...] On the south side of the highway, beyond the barn and the pastures, the South Mountain rose. Solid blue too at the bottom where the dark spruces huddled close, but snow-grey higher up where the sudden steepness and the leafless hardwood began. At the peak the gaunt limbs of the maples could be seen like the bones of hands all along the lemon-coloured horizon.
The mountain slopes were less than a mile high at their topmost point but they shut the valley in completely. (Buckler, 1961, 7)
- 6 The reader is encouraged to adopt the character's viewpoint in order to fully understand the difference between the mountain and the valley, and the impressionistic description of the mountain, with its shades of blue, grey and yellow, is made to contrast with the monochromatic hues of the village. Even if both North and South Mountains aim at isolating Entremont from the rest of the world and highlighting the protagonist's frustrations and disappointments, they call attention to the fragmented nature of the village, with its disseminated houses and its highway which splits the village in two. Similarly, it is the ascent of the mountain that encloses the text between a prologue and an epilogue that echo each other, the main text being a parenthetical narrative about the character's development and setbacks. The epilogue picks up where the prologue left off, that is to say the moment David was looking out the window and deciding, for the first time in his life, to climb to the top of the mountain. The mountain, which is also the last word of the text, concludes the novel.
- 7 The character's perception and representation of the mountain relies on the use of parentheses. The apparent unity of the mountain draws the reader's attention to the

text as a human construct that is linear and resists unity. The author thereby decides to break the linearity of the text with parentheses that enclose as much as they emphasize. They often serve to express concession as if to indicate that the text itself is unable to represent and to capture a given moment in time and say all there is to say about a character. The concessive clauses enable the narrator to endow his character with a sense of unity and include two moments in one. At the age of nineteen, David goes with his father to fell a tree whose wood proves to be useful for ship-building, but the narrator interrupts the narrative to refer to another moment in the text:

They were building vessels in Annapolis that year. The only tree in the village tall and large and straight enough to be hewn for a keel was on Joseph's land. It had stood as a landmark in the woods since his father's time. Knees were solid right angles of bole and root.

David's excitement was mixed of the thoughts of the mountain (though he was nineteen he'd never been to the very top yet) and the thought of their own timber going across the seas to far parts of the world. (Buckler, 168)

- 8 The use of *yet* between brackets enables the narrator to include dramatic irony with a view to placing the readers above the character by telling them that the ascent will take place one day. The concessive clause takes on a proleptic meaning in that it highlights the character's future and leaves the reader waiting for the next development. The parentheses or brackets fill the interstices of the text by inserting the narrator's comments, various proleptic elements and even the character's daydreams and expectations that are represented as substitutes for reality so as to show how thin the line is between reality and imagination. The parentheses mark the border between the third-person narrative and the character's daydreams. When David's friend Toby comes to visit him, he uses the story of his guest to dream of adventure:

"We'll go down to the docks. I'll take you on some of the big ships. There's ships in Halifax, you know, from all over the world."

"There is?"

(The ship glided softly into the harbour, spending exactly its own momentum. He waved to the people on the pier. He felt an exquisite twist of sadness and safety mixed. He was sad because so soon these same faces would be getting smaller and smaller as they waved to him when his ship was going somewhere else. Yet he was safe, because there were so many places in the world to go. There would always be some new place that he had never seen...)

"You better come vacation time, Dave. (Buckler, 135)

- 9 The parentheses mark a liminal space of passage that allows the reader to circulate between the diegetic world of the novel and the imaginary world of the protagonist. The importance of this space of passage is epitomized by the harbour that triggers a daydreaming episode and evokes a space which is always between departure and destination. In this passage, Buckler tries to describe how the mind of the artist works and the extent to which artistic creation relies on transitional moments and the other's words. It comes as no surprise that this passage resembles the incipit of a novel which discloses the literary ambitions of the protagonist. The narrative is indeed replete with liminal spaces that mark the border between everyday life and the imagination.

The Foot of the Mountain

- 10 The narrative between the prologue and the epilogue sheds light on a mountain that is depicted as separate from the character and as the object of his utmost dreams and imagination. His ascent is often deferred for various reasons such as the arrival of villagers who come to tell his father Joseph that they had just lost two of their own. These repeated delays serve to trap David in a liminal space of expectation, as his movements are often limited to the foot of the mountain where a small bridge marks the border between the mountain and the village. The two sections of the epilogue are marked by the crossing of the small bridge that foreshadows his ascent and subsequent epiphany. The bridge becomes a threshold, also one of Bakhtin's chronotopes that "is connected with the breaking point of a life [and] the moment of crisis," so much so that time becomes "essentially instantaneous [...] as if it has no duration" (Bakhtin, 1981, 248). In the novel, the lengthy accounts of the character's expectations end with the violent eruption of truth in his consciousness. The bridge also marks the border between time and expectation on the one hand and sudden epiphany on the other.
- 11 As mentioned earlier, expectation and interruption relegate the character to an in-between space where action is always deferred to leave room for the imagination. From a stylistic perspective, the character's expectations are best expressed by aposiopesis, that is to say a sudden interruption that draws the reader's attention to the suspension of action and discontinuous thought. At the foot of the mountain, where he is about to begin his ascent, David meets Steve, a childhood friend who, like the other inarticulate characters of the novel, struggles to find the appropriate words to express his thoughts:
- Wonder if he ever gut around that Bess Delahunt after she married agin... er that girl a hers... what was her name—Effie? Plan he did. Never find out from *him*, though. Close. ("Git over there, Molly! Where the hell d'ya think ye're...?") Roamin up there all be himself and it cold enough to... Comical duck. What was that he said, now?... *oh*, yes. The secret little smile came back. You're darned right he'd pull it up over tonight... (How did that new song on the radio go— "You're my filligiducha, shinimarucha...? He hummed it, amused.) (Buckler, 278-79)
- 12 In this passage, Buckler resorts to aposiopesis to describe the discontinuous thoughts that characterize a fragmented and postlapsarian world, a world that David will attempt to understand at the top of the mountain. This elliptic device serves to represent thought as a discontinuous flow, a technique used by early modernists such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf to represent the absence of chronology in the human mind.
- 13 The liminal space at the foot of the mountain is supposed to indicate the border between a fragmented world and the monolithic unity of the mountain. Be it Stephen Dedalus or David Canaan, the artist seeks clarity of vision, a vision that would allow the artist to understand everything at once and overcome the fragmented nature of the world through this quest for unity. What David is looking for at the top of the mountain is precisely a clear vision that would enable him to write and draw the most precise portrait of the village possible. The clarity of the mountain air is often evoked in novels that dwell on landscape and relief. In her article "*La Vision artistique de la montagne : panorama, pli ou plongée*," Marie-Madeleine Martinet argues that the clarity of the mountain air downplays the effect by which distance blurs even the remotest elements of landscape, so much so that such distance, albeit precise, becomes attractive to the

eye (Martinet, 2008, 30). Unlike the unified perception of time on the mountain, the time of the village below separates and disjoins. One example is Christmas, a very important time of the year for David and, like many children his age, he wishes that Christmas day could last forever. When the Canaan family pays a visit to their neighbours, David sees no Christmas tree in the house: "They went to Charlotte's. Charlotte had no tree. When they went into Rachel's kitchen, it was as if they'd gone in out of Christmas" (Buckler, 64). The use of the preposition *out* is quite interesting in that it establishes a tight connection between space and time. Prepositions like "in" and "out" that are usually associated with verbs to express movement take on a spatial meaning and recall our conceptions of space and time as two discontinuous dimensions. Very much like time as the philosophical concept, the time of the narrative also disjoins. When David decides to confide in his sister Anna, the twin sibling he loves so deeply, about an argument he had with his father, he realizes that time has finally splintered their closeness: "He couldn't go on. For a minute it seemed suddenly darker under the trees. He knew that time and separation had sealed them off from each other a little. Nothing like it did with others, but even with them, a little" (Buckler, 174). David's ascent of the mountain at the end of the novel consists precisely in representing him as wanting to transcend the separateness and loneliness of the world. The vision he thinks he is having at the top of the mountain enables him to obliterate the border between time and space and between subject and object.

- 14 This desire to capture a moment in time or any complex reality for that matter is often expressed by means of repetition and lists. In his book on English stylistics, Henri Suhamy makes a distinction between two stylistic devices which express disjunction and continuity. While disjunctions and ellipses tend to subtract explicit meaning from the literary text, the salience of the text is often associated with complete, well-constructed sentences and repetitions.³ The narrative of David's ascent is replete with repetitions and lists that remind the reader that he is about to reach his goal and fully understand the noumenal world he wishes to put into words. As he approaches the top of the mountain, his vision of the world becomes clearer and more totalizing:

The fact of that maple growing exactly that way; that beech; that pine... That little cloud that way and no other; that little cloud I didn't see, exactly the way *it* was... The road running that way; and all the runner tracks laced over it exactly as they are... the number of the leaves; the exact number of all the leaves... That birch; the trees behind that birch... The sun; exactly the way that shadow is under that poplar; exactly the way the shadow was there yesterday... That cradle hill; exactly the number of all cradle hills I do not see... (Buckler, 285-86)

- 15 This passage is but the beginning of a series of paragraphs that share the same sentence structures. The repetition of the adverb "exactly" epitomizes the artist figure who gradually manages to grasp reality in order to better describe it for its inhabitants, for his goal is precisely to portray the people of the valley in the most precise way possible. Climbing the mountain becomes synonymous with dominating the world and reality and the regular use of the shifter "that" is a way of inviting the reader to embrace the character's worldview, a worldview in which David remains the centre. Even though the text follows a linear pattern, the repetition of "exactly" suggests that the character is able to grasp the essence of things, an essence that transcends multiplicity and the fragmented nature of the physical world.
- 16 In the same fashion, the ascent of the mountain tends to blur the border between inside and outside. Dvorak lists the many ocular metaphors in Buckler's text that serve to

conflate the artist's viewpoint with the empirical reality being perceived. His description of Steve highlights David's capacity to achieve full awareness of his own gaze upon the world and the means by which he reconstructs reality:

He [Steve] had lived as many years as David, but time itself was a thing he would never hear or see. There was inside and outside for him too, but he would never look at the eye of his own watching. He saw the trees and the fields. Yet in a way he didn't see them at all. A tree was a tree, a thing for the axe. A field was a field. You hauled across it when it was frozen, ploughed it when it was soft. That's all there was to it. (Buckler, 277)

- 17 The ocular metaphor underlines the importance of reflection and the description of David's awakening to his own consciousness, the ultimate goal of any writer for Buckler. The reality Steve lives in is tautological ("A tree was a tree," "A field was a field") unlike David's reality which encompasses both subject and object of perception. In choosing a young character like David, Buckler chose to write a *Künstlerroman* that deals mainly with how the world is perceived and reconstructed through word and language. In addition, the landscapes that the narrator describes are in fact the reflection of the observer's consciousness. Just as Augustin Berque who argues, in *Cinq propositions pour une théorie du paysage*, that landscape is fundamentally relational (Berque, 1994, 27) and Claire Omhové who states that it is "a mediation through which human subjectivity connects with an empirical reality" (Omhové, 2007, 25), landscapes are not mere reflections of reality, but the expression of the observer's viewpoint. While viewers search for the painter's viewpoint within the frame of the painting, readers can trace it through the writer's use of words and style. As the story unfolds, stylistic salience intensifies as the character comes into contact with the mountain that shapes his consciousness.

The Language of the Mountain

- 18 In most novels where mountains play a major role, the mountain is often associated with the epiphanic and the sacred. The trees on the mountain and the way they filter the sunlight evoke the cathedral, and Northrop Frye goes as far as to include the mountain among the four major themes of Western literature along with the Garden, the Cave and the Furnace. For Frye, ascents are not about mourning the loss of ancient texts but about the intensifying of consciousness itself: "The interest of modern poets in ladders and spirals is not nostalgia for outmoded images of creation, but a realization that because such images stand for the intensifying of consciousness through words, they represent the concern of concerns, so to speak, the consciousness of consciousness" (Frye, 1990, 165). Similarly, Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay writes that the mountain is a place for sacred terror, epiphany and the sublime (Dupeyron-Lafay, 2008, 175). This intensifying or salience of consciousness can be found in the language used to represent it since the protagonist wishes to write for others and not only for himself. However, he must understand others before drawing their portrait and find their "single core of meaning" (Buckler, 292), a meaning that could totalize and transcend the world. Such musings on language reflect earlier modernist preoccupations and many artists have questioned the ability of language to represent the world. Linda Hutcheon's general definition of modernism in a Canadian context is appropriate in this case:

Many critics have pointed out the glaring contradictions of modernism: its elitist, classical need for order and its revolutionary formal innovations (Kermode 1971, 91); its “Janus-faced” anarchistic urge to destroy existing systems combined with a reactionary political vision of ideal order (Daiches 1971, 197); its compulsion to write mixed with a realization of the meaninglessness of writing (in the work of Beckett or Kafka); its melancholy regret for the loss of presence and its experimental energy and power of conception (Lyotard 1986, 30-1). (Hutcheon, 1988, 43)

- 19 Hutcheon evokes most of the contradictions the modernists had to tackle. Buckler, like many of his predecessors, points to the inability of language to represent reality while resorting to its system as the only available means of expression. Buckler resorts to stylistic salience to compensate for such imperfections and the shortcomings of the word that is unable to encapsulate reality. In his introduction to “La saillance: questions méthodologiques autour d’une notion multifactorielle”, Frédéric Landragin defines salience as a way of having something stand out so as to draw one’s attention to it.⁴ In addition to the various typographical signs such as the parentheses mentioned earlier, salience in Buckler’s text relies on other stylistic devices that aim at expressing repetition. The artist’s ascent of the mountain at the end of the novel triggers a series of experimental passages that depict the character’s epiphany, that is to say the emergence of a particular truth that can only be grasped and understood through repetition. In this regard, repetition serves to endow this particular emergence of truth with a duration that becomes necessary in terms of artistic creation. Most of these repetitions are triggered by anamnesis or recollection. During his final ascent, time quickens and the past permeates the present:

Time was moving again, faster than ever now. Each moment just escaped the reach of the moment before it.

And David’s legs began to move faster. Without direction from his mind. They moved now like the limbs of one who has run until he can run no longer, yet runs on because the voice of his frightened child is still calling. His heart was beating faster too. He didn’t hear it at all.

And now the fact of exactly the way that *faces* happened to be – exactly that way because of exactly all the *feelings* behind them – added its cry to the voices of the objects about him. It was a more exquisite accusing still.

... the face of my father nights in the kitchen listening to Anna hear my spellings, hearing a son of his own flesh spell correctly words he himself didn’t even know the meaning of... His face the day the hay was perfect to haul in and then the wagon wheel struck a rock and broke. (Buckler, 286-87)

- 20 Italics, which are often used to highlight words and their meaning, aim at combining meaning, feeling and sensation. The term “*faces*” in this passage triggers a list of identifiable and individual faces in order to bring all singular occurrences to a single moment in time. The rest of the text lists the various sensations caused by each face, the faces of his family and of his friends. The faces of his loved ones take part in the synesthetic dimension of the character’s ascent resulting from the character’s need to combine multiplicity and unity. In the unity of the vision that overwhelms him when climbing the mountain, everything merges so that all forms, sounds and sensations become interchangeable. This also explains why one of the central metaphors of the epilogue is that of translation which evokes the need to move from one feeling to another and adds a metalinguistic dimension to Buckler’s text.
- 21 David is a character who masters words and discourse. When his father slaps him in the face one day in a field, the rhythm of the text speeds up because of his anger and

recedes when his anger dissipates. His thought patterns become clauses, syntactic structures that elicit the grammaticality of thought itself: "The clauses of his thoughts tumbled slower in his mind, like the final revolutions of the barrel churn after the foot had been taken from the pedal" (Buckler, 160). The metalanguage alluded to in the text highlights language as an artificial construct that, like any other language, decomposes the world into so many fragments. However, translation is used as a metaphor for David's state of mind when reaching the top of the mountain. Translation not only refers to the translation of one language into another, but it also suggests movement. Buckler uses translation to reunite the past and the present into one single moment, all the familiar and unfamiliar faces into one single face and all the voices speaking to him into one single voice. This apparent unity of the present and of his awareness is expressed by the polyptoton which purports to combine a single root and a variety of lexical forms. Buckler resorts to this device when David finally reaches the top of the mountain:

But the voices didn't stop.

They added a new voice to their frenzied forking, to the bright singing stinging scream of clarity in the accusation of the unattended. Exactly how did the voice *itself* fluctuate, according to the exact inexactness of the listener's listening?

He thought: Myself amongst them, *thinking* of myself amongst them...

He screamed "Stop!" again. (Buckler, 291)

- 22 In this short passage, many stylistic devices are used to represent the emergence and salience of consciousness. The clarity of his vision emerges suddenly and violently with the alliteration "singing stinging scream," and the polyptota ("the exact inexactness of the listener's listening") are a reference to the equation in which the one and the many are reconciled in a unique, synthesizing voice. The reflexive pronoun "myself" shows David reflecting upon his own self and points to the problematics of presence and the authenticity of language that Buckler was struggling with at the time.
- 23 When it comes to the notion of presence, Jean-Jacques Rousseau tackled the problem raised by the authenticity of language. When Jean Starobinski discusses Rousseau's text, he focuses more importantly on the Rousseauian conception of language which posited that modern languages resulted from a decline from the authentic to the inauthentic (Starobinski, 1971, 178). In Rousseau's terms, modern languages are stymied by convention and quite unable to express the true presence of feeling. Language serves to veil and darken the world by separating the subject and the object. In *Of grammarology*, Jacques Derrida, for whom language is "always already a writing,"⁵ goes as far as to assert that, for Rousseau, the origin is always the beginning of an end, an inaugural decadence (Derrida, 1967, 284). Like time, language and writing disjoin and the outcome of the novel discloses a unified vision of the world that dies with the artist at the top of the mountain. Even if Buckler fails to solve the problem of the authenticity of language and writing, he was right in questioning their established meaning. Indeed, the anti-climactic outcome of the novel is a cause for disappointment. When he finally reaches the top of the mountain, the supposedly climactic moment of the text, David dies of a heart attack and his body is slowly covered under a blanket of snow that evokes the blank page. In other words, the salience of the character's consciousness is ephemeral and bound to fail. The character's body ceases to be salient and disappears in the snow, as if absorbed by the mountain that takes away as much as it gives.

- 24 The critical response to *The Mountain and the Valley* is still divided over Buckler's style. Style, or what Suhamy considers to be what we sensorily hear and read in a text (Suhamy, 1994, viii), plays a crucial role in the critical assessment of the text and many critics have gone as far as to compare it with poetry. For others however, his style was deemed excessive and saturated. By drawing most of the reader's attention to the conventionality and artificiality of language, reading can prove to be difficult and style can become an obstacle to what was originally intended, that is to say the representation of a community that lacks words and is forever bound in silence. Ernest Buckler, who used facts of his own life to create David, was not the only writer to voice the concerns of the silent many. In the province of New Brunswick, David Adams Richards's *Miramichi Trilogy* also strives to reproduce the local language of farmers and workers whose "inside" struggles to express itself "outside". *The Cruellest Month*, Buckler's second novel published eleven years later, revisits the theme of language and writing by setting city characters in opposition with authentic country folk. Then again, the writer is trapped between the inauthentic nature of writing and the need to write novels. This question will find its way into Canadian postmodernism with writers like Leonard Cohen and Margaret Atwood who, instead of attempting to answer the question, will tackle it by resorting to irony. The importance of this question in the 1950s and 1960s, already widely discussed by writers of the period, was precisely what helped *The Mountain and the Valley* become one of the forerunners of contemporary Canadian modernist literature and Buckler one of the most salient contemporary Canadian writers.

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NOTES

1. Claude Bissell refers to one of Buckler's texts entitled "My First Novel." The text is part of a collection that is available at the University of Toronto. In his third chapter discussing *The Mountain and the Valley*, Bissell writes that thanks to the publication of the novel, "[t]he farmer who wrote turned into the writer who chose to live on a farm." Claude Bissell, *Ernest Buckler Remembered*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989, p. 55.
2. Marta Dvorak, *Ernest Buckler: Rediscovery and Reassessment*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001, pp. 95-96. Marta Dvorak is one of the most renowned experts on Buckler's work today and she recently published a critical edition of *The Mountain and the Valley* by Tecumseh Press (Ottawa) in 2012. It is worth noting that her book is central to my reading of Buckler's novel, even if does not focus entirely on salience and relief-related questions.
3. « [L]es procédés de ruptures, d'atténuation, d'obscurcissement, de manque, constituent les ombres du tableau. Inversement, la partie saillante et colorée du tableau s'associe à une évocation de plénitude phraséologique, de constructions bien assises aux lignes fermement dessinées, de répétitions insistantes ou modulées. » Henri Suhamy, *Stylistique anglaise*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1994, p. 200.
4. « La saillance, c'est avant tout l'émergence d'une forme sur un fond, la mise en avant d'une entité par rapport à d'autres entités. Etre saillant, c'est ressortir particulièrement, au point de capter l'attention et de donner une accroche, un point de départ à la compréhension » (Landragin 2012, 15).

5. I am using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of « un langage qui est toujours déjà une écriture », available online at http://www.mohamedrabee.com/books/book1_3997.pdf.

ABSTRACTS

With his first novel, *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), Canadian writer Ernest Buckler chose to stay true to the longstanding tradition of the *Künstlerroman*, best illustrated by one of the greatest modernist writers of the twentieth century, James Joyce and his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Like Joyce who chose to revisit the genre, Buckler decided to write about the throes of a young artist who seeks to escape from tradition and life in the country. *The Mountain and the Valley* relates the intellectual coming of age of David Canaan, a young character whose artistic sensitivity sets him apart from the rest of his community in the Annapolis Valley, a valley in the Nova Scotian hinterland of Canada. The story is set in the small town of Entremont which, as its very name suggests, is surrounded by two mountains that isolate and confine the characters to a life of routine and deny them access to time and progress. The North and South Mountains do not merely enclose the characters in the seasonal life of the farmer, they frame the narrative of David Canaan that begins and concludes with the ascent of the South Mountain where he dies prematurely at the age of thirty.

This article will study the relationship between the image of the mountain, the plotline and the very act of writing itself as a creative process that the writer constantly interrogates. Is writing the only way to represent the emergence and uniqueness of a writer who is awakening to his own consciousness? I will try to explain how the mountain not only shapes the novel, but also a text made salient through contact with a seeming monolithic mountain. As a result, salience will be understood as the emphasis laid on the artist's awakening, an awakening that cannot be studied separately from the geographical space the protagonist inhabits. Relief-related discourse will inevitably lead to discourse related to the awakening to one's own consciousness.

INDEX

Keywords: novel, Canadian literature, terrain

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