

HERO TRIP: DIVINE RIGHT'S JOURNEY OF SELF

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Gurney Norman's Appalachian epic *Divine Right's Trip* first appeared in *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* in 1971. Norman had hatched a plot with Stewart Brand to write a novel whose hero would use products advertised in the Catalog. Eventually, Norman refused to be held by these artistic constraints, as Ed McClanahan explains in the afterword to the novel (306). Rather than following the random placement of hippy wares in the catalog, Norman created a story whose hero is the acid-addled cousin of Huck Finn and Stephan Dedalus on a journey that reconciles his dissociated selves: Divine Right and David Ray. The novel is preceded by three epigraphs: a quotation from Joseph Campbell summarizing the epic journey of the hero; James 1:8, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"; and finally from the Tao, "The surest test if a man is sane is if he accepts life whole, as it is." Norman has given readers a clue to one of the novel's many meanings by beginning the story with these three enigmatic quotations. Campbell's cyclical heroic journey consists, as he explains in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, of "separation, initiation, and return" (30). The epigraphs then are a puzzle that once solved will illuminate the text. At the beginning of D.R.'s heroic journey he is a "double-minded man," hence the scripture; however, D. R. is, by story's end, "sane" by the definition put forth by the Book of Tao because he "accepts life whole, as it is." The appearance of the two scriptures just after the title page and their inclusion in the wedding ceremony at the end of the book frame the story just as Campbell's model of the hero journey frames it.

Campbell's model is a circular one, beginning with the call, then a crossing over the "threshold of adventure" to oppose a foe, in D.R.'s case a dragon he himself has created. As Campbell explains:

There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark. . . . Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him [tests], some of which give magical aid [helpers]. . . . [His] triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world [sacred marriage]. . . . [I]ntrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being. (245-46)

Norman's hero, D.R., proceeds with the aid of helpers into an adventure within himself. His fight with the dragon is a fight between his two selves for supremacy, between David Ray and Divine Right.

D.R.'s circular orbit comes in contact with others off on their own journey, who represent either helpers or tests that D.R. must overcome. D.R.'s first encounter on the road is a nameless hitchhiker whose silence infuriates D.R. The boy's only words foreshadow the hero-journey D.R. has begun:

"Did you ever read about St. George and the dragon?"

D.R. said he hadn't.

"It's far-out shit," said the kid. And he closed the door and started walking down the highway toward wherever they'd just come from. (11)

This mysterious stranger not only sets the context of D.R.'s journey, but this scene also indicates a crucial aspect of D.R.'s current predicament and the tone of the journey: he has no idea where he is or where he is going.

D.R. and Estelle take turns sleeping and driving, and his state of consciousness is always in doubt due to his penchant for chemical stimulation and the fatigue of driving. D.R.'s constant straddling between waking and sleeping indicates that the journey is as much a trip inside himself as it is a seemingly random trip from Urge to God-knows-where. D.R.'s next visitor/helper is the Lone Outdoorsman whose lifestyle indicates that he has long since quit his journey. The Lone Outdoorsman is a static character; he never seems to move even when he is in motion. He requires a motorcycle to make the hundred-yard trip to the bathroom of the campsite. Prepared for anything, he rarely acts, and when he does it is with all the ferocity and cunning of a box turtle. He is suspicious and lonely but kind as well. His journey is over, and as a result, he is as anachronistic as the black-and-white western he watches with D.R. and Estelle on his miniature television.

D.R.'s fascination with the red tent at the campsite is laden with importance as far as his journey is concerned. D. R. Contemplates space thanks to the red tent, and the tent is symbolic of the paradoxically static nature of D.R.'s journey. The red tent is a stop sign that shows the folly of Divine Right's flight from himself. In the tent or in Urge, D. R. has no sense of place. His flight from his home in Kentucky leads nowhere. Only by being back home can he really occupy space. His present position in the universe is as unstable and transitory as the tent's.

D.R.'s next signpost or helper is the Greek, ironically named for his "gift" of oratory. The Greek's journey consists of his return to Norman, Oklahoma (Norman's choice of place names amounts to a wink at his readers) to destroy the last remaining record of himself -- his autobiographical Master's thesis. Its destruction is paramount to the Greek's quest to destroy any record of himself and particularly his name. By forgetting his name, the Greek hopes to escape from a life of "mucus-loving servitude" and move toward his Sumerian nut-eating nirvana. The Greek cryptically explains:

Yes, sir, the Sumerian line of nut-eaters remained unbroken right on up 'til modern times. That's a little known fact, but it's true. There's a good book about Sumerian nut culture by a guy named Agolt you ought to read. *The Happy Sumerians* is the title. (61)

But the Greek's absurd quest is a mirror of what Divine Right has attempted to do -- forget his name, his past, and his place in the universe. At least the Greek is moving toward some goal; D.R. is merely running away from home. The Greek's girlfriend, aptly named Frieda, wisely escapes with a new-found family. By now she has learned that the Greek's rap is about as profound as D.R.'s acid-induced gibberish.

D.R.'s next test is Eddie's death. It eliminates his only frame of reference on the road. Eddie's funeral is attended by other lost souls, including the Native:

The Native got his name because he was always talking about how nobody's a native any more. Nobody lives where he was born, nobody's got real roots any more. And that's why people are so unhappy. The Native grew up in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. He was so homesick most of the time, all he ever talked about was his family and his old home place back in the Ozarks. People at

home have got identity, said the Native. They've got a history, and their lives are full of the most beautiful rituals. (93)

The only ritual the homeless funeral party can muster is a stoned service officiated by way of television by Billy Graham and the "hypnotism man." The hypnotism man's analogy of the three boxes should be particularly instructive to D. R. By describing boxes that represent the past, the present, and the future, the hypnotism man has constructed a symbol of time that involves something more tangible than the white line on a highway, and it anticipates D.R.'s quest for a more tangible time and space: home in Kentucky.

Prior to Estelle's leaving D.R. (appropriately in the "terminal"), D.R. tells Estelle he would prefer to see his sister's family without her. D.R. is incapable of reconciling his two selves at this point. With Estelle he is Divine Right; with his family he is David Ray. For Estelle and his sister to meet, David Ray would have to meet Divine Right. That will come soon enough. In the meantime, D.R. settles in at Doyle and Marcella's as if he were born in the house. As a result, Doyle's dreams and subsequent salvation can point the way for D.R. It is at his sister's that D.R. finds out about Emmit, D.R.'s own chance for salvation. Thus begins the final arc of his journey cycle.

While Marcella's family is at church, D.R. gets his own message from God (Mrs. Godsey) over the phone. Come home and take care of Emmit. As D.R. crosses the Ohio River, the narration suddenly shifts from Divine Right's journey home to David Ray's weekend trips as a boy from Cincinnati back to the old homeplace. When the narrator shifts attention back to Divine Right, he is at a crossroads in Kentucky and so is the story: the two D.R.'s are about to converge. The spectral appearance of Fess Parker on the movie screen and the miner with his hat lit are an indication that D.R. is in unknown territory. Consistent with Campbell's model, however, is a strange intimacy: Fess Parker and Coal are two Kentucky icons who announce D.R.'s return home. D.R. plunges into even more intimate territory as he struggles with his two selves in the back of the van while the miner drives him closer to home. His hallucination in the back of the van sends him into a netherworld where he meets a dragon with "seven horns, and crowning each horn in rays of light was Estelle's face, distorted by a grin so evil and so knowing D.R. shuddered" (195). In Divine Right's imagination, the energy of his real self, David Ray, appears as a monster and the one thing that David Ray longs for most -- Estelle -- seems "evil." By the time that he reaches Mrs. Godsey's, however, it is David Ray who gets out of the van.

The two D.R.s finally face off in the mine where "He was a snake shedding old and stiffened skin" (205). D.R. slays the dragon, but it carries him down deeper into the mine. The mine represents D.R.'s mind where he rediscovers who he is and reunifies parts of himself that have been repressed for so long. By chapter six, D.R. is psychically at home, helping his dead grandmother with the laundry and sharing tea with his Uncle Emmit, who will be a shade himself soon.

Mrs. Hubbard is struck by D.R.'s compassion for Emmit. She marvels at how "that young man is caring for him as if it was his own life at stake" (234). And it is. Immediately upon becoming whole -- no longer "a double minded man . . . unstable in all his ways" -- D.R. becomes a part of his Uncle Emmit, a part of his family, and a part of the hillside where he will live and where his Uncle Emmit will be buried. In contrast to the blaring televisions that were at Eddie's funeral, "Abide with Me" accompanies Emmit's body into the grave. However, the attendants at Emmit's funeral have a liturgy oddly similar to that of the hypnotism man: Ecclesiastes chapter three is more poetic than the three boxes that represent past, present, and future, but both compartmentalize time. Emmit is planted in the ground "like a seed," and D.R. sleeps in Emmit's bed. Emmit is in the box marked "past," and D.R. is in the one marked "present."

As Leonard and D.R. go on to build the hogpen, the boxes that hold D.R.'s life come together. The hogpen itself is a kind of box, and all of D.R.'s hard work will pay off: "Next winter when we have some good sausage for breakfast, we'll remember this day, David" (274-75). Everything is in its place, not only the hogs, but also David Ray. Everything, that is, except Estelle. D.R.'s marriage to Estelle is necessary for the circle to be complete. The wedding is the last stitch in the mandala that closes the circle, that puts all the boxes in their places. Therefore, hippies and Kentuckians can come together to close the circle of David Ray's heroic journey. Emmit and his rabbit's manure will reclaim the hillside from erosion. D.R. and Estelle will live in the house where D.R.'s ancestors lived and died. As Reverend Bagby reads from the Tao, Swami High-Time reads from the Bible, and the cycle is complete.

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