

ERNEST BUCKLER

IRONY AND ISOLATION
IN THE
FICTION OF ERNEST BUCKLER

By
RHONDA GERTRUDE HUSTLER

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AUTHOR: Rhonda Gertrude Hustler, B.A. (University of
Windsor)
M.A. (University of
Windsor)

SUPERVISOR: Professor J. Ferns

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	51
The Short Stories	
Chapter II	89
The Mountain and The Valley	
Chapter III	167
The Cruellest Month	
Chapter IV	230
Ox Bells and Fireflies	
Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea	
Whirligig	
Conclusion	283
Bibliography	286

Abstract

This thesis examines how Ernest Buckler's literary style, particularly in his presentation of the theme of isolation and his characterizations, is determined by his intentional use of irony. By examining all of Buckler's work, including both unpublished and often neglected writings, this thesis offers critical analysis of the author's entire literary career. Unlike other critical discussions which have concentrated narrowly on the role of the artist figure and recognize irony only in limited areas, my criticism focusses on the pervasive ironies which effect the content of Buckler's fiction. I discuss irony as a structural device which unifies the Buckler canon and demonstrates the author's creative development. Through detailed analysis of the works, I offer internal evidence for my theory, and from The Buckler Collection I offer external evidence about Buckler's intentions and beliefs concerning irony. My thesis argues that critical evaluations of Buckler's writing must consider how his conscious use of irony determines our interpretation and understanding of his work.

Irony as used in this study involves the recognition of incongruities, the contrast between appearance and reality. It manifests itself in Buckler's perspective of irony, his vision of the world as characterized by irreconcilable tensions and contradictions that are tolerated by mankind only through human relationships. The role of irony in his fiction is to elucidate this attitude as it affects his themes, characterizations, plot structures and writing techniques. When applied to his beliefs and perceptions, the term irony no longer identifies only the literary genre or stylistic devices of fiction, but refers to the

kinds of themes and subject matter explored by Buckler. Therefore, this thesis explains how Buckler emphasizes in his work the recognition of incongruities and uses irony to thematically structure his work.

According to Buckler, one tragedy of modern society is alienation caused by the contradiction between man's idealized expectations and his disillusioning experiences. Buckler's perspective of irony concentrates on this discrepancy which isolates man from his community and forces him into absolute isolation, Buckler's term for bitter loneliness and irreversible alienation. This bleak process can only be prevented by each man acknowledging the presence of local ironies, accepting them as part of the universal human condition and reaching out to share that awareness with other men equally doomed and troubled by absurdities and contradictions. Together, through love and honest human relationships, they will face life's disturbing inconsistencies and cruel disappointments. As well, they will reject the despair of nihilism when they find truth and meaning in such human relationships.

In this thesis I examine how Buckler expresses his perspective of irony in the form and content of his fiction, but I concentrate on his subject matter, themes and characterizations. The chapter discussions explain how Buckler's intentional use of irony affects his central theme of isolation. Chapter One discusses the short stories in The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories (1975) as well as other pieces of short fiction, published and unpublished from The Buckler Collection. These selections illustrate how tensions in family relationships cause misunderstandings and feelings of rejection until a demonstration of family loyalty expressing love reunites family members.

We see Buckler creating irony by juxtaposing opposites, contrasting different narrative voices, shifting time frames and manipulating images and symbols. All of these techniques develop over the period of Buckler's career.

Chapter Two discusses The Mountain and The Valley (1952) in relation to the central theme of isolation, the artist as an ironic figure, the disintegration of the Canaan family and the conflict between various perceptions of reality. I focus on the power of language, the creative process and metaphor and the ultimate meaning of David's death. My criticism explores the entire scope of Buckler's handling of irony as it relates to David's character and to Buckler's own commentaries and plans.

Chapter Three examines irony as Buckler's challenge to nihilism in The Cruellest Month (1963), the use of verbal irony, the highly intellectual style of writing, the confirmation of love as the only solution to the modern condition and the treatment of the ironic artist figure in the characters of Paul Creed and Morse Halliday.

Chapter Four includes a discussion of Ox Bells and Fireflies (1968), a nostalgic, poetic memoir of the way it was. This work contrasts the ideal past with the disillusioning present to illustrate how man lives in a sterile, alienating environment. The presence of unintentional irony involving the conflicting perceptions of the reader and Buckler weaken the overall effectiveness of the work. In Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (1973), Buckler juxtaposes contrasting ways of life, values and characterizations to emphasize how his Nova Scotian home embodies ironic contrasts. The isolation that Buckler describes is, for the most part, associated with geography and

physical solitude rather than a sense of alienation. Whirligig (1977) demonstrates how irony can evolve into satire and parody while continuing to contrast appearances with reality. Isolation occurs as a mild form of loneliness and alienation, an inescapable part of modern society made tolerable by man's sense of humour and absurd comedy.

As a modern writer of ironic literature, Buckler focusses on the complex ironies of human existence and the tragedy of alienation. His ironic perspective views man as fated in his struggle to survive in an indifferent universe where the phenomenal world thwarts his aspirations toward the ideal and his longing for perfection. But Buckler believes that human relationships give ultimate meaning to life and triumph over the ironies and isolation suffered by mankind. Although often imperfect and subject to the perversities present in the modern world, love remains man's only hope. While recognizing the ironies inherent in life, Buckler affirms in his fiction the significance of life itself, the human family and human love. This thesis examines the Buckler canon in the light of his philosophy and demonstrates that Buckler writes from an ironic perspective which modulates the reader's understanding of his work.

INTRODUCTION

I. Buckler's Life and Literary Career

Ernest Redmond Buckler was born July 19, 1908, in Dalhousie West, Nova Scotia, the third of five children to Appleton and Mary (Swift) Buckler.¹ Buckler's ancestors had settled in the region of Annapolis in the early 1780's, and, in 1817, John Buckler, his great-grandfather, received a land grant in the Dalhousie area. The Buckler family lived in Dalhousie West until the 1930's when they moved to Centrelea following the death of Appleton Buckler.

By the age of twelve, Buckler completed secondary school. He spent the summers from 1920 to 1925 working at the elegant Kent House in Greenwich, Connecticut. In 1925 at the age of seventeen, Buckler entered Dalhousie University and after taking one year off, graduated in 1929 with a liberal arts B.A., gaining a distinction in Mathematics. While at the university, Buckler published several poems in The Dalhousie Gazette.² In 1929, Buckler moved to Toronto, and in 1930, he graduated from the University of Toronto with an M.A. in Philosophy.³ From 1930 to 1936, he worked as an actuary with the Manufacturers Life Insurance Company until poor health resulted in his returning home to the family farm in Centrelea. There, he became a "farmer who writes, not a writer who farms."⁴

In 1937, Coronet, an American magazine, offered a \$100.00 prize for the article which best described "What Is Coronet?", and Buckler's piece was the winning entry. Buckler describes his entry into the world of writing as "entirely by accident...so it was just a fluke; as it happens, my sister and her husband were coming home from Montreal and they picked

up this magazine, Coronet, which used to be a first-class magazine. There was a contest in it, so I thought, 'What the hell, I'll try it' - - and I got first prize. After that I got into Esquire, which was an allied publication. And then I got into the writing bit."⁵ In a letter to Arnold Gingrich, editor of Coronet, Buckler expresses his "sincere gratitude...that even if I never see another comma or even if I write a Farewell To Arms, I shall always remember with deep thanks that it was you who first let me in."⁶ With this recognition and his letters of "exegetical comments" to Esquire, Buckler entered the realm of magazine publishing.⁷ His letter, which began when Esquire was still a young magazine, appeared in the correspondence column and gained a significant readership which would, according to Gingrich, "rather read what Buckler said about the issues than read the magazines themselves."⁸ Gingrich recalls that some readers "began saying they hoped I was paying Buckler a lot of money, because he was worth Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Dreiser, and all the rest put together."

Having been encouraged by Gingrich to "write in the pages between the ad sections forward and aft," Buckler began submitting feature articles while continuing to write the Esquire letters with "informal freehand and wildly swinging and widely ranging comments."⁹ Buckler's early attempts at feature writing were, in Gingrich's opinion, "stiff and terribly self-conscious, as if he were aware for the first time of speaking 'prose,' like a boy standing up to recite something in school." Eventually, in 1940, Esquire published the short story "One Quiet Afternoon." According to Gingrich, "by that time the attention of the crowd had turned to something else, and his first story was nothing like the sensation that his first letters to 'The Sound and The Fury' had been." When a second story,

"The First Born Son," was published in 1941, Gingrich considered this Buckler's "graduation from the amateur ranks."

Buckler's initial association with Esquire heralded his beginnings as a writer and may account, in part, for his predilection for American publishers and his desire to be published in the United States. This early relationship with Esquire continued until the 1970's, with lapses in the 1940's and the 1960's, years which saw Buckler devoting his energy to his novels and short stories. During his years with Esquire, Buckler began his long association with Harold Ober in New York as his literary agent.

Early in 1940, Buckler found another audience in the readers of Saturday Night, and between the years 1940 and 1948, he published a variety of poems and articles, as well as the "Maritimes Letter" which touches on subjects from art to politics. The short stories such as "Another Christmas" (1941), "Yes, Joseph, There Was a Woman; She Said Her Name Was Mary" (1945) and "You Could Go Anywhere Now" (1946) reveal his abiding concern with life in rural Nova Scotia.

Between the years 1940 and 1945, Buckler also wrote a number of radio plays for CBC Radio, the majority of which are light romantic comedies such as Four On A Match (broadcast July 10, 1941) and Three's A Crowd (broadcast May 29, 1942). In both plays, Buckler contrives happy endings for four young people involved in fluffy romances. Altogether the CBC broadcast five of his radio plays between 1940 and 1944; later, between 1960 and 1968, three more plays were presented and between 1950 and 1966, sixteen of his short stories.

Buckler began publishing his short stories in Maclean's in 1948, winning that magazine's Fiction Award in the same year with the story

"The Quarrel" (1949). Continuing to publish in Maclean's until 1951, Buckler contributed three more short stories and four articles about rural Nova Scotia.

From the early 1950's to the mid 1960's, Buckler published widely in both American and Canadian magazines. Over a dozen short stories, articles and poems appeared in the Atlantic Advocate alone. Chatelaine, Colliers, The Canadian Home Journal, The Advertiser (Kentville, Nova Scotia), Family Herald, Weekend and Star Weekly among others published dozens of Buckler's pieces of prose and verse. For his short story "The Dream and The Triumph" (1956), Buckler received the University of Western Ontario President's Award for the best Canadian short story of 1956. Into the seventies and eighties Buckler has continued to publish in a variety of periodicals.

The major achievement of Buckler's literary career occurred in 1952 when Henry Holt published The Mountain and The Valley.¹⁰ The CBC Radio in 1956 and again in 1967 and 1972 presented a ninety minute adaptation of the novel, and CBC Television scripted and prepared for "Festival" an adaptation of it. In 1961 The Mountain and The Valley was published in Canada in McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library edition.

Nearly ten years after the publication of his first novel, Buckler received a Canada Council grant for the years 1960 and 1961. This financial security allowed for the completion of his second novel, The Cruellest Month, which McClelland and Stewart published in 1963.¹¹ With the continued assistance of the Canada Council in the years 1964 and 1966, Buckler finished Ox Bells and Fireflies which McClelland and Stewart published in 1968.¹² In Nova Scotia: Window On The Sea, published in 1973

by McClelland and Stewart, Buckler combined his prose with the photography of Hans Weber to produce a visual and literary account of his home province.¹³ Fourteen of Buckler's previously published short stories were selected and arranged by Robert Chambers into the anthology The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, published in 1975 by McClelland and Stewart.¹⁴ Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse, published by McClelland and Stewart in 1977, is a gathering together of some of Buckler's satiric and humorous pieces, poems and short stories written throughout his literary career.¹⁵

II. The Man And His Art

As a Maritime writer living alone, Buckler considers himself an isolated artist. But his isolation presents no creative problems "because nobody in whatever he writes is writing about anything but himself."¹⁶ An overview of Buckler's life and art offers evidence for his belief and reveals definite links between Buckler's life and his fiction.

The setting for many of Buckler's short stories, Entremont in The Mountain and The Valley, Endlaw in The Cruellest Month and Norstead in Ox Bells and Fireflies mirrors the landscape of the Annapolis Valley. According to Buckler, Entremont is the Dalhousie West of his childhood.¹⁷ Buckler's own home, located at the edge of a narrow paved road, sits in the Annapolis Valley with a low mountain range and orchard behind it. The white frame house appears unchanged since Buckler's youth. In an article for Maclean's, "This Side Paradise, Nova Scotia," Buckler's description of his own environment parallels that of his fiction, particularly that of The Mountain and The Valley, "When I need such respite, I walk up the

log road that threads its leisured way along the South Mountain which rises behind my pasture."¹⁸ There Buckler, like his fictional characters, feels "suddenly and exultantly exempt from the rat's tooth of time and liberated from all its gnawings into a peace that has no match."¹⁹ The country kitchen, a symbol in Buckler's depictions of rural life of simple beauty, has personal significance for him, "Dearer than all this is my country kitchen. No parlored splendors here or vaulting epiphanies of any kind; only the loyalty of homely things long lived with and more trust-worthy than passions."²⁰ The land in the valley offers Buckler the same kind of solace and inspiration experienced by his characters, "Here everything is flat and wide, but there is a very levelness of peace that in its own way is as deep as the mountain's soaring."²¹ The mountain and the valley, which form the Centrelea landscape, Buckler transforms into the imaginary and symbolic world of his art.

Autobiographical links between Ernest Buckler and his family and the fictional protagonists and their families appear equally evident. Buckler curbs rampant speculation in his dedication of The Mountain and The Valley, "To my family, who did not model for this book, but whose faith sustained it." Nevertheless, in letters Buckler admits to certain family models in the novel.²² Mona, Buckler's younger sister, "is kind of roughly the Anna of the book." Her husband, Robert Simpson, is "not totally unlike Toby and Rex." Buckler's grandmother, Ellen Kenny Buckler, is "roughly the Grandmother of the book." Buckler stated privately to Gregory Cook that his highly idealized grandfather, Joseph Buckler, served as the model for Joseph Canaan.²³ Buckler's mother, Mary, clearly forms the model for Mrs. Buckler in "A Little Flag For Mother" (1963) and

its original version "The Dream and The Triumph" (1956); with some variations, her personality appears in the character of Martha Canaan.

Buckler's personal experiences surface in his fiction as well. The persistent and frequently unresolved presence of death in his work suggests a private struggle of reconciliation that began in childhood with the death of his older sister. Buckler's infancy was overshadowed by the death of Ruby at the age of four.²⁴ The impact of her death can be felt in The Mountain and The Valley where David Canaan frequently imagines his sister Anna dying and in "The Rebellion of Young David" (1951) and in "The Bars and The Bridge" (1958) where death threatens the lives of children. The death of Buckler's idealized grandfather and later the death of his father in 1932 may account for his preoccupation with the deaths of fathers in The Mountain and The Valley, The Cruellest Month and short stories such as "Penny in the Dust" (1948), "Last Delivery Before Christmas" (1953) and "The Accident" (1960).

The settings and the characters for Buckler's rural fiction find their roots in his own country environment of Dalhousie West. When writing about Endlaw in The Cruellest Month, Buckler drew on his five years of experience at Kent House.²⁵ In his second novel, Buckler makes scientific and mathematical allusions which reflect his academic interests at university. The poor health that caused Buckler to return home from Toronto, a "bone-aching headache" and "chest pain", parallels David Canaan's headache and Paul Creed's heart disease.²⁶ Following the death of his mother in 1958, Buckler remained a bachelor. His struggle for literary success and recognition is reflected in the writing careers of such characters as David Canaan, Paul Creed, Morse Halliday, Steve in "Another Christmas"

(1941) and Jeff in "Glance in the Mirror" (1957).

Buckler has spent little time in the company of other writers, believing that "you can find yourself, can find what you have to write about, much better in isolation than you can if you are inside a clique."²⁷ In this solitude, Buckler has "the abject loneliness which is almost the sine qua non of the writer's art" and which makes the "irritated oyster which produces the pearl."²⁸ Buckler admits, however, that during the writing of his second novel, he often heard "that ghostly voice which from time to time sounds the terrible question in the echo-chamber of all writers' minds: 'Will anyone listen?'"²⁹ Buckler's isolation, however, does not totally prevent him from contact with the outside world, "I have books, correspondence, I have theatre by gramophone, so I don't feel bereft in that sense - - although there is undeniably, the extra subsistence you get from the actual performance of things - - and I do miss that."³⁰

With the exception of W.O. Mitchell who corresponded with Buckler and offered to read passages of his first novel, Buckler has had only limited contact with other Canadian writers.³¹ Buckler's attention as a reader has focussed largely on American and British authors. In The Buckler Collection scant reference is made to other Canadian writers, and there is little to suggest that Buckler considers himself a part of the Canadian literary tradition. This may result from Buckler's geographical proximity to the United States, the heavy American influence on Canadian culture and his years spent in Greenwich, Connecticut. More importantly, however, his writing career began in American magazines and with his agent stationed in New York, Buckler's writing was aimed initially at an American market.

The writers whom Buckler acknowledges as important in his library are American and British: "Elizabeth Bowen - - who incidentally, is the woman I love - - E.M. Forster, Henry James, Dylan Thomas, Hemingway, Faulkner, Proust."³² A sample of Buckler's reading appears in a list of books ordered from The Annapolis Valley Regional Library in the winter of 1960. Again the authors are mostly American and British: John Leggett, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Joseph Conrad, Samuel Butler, Alexander King, Chekhov, Max Beerbohm, D.H. Lawrence and Faulkner.³³ Buckler's own statements on literature reveal his preferences:

Hemingway rises about every ten years or so, like the old bull whose dominance of the hero is threatened, to demolish the Bright Boys with the bangs...There's the fetid breath from Capote's stories, which has nothing to do with their content...John O'Hara's don't have it, although Heaven knows their characters and situations are hardly less halitoxic...Angus Wilson's stories have a macabre charm I've struck nowhere else, not even in Mr. Waugh's inspired romp with Mr. Joyboy and the Hollywood corpses. 34

Buckler claims to prefer "novels with a high psychological content: William Faulkner, Henry James, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen."³⁵

During a writing career that spans five decades, Buckler shares the literary stage with such Canadian writers as Morley Callaghan, Robertson Davies, Hugh McLennan, W.O. Mitchell and Sinclair Ross. The idea of being a Canadian writer, however, holds little mystery for Buckler:

If you're a Canadian writer, and write as honestly as you can about what you know - - here or anywhere else - - and the result doesn't sound Canadian - - well, no conscious attitude you strike will ever make it sound so. If you're a Canadian and want to write a distinctly Canadian novel, I'd say: just trust your natural processes. Don't try to write like anything - - except yourself. 36

In Buckler's estimation, W. O. Mitchell's fiction has the "stuff of real flesh, blood, bone and spirit."³⁷ Buckler refrains from classifying himself as a consciously Canadian writer and is relieved to note in "My First Novel" that "all this flapdoodle about the writer's first obligation being to write like a Canadian (however that is) is dying down."³⁸ Yet Buckler's fiction stands in the tradition of Canadian regionalism that begins in the Maritime provinces with Thomas McCulloch (1776-1843) and Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865) and continues, for example, with the short stories of Willaim R. Bird, the poetry of Elizabeth Brewster, Charles Bruce and Alden Nowlan and the novels of Thomas Raddall.

Buckler's regionalism follows in the tradition of accurately depicting the manners, morals, dialects and scenery of a particular geographical area. Unlike some regionalism, Buckler's devotion to "local colour" does not limit the value of his work as only the portrayal of life in a specific region. While focussed on the particular region of the Annapolis Valley, his writing, nevertheless, possesses a universal interest in mankind. In this way, Buckler's regionalism resembles that of Thomas Hardy, William Faulkner and W. O. Mitchell. According to Buckler, "In a small community like this even, you have a representation of every kind of action, of every kind of psychological mode. The whole thing, the whole macrocosm, is here in microcosm."³⁹

Buckler's Maritime regionalism parallels the regionalism of Ringuet in Quebec, Stephen Leacock and Robertson Davies in Ontario and F.P. Grove and W. O. Mitchell in the West. While Buckler's fiction easily fits into the regionalist mold of these writers, it stands apart from the Canadian literary tradition in particular ways. Like Ringuet, Buckler

looks to the land's rural simplicity and to traditional morality for solutions to human conflict. Unlike Leacock and Davies, however, Buckler depicts his characters with compassion and empathy. With the exception of certain pieces in Whirligig, Buckler's work lacks the acerbic wit and pointed satire of these authors' works. Although Buckler and Grove share a bond with the land, Grove, in his search for a socio-economic utopia, confronts head-on the modern industrial society that Buckler rejects in favour of the past and the country life. Mitchell and Buckler both focus upon man's relationship with the natural world, the land and the child protagonist whose heightened sensibilities alienate him from the rest of his society. Mitchell's fiction, however, possesses a humour and an overt optimism that Buckler's often lacks. Buckler's focus is exclusively rural at a time when urban novels more often express the Canadian experience. Buckler rejects conventional plot structures for complex psychological studies, and he uses a highly poetic and stylized prose that, at the time he began writing, was uncommon in Canadian literature.

In as much as every writer regardless of nationality writes from personal experience, Buckler's fiction is "not literally autobiographical. Except as all writing is - - between the lines - - autobiographical."⁴⁰ According to Buckler in an interview with Donald Cameron in 1968, "one is always writing about one's background and of course one is always writing about oneself."⁴¹ Buckler believes, however, that fiction transforms the acts of personal experience into a greater imaginative truth. Fiction's ability to "construe the circumstances better than fact baldly states" leads Buckler to "embroider" the facts with imagination and to create an art form that "is so often not only more emphatic, but it's truer than

fact."⁴² In Buckler's mind, life does not imitate art nor does art delineate life. Citing the difference between the factual perception of photography and the imaginative interpretation of painting, Buckler aligns himself with the fine artist. "I think the writer has to paint life."⁴³ In the same interview, Buckler speaks of himself being, like all writers, "always schizophrenic," simultaneously being a spectator of others who simply act without any introspection and "acting to get some substance." In light of this, Buckler criticizes the "pure ivory tower stuff" spun from the isolated artist's "own viscera" as too removed from actual experience to be meaningful.⁴⁴ Although he himself writes in isolation, Buckler's strong attachment to his rural community maintains his social perspective. The people around him are the "source of whatever talent or substance I have in my writing."⁴⁵

In "My First Novel" Buckler reveals his theories and processes that culminated in the writing of The Mountain and The Valley. This novel, according to Buckler, was one he had to write and "the six years the novel took, I spent in almost complete isolation."⁴⁶ Being an extremely slow writer, Buckler spent equally long periods of time on successive works: approximately eight years on The Cruellest Month (1953-61) and nearly five years on Ox Bells and Fireflies (1963-67).⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Buckler admits that "if writing is hell, not writing is worse."⁴⁸ Buckler explains how his struggle for the exactness of language marks all his writing:

If there is any purgatory more undiluted than attempting to trap the quicksilver of life with the laggard spring of words, I don't know it. You often feel like those fatuous ancients who thought to enclose the bird with a wall. For life is so infinitely tangential. It flees touch like a ball of mercury flees the finger. And you find not its smallest feature in clear outline, but always in solution. 49

Buckler's near obsession with finding the precise word is reflected in his fictional characters David Canaan and Morse Halliday. In order to express what he terms "the infinite language of human relations,"⁵⁰ Buckler creates characters around whom his novels develop. Allowing them to "more or less work their own passage," Buckler then discovers the theme, development and "climate" for his work. As is made clear from his psychological writing, Buckler finds action "far less important than motivation" and "insides...far more important...and interesting - - than outsides." According to Buckler, "as soon as complications in a book start popping, I always feel like muttering to the characters: 'Oh, for heaven's sake, stop scurrying around advancing the plot!' Sit still a minute, 'til we get a squint at your insides." This tendency toward introspection renders Buckler's fiction heavily psychological and often makes the plot structure a servant to his study of motivation.

III. A Critical Theory of Buckler's Writing

Although Buckler has written some fifty short stories, twenty articles and five full-length works, critical attention to his writing has been relatively sparse. It was not until 1952, following the publication of The Mountain and The Valley, that critics began to regard him as a writer of any consequence, even though he had been publishing short stories since the early 1940's. With each successive publication, there have been the usual reviews in journals and magazines, but scholarly work has been limited. Although a Buckler biography has yet to be published, Gregory Cook's M.A. thesis, "Ernest Buckler: His Creed and Craft," offers a finely detailed biography up to 1967. This work,

however, does not draw on all the material now available in The Buckler Collection in The T. Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. In 1972, Cook published a selection of essays and articles on Buckler's fiction, Ernest Buckler: Critical Views on Canadian Writers. The lack of literary criticism of Buckler's work may result, in part, from Buckler's deliberately low profile on the Canadian literary scene and the lengthy time spans between his book publications.

Following the publication of The Mountain and The Valley, critics hailed Buckler as a promising new talent in the field of Canadian writing. R.E. Watters in "Unknown Literature" declared Buckler's first novel "the most distinguished and promising first novel ever published by any Canadian anywhere."⁵¹ Watter's response was echoed to greater and lesser extents by most reviewers. This initial flurry of interest in Buckler as a potentially successful writer waned as the years passed and a second novel was not forthcoming. Finally, eight years later, in 1963, The Cruellest Month was published, but the critics who expected another novel like the first were greatly disappointed. Buckler's second novel received mixed reviews that consistently compared it to his first and found it lacking in a variety of ways. With the publication of Ox Bells and Fireflies in 1968, Buckler regained some critical approval and reinforced it with his selected short stories, The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories in 1975. Although his most recent publications Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (1973) and Whirligig (1977) did not increase his literary reputation in any significant way, they did increase the sense that Buckler is a Canadian writer worthy of serious critical attention.

Such critical attention to Buckler's fiction often focusses exclusively on the figure of the artist, the themes of family, death, and the past, as well as Buckler's artistic views. While these concerns reveal essential aspects of his work, they neglect what I recognize as the inherent and conscious sense of irony which directly influences critical interpretation of the Buckler canon. In this study, I will attempt to show how Buckler's literary style, particularly in the presentation of the theme of isolation and his characterizations, are determined by his use of irony.

The term irony can be defined in a variety of ways depending upon its context and application. An understanding of the term and its uses increases the appreciation of art, specifically, in this case, of literary art. Indeed, the quality of an author's work may be lost to the reader who, in failing to grasp the concept of irony and its subtlety of expression, fails to appreciate the complexity of ideas and rhetorical devices used by the author. The entire scope of a work can be misinterpreted if the reader does not recognize its irony and the effects thereby produced.

Critics and artists agree that no single definition can apply universally or individually to all literary works. But some common ground exists if we accept the view that the contrast between appearance and reality is fundamental to all forms of irony. A broad but accurate definition appears in Cleanth Brooks' statement that in poetry "irony is our most general term for indicating that recognition of incongruities," that awareness of how actuality contradicts illusion.⁵² In literature, the term has specific references and meanings when

applied to a figure of speech, a drama, an event or situation, and an author's tone of artistic expression. As well, it may be used to describe the style and the content of a work. The precise application may vary, but the sense of the term remains constant as the recognition of incongruities, particularly between appearance and reality. Writers of modern literature have developed an ironic tone by emphasizing oppositions and offering tenuous resolutions, contrasting the ideal, heroic past with the disillusioning, unheroic present of modern life. The modern writer develops his characters, themes, plot structure and language to reveal various kinds of irony which complement his tone.

One kind of irony the Oxford English Dictionary defines as verbal: "A figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used." This sense of verbal ambiguity Northrop Frye recognizes as "a technique of appearing to be less than one is, which in literature becomes most commonly a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or in a more general way a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning."⁵³ Similarly, G.G. Sedgewick suggests that irony is "contrasting appearance with reality. The proper signification of the word constitutes the appearance, the designed meaning its reality."⁵⁴ In this particular sense, irony refers to the author's rhetorical devices of verbal uncertainty. William Empson discusses such complexity of language as ambiguity, a sense of uncertainty about the true significance of a statement with more than one meaning.⁵⁵ In addition to the language and specific words, ambiguity refers to the complexity of meanings in a broad context, the various senses suggested by the

author's choice of words. Empson's definition of ambiguity involves inconsistencies, alternate meanings, and the complexities of language characteristic of verbal irony.

A similar contrast between meaning and significance occurs in dramatic irony when information afforded the audience by the playwright is withheld from the actors on stage. Often the intent of the actor's words contradicts their full importance to the audience. According to Wayne C. Booth in A Rhetoric of Irony (1974), dramatic irony occurs not only in plays but "whenever an author deliberately asks us to compare what two or more characters say of each other, or what a character says now with what he says or does later. Any plain discrepancy will do."⁵⁶ When the author and the audience share this information about a character, they are joined in a relationship of equal awareness, and they are equally conscious of the dramatic irony. With this edge of awareness, the audience perceives the actor with intensified emotions such as pity or fear.

Another kind of irony cited by The Oxford English Dictionary involves events or situations: "A condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things." Also called irony of situation, this definition includes the primary contrast between appearance, which is now the expectation, and reality, the occurrence. The character involved may or may not recognize the irony of his situation. If the reader alone comprehends the inconsistencies, then he and the author have again entered into a relationship based on shared knowledge and an expanded understanding of the character.

In addition to verbal, dramatic, and situational forms, irony may refer to an author's overall attitude toward life. When referring to an author's perspective, the term is no longer used solely for the sake of identifying any literary genre or stylistic device but for the elucidation of the themes, content, and the author's spirit of creative expression. This particular view, which I term a perspective of irony, contains the fundamental contrast between appearance and reality.

This perspective began when nineteenth century romantics rejected, what they found to be, intolerable external truth for "inner fantasies of the self."⁵⁷ Thus romantic irony refers to this disparity between the objective reality of the outside world and the subjective idealism of man's inner consciousness. The twentieth-century view of man includes this romantic struggle but extends to "the wryly disillusioned way the modern mind adopts of interpreting the role of man in the universe."⁵⁸ This perception emphasizes in theme and subject matter the incongruities of existence and man's relationship to his social condition and appears in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and the novels of Thomas Hardy, James Joyce and E.M. Forster. A modern definition of irony may also include the idea of nihilism, the view that all human striving is futile and meaningless because man is victimized by an indifferent and chaotic universe. The romantic's struggle to reconcile the real with the ideal continues with modern writers, but despair and an overwhelming sense of the absurd often influence their sensibilities.

This overview of irony illustrates how an author's viewpoint and philosophy may be focussed on the conventional contrast between appearance and reality and on the recognition of incongruities. He

emphasizes in his themes, subject matter, characterizations and writing style this discrepancy. Critic Charles Glicksberg suggests in his work Ironic Vision in Modern Literature (1969) that the author with a perspective of irony acknowledges "the intolerable contradiction at the heart of life between man's craving for ultimate meaning and his inability to satisfy it, his irrepressible longing for the absolute and his confinement in a fragile envelope of flesh, his hunger for immortality."⁵⁹

The term irony, then, as I use it here, is defined as the recognition and use of incongruities between appearance and reality. When applied specifically, this contrast involves the meaning and the significance of words, the expectation and the occurrence of events, the objective and subjective perceptions of reality. When an author emphasizes these discrepancies in local instances through themes, characterizations, plot structure and writing style, he is often articulating his sense of the universal conflicts which afflict mankind. Thus, individual and specific contrasts within literature itself reflect the way an author views life, through a perspective of irony.

This broad analysis applies to the fiction and the beliefs of Ernest Buckler whose perspective of irony determines the nature of his writing and influences our interpretation of his work. He recognizes the tensions and oppositions of life, understands how man searches for truth and meaning but fails to find them and believes that nature often works without regard for man's striving. He acknowledges that these often cruel ironies cause alienation, the tragedy of modern society. Buckler nevertheless has faith in man's ability to endure overwhelming disillusionment through love and sustaining human relationships.

Buckler's sense of irony structures all his work and relates directly to his central concern with isolation. The development of his novels is not linear or chronological but thematic. His concern is with two kinds of isolation: figurative and literal. Figurative isolation is, in fact, alienation. When a Buckler character cannot adjust his ideals to society's or accept its outward conditions, he becomes psychologically removed from his community and environment. Like the nineteenth-century romantics, he confronts the "intolerable contradiction at the heart of life" and becomes alienated. This figurative isolation applies to David Canaan, for example, who feels intellectually, imaginatively, and spiritually cut-off from his family, the valley community and rural environment. When external conditions do not mirror his mental state, David feels separated from everything and everyone, even though he may be physically involved with people. Buckler, however, often emphasizes this sense of bitter loneliness by making David physically lonely as well. If this alienation becomes irreversible with the character trapped forever in his solitary state, it is described by Buckler as "absolute isolation."⁶⁰ This tragic situation David Canaan enters and never leaves. Buckler associates figurative and absolute isolation with the corrupted morals and values of urban, industrialized centres, self-deception, sterility and the disillusioning present.

Literal isolation, which Buckler associates with the positive morals and attitudes of rural simplicity, the ideal past, the imagination and childhood innocence, refers to the physical solitude of a self-fulfilled person geographically separated from the mainstream

of society. Living apart from corrupting influences, in harmony with nature and his community, the character feels no sense of loneliness. Literal isolation exists at the beginning of The Mountain and The Valley, for example, when the Canaan family lives in Entremont, away from the outside world, entirely self-contained and happy with family and community relationships. As a child, David associates this pleasant solitude with imaginative revelations and happiness. If disruptive external forces invade this idyllic state, however, literal isolation may become figurative as the contrast between the old and the new order creates irony. As David grows older, outside influences such as Toby , Richmond and the war transform his literal isolation into alienation.

Another form of isolation affects those characters who, "because their inner warmth and vitality are never suspected, come to be cruelly labelled by others as if one negligible 'type' or another."⁶¹ Society's failure to distinguish between the type's outward appearance and his inner nature forces him into a state of spiritual loneliness and alienation. Buckler's definition of the type applies to Herb Hennessey in The Mountain and The Valley, a solitary man whose unattractive and eccentric appearance the Entremont community considers to be reflective of his whole person. The physical loneliness imposed on Herb becomes figurative as he moves further and further away from everyone into a state of absolute isolation.

Buckler's fictional treatment of this theme of isolation may well originate in his own deep sense of being alone in Nova Scotia as a farmer, writer and human being (he is unmarried). While writing The Cruellest Month, he wrote to Von Auw that "writing here in N. S. is

like working in an utter vacuum," distanced from any kind of intellectual or imaginative stimulation.⁶² Buckler's solitude could be described as figurative when, in another letter, he despairs that "There is no one here, absolutely no one who has any interest whatsoever in writing, with whom I can discuss anything in that field, or draw the slightest encouragement from."⁶³

The theme of isolation reveals Buckler's concern with the conditions of modern society, and his concern leads him to an exploration of nihilism. He believes that when events and circumstances become increasingly incongruous man faces "the challenge of nihilism, which at times, seems to be the only logical creed."⁶⁴ Man is tempted to abandon all hope for human striving and, in despair, adopt a belief in nothingness. Critic Alan R. Young considers this tension surrounding the challenge of nihilism as part of Buckler's own "nihilistic tendencies."⁶⁵ This challenge affects the irony in The Cruellest Month where Paul Creed must choose between this absurdist attitude and seemingly illogical human relationships. He discovers that nihilism is actually an untenable philosophy and that love is his only means of survival. Buckler may acknowledge nihilism as a possible attitude toward life, but he ultimately rejects it to affirm the meaning of life, the family and human love. If man finds comfort in other men equally subject to conflict and an indifferent universe, they will avoid alienation, collectively and individually. In this joining together of man, Buckler expresses his view that love, which arises from the heart, the natural world and genuine human relationships, endures all things.⁶⁶

Buckler's concern with love, which he calls the "most

extraordinary thing," is the cornerstone of all his work, and he considers human relationships fundamentally bound to the land, the family and the natural world.⁶⁷ In conversation with Donald Cameron, Buckler explains how his view of love depends upon a humane philosophy rather than any religious system of doctrines and how love may well offer a solution to the irony and tragic isolation involved in modern life:

If you think of a God up there - - well, I'm not hot on God - - but if you think of God, how incredible that he could have made up a thing like love, which I think is the only answer to anything. I'm not quite a flower guy but by golly, if you have love you don't care about much else, do you? All this worrisome thing, the way the world is going on, if you have love you can shake it off. 68

Buckler focusses on family love in particular. The Mountain and The Valley, for example, chronicles the different kinds of love relationships in the Canaan family and, as Buckler suggests, "celebrates families being together; it celebreates...love."⁶⁹ The Cruellest Month, which emphasizes the regenerative powers of love in adult relationships, explores the relationship between sentiment and sentimentality and supports Buckler's claim that cynicism, "hardening against sentiment is what kills people."⁷⁰ Love, mankind's only salvation, Buckler often symbolizes by a heart because "heart is a big word...it has the same letters as earth...heart is what we live by; I don't think we live by mind, I think we live by heart."⁷¹

The complex combination of irony, isolation and love which Buckler explores in his fiction suits an author who Claude Bissell considers "the only Canadian novelist who writes in what might be described as the high metaphysical style."⁷² Bissell defines this term as "the reaching out of the mind and the sensitivities in many directions in order to encompass the full impact of an idea or a situation."⁷³ Like the

seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets, Buckler uses logic and reason to express his sense of the complexities in life, and, like Donne and Crashaw, Buckler emphasizes what is commonly referred to as the emotional apprehension of thought. Buckler's metaphysical style embraces both the emotional and the intellectual issues of existence by exploring the depth and breadth of the human condition.

In order to apply the term irony to Buckler's fiction, we must be able first to recognize those incongruities which create it. According to Wayne C. Booth, an author may speak directly to us, pointing out the specific inconsistencies; facts may conflict within a work to create dramatic irony around specific information or knowledge; the author may deliberately change his writing style; and beliefs which are expressed within the work may conflict unquestioningly with our own beliefs which are presumably shared by the author.⁷⁴ Recognizing these contradictions as part of the context is our first step to discovering and understanding irony. If, for example, we notice a contrast between the character's thoughts about his situation and our knowledge of his circumstances, then we have begun to investigate that inconsistency as possibly ironic. As Booth suggests, we set aside the appearances of the situation to consider alternative meanings, to decide upon the author's intent or position, and, finally, to interpret the situation according to our understanding of the author's position.⁷⁵

Clearly, the crucial point of our analysis of irony involves the author's position and the danger of intentional fallacy. Taken only by themselves, an author's intentions and beliefs are inadequate arguments, external pieces of evidence that go beyond the scope of the work itself.

Yet within his work, an author explicitly or implicitly reveals to the reader his values and attitudes. Thereby, the careful reader who senses an author's intentions and identifies his position cannot logically ignore that awareness when interpreting the work. When considered within the context of the whole work and in accordance with the work's internal examples of irony, the author's beliefs and intentions may be used by the reader to argue for an ironic reading. Indeed, Wayne C. Booth supports this view "that we simply cannot get along without using inferences about intentions."⁷⁶ If, in a determined effort to avoid intentional fallacy at all cost, we exclude our knowledge of an author's beliefs or ignore reasonable conclusions based on internal and external evidence, we limit considerably our understanding of the work and our appreciation of the author's skills. In my discussion, I will use both the internal evidence of the texts themselves and the external evidence of Buckler's letters, commentaries and interviews to illustrate how he uses irony in relation to the theme of isolation and how he writes intentionally from an ironic perspective.

Internal evidence exists in the works themselves where Buckler establishes and develops tensions by juxtaposing opposites, contradictory forces and conflicting points of view. These tensions arise from the subject matter, delineation of characters, plot structure and writing style. A general introduction to each of these aspects will highlight the basis for my discussion. As well, external evidence will support further my interpretation of Buckler's work.

In his subject matter, Buckler creates tension by coupling such opposites as the city and the country, the land and the sea, the mountain

and the valley, the old and the young, the boy and the man, ox bells and fireflies, time past and present, mortal man and immortal nature, and life and death. Each pair of opposites, which embodies the contrast between the ideal and the real, the expectation and the experience, dramatizes Buckler's sense of ironic contrast and symbolizes the larger themes of his fiction. The pairs of opposites which form the core of Buckler's subject matter reveal his morals and attitudes concerning the virtues of the country and the rural communities, the beauty and power of nature, the importance of the nuclear family and the land, the sorrow of figurative isolation, the need for creative expression and the articulation of love and the glories of the past. The geographical differences between the city and country, for example, he expands to symbolize the spiritual and mental conflicts suffered by certain of his characters. The city appears to promise imaginative fulfilment to a young, naïve farm boy stifled by rural practicality, but it actually offers him loneliness, despair and spiritual sterility. Similarly, the sea, which seems to be a world of exotic adventure really involves a journey into figurative isolation.

Buckler's second novel, The Cruellest Month, exemplifies the central dualities of truth and illusion, immortal nature and mortal man, the regenerative spring and the decline of his characters, art and life, and word and deed. Critic Bernita Harris suggests that these tensions indicate how Buckler was "deeply impressed by the irony of rebirth in nature and the rejuvenation of the earth in spring in contrast to the wintry desolation" felt by mankind.⁷⁷ Alan Young points to the same tensions in subject matter to argue that Buckler deliberately juxtaposes

opposites to develop his "complex system of irony."⁷⁸ The title that Buckler chose for this novel illustrates further how he consciously strove to emphasize the tensions in his material. These lines from T.S. Eliot's poem, The Wasteland, are the source for the title: "April is the cruelest month/ Mixing memory and desire."⁷⁹ Buckler's personal correspondence provides external evidence to support the view that he intentionally created irony through his use of dualities. He writes that he considered other titles besides the one from Eliot's poem: "'Man alone' - - with its dual meaning of 'Man, alone' and 'only man,' " and "'The Cells of Love' " which he felt carried " 'a kind of double, somewhat ironic, application' " of the words love and cell.⁸⁰

In Buckler's subject matter a central tension involves the conflict between life and death, the final ironist and contravener of all human aspiration. Indeed, for Buckler, death is the only absolute and final conflict which remains unchanged and unchangeable. When his characters confront death, their own or another's, they see clearly how the struggle involved in trying to defeat death is ultimately futile. If faced alone, death will triumph over the human spirit, but when accepted as part of a natural cycle and experienced within the context of love, death becomes bearable, even purposeful in certain situations. Like ironic disillusionment, death is tolerable within the framework of strong human relationships.

The delineation of character indicates Buckler's consistent interest in tension and illustrates his use of irony. Buckler concentrates on the complexities of human nature through his characters who, according to him, "only interest me in their revelatory moments of tension."⁸¹ Their moments of tension occur when they struggle to reconcile the

discrepancy between their subjective perceptions and objective reality, what appears to be true and actually is true. The character's sense of self often conflicts with Buckler's concept and presentation of the character, and these discordant versions of the truth create irony. The reader perceives the character from two points of view, the character's and Buckler's, and from these different perspectives emerges irony in the presentation of character.

Irony surrounding characterization may be identified by the reader in two possible ways: the character himself may reveal it to the reader through direct statement, or Buckler may point it up to the reader. In the first instance, the hero's awareness of inconsistencies depends upon his ability and willingness to see distinct differences between his desires and experiences. He must see how he has misinterpreted appearances as reality, confused his impressions with his knowledge and moved further away from a contradictory reality into his own delusions. The hero shares this truth with the reader who then views him as enlightened and whole. If this character understands how the tensions in his life are part of the universal conflicts suffered by man, he can then reach beyond these local ironies to human relationships and thereby avoid figurative isolation. This identification occurs, for example, in many of the short stories where a young, sensitive boy interprets his father's gruff, unemotional behaviour as unloving. These false impressions, which alienate the child from his father, are contradicted eventually by the father's demonstration of love. The child then reveals to the reader, through the narrative, how he misinterpreted his father's appearances and how he now knows genuine family love.

The second method of identification involves Buckler's presence in the narrative. When the hero fails to or refuses to recognize the incongruities, Buckler steps in to point them out to the reader. As omniscient narrator, he contradicts intentionally the hero's sense of himself and views of reality with his presentation of the hero and the hero's reality. Thus, the reader shares in Buckler's heightened awareness of the central character, considers him ironically and feels distanced from his experiences and fate to some extent. Together, Buckler and the reader represent a social reality that contravenes the hero's perceptions, and the juxtaposing of these two opposing realities creates irony. David Canaan, for example, considers himself a talented writer, but Buckler's narrative and presentation of events contravene deliberately David's impressions and reveal to the reader dramatic inconsistencies which show David to be self-deceived and alienated. The reader recognizes Buckler's intent through the numerous references to and examples of David's ineffective writing. External evidence for this interpretation appears in Buckler's claim that David's expectations of becoming a writer are entirely unjustified because "only one in a million" ever achieves success, and Buckler clearly intended the reader to see his dream as the "crucial irony" of his self-deception.⁸² David believes that the artist can create art in absolute isolation and out of his imagination alone rather than from experience. His art, therefore, lacks authenticity by reflecting only his false identity and distorted view of Entremont.

Thus, irony, arising from the tensions of characterizations, may be identified in two ways. The character may see his impressions as distorted and share that awareness with the reader. If he fails, Buckler

again indicates through his narrative the disparity between the hero's sense of self and his own presentation of the hero. In either case, the reader comes to understand how the irony affects his interpretation of the character as well as his intellectual and emotional responses. These opposing forces involved with characterizations give further evidence of Buckler's perspective and conscious use of irony.

In his plots, Buckler uses the tension between a character's expectations and his experiences to create the conventional irony of situation. It may be recognized in the same two ways as those associated with characterization. Overt recognition within the text occurs, for example, when David Canaan realizes that he will never leave the farm to fulfil his dreams of adventure. In his moment of shattering truth in the parsnip field, David expresses to himself and the reader his sense of the irony of his situation. The reader, therefore, shares in his awareness of his tragedy. When the character cannot see how his dreams and plans run counter to his experiences, Buckler's handling of events makes evident to the reader those ironic contraventions. The reader responds to the hero's dilemma with pity and a heightened awareness equal to Buckler's vantage point as omniscient narrator and author. This occurs, for example, when David's search for inner truth on the mountain ends in death, and Buckler must point up the incongruities surrounding his final delusions.

Buckler's irony of situation involves what he terms the "thesis of accidental determination."⁸³ This theory suggests that a sudden change in a character's circumstances may have been caused by his own contradictory nature and divided consciousness. Thus, what may appear to be an illogical accident may actually be quite logical in the context of the character's

personality. Accident no longer is based solely on chance and misfortune but on a series of events determined by the person's attitude and behaviour. The reader sees "accidental determination" as one of Buckler's intentional forms of irony, but it is generally unrecognized by the character involved. When Joseph Canaan, for example, is struck and killed by the tree he felled for the keel, his death seemingly involves a sense of sheer coincidence. But, as Buckler's narrative points out, Joseph's death is the direct result of his mental preoccupation with Martha and their earlier quarrel. The tree, which may appear to fall according to chance, actually falls according to the logic of physics, indifferent to Joseph's presence below. Thus, Buckler emphasizes the logic surrounding events and circumstances, and he juxtaposes it with his sense of accident to illustrate the opposing forces at work against man.

Buckler's "thesis of accidental determination" is exemplified best in the epilogue of The Mountain and The Valley. Here he intends the reader to identify the irony of situation and characterization by following the delineation of character and the logic of the plot. When David begins his climb to the mountain, he expects to find imaginative fulfilment as well as psychological and spiritual renewal. Instead, he dies alone, trapped in his delusions. Clearly, the unexpected and seemingly illogical turn of events constitutes irony of situation. But the reader should recognize as well how the conclusion portrays an ironic treatment of the quest myth and includes a series of events responsible for his death. David dies as a direct result of the physical conditions of a weak heart, a strenuous climb and his illusions. All these factors, which combine to cause his death, arise from his physical and mental

states and appear in Buckler's narrative. Thus, Buckler deliberately undercuts any sense of tragic fate the reader might feel by making David and his self-deceiving nature entirely accountable for his death.'

External evidence for this interpretation appears in a letter from Buckler to Dudley Cloud where Buckler claims that David's death

was to be the crowning point of the whole dramatic irony (and, of course, the most overt piece of symbolism in the book), that he should finally exhaust himself climbing the 'mountain, and, beset by the ultimate clamor of impressions 'created by his physical condition and his whole history of divided sensitivities, come, at the moment of his death (prepared for, not only by the medical officer's advice to him at the time of his enlistment examination; and more immediately, by the excitement, the panic, the climbing), achieve one final transport of self-deception: that he would be the greatest writer in the whole world. 84

David's dream of becoming a writer Buckler describes as "the crucial irony... the writing business was just another instance of his fatal self-deluding blinding."⁸⁵ As Buckler claims, internal evidence for such irony appears throughout the novel when David tries and fails repeatedly to write effectively: "his attempts at writing are rather pointedly referred to no less than four or five times. In one case, to the extent of a whole chapter." Further external evidence appears in a letter from Buckler to his agent, Harold Ober. When describing the circumstances and the rationale involved in David's fate, Buckler refers to "the tragic dichotomy in David, the protagonist's nature" which he intends the reader to see as "traceable, inevitably, to the heritage of Ellen's perceptiveness and romanticism, his mother's alternate open-heartedness and melancholy, his father's dogged will."⁸⁶ The divided nature of a character like David refers directly to Buckler's "thesis of accidental determination" which argues that such inner tensions dictate and determine a character's fate.

According to Buckler, his characters are " finally trapped by their own nature," which, in a sense, is the opposite of accident.⁸⁷

Much of the irony in Buckler's work arises as often from the psychology of the hero as from the events of the narrative. The tensions involved in characterization and plot often blend and overlap to the degree that clear distinctions between mental and physical states, human nature and events, blur. Buckler's "thesis of accidental determination" extends the irony of situation, with its twists and contraventions, to an almost metaphysical level where logic is used to explain the seemingly illogical and where contradictory human nature and inner tensions are responsible for the character's circumstances.

Buckler's writing techniques include the use of metaphor, symbolism and imagery. This stylistic irony, which relies on Buckler's language and precise choice of words, encompasses the conflicts involved in the creative process, the power of language and the inner tensions of the artist figure. By contrasting desire with experience and illusion with truth, Buckler establishes irony and applies it specifically to his style.

The fictional writer, like Buckler himself, longs to create a work written "in the infinite language of human relations" and "to trap the quick silver of life with the laggard spring of words."⁸⁸ But instead he often feels betrayed by words which, he believes, are inadequate instruments of creative expression. The writer's frequent failures to write effectively and to articulate accurately the world around him result not from the limitations of his language but from his own divided nature. His illusions and desires distort his perceptions of life and people. Often, he is figuratively isolated, and his alienation prevents him

from speaking in "the infinite language of human relations." In an attempt to record honestly the valley experience, David Canaan, for example, tries to reconcile the crude, practical language of Entremont with his own imaginative, artistic language. His work, however, created in a state of absolute isolation and based only on his private, blurred impressions of the valley life, bears false witness to the people and events of Entremont. Written from outside the community, David's self-indulgent art bears little, if any, resemblance to common reality. Buckler's presentation of David as an ironic artist reflects his own view that absolute isolation will cripple and destroy a writer's language of expression: "You mustn't, except while you're writing, have lived entirely to yourself. Pure ivory tower stuff may be as miraculous and delicate as the silk a spider spins out of his own viscera - - but it's equally thin."⁸⁹ Part of the writing technique, Buckler suggests, involves the artist's ability to reconcile the tension between the language of common, everyday experience and that of his imagination; to live within society while maintaining his own unique aesthetic sensibilities; and to capture in words the essence of life, although words are only the shadow of life's full experiences. Art, to Buckler, can only attempt to capture life's fragments rather than its unity. But, as critic John Orange points out, Buckler himself turns to art to express what he says it cannot do: articulate the wholeness and exactness of human experience.⁹⁰

A literary device used by Buckler to create irony is verbal ambiguity, the contrast between the meaning and the significance of the spoken word. The tension surrounding the uncertainty of a word's meaning Buckler exploits to emphasize the power of language to alienate

and to unify his characters. In The Cruellest Month, for example, where much of the irony arises from verbal uncertainty, speeches are often intended to be interpreted in at least two ways. Sheila Giorno and Morse Halliday exchange comments deliberately barbed with double meanings and particularly cruel signification. Their sharp statements the reader readily recognizes as intentionally ironic.

The speaker, however, may be unaware of how his words convey some greater significance to the other characters. Our recognition of verbal irony depends now on contrasting this character's perceptions and words with those of the other characters and Buckler's portrayal of him. If striking incongruities arise between these various points of view, we may conclude that the statement carries ironic overtones affecting our interpretation. A dramatic example of such verbal irony is Letty Spence's misguided and pitiful attempt to speak proper English with Paul Creed who loves her precisely because she speaks an earthy, natural language which unites him with her. The reader and Paul share in the awareness, made more poignant by Letty's innocence.

Tragic circumstances often result from misunderstood words and comments. Characters interpret conversations according to their private, inaccurate conceptions, behave according to those false impressions, and become alienated because they cannot express their feelings or trust the power of words. The misinterpretation of language causes misunderstandings between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and siblings. The verbal irony in these conflicts is identified by the reader alone, and the resulting situations are viewed by the reader with pity. The solution to these conflicts is a physical demonstration of affection, a wordless

expression of genuine emotion which avoids any possible verbal irony.

The writing techniques employed by Buckler include the metaphysical elements and metaphor which, according to Northrop Frye, "In its literal grammatical form...is a statement of identity: this is that, A is B."⁹¹ Frye also suggests that in a "world of total metaphor everything would be identified as itself and with everything else," and "subject and object, reality and mental organization are one."⁹² With this definition in mind, we can see how metaphor, a statement of identity, might be used in conjunction with irony, the recognition of incongruities. Irony in Buckler's content emphasizes the contradictions between seemingly similar things, and metaphor in his writing style indicates the similarities between seemingly dissimilar things. Thus, irony, to some degree, counterbalances metaphor.

Buckler's particular application of metaphor reveals the "high metaphysical style" attributed to him by Claude Bissell. As used by Buckler, metaphor often resembles the metaphysical conceits which use esoteric knowledge or unusual analogies, and which may exaggerate logic to the degree that it becomes absurd and slightly twisted. His metaphors also present a credible but unconventional similarity between two entirely different things, and they create both an intellectual and an emotional response in the reader. To express a Nova Scotian's despair by comparing the mind to a lighthouse, for example, seems entirely illogical and unlikely until Buckler's metaphor reveals their striking similarities in a kind of metaphorical conceit: "The windows in the lighthouse of the mind are streaked with the grime of failed hopes."⁹³ His imagination recognizes unusual associations between

apparently disparate things and exploits those common qualities to create his metaphors. He recognizes the inconsistencies between apparently similar things and then exploits those differences to create a special kind of irony.

Buckler's use of metaphor in the larger life of his themes, characterizations and perspective of irony appears notably at the conclusion of The Mountain and The Valley. Here Buckler's metaphors represent the opposite of ironic contradiction and demonstrate the power of identification between man and the natural world, individuals in a relationship, and man's subjective illusions in relation to objective reality. David has always longed for his sensibilities to be reflected in, rather than contradicted by, the conditions of Entremont; in other words, he has sought a metaphorical existence where "subject and object, reality and mental organization, are one." When he walks through the winter fields on his final climb, he begins a metaphorical experience when he identifies with the natural world: "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. 218). Through this power of identification, David now relates to Steve completely: "David's mind deliberately suspended its own nature. It assumed the cast of Steve's" (p. 228). Finally, external reality reflects David's imaginative inner visions when he discovers and articulates the power of metaphor: "how you could become the thing you told" (p. 300). In death, he becomes a metaphor of the landscape when he becomes identified with the "fallen log that lay beside him until the two outlines were as one" (p. 301). This final scene embodies irony as well as metaphor and establishes the tension

between these two forces. Buckler often uses this broad sense of identification associated with metaphor to demonstrate how man can move out of his figurative isolation and return to the human community. Indeed, metaphor may, in certain instances, have the ability to reconcile the incongruities which make irony and lead to alienation.

Buckler's symbols and images embody the ambiguities that William Empson might consider effective in several ways at once and that suggest various and alternative meanings. Again, the reader interprets the significance and the meaning of the symbols separately. When he views the symbols from both the character's point of view and from Buckler's point of view, ironies emerge from these conflicting perspectives. Buckler introduces a particular symbol and then re-introduces it with variant meanings and suggested associations that contradict, in the reader's mind, his earlier meaning. This conscious patterning of contradictory symbols and images helps to give structure to Buckler's fiction. In The Mountain and The Valley, for example, the train whistle symbolizes, initially to David as well as the reader, adventure and fulfilment, but Buckler later associates the train whistle with war, death and the irony of David's situation. The mountain always symbolizes to David creativity and spiritual renewal, but the reader realizes gradually that it actually represents David's total alienation and self-deception. Each stage of David's development, which is symbolized by one particular image, promises him some degree of fulfilment, but in the next stage Buckler destroys that promise with a new image. The Play, which promises him integration with the community, is followed by The Letter which heralds his increased loneliness and despair. In The Cruellest Month

between these two forces. Buckler often uses this broad sense of identification associated with metaphor to demonstrate how man can move out of his figurative isolation and return to the human community. Indeed, metaphor may, in certain instances, have the ability to reconcile the incongruities which make irony and lead to alienation.

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Buckler treats conventional symbols in an ironic way. The spring symbolizes painful regeneration and trial by fire rather than joyous re-birth and baptism by water, and symbols of fertility Buckler associates with infertile characters. By contradicting the significance of the symbols and images with variant meanings and associations, Buckler intentionally develops tensions in his writing style and his narrative which the reader recognizes as unifying and structuring devices.

Buckler's language involves mathematical and scientific terms which support the logic of nihilism and reflect his academic interests. In the course of human experience, however, the pure logic and precise calculations collapse when an incident of "accidental determination" occurs. The chemistry metaphors involving electrolysis, energy, ions and elements reflect Buckler's view that certain genes and chemical elements determine an individual's nature and sometimes even his fate.

Buckler's writing techniques reveal his concern with the creative process in general, the power of language and the psychological tensions of the artist. Although he may feel disillusioned like the nineteenth-century romantics and wish to withdraw from life into the idealized illusions of his mind, the true artist remains integrated with his society through human relationships. He creates an authentic record of his community and its common experience by using language to identify disparate things. This genuine artist relies on the power of metaphor to reconcile his imaginative vision with society's objectivity and thereby nullify, to some degree, the ironies which lead to figurative isolation. He will then speak in "the infinite language of human relations."

These various tensions in subject matter, delineation of character, plot and writing technique illustrate local ironies throughout Buckler's fiction and indicate how he writes from a perspective of irony while concentrating on the theme of isolation. The selected short stories and unpublished material usually involve a family member who misinterprets appearances and feels unloved and lonely until some physical demonstration of affection expresses family loyalty and replaces a sense of alienation with greater sympathetic awareness and love. This juxtaposing of different perceptions continues to create irony in The Mountain and The Valley, but now the threat of figurative isolation materializes as overwhelming disillusionment and tragic circumstances engulf the Canaan family. Romantic comedy arises from the verbal ambiguities and unexpected turn of events which structure The Cruellest Month, but Buckler's characters continue to suffer varying degrees of loneliness while they search for their ideal love relationship. A nostalgic sentiment softens the often harsh desolation and deep sense of nihilism running through Ox Bells and Fireflies and Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, two works which reveal Buckler's strong attachment to the past and "the way it was." Finally, Whirligig demonstrates how irony in its various forms can evolve into satire and parody and how humour can sometimes compensate for the bitter loneliness and despair of modern society. Although Buckler's treatment and individual instances of irony vary, his perspective remains constant.

Buckler emphasizes in his writing style and content of his work the recognition of incongruities, the contrast between appearance and reality. His perspective focusses as well on alienation and figurative isolation that is the tragic condition of modern man. He acknowledges how

ironic disillusionment suffered by man presents the challenge of nihilism and often causes absolute isolation. In this view, Buckler expresses his faith in man's ability to endure cruel and disheartening contraventions by sharing in human relationships. In this sense, Buckler's work offers hope and reassurance to modern man and confirms the enduring nature of the human spirit.

In Buckler's fiction, isolation and irony maintain a symbiotic relationship largely ignored by critics. Discussion of Buckler's characters and the Buckler protagonist frequently stress the artist's struggle in Canada, a struggle with mythic proportions for such critics as Margaret Atwood, Ian Atkinson and D.G. Jones, yet which has moral overtones for D.J. Dooley.⁹⁴ These particular critics concentrate upon the myth of the buried or sacrificed artist whose unsympathetic environment, literally or figuratively, destroys his creativity. According to Ian Atkinson, this isolated artist "passes through his empirical life without externally realizing the potentialities of his mind."⁹⁵ Through death, however, the artist triumphs as a mythical figure.⁹⁶ In conjunction with the myth of the buried artist, critics emphasize the problems of geographical isolation, cultural regionalism and Canadian identity which confront the Canadian writer. These same critics argue that time joins with the sterile environment to defeat the artist, and they consider the themes of the family, the land, the past and death as essential ingredients in this myth. But they fail to recognize clearly the irony which dominates Buckler's portraits of the artist and determines the accuracy of one's critical analysis.

Such critics as Alan Young, John Moss and John Orange come close

to describing accurately the scope and significance of irony in Buckler's fiction. In Ernest Buckler (1976), a full-length study of the Buckler canon except for Whirligig, Young defines Buckler's artistic development as a "two worlds" motif.⁹⁷ The first world Young identifies with the past, childhood, harmony and the natural world; the second he aligns with the present, adulthood, fragmentation and urban life. Young focusses on Buckler's pastoral images, time, death and artist's struggle to unite the "two worlds" of his experience. Buckler's two novels Young considers "Portraits of the Artist." Unlike other critics such as D.O. Spettigue who recognizes the "between two worlds" theme, Young points up the irony implicit in Buckler's portraits.⁹⁸ He fails, however, to explore it fully, admitting that a reassessment may be in order.

In keeping with those critics who interpret Buckler's heroes as genuine artists, John Moss in Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Literature (1974) describes Buckler's first novel as "one of the first and most successful attempts in Canada to explore the special problems of the creative person born into an articulate world."⁹⁹ In his brief study of The Mountain and The Valley, Moss claims that in "fiction given to explication of individual consciousness in response to the self or the world around it, irony, too, is the distinguishing characteristic."¹⁰⁰ Moss also points out that Buckler's irony arises from the "divergence between two realities...that of the protagonist's perception and that of the author's, of the protagonist and his environment."¹⁰¹ While recognizing that Buckler "exploits the ironic dichotomy and convergence of moral and natural conditions," he limits his discussion to the first novel and the myth of the buried artist.¹⁰²

In his unpublished M. A. Thesis, "Ernest Buckler: The Masks of the Artist," John Orange discusses irony with respect to Buckler's fictional artists.¹⁰³ According to Orange, irony occurs because Buckler distrusts these fictional artists who have an inordinate faith in art as something that can actually show life as it truly is. Orange discusses the irony in The Mountain and The Valley in relation to David whom he considers an artist figure whose creative sensibilities are smothered by his environment. Consequently, Orange argues that the novel's final irony involves David's awareness of himself as an artist, his struggle to assuage his guilt as a failed artist and his longing to be complete in an incomplete world. Thus Orange recognizes some of the novel's ironies but only in relation to David Canaan as an artist figure. Critics Young, Moss and Orange acknowledge the presence of irony in Buckler's work but each limits his exploration to the artist. They fail to acknowledge the pervasiveness of Buckler's irony.

This thesis argues that sound critical analysis must recognize that irony unifies and structures the Buckler canon while it affects the central theme of isolation. My criticism considers how in subject matter, characterization, theme, and writing style Buckler reveals both an ironic perspective and a concern for man. Criticism which ignores Buckler's irony in form and content fails to see the layers of subtle meaning and complex resolutions which affect our understanding of each work and deepens our appreciation of Buckler's creative expression. Thus, an exploration of irony as it relates to Buckler's attitudes, intentions and material is a valuable approach to evaluating the quality and effectiveness of his work.

Notes

¹Biographical material from Gregory M. Cook, "Ernest Buckler: His Creed and Craft" (M.A. Thesis, Acadia University, 1967), Chapter 1. In preparing his material, Cook spent several weeks with Buckler at his home outside Bridgetown, Nova Scotia.

²Buckler published the following poems in the Dalhousie Gazette: "The Chase", LXII (Jan. 18, 1929) 2; "What Price Freedom?", LXII (Feb. 15, 1929) 2; "Why?", LXII (Feb. 22, 1929) 2; "Music", LXII (Mar. 15, 1929) 2; "Visions", LXII (Mar. 15, 1929) 2; "Thought", LXII (Mar. 22, 1929) 2.

³According to John Orange, April 1982, the Buckler M.A. thesis "doesn't exist per se. He [Buckler] had to write a series of essays on various topics and these essays sit in the MSS Collection in his handwriting on foolscap paper. I don't think they're catalogued yet." The titles are: "Aristotle's Theory of Conduct", "Benedetto Croce", "Pritchard's Criticism of Kant's Theory of Knowledge", "Progress of Idealism from Kant to Lotze", "Relation of Leibnitz to Locke", "Relative Merits of The Schools of Association and Appreciation", "Spinoza's Conception of Experience and Its Evolution", "Christianity and Wealth", "Plato's Myths and Their Significance", "Greek and Christian Views of The State", "A Criticism of G. F. Stout's Method of Analysis of The Psychological Problem".

⁴Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel", CBC Radio Toronto, 1953, in Gregory M. Cook, ed., Ernest Buckler (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 22.

⁵Donald Cameron, Conversations With Canadian Novelists - - 1 (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1973), pp. 5-6.

⁶T. Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Ernest Buckler Manuscript Collection (M.S. Collection 99), Box 4, Buckler to Arnold Gingrich, December 7, 1937. All further references to this collection will be indicated as BColl. While at the University of Toronto, Buckler published two short stories in The Trinity University Review, "No Second Cup" (1933) and "Always Old Ending" (1934).

⁷Arnold Gingrich, Nothing But People. The Early Days at Esquire. A Personal History: 1928-1958 (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), p. 252.

⁸Ibid., p. 253.

⁹Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰Ernest Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley (New York: Henry Holt, 1952). (New York: North American Library, 1954). (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), New Canadian Library.

¹¹_____, The Cruellest Month (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

¹²Cameron, Conversations, p. 9. Ernest Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), New Canadian Library.

¹³Ernest Buckler, Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

¹⁴_____, The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, ed., Robert Chambers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

¹⁵_____, Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

¹⁶Cameron, Conversations, p. 4.

¹⁷Cook, M.A. Thesis, Chapter 1.

¹⁸Ernest Buckler, "This Side Paradise", Maclean's, LXXXVI (Sept. 1973), 40.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 41.

²⁰Ibid., p. 41.

²¹Ibid., p. 41.

²²BColl., Box 11, Unaddressed fragment of letter from Buckler, December 11, 1969.

²³Cook, M.A. Thesis, Chapter 1.

²⁴Ibid., Chapter 1.

²⁵BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackcliffe, Addenda and Corrections to The Cruellest Month.

²⁶BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Dr. Schaffner, December 23, 1954.

²⁷Cameron, Conversations, p. 4.

²⁸Ibid., p. 5.

²⁹BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackcliffe, October 14, 1961.

³⁰Cameron, Conversations, p. 7.

³¹BColl., Box 9, Buckler to W. O. Mitchell, Fiction Editor at Maclean's, February 15, 1949; April 19, 1950.

³²Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 24.

³³BColl., Box 6, Annapolis Valley Regional Library to Buckler, February 10, 1960.

³⁴BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Bob ?, February 17, 1950.

³⁵BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Gertrude Greer, Editor of The Narrator, April 4, 1951.

³⁶Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 26.

³⁷Ibid., p. 26.

³⁸Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹Cameron, Conversations, p. 8.

Clara Thomas, "Ernest Buckler", Our Nature - Our Voices: A Guide To English-Canadian Literature. Vol. I (Toronto: New Press, 1972), pp. 126-127. Thomas also recognizes Buckler as a "regional novelist" whose work, nevertheless, embodies a universality and involves "all men and women at all times."

Elizabeth Waterston, Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature, Methuen Canadian Literature Series (Toronto: Methuen, 1973), pp. 109-110. Waterston claims that Buckler's first novel, The Mountain and The Valley, concerns regionalism and that David Canaan's conflict stems from the confinements of regionalism.

Robert Chambers, "Notes On Regionalism in Modern Canadian Fiction", Journal of Canadian Studies, II (May 1976), 27-34. Chambers echoes Waterston's view but claims that Buckler's symbolism, in particular that in The Mountain and The Valley, involves a universal perspective.

- ⁴⁰Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 26.
- ⁴¹Cameron, Conversations, p. 8.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁴⁴Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 25.
- ⁴⁵Cameron, Conversations, p. 7.
- ⁴⁶Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 24.
- ⁴⁷BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Buckley at Holt, May ?, 1956.
- ⁴⁸Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 27.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 23.
- ⁵¹R. E. Watters, "Unknown Literature", Saturday Night, LXX (September 17), 33.
- ⁵²Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanoich, 1947), p. 209.
- ⁵³Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 40.
- ⁵⁴G.G. Sedgewick, Of Irony, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948) p. 49.
- ⁵⁵William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930), p. 41.
- ⁵⁶Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 63.
- ⁵⁷Charles Glicksberg, The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 5.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 46.
- ⁶⁰Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley, p. 229.

- ⁶¹Buckler, Biographical note in Chatelaine, XLII (July 1956), 65.
- ⁶²BColl., Box 6, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, October 22, 1958.
- ⁶³BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Jan Trewitt, February 25, 1956.
- ⁶⁴BColl., Box 7, Buckler to Vance K. Henry, March 17, 1962.
- ⁶⁵Young, Buckler, p. 43.
- ⁶⁶Cameron, Conversations, p. 11.
- ⁶⁷Ibid.
- ⁶⁸Ibid.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.
- ⁷⁰Ibid.
- ⁷¹Ibid.
- ⁷²Claude Bissell, Introduction to The Mountain and The Valley, p. x.
- ⁷³Ibid., p. ix.
- ⁷⁴Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony, p. 47.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 147.
- ⁷⁶Ibid., 126.
- ⁷⁷Bernita Harris, "A Comparison of the Symbolism and Imagery of Ernest Buckler's The Cruellest Month with T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland", (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1969), p. 5.
- ⁷⁸Young, Buckler, p. 43.
- ⁷⁹T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland in Collected Poems 1909 - 1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 63.
- ⁸⁰BColl., Box 8.
- ⁸¹BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, October 14, 1961.
- ⁸²BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

- 14, 1961.
- ⁸³BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, October 14, 1961.
- ⁸⁴BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.
- ⁸⁵Ibid.
- ⁸⁶BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Harold Ober, May 23, 1951.
- ⁸⁷BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.
- ⁸⁸Cook, Buckler, pp. 22-23.
- ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁹⁰John Orange, "Ernest Buckler: The Masks of The Artist" (M. Phil. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1970), p. 13.
- ⁹¹Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 248.
- ⁹²Ibid., p.
- ⁹³Buckler, Nova Scotia, p. 14.
- ⁹⁴Margaret Atwood, Survival (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), pp. 186-187.
- Ian Atkinson, "The Mountain and The Valley: A Study In Canadian Fiction" (M.A. Thesis, University of Guelph, 1969), p. 25.
- D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 23-25.
- D. J. Dooley, Moral Vision in The Canadian Novel (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1979), pp. 49-59.
- Hugo McPherson, "Fiction 1940-1960", Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 711-712.
- David Savage, "Not Survival But Responsibility", Dalhousie Review, IV (Summer 1975), 272-279. Savage agrees with Atwood's theory of survival and victimization to the extent that he recognizes how Buckler's novel, The Mountain and The Valley, concerns "the hard lot of the artist in Canada." He argues, however, that David's plight stems from his "Puritan inspired sense of responsibility" to the farm and his family.
- ⁹⁵Atkinson, M.A. Thesis, p. 25.
- ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁹⁷Alan Young, Ernest Buckler (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 12.

98

D. O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was", Canadian Literature,
(Spring 1967), p. 40.

99

John Moss, Patterns of Isolation In English Canadian Literature
(Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 225.

100

ibid., p. 195.

101

ibid., p. 198.

102

ibid., p. 195.

103

Orange, p. 13.

Chapter 1

The Short Stories

Ernest Buckler's career as a short story writer spans three decades from the 1940's to the late 1960's. Beginning in 1940 with the publication of "One Quiet Afternoon" in Esquire, Buckler went on to write over eighty short stories of which nearly fifty have been published.¹ Throughout his literary career, Buckler depended on the income from his short stories to support him when writing his novels. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to date those of Buckler's undated and unpublished short stories that remain in manuscript form. However, the arrangement of the material in the Buckler Collection suggests in many cases possible dates and decades.

In the 1930's, Buckler wrote several sketches, poems and a few short stories that despite their heavy sentimentality and melodramatic elements reveal his early concern with human emotions in conflict. Buckler wrote some of his finest short stories, "The First Born Son" (1941), "Penny In The Dust" (1948) and "The Quarrel" (1949), in the 1940's, and he strongly defined the rural setting and the male protagonist, both of which form the basis for his art. Many stories appeared in Esquire, Maclean's and Saturday Night. With the publication of The Mountain and The Valley in 1952, it was evident that stories such as "One Quiet Afternoon" (1940), and "The First Born Son" (1941) had, in fact, been preparatory pieces for his first novel. In the late 1950's and the 1960's, Buckler began to look beyond an exclusively rural setting. Stories such

as "The Eruption of Albert Wingate" (1956), "The Accident" (1960), "The Doctor and The Patient" (1961) and "One Sweet Day" (1962), have either an urban setting or are set in an undefined environment. Unlike his earlier stories, the setting has little, if any, influence on his characters. This new direction may have resulted from the readership of Chatelaine and Atlantic Advocate which was urban in outlook. Lacking the depth of his rural characters, Buckler's urban characters often seem rootless and superficial, and the stories themselves are far less convincing than those from the 1940's or the early 1950's. Buckler's stories succeed best when written out of a first-hand sense of rural characters and life, rather than a self-conscious artistry about the city. Chronologically, the stories change only slightly in subject matter and theme over the years, but they develop artistically to suffuse the initial sentimentality with controlled sensitivity. Clearly, the forties and the fifties stand as Buckler's most productive years in terms of the sheer number of stories that he wrote and their frequently high quality.

Fourteen of Buckler's published short stories were selected and arranged by Robert Chambers in The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories (1975).² All had been previously published in such widely read magazines as Atlantic Advocate, Chatelaine, Esquire, Maclean's and Saturday Night between the years 1941 and 1959. Chambers hoped that his selection would cast "a new light" on Buckler which will reveal "his refined mastery" of the short story.³ Unfortunately, Chambers offers no unpublished work in his selection, such as "The Locket" or "The Trains Go By," two superior stories that deserve critical attention. However limited, Chambers's selection fairly represents Buckler's

achievements as a short story writer and provides a critical base for discussion of Buckler's work. Thus, my discussion of the short fiction will focus primarily on Chambers's selection with cross-references to other selected stories, both published and unpublished.

When judging Buckler's mastery of the short story, critics usually base their criticism on the Chambers selection. Critical response to Buckler's short fiction is generally favourable and often characterized by the critic's comparison of it to the longer works. As Alan Young claims, many of these short stories prefigure the two novels and clearly prove that Buckler's talents are "by no means restricted to his novels."⁴ Indeed, those stories, such as "Penny In The Dust" (1948) and "The Quarrel" (1949), Young finds "equal to the very best of Buckler's longer works." Young admits, however, that while these fourteen stories reaffirm Buckler's "perceptiveness, emotional power, and control," they also reaffirm "the impression one has from the novels that Buckler's narrative technique is limited to the conventional and that his themes and plot motifs are limited in their variety."

In his reading of the short stories, D. O. Spettigue recognizes the temptation "to say the closer they come to his novels, and particularly The Mountain and The Valley, the better they are."⁵ Spettigue considers Buckler's early stories, such as "Penny In The Dust" (1948) and "The Clumsy One" (1949), his best and clearly apprentice pieces for his novels. Each of these stories, as well as others, such as "The Quarrel" (1949), "Last Delivery Before Christmas" (1953), "The Bars and The Bridge" (1958) and "The Wild Goose" (1959), is a recollection of a childhood experience which helps the adult narrator to understand both himself and his family,

the past and the present. This technique Buckler later refines in Ox Bells and Fireflies. Although the short stories published in Chatelaine and Esquire Spettigue considers "flawed by their sentimentality," they are redeemed by Buckler's "sure sense of human relations."

In a similar way, reviewer Francis Mansbridge strongly but correctly criticizes Buckler's use of the "conventional happy ending" as sentimental and a result of his pervasive moralism.⁶ Critic Linda Sandler, who agrees with Spettigue and Mansbridge, considers the effectiveness of Buckler's stories damaged by "sentiment and respectability" that find their roots in nineteenth-century pastoral romance.⁷ John Orange also notes that some stories "just manage to skirt the edge of cloying sentimentality, but one has to remember when, and for whom, they were written."⁸ In defense of his style, Buckler explains what he considers to be the clear difference between sentiment and sentimentality:

There's a very, very thin line between sentiment and sentimentality, and I think that sentiment is just fine. I think this thing about hardening against sentiment is what kills people. Of course sentimentality, blatant sentimentality, is a different thing altogether. But I think the only thing in this world that saves us at all is feeling, and it seems to me you bloody well go the hell ahead and feel.⁹

Thus, Buckler's use of honest sentiment characterizes his style and parallels his philosophy that love is the most important value in human life. In both the style and the theme of his short stories, emotions rather than intellect play the dominant role and, therefore, make Buckler's writing vulnerable to charges of sentimentality. In his review of Buckler's stories, John Orange briefly traces Buckler's development as a short story writer: "The author was drawn towards experimentation in prose style, towards a search for the radiant word or phrase, and often away from

problems of structure."¹⁰ As well, Orange points out that the early stories reveal the recurring themes of the Buckler novels: "rural vs urban sensibilities, complex emotional ties among members of disintegrating families, love felt as pain as well as pleasure, the problems artists face in their attempts to communicate feelings perfectly or to translate experience into art absolutely."¹¹ Again, Orange emphasizes the "'buried artist' theme which receives extensive treatment in The Mountain and The Valley."

Chambers divides the fourteen stories according to their themes. The first group, "Fathers and Sons," explores misunderstandings in the relationship between an inarticulate, unimaginative father and his sensitive, articulate son. The "City and Country" group focusses on the tensions between the rural and urban worlds, a theme Alan Young¹² considers central in Buckler's work. In the "Ebb and Flow" section, Buckler's stories present family members in conflict, and in the next grouping, "Love among Strangers," family tensions result from an outsider's intrusion into the family. The stories in the final section, "Remembrance of Things Past," involve the contrast between the past and the present as well as the power of memory and the past on the individual.

All of Chambers' selected short stories, regardless of their theme, involve irony, isolation and love. Each story centres upon a single character struggling to understand the true nature of love and the intolerable contradictions and incongruities at the heart of life. Irony commonly arises when the character misinterprets appearances as reality, when his idealized expectations contrast with his disheartening experiences and when his inner perceptions are contradicted by his

outward condition. Generally, the character recognizes these incongruities in his life and shares his awareness of irony with the reader. Occasionally, Buckler steps in to point out the contradictions which he intends the reader to acknowledge as ironic.

Contemplative, introspective and reflective, the Buckler hero reveals the author's concern with the individual's thoughts rather than his actions. Buckler "didn't fret too much about action," because action "despite the wired-upper-lip and prose clipped-with-mat scissors school - - is far less important than its motivation."¹³ Buckler's psychologically motivated protagonist possesses heightened sensibilities, an imaginative consciousness and a "word-shaped" mind that most often responds to the world through language rather than actions. He seeks in his ordinary life the perfection he imagines in his own consciousness, and when his experiences contradict his idealized expectations, he feels deeply disillusioned and alienated. Figuratively isolated and deluded by his own imagination, he continues to interpret appearances as reality. This Buckler hero eventually recognizes that love can unite him with his family and society, end his loneliness and reconcile his imaginative longings for perfection with actual experience. Alienation may also be overcome when he discovers someone else who shares his sensitivities or when fractured relationships are restored to wholeness through demonstrations of love. Those few Buckler heroes who fail to understand the power of love remain in a state of absolute isolation, trapped by their self-deceiving nature and close to adopting a nihilistic attitude of total despair. The reader perceives the irony in the short stories through the development of the narrative, the juxtaposing of opposite, conflicting points of view and the character's observations about his

own circumstances, comments which confirm the reader's recognition of incongruities.

The protagonist's psychological conflict is affected by his understanding of the power of language, which Buckler defines in two ways: verbal articulation and emotional articulation.¹⁴ Verbal articulation refers to words actually spoken, whereas emotional articulation describes actions that express physically one's feelings. In his introduction to "The Quarrel" (1949), Buckler points up the disparity between an inarticulate appearance and an articulate reality. A quiet man whose limited use of language makes him appear verbally inarticulate is not, according to Buckler, "inarticulate emotionally as well." Indeed, those characters who rely on actions rather than words to express their emotions often possess the deepest, most complex feelings. Often the protagonist with an intellectual, "word-shaped" mind mistakenly thinks that men of few words have few emotions. He therefore resists the physical language of his family and society and becomes alienated. Indeed, he frequently resembles David Canaan whom D.J. Dooley describes as tragic because "if he lived by the word, he could not trust the word."¹⁵ The short story protagonist cannot be part of his community until he understands that love can be expressed physically as well as verbally. With this awareness, he finds in his personal relationships the unity and perfection he seeks; the psychological conflict between his inner consciousness and outward condition ceases and his alienation ends at the same time.

The three stories in the first section, "Fathers and Sons," reveal Buckler's interest in the often ironic nature of the father and son relationship. In "The Penny in the Dust" (1948), one of his

finest stories about the conflicting father and son relationship, irony arises from the disparity between the child's creative illusions and his father's pragmatism, the past and the present, childhood and adulthood, and appearance and reality.¹⁶ Various ironies are revealed to the reader by the narrator who, in retrospect, re-evaluates the contradictions and tensions involved in his relationship with his father. When he comes home for his father's funeral, Peter, the narrator, accidentally finds the penny his father had given to him as a child. He recalls how his quiet, undemonstrative father, had always been "an inarticulate man a little at sea with an imaginative child" (p. 4) and how the differences in their consciousnesses had threatened to alienate them from one another. This penny, which had once symbolized for Peter the guilt feelings and misunderstandings of their relationship, now symbolizes the enduring quality of their love. In contrast to Peter's childhood perceptions, his father had kept the penny as a token of his son's love and not, as Peter had assumed, a symbol of their conflict. Like love itself, the penny has transcended time and his father's death.

Several of Buckler's stories turn upon objects from the past that symbolize relationships and love's enduring quality; they prevent feelings of loneliness and the anxiety that comes from misunderstandings; they illustrate how a character's perceptions of a relationship can be entirely inaccurate; in the course of the story his misconceptions are shown to be ironic. As John Orange points out, Buckler is experimenting here in these early stories with "ways of using symbols that they carry many different weights simultaneously."¹⁷ In "David Comes Home" (1944), the son's fishing spinner and letters home reassure his lonely father of their strong father-son relationship which must

now transcend the child's death. The parents in "The Finest Tree" (1944) feel alienated from their son serving in the war until a Christmas tree symbolizes for them their family bond. In "Unto The Hills" published in 1958 as "The Echoing Hills," a mother joins spiritually with her martyred son as the landscape embodies his spirit of love. In "A Sort of Sign" (1945), a glass bobble reaffirms a young wife's love for her sailor husband serving in the war. In these stories a character begins to doubt the quality of his love relationship when he judges the strength of that bond simply by its appearances rather than its actual nature. The incongruities between the different perceptions are noted by the characters eventually, and their **new** understandings are shared simultaneously through the narrative with the reader.

The young boy in "The Rebellion of Young David" (1951) suffers similar misunderstandings and inconsistencies, but this story emphasizes, in particular, the guilt feelings associated with such misinterpretations of reality and the failure to fulfil idealized expectations.¹⁸ Although this story succeeds as a statement on the importance of strong family bonds, David's percocious conversations and Art's constant contemplation become tedious and undercut the story's effectiveness. Both father and son lack the simplicity common to Buckler's rural characters and more closely resemble Buckler's chatty, pseudo-intellectual urban characters. Not surprisingly, Buckler incorporated this story into Chapter Three of The Cruellest Month.

Much of the irony arises when Art and David misinterpret each other's words and deeds and operate from within their own self-deceiving

and deceived inner realities. Art's narration, a recollection of their relationship and their circumstances, points out to the reader the incongruities surrounding their behaviour, perceptions and experiences. As well, Buckler's occasional comments as omniscient narrator supplies the information necessary for the reader to see the discrepancies between the characters' consciousnesses. David, for example, struggles to reconcile the "blind contradiction" (p. 8) between being a child and being treated as an adult by Art who had abdicated his role of father to be his son's "pal" (p. 19). This central conflict between David's desire and his experience reflects itself in the contrast between his vulnerable, "perceptive face" (p. 8) and the "actual belligerence" (p. 8) of his behaviour. Sporadic bursts of "isolating violence" (p. 8) further betray his inner struggle and private frustrations. David, whose nature is divided between child and adult, feels guilty that he cannot be his father's "pal" at the same time that he longs to be his father's "son". These guilt feelings and contradictions intensify his sense of alienation. His burden of guilt can, according to Buckler, create a state of figurative isolation. Finally, David's confrontations with death, the bones of the dead animal in the words, and his fall from the barn roof reveal to Art and the reader the contrast between David's perceptions of their relationship and Art's understanding of it. When he realizes how he has distorted his role of father, he sees the irony of their circumstances as well as "the awful misinterpretation a child has to endure" (p. 16). This kind of childhood misunderstanding and guilt which Buckler associates with figurative isolation reappears in "Anything Can

Happen At Christmas" (1957) and "The Accident" (1960) and, to some degree, in all stories concerned with the break-down of the father and son relationship.

"The First Born Son" (1941), which demonstrates Buckler's sure hand at drawing powerful, psychological portraits, parallels the rock moving incident in The Mountain and The Valley.¹⁹ By dividing his narrative focus between the opposing thoughts of Martin and his son, David, Buckler establishes a duelling tension which creates irony and structures the story. By working side by side in the field, father and son, at first, appear, to the reader, to share a love of the land and the farm life. But their contradictory streams of consciousness, which form the narrative, quickly dispel that image of physical harmony and reveal to the reader the story's central irony. David, who despises the numbing and demanding farm life and longs for imaginative fulfilment in the city, is dreaming of escape from the family farm. Meanwhile, Martin, who loves his land and rural way of life, is dreaming of the day when his first born son, David, will inherit the family farm and continue the rural traditions. The contrast between their streams of consciousness, as yet apparent only to the reader, intensifies as David and Martin delude themselves further and misinterpret each other's behaviour. Angry words finally betray David's private fantasy to Martin, who is now aware of the irony of their situation and is spiritually defeated by this cruel truth. David rejects his father's overtures of love and reconciliation, determined to exist within his unrealistic expectations of the city. He remains trapped by such delusions and his own fanciful nature. His particular

form of self-inflicted alienation Buckler develops and expands upon in his first novel where David Canaan moves into absolute isolation.

With the exception of "The First Born Son" where David is a victim of his own illusions, alienated from his father and rural community and outside love relationships, the stories in this first section illustrate how tensions between a father and son can be resolved happily in physical demonstrations of love. Then the child's longings for a close father-son relationship are realized and the psychological conflict between his idealized illusions and disappointing experiences is overcome. When the father and son recognize the incongruities in their relationship which cause their alienation from one another, they can use their awareness to work towards a reconciliation. The reader may be made aware of the ironic contrast in the narrative or from Buckler's psychological portraits and may share in the process of renewal. When a character such as David in "The First Born Son" fails to recognize the conflicts which are evident to others in the story and to the reader, he remains alienated and trapped by his delusions. Then the irony takes on tragic qualities, and the reader feels pity for the character.

Chambers' second grouping, "City and Country", includes "Another Christmas" (1941) and "You Could Go Anywhere Now" (1946), stories which confirm Alan Young's view that Buckler's "most persistent motif in all his writings is his juxtaposition of 'two worlds'."²⁰ According to Young, the first world is identified "with the past, with childhood, with seemingly secure and permanent moral values, with leisure and composure...an...intimate and harmonious relationship between man and

nature, with the rural life-style of Nova Scotia." The second world, Young suggests, is identified "with the present, with adult experience, with competitive individualism, with urban life, and with the materialist products of the educational and technological revolution." Buckler's characters in these stories frequently must choose between these two worlds, and, as Young points out, their choosing is "a dilemma of sufficient intensity to produce spiritual anxiety and even alienation in a person of any sensibility."

Buckler's city and country theme, which appears as the central conflict or as a secondary interest, encompasses the artist's struggle to create, the conflicts involved in male-female relationships and the contrast between a young man's glorious longings for adventure and his disappointing experiences. In "Another Christmas" (1941), Steve typifies those rural characters who have been transplanted to the city but never truly belong there.²¹ Although he lives in an urban society and appears to those around him to share in its way of life, it is clear to the reader that Steve remains spiritually tied to his past and the country world. His contradictory existence is reflected in his relationship with Eve, a sophisticated, urban woman whose insensitivity to the past and denial of sentiment alienate Steve. Neither of them, however, can articulate his true feelings, and their marriage becomes riddled with misunderstandings and incongruities similar to those in the relationships in The Cruellest Month. Their constant misinterpretations of each other's words is revealed through verbal ambiguity that complements their irony of situation. Many of the tensions in their relationship parallel those between the rural and

urban worlds, and physical geography is reflected in their individual consciousnesses and mental landscapes. The men and women in Buckler's fiction are often stiff, unconvincing characters who appear to be desperately uncomfortable with one another, and their relationships seem contrived to suit Buckler's thematic purposes concerning the city and the country. Buckler may have intended their awkwardness to underscore their distorted perceptions of one another, but these stories involving couples are certainly among his least successful. In terms of his characterizations, "Another Christmas" follows this pattern of two dimensional male and female figures.

Steve expresses what will become the dilemma of all Buckler's artist figures: that words can never capture exactly or completely the essence of life's experience, great or small. He confronts the irony at the heart of all writing that "you never found that single light... that single plan" (p. 32) for art. Knowing that there are "a million ways to tell every one of them, and only one way for each of them was right" (p. 32) overwhelms Steve, and he adopts the almost nihilistic view that without a "single plan...how could the little separate part you told matter at all?" (p. 32). The memory of how, as a child, he had skated in a moment of perfect wholeness brings to the despairing Steve greater happiness and hope than even the present success of his new novel. But, unable to duplicate in art the perfection and completeness of the past, he writes only parts of experience, fragments of a greater whole, and resigns himself to the inability of art to capture life completely. Through Steve's character, Buckler suggests that to be an artist one must sift through the countless pieces of human experience

and collect only those particular fragments that speak for the whole quality of existence. Otherwise, the writer is simply overcome with the amount of material, and his inability to articulate the million different parts of experience forces him into a nihilistic silence.

While Steve contemplates privately the problems of creativity, Eve has completely misinterpreted the meaning of his skating recollection and admonishes Steve for his apparently unjustifiable sentimentality. Her inability to appreciate the value of Steve's honest sentiment Buckler associates with the sterile urban mentality and condemns as a loss of individual humanity. Their marriage remains riddled with inconsistencies and misconceptions. While Steve tries to resolve the many contradictions involved with artistic expression, he continues to be torn between the rural and urban worlds, despite Young's argument that "The city/country conflict is resolved" in this story.²²

Although Chambers does not include "Glance in the Mirror" (1957) in this "City and Country" group, it also involves the city and country theme, the writer's struggle to articulate the essence of life and male and female relationships.²³ The artistic philosophy, personal failures and triumphs depicted here reappear in "The Concerto" (1958) where a musician successfully combines art with love, "A Catch in It" (unpublished) where artistic success without love means personal loneliness, "It Was Always Like That" (unpublished) where a writer's imaginative vision results in death and figurative isolation and "No Matter Which People Are There" (unpublished) where a writer's love/hate relationship with writing is at once creative and destructive, alienating and unifying. In "Glance in The Mirror" the disparity between the male and female

consciousnesses reflects the ironic contrast between the rural and urban spirits and, by implication, Jeff and Sheila embody the country and city respectively. The central irony in this story stems from Buckler's view that one truly never recognizes who or what one is and that one's perceptions of oneself are quite likely the mirror image, the opposite of reality. Jeff, a writer, deludes himself when he thinks that he has, at last, found the one, true interpretation of experience and character.

Jeff, like Steve in "Another Christmas," writes about a fictional rural woman rather than about his wife whose sophisticated, urban manner contradicts his rural nature and creates in him anxiety and alienation. Sheila, who "brings the love and the destruction both" (p. 136) to Jeff and his art, perceives Jeff's efforts to write as "puttering around with a few old words, and what difference do they make?" (p. 135). In contrast, Jeff considers his art the very centre of his world. When he eventually writes about Sheila, he creates two different and opposing portraits. Sheila fails to recognize herself in the unflattering portrait, and her inner blindness Jeff and the reader find highly ironic but consistent with her self-deception. The reader considers Jeff's second description of Sheila equally false because it is the product of his guilt-ridden, delusive mind. When Jeff concludes abruptly that art can never replace love, that "A writer...could never see that his few stuffy old words were less important than any kind of love" (p. 138), the reader is unconvinced and conscious of the ironic reversal in his attitudes. Jeff, a formerly committed artist who espoused the beliefs of Buckler about writing, rejects his medium in the words and tone of the insensitive

Sheila. His new perception of writing contradicts, in the reader's mind, the earlier dedication to art, and his unexpected reaction anticipates Morse Halliday's false, philosophic transformation in The Cruellest Month.

Jeff had earlier defined the nature of the artist in terms close to Buckler's own and with reference to the inherent conflicts involved with being a writer. Although writing appears to others to be "always wonderful" (p. 133), it is actually "the loneliest job in the world" (p. 133). When Jeff is incapable of writing anything, time becomes a "crippling silence" (p. 133) and passes by untouched, lost forever. But when his inspiration returns, he has "words for the touch of flesh, and words for the way of two people who were really together, and words for the wordlessness in the mouths of people who never had anyone, and words for all the incommunicable shadows on the heart that the face hid" (p. 133). But Jeff then realizes that "he's done only bits of the thing that was meant for him to do wholly. And again just one word would pulse in your brain: alone...alone...alone..." (p. 133). Thus, like other artists, Jeff struggles to capture in words, "to put outside" (p. 134), that "thing that had been cloudy and coreless inside" (p. 133). When he finally reaches a level of metaphorical expression, Jeff possesses everything by "telling it" (p. 134), "nothing could be intolerable," "time was not a fear and loneliness was beaten. Then you were free like no one else" (p. 134). This definitive, creative act mirrors the discovery of absolute perfection, the realization of idealized longings and the attainment of loving relationships sought by many of Buckler's protagonists. This apocalyptic moment defeats the threat of nihilism and the absurdities of life. For Buckler's artist figures, this moment of pure revelation and wholeness

will be their ultimate goal and aspiration.

Buckler acknowledges that often city people possess the sensibilities and virtues he associates with rural folk and that country people may embody negative urban values. Buckler illustrates this contrast between appearances and reality in "You Could Go Anywhere Now" (1946) when David discovers that the city girl, Katherine, appreciates his deep love for the country far more than Anna, the rural girl he had planned to marry.²⁴ With Katherine, David feels integrated physically and spiritually with his rural and urban environments, "you could always go home now no matter where you were, just to speak of it..." (p. 36). Home becomes part of a character's internal landscape and the attributes of the country can be found in certain urban characters who are sensitive to nature and share in a genuine love relationship.

In addition to the male-female relationships, Buckler's city and country theme encompasses the rural hero's search for inner fulfilment beyond the farm in the city or on the sea. Buckler's writing style in these stories has an immediacy and authenticity that suggest he may have identified with his youthful, rural characters. The rich, lyrical prose captures both the beauty of the land as well as the often numbing routines of farming. Each young man in "No Second Cup" (1933), "The Locket" (unpublished) and "Would You Know It If You Fell Over It?" (unpublished) abandons his farm life which he thinks contradicts intolerably his private fantasies of an ideal, exotic life. His dreams, however, prove tragically self-deceptive when he discovers only figurative isolation and spiritual decay. When he recognizes that his rural home is, in fact, his true home and ideal environment, he has become permanently alienated. The irony of the situation and

the thematic concerns in these stories reappear in a great many others involving a protagonist's movement away from the farm to the city. These particular stories, however, which offer no personal redemption, conclude with tragic overtones and a complete sense of despair reminiscent of "The First Born Son."

"No Second Cup" (1933), written while Buckler was a student at the University of Toronto, involves Crewe's futile search for inner contentment.²⁵ Feeling emotionally empty and alone on the family farm, Crewe moves to the city where he enjoys temporarily a sense of belonging until, "The wine of cities creeps slowly out of one's limbs, leaving them very tired and there is no second cup" (p. 76). Now figuratively isolated and disillusioned with the city life, Crewe returns home, convinced that he can find some of his former contentment on the farm. He is again self-deceived when he cannot find any peace of mind in the country not even the slight pleasure he had known once before. With the farm no longer his home in any sense, Crewe returns to the city, aware of the irony of his circumstances and aware that he will suffer perpetual displacement.

David, in "The Locket" (unpublished), is another alienated and frustrated farm boy who learns too late that a search for adventure can result in ironic consequences.²⁶ This early David character resembles in many ways David Canaan, and the train and the sea motifs, which here symbolize the worlds beyond the country, reappear in The Mountain and The Valley. Buckler incorporated this story, one of his most successful treatments of the youthful struggle for personal fulfilment and a sense of belonging, into his first novel as Ellen's sailor story to Anna.

David believes that home "was some place you had to find" (p. 2) and that living on the farm "was like your life was going by in the train" (p. 9). With this misunderstanding, he runs away from home and his family in search of an ideal place of belonging on the sea. But his fantasy of truly belonging somewhere beyond the farm is contradicted by his realization that "the sea is a lonely thing," and "places are all alike when you get there. I know there is no one place where I will be really among" (p. 14) other people. The train whistle, a motif for David's inherently restless, uprooted spirit, "would always be ahead for me, and have the lonesome sound" (p. 14). When the story ends, years later, David has made the tragic discovery that he will always be figuratively isolated and that he will never find "home" on the sea or on the farm because his romantic nature seeks an ideal unattainable in the real world.

In another unpublished short story, "The Trains Go By," Peter, like David Canaan, deludes himself that figurative isolation can be self-sustaining.²⁷ When preparing to write The Mountain and The Valley, Buckler submitted "The Trains Go By," "Thanks for Listening" (unpublished) and "Indian Summer (unpublished) to Edward Aswell of Harper Brothers with the comment that they are "my best and have in them the foetus of a novel," and that the novel's "main theme is embodied in the one, 'The Trains Go By', the frustration of a young man who has seen it all happen to someone else."²⁸ In this story, the country represents Peter's figurative isolation and frustration while the city and war seem to promise him personal fulfilment and excitement. Having been kept out of the war by illness, Peter manages to feel relatively satisfied farming

alone, free from the many contradictions which cause him psychological conflict. But a sudden visit from his sister, Martha, and her sailor - husband, David, shatters his fragile illusion of contentment. Confronted with the truth of his alienation and repressed desires, Peter realizes that his dreams of fulfilment beyond the farm are foolish. Contrary to his longings, he will always have a lonely life on the farm and always be outside normal human relationships. Life has passed him by in the same way that David's troop train passes him by as he stands in the field: "It was always someone else" (p. 18) who rode the train away from the farm. The desolation and recognition of the irony of his situation overwhelms Peter, and the reader shares in his despair. The bleak, shattering light of self-awareness that Buckler shines on his subject reveals to the reader the sharp contrast between Peter's dreams and his reality and illustrates the fall of a common man not unlike himself.

The "City and Country" grouping involves the struggle and the conflicts between the rural and urban worlds, the relationships between country men who marry city women, the internal landscapes of the consciousness, the artist's challenge to create, the ideal past and the disillusioning present and a young man's rejection of the farm for the city's false glitter and the sea's loneliness. Buckler's irony arises from the disparity between appearance and reality and between the hero's perceptions of romantic illusions and his actual experiences.

The stories in the "Ebb and Flow" section illustrate how verbal ambiguity and misunderstood behaviour determine the rise and fall of family relationships. "The Quarrel" (1949) focusses on an argument between a husband and wife, the kind of verbal misunderstanding that

reappears in "You Wouldn't Believe Me" (1947), "The Eruption of Albert Wingate" (1956), "One Sweet Day" (1962) and "Choose Your Partner" (1962).²⁹ These marital rifts Buckler resolves in comic, conventional ways which may have been occasioned by the conventional nature of the magazines in which they were published, Atlantic Advocate and Saturday Night.

"The Quarrel," which won Maclean's short fiction award in 1948, concerns, according to Buckler, "The extraordinary intricacy of feeling and loyalty in the members of the close-knit country family, contrary to common supposition that they are inarticulate emotionally as well as verbally."³⁰ Irony arises when a character mistakes a person's outward appearance for his inner state of being, and these misinterpretations cause discord, disillusionment and alienation until each family member rediscovers the family's indestructible bond of love. Only in retrospect do the characters recognize the contradictions associated with their perceptions and behaviour; the reader has been made aware of the irony through Buckler's juxtaposing of the actual with the imagined circumstances.

"The Quarrel" is a childhood recollection in which the adult narrator recaptures temporarily his past through memory. Like Buckler's artist figures, he seeks to reveal to the reader the whole of his recollection "by the light of some single penetrating phrase" (p. 51). As a child, he felt his family bond shatter with "the special havoc of a quarrel" between his parents; his consciousness, which always seeks in everyday conditions perfect wholeness, shatters instantly as well.³¹ Although Buckler considers the quarrel "really a function of their fierce affective bond" which makes a family's objective reactions

impossible, the child feels alienated from and betrayed by his parents.³² The incongruities which have destroyed his sense of contentment and wholeness intensify when the family attends the Annapolis Exhibition where the mother has entered her hand-made table cloth in the fair competition. Among the city people, the child feels suddenly vulnerable and keenly aware of the family's rural plainness as all his wonderful expectations of the Exhibition are contradicted by reality: the seemingly grand mystic, Madame Zelda, is actually a crude fraud; the test of strength machine is rigged to defeat the honest efforts of his father; his mother's table cloth, the family's pride and joy at home, is here pathetically inadequate. But the disillusionment, imperfection and alienation that they each encounter at the Exhibition allow for their reconciliation. Although no one speaks of his remorse for having hurt each other with angry words in the quarrel, each demonstrates his penitence to the others with simple, expressive gestures of abiding love and loyalty. They contradict the common assumption that "they are inarticulate emotionally as well as verbally." When they return home, the farm's familiar surroundings reinforce their "constitutive loyalty" which triumphs over their earlier feelings of alienation.³³

With his family reunited and free from the quarrel's intolerable contradictions, the child now understands how the falseness and loneliness of the outside world, represented by the Exhibition, have strengthened the family bond. The idyllic farm life becomes his only reality, and, cut-off from all the negative influences of the outside world, he and his parents exist in a state of literal isolation and emotional security: "This sureness when we were home couldn't be

transplanted; but that's why, when we had it all about us and in us, like an invisible armour, it was such a crying thing to hurt each other" (p. 52). Buckler implies to the reader that this Edenic world may appear to be permanent, but, in fact, it is transitory. In the final moments of the story, the child attempts to preserve his ideal family unit and perfect harmony through the bedtime prayer, "If I should die before I wake" (p. 52). Through this prayer, Buckler suggests that death is the only state of permanence which can maintain perfection because any other human state falls victim to the ravages of time and accident. Thus, the story ends with the tension between the narrative expressing the eternal force of the family unit and the symbolism of the prayer suggesting the mutability of life and time.

In terms of the story itself, Buckler confesses that, "If I were doing it again I think I could improve on my invention of character and incident. It sprawls not a little and sometimes there's an obtrusive filigree of expression which I'd try to curb now. What's more, it's sentimental, I guess."³⁴ Buckler's comments concerning characters are, in some respects, valid. The rather stiff characterizations of the mother and the father are two dimensional and display the awkwardness common to Buckler's couples. In the child's characterization, however, Buckler captures the innocence and wonder of childhood by consistently viewing the family's quarrel and relationships from the child's perspective. The boy's narrow view of the mother and father as exclusively his parents may account for their limited, often stilted characterizations. Buckler's claim that this story "sprawls not a little" apparently refers to the considerable number of incidents

he used to illustrate the rather simple idea of family loyalty. The "obtrusive filigree of expression" and sentimentality appear, for example, in his rather gushing description of the child's guilt feelings: "Do you know how I felt, remembering I had wished that father would put his coat on, and thinking of the Christmas when there was hardly money for bread, but when there had been a sled and crayons for me just the same?" (p. 51). Despite this self-criticism, Buckler remains fond of "The Quarrel" because, in his estimation, it captures finally that loyalty of family "with that immediacy of communication which ingenuous fervour often accomplishes blindly where some expert skill often kills." In this statement, Buckler is referring to the unselfconscious creative effort, the intuitive act of expression which his fictional artist figures Steve and Jeff search for in their art.

"The Clumsy One" (1950) focusses on the relationship between entirely opposite brothers.³⁵ Similar pairs of brothers appear in "No Second Cup" (1933), "It Was Always Like That" (unpublished), "Good-bye Prince" (1954), "The Wild Goose" (1959) and "The Locket" (unpublished). Buckler's pairing of brothers suggests the joining together of two opposites, two polarities that have a synthesizing and complementary function in the narrative. These pairs of brothers anticipate Chris and David Canaan and resemble the Mithraic twins, Cautes and Caupates, who represent life and death, sunrise and sunset. In biblical terms, they represent Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob. Buckler handles these various allusions ironically when his sets of brothers reconcile their differences and establish indestructible bonds that transcend brotherly rivalry and even death.

The story's title, "The Clumsy One," embodies the contradictions inherent in the narrator's misconceptions about what it means to be truly "clumsy" in the emotional and verbal sense. Dan, a clever, verbally articulate college student comes home to the farm for the summer and uses sophisticated, city language to strike out at his brother, David, a quiet farmer whom Dan assumes is as emotionally clumsy as he is mentally. The reader, however, suspects that Dan has misinterpreted his brother's appearances. Dan's language and superior manner alienate the brothers and create a strange, new awkwardness between them, and he cannot rectify their broken relationship with words, his only real strength. Finally, David's emotional, intuitive strength reunites them, but only after he humiliates Dan in front of his farmer friends. Dan finally recognizes that he, rather than David, is the "clumsy" one when it comes to understanding human nature and being sensitive to others. He sees how he misunderstood David's simple appearance as the essence of his entire nature, and how he misjudged the true power of words and his own divided nature. Dan's admissions confirm the irony that the reader had already recognized and applied to the story's narrative.

The "Ebb and Flow" stories centre upon incongruities which shatter family unity, create disillusionment and personal alienation. As well, verbal irony arises from the power of words to create and destroy relationships. Although family loyalty appears to the characters and to the reader to ebb away when conflict strikes a family, in reality, love and loyalty continue to flow between the family members and form an indestructible bond. This emotional loyalty and love triumph over figurative isolation and despair.

Chambers's "Love Among Strangers" grouping presents three stories which, in many ways, extend the themes and uses of irony seen in all the other groupings. Each story involves a stranger's integration into a close-knit family and the misunderstanding of the stranger's appearances for his entire nature. As well, the protagonist suffers the psychological conflict common to Buckler's heroes until love helps to form around him a new family unit founded on loyalty. Without exception, these particular stories and several others involving a stranger's entry into a family conclude with comic resolutions that replace personal isolation with integration and individual fragmentation with a new social order.

"The Dream and The Triumph" (1956), winner of the 1956 President's Award for the best Canadian short story, is an expanded version of "A Little Flag For Mother" (1963), an autobiographical story about the author's mother, Mary Buckler.³⁶ The protagonist, Paul, has returned to his country home to care for his aging grandmother after years spent in the city. A mathematician and engineer, Paul relies more on intellect than emotion and, therefore, feels alienated from his rural environment. While Paul's external reality comprises physical farm labour, his internal consciousness comprises an intellectual city life now abandoned. The tension between his external and internal realities creates a psychological conflict in Paul which leads to angry words between Paul and his grandmother. But when Paul realizes that she is gradually going blind, his "constitutive loyalty" surges forth, and he arranges an operation to save her sight. Their subsequent trip to the city hospital threatens to intensify Paul's sense of loneliness and loss, "What fresh restlessness

would he have to battle all over again when he came back home?" (p. 79). But the city no longer holds any attraction for Paul who now understands the rural world in relation to the urban world. Paul undergoes, like his biblical namesake, a revelation that grants him new vision:

Here you left no track, where almost everyone was servant to something, where the memory of you stopped with your breath, he longed to go back where you could see the paths your feet had made on the yielding earth...where in your neighbour's registry of deeds any little individuality you'd ever achieved was perpetually recorded. (p. 80).

Now aware that the country offers him an ideal home, Paul returns to the farm with his grandmother who, like himself, has regained her sight. A new rural family forms around Paul and his country bride, Molly. Like Katherine in "You Could Go Anywhere Now," Molly is the ideal Buckler woman who has "the kind of understanding that's a passport anywhere that matters" (p. 80). Paul's inner vision of contentment becomes, at last, a reality on the farm where, no longer isolated and a stranger, he is integrated into a loving family unit. We witness Paul's ideal world and family in the closing scene of the story. Buckler offers us a complete vision of the family as eternal. The old grandmother represents the past, Paul and Molly represent the present and little baby Paul Junior represents the future. Collectively and individually, Paul's country family will transcend, like the rural lifestyle, the cruel ravages of time and death.

While "The Dream and The Triumph" effectively illustrates Buckler's message that family love can defeat the contradictions in life's experiences, it suffers from certain flaws in characterization, an inconsistent point of view of the rural and urban worlds and overt

sentimentality. The story's autobiographical nature and Buckler's total idealization of his mother may account for some of the sentimentality which detracts from the story's overall success.

"A Present For Miss Merriam" (1952) illustrates a woman's struggle to escape her narrow experience and loneliness.³⁷ Helen Merriam's story describes a "type", a character like Martha Legros in "One Quiet Afternoon" (1940), Syd in "Last Delivery Before Christmas" (1953) and Wes in "Long, Long After School" (1959), who, "because their inner warmth and vitality is never suspected, come to be cruelly labelled by others as if one negligible 'type' or another."³⁸ Helen Merriam realizes that her alienation is changing her into the kind of person others in the community mistakenly perceive her to be: a spinster school teacher. But, at Christmas time, that magical time when Buckler allows the unexpected and miraculous to occur, Helen decides to contradict dramatically her staid image, to step out of her figurative isolation and to discover a love relationship with Chris, the widowed father of one of her young students and another of the community's 'type' figures. Helen and Chris establish a loving relationship and family bond, experience their inner longings for an ideal male-female relationship and, most importantly, shed their 'type' images. The reader sees how their metamorphosis and new understanding creates a gentle irony involving the contrast between their appearances and their real nature.

In "Long, Long After School" (1959), the narrator listens to Wes Holman recall his childhood friendship with his school teacher, Miss Tretheway, who, like Wes, was considered to be a 'type'.³⁹ Like Helen

Merriam, Miss Tretheway was perceived by the community to be only an old maid school teacher, but, as Wes discovered, her "sturdy plainness" (p. 123) belied an inner beauty. Both Wes and the school teacher are alienated characters who manage to reject society's inaccurate view of them and find comfort with one another by recognizing the discrepancies between their public and private personae. Having heard Wes's story about their friendship, the narrator confronts his own faulty assessment of Wes and Miss Tretheway, and he "never felt less beautiful, or less of a gentleman" (p. 126). The narrator, accustomed to being on the inside of relationships, now stands outside, looking in at the sensitive and warm friendship of two types. By implication, the reader shares in the narrator's sense of shame and guilt feelings, and the narrator's point of view and emotional responses are shared by the reader.

Syd Weston in "Last Delivery Before Christmas" (1953) represents another of Buckler's 'type' characters.⁴⁰ His earth-bound pragmatism collides with the imaginative consciousness of his new step-son, Ronnie, and their strained father and son relationship resembles those in "Penny in the Dust" (1948), "The Bars and the Bridge" (1958) and "Anything Can Happen at Christmas" (1957). Ronnie, who misunderstands Syd's predictable and artless behaviour as his total personality, also perceives Syd as an intruder upon what remains of his once close-knit family. When Ronnie rejects Syd in order to remain absolutely loyal to his dead father, he prevents the creation of a new "constitutive loyalty" in his family. But, finally, at Christmas time, Syd's impulsive and surprising trek through a snowstorm to deliver his family's presents proves to Ronnie how he has misunderstood and misjudged his step-father.

Syd's present to Ronnie, a rifle, creates their ultimate unity as a family, "with the man and the boy disputing with a woman the wisdom of a gun for the boy, we are a family" (p. 113).

Buckler's view of the past and memory embodies a contrast between the way it was then and the way it is now, the ideal past and the disillusioning present. The keen sense of loss creates an elegaic tone in stories where death or time have separated characters from one another or from their own sensibilities. Buckler associates the past with the innocence of childhood, the natural beauty and wonder of the country, the family together and united with love, the existence of whole loving relationships and the ability to experience in everyday living the idealized expectations of the protagonist. The present he equates with adult experience, the sterility of the city, the fragmentation of the family, absolute isolation and love relationships riddled with self-deception and the challenge of nihilism. Through memory, Buckler believes, one transcends time, escapes the present, and recaptures the earlier time when love, beauty and the ideal past existed. Recollection triumphs over time and death to the degree that in Ox Bells and Fireflies Buckler will describe it in the following way,

You are not seeing this place again through
the blurred telescope of the mind: you
are standing right there. Not long enough
to take it all down, but long enough to give
memory a second chance. 41

This return to the past, a transformation similar to David's on the mountain in the epilogue of The Mountain and The Valley, allows Buckler to counteract the disparities between the ideal and the real, the past and the present, and life and death. Several of Buckler's characters

experience this transformation . By returning to the past through their recollections, Buckler's characters gain new insight into themselves. They all face psychological and emotional conflicts contained in such recognition and confront their own complex, contradictory natures. Indeed, Buckler layers and multiplies the ironic disparities between the past and the present, the ideal and the tarnished, illusion and reality, the character's feelings and his thoughts, his words and his deeds. The themes and irony present in the grouping "Remembrance of Things Past" continue in Buckler's longer fiction, in particular, Ox Bells and Fireflies and Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea.

"The Wild Goose" (1959) involves two brothers, Kenny and Jeff, who resemble those in "The Clumsy One."⁴² The sight of a flock of wild geese reminds Kenny, the articulate and clever brother, of a hunting experience with his older brother, Jeff, when he accidentally ruined Jeff's expert shot at a flock of geese. The brothers' ensuing conflict and angry misunderstanding alienate them until the quiet, mentally clumsy Jeff reconciles them with a wordless, intuitive demonstration of love. On their last hunting excursion together, Jeff pretends that Kenny's inept shot rather than his own marksmanship brought down a wild goose. Only when Jeff prepares to leave for the Korean War, several years later, does Kenny confront him with the deception of the wild goose and he reveals his affection for his older brother. Kenny's recollection of these hunting incidents involves a sharp contrast between the past and the present, life and death. Although the wild geese return every year, they never light on the spot where Kenny and Jeff once hunted. The "lonesomeness" that Kenny associates with the wild geese reflects his own sense of loss of the past, his youth and, in particular, his brother Jeff, long since

killed in the Korean War. Buckler's juxtaposing of opposites also structures the narrative and contributes to the story's fundamental irony. The brothers share a close relationship, but they are opposite in nature. Wordless demonstrations of love succeed in resolving conflicts when verbal articulation fails. The past, symbolized by youth, innocence and life, Buckler sets against the present, symbolized by age, experience and death. But love endures, triumphing over time, death and misunderstandings.

"Cleft Rock, With Spring" (1957), a rather contrived and unsatisfactory story about a young married couple, illustrates how a physical and spiritual return to the past can resolve present tensions.⁴³ By travelling back to their childhood country haunts, Madge, a city girl, hopes to revive the "original happiness" (p. 89) of her marriage with Ken, a country boy now living in the city. Years of urban living have alienated Ken and Madge from each other. The country landscape they pass through on their journey back to the past reflects their emotional return to their childhood and former innocence. Although the trail they follow to the spring is overgrown and nearly impassable, the spring, like their love, remains essentially unchanged. Although reaching the spring, a symbol of renewal, proves difficult, once there, its water provides an emotional rebirth for their parched and sterile relationship. When they discover an old ox-shoe nail ring, a symbol of their former innocence and affection for one another, Ken reveals suddenly his feelings of insecurity at being a country boy. His admission that he has always felt inadequate in the face of Madge's "city-grained" (p. 90) easiness contradicts dramatically her understanding of her husband's self-assured appearances. Ken's self-revelation seems to promise reconciliation for them, but the story's conclusion takes

a disconcerting twist. Madge pretends to Ken that his confession must be intended to bolster her ego because she certainly never thought he was inadequate in any way. Privately, however, Madge pities Ken, patronizes him and considers him to be as vulnerable as a child. Thus, Madge's verbal ambiguity, which the reader recognizes as ironic, and her deliberate deception of Ken prevent an honest reconciliation and discredit the supposed sense of renewal. In consequence, Buckler intends the reader to regard this conclusion as ambiguous and unresolved. This particular kind of verbal irony and intentional undercutting reappear in a similar relationship between Sheila and Rex Giorno in The Cruellest Month.

Each of Buckler's stories, like each of his longer works, depicts a character's search for love in the light of incongruities and the conflict between appearance and reality, his subjective illusions and objective reality, expectation and experience. Whether a child, a husband or father, the hero of the short story discovers eventually how love relationships reconcile those disparities and rescue him from alienation. The hero who is a victim of his own deluded nature fails to recognize love as the ultimate and true value in life and continues to suffer the psychological conflict associated with the contrast between inner longings and outward conditions. The various ironies which arise from the discrepancies between a father's and son's consciousness, the city and the country, the family and the stranger, and the past and the present reveal Buckler's view that life's cruel twists and events are survivable only through love relationships. Indeed, when love exists, the Buckler hero experiences in his everyday

living the perfection and idealism for which he longs. The contradiction between illusion and reality Buckler overcomes by dramatizing the possibility of the love between two people. Far more of Buckler's short stories conclude with this positive view of human life than with a despairing, nihilistic view of man's inability to satisfy his longings that doom him to figurative and absolute isolation. Those stories which illustrate the former point of view anticipate The Cruellest Month and Nova Scotia: Window On the Sea. Those illustrating the latter share the tragic qualities of The Mountain and The Valley and Ox Bells and Fireflies. Buckler's philosophy remains consistent, nevertheless: love transcends, even defeats, time's erosion of existence, irony and death. The reader recognizes in these short stories Buckler's emphasis in his content and characterization the fundamental contrast between appearance and reality and the incongruities which create irony. This awareness of irony is shared, for the most part, with the characters involved, and even when the recognition of contrasting perceptions comes years later, the new understanding assures a continuation of the original love relationship.

Notes

¹Ernest Buckler, "One Quiet Afternoon", Esquire (April 1940), pp. 70, 199-201.

²_____, The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, ed., Robert Chambers, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

³Ibid., dustjacket.

⁴Alan Young, review of The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, Dalhousie Review, LV (1975), 387.

⁵D.O. Spettigue, review of The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, Queen's Quarterly, LXXX (1975), 658.

⁶Francis Mansbridge, "Simple Stories", review of The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, Canadian Literature, (1975), 117.

⁷Linda Sandler, review of The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, The Tamarack Review, (1976), 86.

⁸John Orange, "Buckler Revisited", Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (1976), 184.

⁹Cameron, Conversations, p. 10.

¹⁰Orange, "Buckler Revisited", 182.

¹¹Ibid., 183.

¹²Young, Buckler, p. 12.

¹³Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 23.

¹⁴Ernest Buckler, Introduction to "The Quarrel", Chatelaine, XXXVI (July 1959), 65.

¹⁵Dooley, Moral Vision, p. 59.

¹⁶Ernest Buckler, "Penny In The Dust", Maclean's, LXI (December 15, 1948), 18-19. Chambers, pp.3-7.

¹⁷Orange, "Buckler Revisited", 182.

¹⁸Ernest Buckler, "The Rebellion of Young David", Maclean's, LXIV (November 15, 1951), 22-23, 36-38. Chambers, pp. 7-17.

As well, David's fall from the barn roof parallels David Canaan's fall from the barn rafters in The Mountain and The Valley. Both characters suffer from self-destructive isolation and intolerable contradictions.

¹⁹Ernest Buckler, "The First Born Son", Esquire (July 1941), pp. 54-55, 114. Chambers, pp. 18-27.

²⁰Young, Buckler, p. 12.

²¹Ernest Buckler, "Another Christmas", Saturday Night, LVII (December 20, 1941), 25. Chambers, pp. 29-34.

²²Young, Buckler, p. 12.

²³Ernest Buckler, "Glance In The Mirror", Atlantic Advocate, XLVII (January 1957), 53, 55. Chambers, pp. 133-138.

²⁴_____, "You Could Go Anywhere Now", Saturday Night, LXII (November 2, 1946), 28-29. Chambers, pp. 34-38.

²⁵_____, "No Second Cup", The Trinity University Review (December 1933), 74-76.

²⁶BColl., Box 2, Ernest Buckler, "The Locket", unpublished.

²⁷BColl., Box 2, Ernest Buckler, "The Trains Go By", unpublished.

²⁸BColl., Box 4, Buckler to Edward Aswell, September 10, 1946.

²⁹ Ernest Buckler, "The Quarrel", Maclean's, LXII (January 15, 1949), 5-6, 24, 26-27. Chambers, pp. 41-53.

³⁰ Buckler, Introduction to "The Quarrel", p. 65.

³¹ Ibid., p. 65

³² Ibid., p. 65.

³³ Ibid., p. 65.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

³⁵ Ernest Buckler, "The Clumsy One", Maclean's, LXII (August 1, 1950), 8-9, 28-30. Chambers, pp. 53-64.

³⁶ _____, "The Dream and The Triumph", Chatelaine, XXVII (November 1956), 13, 33-36. Chambers, pp. 67-81.

³⁷ _____, "A Present For Miss Merriam", Chatelaine, XXIX (December 1952), 8, 36-39. Chambers, pp. 81-97.

³⁸ _____, Biographical note in Chatelaine, XXXII (July 1956), 65.

³⁹ _____, "Long, Long After School", Atlantic Advocate, L (November 1959), 42-44. Chambers, pp. 122-126.

⁴⁰ _____, "Last Delivery Before Christmas", Chatelaine, XXVI (December 1953), 11, 30, 34-36, 38-40. Chambers, pp. 97-113.

⁴¹ _____, Ox Bells and Fireflies, p. 21.

⁴² _____, "The Wild Goose", Atlantic Advocate, L (October 1959), 91-95. Chambers, pp. 115-121.

⁴³ _____, "Cleft Rock, With Spring", Atlantic Advocate, XLVIII (October, 1957), 89-91. Chambers, pp. 126-132.

Chapter II

The Mountain and The Valley

In the years preceding publication of The Mountain and The Valley, Buckler's career had developed through the writing and publication of his short stories. According to Buckler, his first novel was one he "had to write," and the "six years the novel took, I spent in almost complete isolation."¹ The seeds of this novel appear to have germinated some years earlier in his short stories. As the correspondence from the years reveals, his ideas for a novel had been taking shape for some time.²

As early as 1937, Buckler quotes from the novel he claims to be writing, "when David closed his eyes at night, all the strange horde of imagination swarmed, seething, into his brain - - the bewildering multiplicity of memory, the teeming variety of perception, the infinite permutations of speech."³ Alan Young recognizes in this quotation "an intriguing but unconscious anticipation of the inner turmoil of David Canaan which is to become the central concern of the completed novel some fifteen years later."⁴ In 1939, Buckler mentions to Burton Rascoe of Doubleday-Doran his interest in writing a "farm" novel, "Stories of country life are the ones I write easiest and like to write best, and I am taking the liberty to enclose a carbon of the last one of that type which I sent to 'Esquire', with the hope that you will read it and tell me if you think I could make the grade with a novel along that line."⁵ By 1946, Buckler had focussed his subject on the war, but in a letter to Edward Aswell of Harper Brothers, Buckler wonders if it is "too late for

a book which has anything to do with the war?"⁶ He sent Aswell three stories with war themes, "The Trains Go By," "Thanks For Listening" and "Indian Summer," with the comment that they are "my best and have in them the foetus of a novel."⁷ These three stories, wrote Buckler, had been written "several years ago" and were "merely indications of what I have in mind." The novel's "main theme is embodied in the one, 'The Trains Go By', the frustration of a young man who has to see it all happen to someone else." But, because of their unpopular war theme, all three stories were returned to Buckler, with the suggestion that he "broaden the base of your idea and make the war only an incident in the story of a young man forced to watch life from the sidelines."⁸ Although Aswell's critic, Elizabeth Laurence, considered the stories "extremely nice," she found it "difficult with only the hints you have given to know how your idea of the frustrated young man would expand into a novel. The narrative line in all of these stories is quite slight." Alan Young suggests that Buckler may have expanded the novel's scope as a result of Laurence's advice.⁹

The title Buckler chose early on for his novel, The Mountain and The Valley, suggests the divided nature of his characters, and, according to Buckler, it "immediately fell into my mind, right at the first...fell, that is without seeking, as if it had already been formed somewhere and waiting. So using it was something like following a compulsive hunch."¹⁰ Buckler had considered alternate titles, such as "The Twins," "The Alien," "The Family" and "The Near and The Far," which illustrate the dualities and contrasts of his themes.¹¹ He chose The Mountain and The Valley which he believed "covers the thing very well, I feel, symbolically."¹²

While supporting himself with the sale of his short stories,

Buckler worked "intermittently" on his novel, and by 1950 had it "about half done. That is, the structure is all blocked out, and a good bit of the first draft done."¹³ In this same letter to Naomi Burton, Buckler claims, for the first time, that his novel "is psychological as all get out (with a background of Nova Scotia rural life, the nature of whose people I feel I know pretty well from being one of them, and whom I've never seen adequately delineated anywhere) - - perhaps (if you'll pardon the structure of this sentence!) to the point of afflicting sales potentiality. The poor man's Henry James?"

In the spring of 1951, Buckler finally submitted his novel to Dudley Cloud at The Atlantic Monthly Press, with the comment that "this isn't the tentative draft I had in mind when I wrote to you originally. I couldn't bear not to keep at it until I felt that it was just as good as I could do."¹⁴ Buckler goes on to say that "I'm glad the project is done. It has been a long, long job, and meant much blood, sweat, and tears." The editors at Atlantic, however, rejected the novel. According to Cloud, "The principle adverse criticism, however, concerns the lack of narrative movement in the story."¹⁵ One editor, E. P. Shiverick, summarized what many editors said about Buckler's novel, "I sometimes couldn't see the woods for the trees. And you get so deep inside David that you no longer know what sort of person he is, or how he would strike an outsider; actually, I think this is necessary, but it makes for sticky going...there is nothing pornographic, but lots of ripe Anglo-Saxon filth. People who don't like the book will find it dull and pretentious. It bored me, but I must admit I was impressed."¹⁶ The "ripe Anglo-Saxon filth" Buckler defended as "entirely in the interest of accuracy...I know that the companions of

my childhood, anyway, would have made the New York stage blush."¹⁷

Buckler next offered his novel to Harper's editors and to those at Random House, but both publishers turned it down.¹⁸ The editors at Random House, like those at Atlantic earlier, read the novel with "genuflections to occasional passages, particularly of landscape depiction, but with the feeling that the novel is inordinately long for the story it has to tell and without quite enough narrative drive and interest to hold out promise of successful revision."¹⁹ Finally, in 1952, Henry Holt accepted Buckler's novel for publication.²⁰ Holt's editor, Jonathon Leff, suggested revisions "aimed at tightening the narrative, while others are for clarification. None is intended to effect a qualitative change."²¹ According to Buckler, Leff had captured his "intent exactly."²² By April 1952, Buckler had completed the revisions, and in October of that same year, Holt published The Mountain and The Valley. Several years later, in 1961, McClelland and Stewart published the novel in Canada.²³ After the long years spent writing his novel and then finding a publisher, Buckler expresses certain reservations in "My First Novel":

If a novel were to bear any physical likeness to its genesis, it would look more like one of those tortuous deltas of the nervous system. You pick it up. The print has a kind of almost strident assurance. As if it were quite satisfied with itself, whereas you were never absolutely sure you were satisfied with any of it. And it looks so immaculately clean. You'd half-expected that the hours of indecision about that particular passage, writing in and then rubbing out in your brain, would somehow turn up as a smudge on the physical page. 24

Critical reaction to The Mountain and The Valley in the United States was generally favourable. Reviewers, such as Stuart Keate, considered

it "perceptive and altogether first rate."²⁵ Although limited, Canadian recognition was equally favourable and reinforced Claude Bissell's judgment that it was "a fine Canadian novel, in many respects the best that has been written in this country."²⁶ Similarly, R. E. Watters called it the "most distinguished and promising first novel ever published by any Canadian anywhere."²⁷ The criticisms made by the early editors at Atlantic, Harper's and Random House returned to haunt Buckler. Stuart Keate commented that "nothing much exciting happens on the Canaan farm," and Edmund Fuller agrees that there is "a rather frustrating aimlessness" in the lives of the characters.²⁸ Although the language has what Keate calls a "haunting eloquence, an almost aching sensuality," it is frequently "overripe" and in need of a "sterner editorial pencil." But critic Katherine Douglas believes that Buckler's style "incorporates the simplicity and intensity" of a Van Gogh painting, and "indeed, Ernest Buckler is a painter, using words instead of colours."²⁹ ~~The most lasting~~ and most accurate opinion of Buckler's style of writing comes from Claude Bissell who considers Buckler "the only Canadian novelist who writes in what might be defined as the high metaphysical style."³⁰ Bissell defines his term "high metaphysical style" as "the reaching out of the mind and the sensitivities in many directions in order to encompass the full impact of an idea or a situation." Buckler's intense search for the exact word easily becomes a metaphysical search for precise language. Emily Beck, an editor at Atlantic, had criticized Buckler for his "extremely uneven" style: "He will devote pages and pages even a whole chapter to description that is mere reiteration or enumeration, until the original concept is quite worn out."³¹ Buckler admitted that, "Actually, if I'd let the thing cool off a little before I sent it in, I'd certainly have cut out a great deal of the

descriptive (and quite likely, other) passages myself."³² As well, he explains that,

I don't strive for pictureseque speech, as she [Emily Beck] says (though, I must confess, Reader's Digest have quoted me on that page). I loathe "rich, beautiful prose", as the New Yorker calls it, as much as she does. I never consciously attempt anything but a meticulous search for the absolutely accurate phrase. But I concede that however honestly the attempt at accuracy may be conceived it may still turn out to sound like a Thesauristic bastard.

Buckler explains how "if language comes out sometimes a little poetic, that's not because I'm straining to be picturesque; it's the very opposite. It's because I'm struggling for the accurate expression. (Aren't the deliberate approximations of prose sometimes the subtler affectation, anyway?)."³³

A psychological novel, The Mountain and The Valley deals with the isolation, tragedy and ironic fate of David Canaan whose consciousness forms the centre of the novel. Buckler suggests that the psychological nature of the work makes it "more of a picture than a development."³⁴ When criticized for the novel's lack of action, Buckler defended his psychological approach in the following way, "The novel is intended to have a cumulative effect. It's supposed to be an integral novel of character, rather than one in which action is its own excuse, chapter by chapter."³⁵ In a letter to his literary agent, Harold Ober, Buckler defines the novel's purpose:

It is meant to be a psychological cross-section of life in a small Nova Scotia village about the time 1910-43, with particular focus on one particular family, the Canaan's. This is a village not unlike the one I grew up in, myself, and though the story is not autobiographical in the literal sense, I

feel that its subject matter is something which I know thoroughly and at first hand...I hope its several intentions are clear enough, inasmuch as a good many of them are by implication: for example, how these people are no less intricate for being inarticulate; the gradual dispersal of family-oneness in the leading characters and (in parallel) in the village as progress (?) laps closer; how the day itself is an extra character in every situation, these people living as they do, in the very house of the weather. 36

According to Buckler, the novel is "not autobiographical in the literal sense," but in the figurative sense, his family influenced his characterizations. ³⁷ His family "didn't model for it (nor incidentally, did I, except as an occasional stand-in), but nurtured it nonetheless."

The work's circular time structure reflects Buckler's desire for a "cumulative effect" and constant sensitivity to contrast and irony. According to the author, time and space "are absolutely riddled with inconsistencies" as "mere 'forms' of thinking...because only those contents which we can impose them upon can ever be known by us at all."³⁸ In the Prologue, David Canaan stands in present time, in the following six parts, he moves through his past life, and in the Epilogue, he returns to the present time. In both the novel's form and content, Buckler considers the boundless, metaphorical nature of time where "every time and space means time and space related to a time and space next to it and so on, forever."³⁹ Memory transcends as well as unifies time and space by bringing the past forward to be re-experienced in Proust-like visions of time recaptured. Buckler, like Proust, rejects conventional chronology to explore a reality outside time where man may be free from time's erosion and remember events with all the vivid actuality of their original impression.⁴⁰ In ways similar to William Faulkner, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Buckler

forces his readers to grapple with temporal sequences which consciously defy regular chronology. Moving full circle from the Prologue to the Epilogue, the novel encloses David Canaan's entire life in a single day of recollection that, to some degree, recalls Joyce's compression of lives into one day in Ulysses and Eliot's view of time as cyclical in Four Quartets:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. 41

As R. E. Watters suggests, the Prologue and Epilogue illustrate how "every moment of our lives is the cumulative total of every preceding moment, and that we are what we are because of what we were."⁴²

In addition to this external structure of cyclical time, Buckler provides internal circles of time within the rug and the weather motifs. Symbolically, the rug binds together the people and events of the past with the present. Its construction cuts across the man-made boundaries of time and space to interpret seemingly unrelated events into an entirely new, cohesive network of human experience and relationships. Ironically, the rug epitomizes the unified, structured pattern of articulation that David seeks for but never finds in the pursuit of art. Buckler intended the rug "to illuminate either situation or character...to show how the apparently blind and capricious turns of their fortune are the inevitable outcome of circumstance and inheritance."⁴³ The strips of clothing that Ellen hooks catalogue the events of the past which shape the present lives of the Canaan family.

The weather Buckler uses as an "extra character," and not, as Emily Beck suggested, "an excuse for words."⁴⁴ Buckler admits that

"There is a great deal of weather in the book, I know. But I feel, from experience, that, in a place like this, it is a (if not the) main character; and it was never introduced except as I felt that if the day had been otherwise, so would have been feeling, thought, and action."⁴⁵ The weather creates not only a cosmic backdrop for the characters and the action but also a sense of continuity between man and his environment. The weather, which structures the rural events and functions as both an agent of pathetic fallacy and of the indifferent, natural world, creates an ironic background to Buckler's narrative. When, for example, Joseph leaves to cut the keel, the wind blows away Martha's words of reconciliation that probably would have prevented Joseph's accidental death.

Buckler's "high metaphysical style" of writing reflects his view that the artist must find a single plan which, ultimately, unifies all things. By shining an individual light on each separate part of experience, Buckler reveals its particular beauty and meaning. He then unites each separate part through metaphor and identification. In many respects, Buckler's use of metaphor resembles mathematical equations based on similes and conceits. His academic career in mathematics may account for his often calculated style wherein many disparate objects and experiences total one single vision, one feeling, one metaphor. This particular passage describing David Canaan's childhood Christmas illustrates how Buckler transforms a collection of individual articles and actions into one, single, cumulative moment of experience:

The room was snug with the bunching of the furniture and the little splendour of eating there on a week-day. And when Martha held the match to the lamp wick, all at once the yellow lamplight soft-shadowed their faces (with the blood running warm in them after

being out in the cold) like a flood and gathered the room all in from outside the windows. It touched the tree and the hemlock and the great red bell with the flaw no one could even notice, like a soft breath added to the beating of the room's heart: went out and came back with a kind of smile. The smell of the tree grew suddenly and the memory of the smell of the oranges and the feel of the nuts. In that instant suddenly, ecstatically, burstingly, buoyantly, enclosingly, sharply, safely, stingingly, watchfully, batedly, mountingly, softly, ever so softly, it was Christmas Eve. (pp. 64-65)

Buckler relies on recurring images and symbols to create in his novel a pattern and structure. For example, the lamp comes to symbolize family unity and the warmth of the farm kitchen. The Christmas season becomes synonymous with perfection, harmony and a magical suspension in time. The train represents the world outside the valley, David's entrapment on the farm and is associated with death and alienation. Similarly, the sea represents adventure and escape to exotic places, but it also becomes aligned with death and separation. The Baptising Pool is associated with a loss of innocence, a baptism into adulthood and entry into the world of experience. The bridge on the highway literally and figuratively separates the mountain and the valley and symbolizes the passage to personal fulfilment in another world beyond the valley. These recurring images Buckler uses so masterfully that simply to hear the train whistle, for example, indicates David's longing for fulfilment. By structuring the novel around strong, central symbols, Buckler entitles his sections "The Rug," "The Play," "The Letter," "The Valley," "The Rock," "The Scar," "The Train" and "The Mountain." The significance of each division is identified immediately by the single image.

The mountain and the valley have particular meaning in the novel

as polarities which illustrate Buckler's concern with opposites: the infinite and the finite, the spiritual and the physical, the artist and the farmer, illusion and reality. The mountain symbolizes all time, past, present and future, unified and transcended through the imagination. Existing outside time, the mountain Buckler associates with illusion as it offers a sanctuary from the guilt, ironic contradictions, psychological conflict, death and isolation experienced in the valley below. While the mountain represents to David Canaan spiritual and emotional freedom, the valley represents reality where time erodes every form of human existence and where death contradicts all human aspirations. The valley community of Entremont, nestled below the mountain, represents the physical world that David Canaan finds frequently intolerable and ironic. The mountain symbolizes the imaginative world and the beautiful sphere of illusion that David longs to exist in. The contrast between these two worlds of the mountain and the valley Buckler exploits as a motif for the novel's structure, and the disparities between these two central symbols create a tension that, in turn, creates irony. Thus, the landscape of the novel mirrors the internal landscape of the protagonist, David Canaan.

— The Prologue "The Rug" begins the novel in present time with old grandmother Ellen, like one of the Three Fates, chronicling the Canaan family history in her rug of patterned, concentric circles.⁴⁶ She will complete this same rug in the Epilogue to bring the novel full circle and to illustrate the cyclical nature of time. Old age has weakened Ellen's sight and replaced the earlier complexity of "scrolls and flowers" (p. 15) patterns with a "target pattern of circles radiating from the centre of the canvas" (p. 15), a pattern which represents life's cyclical

configuration and the family's fortunes. Time has narrowed Ellen's sight to an inner vision of memory in which family relationships endure in her rugs. Another "time and space builder," Ellen becomes in R. E. Watters's estimation, "a symbol also of the eternal present whose function is always the inter-weaving of our yesterdays with our todays in some kind of useful and meaningful pattern."⁴⁷ Ellen is Buckler's counterpart in the novel. As the genuine artist figure, she demonstrates in her rug-hooking the unified pattern of art necessary for creative expression. Ellen possesses the intuitive power of artistic creation that David consciously seeks but cannot discover for himself. Thus, the rug symbolizes true art that combines time and families and their infinite experiences, language and emotions. Ellen selects particular fragments of life represented by the garments to express the whole of life's experiences and relationships. Her rugs, therefore, capture what Buckler calls "the infinite language of human relations" and render the past and the present indistinguishable.⁴⁸ Buckler uses the garments in the rug as catalysts for Ellen's memory which forms the unifying pattern for the rug's construction. Buckler's technique resembles Proust's madeleine incident that dramatizes the memorie involuntaire, the sudden, spontaneous recollections that are once more tangibly present though thought to be buried and forgotten.⁴⁹

The rug-hooking parallels the action in the novel and often refers to events not dealt with directly in the narrative. Ellen's ordering of the strips defies conventional chronology but reflects the wearer's status in the family, and her colours are symbolically related to each character. The single circles of varied colours represent each member of the Canaan family except David. The border of the rug is dark and symbolic of death.

Buckler uses the rug to define the lives and fates of the Canaan family. Richard Canaan's death begins the rug, and David Canaan's death will complete it and mark the death of a rural family and way of life as well. Ellen chooses to represent David with a double circle of red fabric from the tablecloth stained with his blood after his fall in the barn. Thus, David becomes the focus of the rug and its memories. Inside this double red circle which emphasizes David's distance from the rest of the family members, Ellen incorporates a strip of ethereal blue cloth. Originally, the blanket used to wrap the twins David and Anna the night they were born, this blue fabric now points backward to David's childhood and forward to the "solid blue" (p. 13) of the mountain where he will die. Anna occupies two positions in Ellen's rug. She is outside the double red circles, included with the family because she is not as psychologically isolated from them as David. But as David's twin, however, she appears also inside the circles with him. At the center of the rug, Ellen hooks a fragment of white lace which represents herself and her unified vision of art.

While Ellen and her rug unify time and experience "with the steady staccato like the sounds of seconds dropping" (p. 13), David stands at the kitchen window, isolated physically and psychologically from the world he sees outside the house, "it was as if another glass, beyond the glass of the window pane, covered everything, made touch between any two things impossible" (p. 14). This other glass separating David from the rest of life represents his individual consciousness at odds with society's consciousness. David seeks a metaphorical existence wherein subject and object join in a unified level of awareness. David cannot, however, reconcile the contradictions between the reality of his environment and the

idealism of his illusions. In a letter to his agent, Harold Ober, Buckler defines David's psychological conflict as

the recurrent dichotomy in David's nature (Country boy or city boy? Naive or sophisticate? Harsh or tender? Homebody or alien? Over-child or over-adult? Serious or comic?) will be seen to be traceable, inevitably, to the heritage of Ellen's perceptiveness and romanticism, his mother's alternate open-heartedness and melancholy, his father's dogged will. 50

In the same letter, Buckler claims that David's internal struggle to resolve these ironies forms the novel's nucleus, "The main subject, of course, is the tragic dichotomy in David, the protagonist's nature; and the interplay of it with the intricate and exceedingly closely-knit family relationships, and with the opposing fascination of the outside world."

John Moss, in Patterns of Isolation, describes David as one of "the individual protagonists engaged in the mortal struggle to know themselves, to accept the conflicting conditions of inner and external realities within their separate consciousnesses."⁵¹ As Moss suggests, the crux of the novel rests in David's individual consciousness and his awareness that he is different from others. This knowledge, Moss continues, causes David's isolation. Throughout his entire life, David struggles to escape the ironic dichotomy between his imagination and his actual experiences. He aspires to a metaphorical existence where, according to Northrop Frye, "the distinction between subject and object disappears in favour of a unified consciousness."⁵² Ironically, David will achieve such a metaphorical state of total identification only in death.

With all his thoughts and feelings subsumed in the emptiness, David stands at the window, a spectator of life, isolated and suspended in the

moment. The "high metaphysical style" that Buckler uses to describe the frozen, December landscape is the language of identification which David seeks for himself. The bare winter landscape personifies his numbed, alienated consciousness; it appeared "as if all their life had fled its own nakedness" (p. 14). The surrounding mountains which "shut the valley in completely" (p. 14) isolate Entremont geographically from the rest of the world while David's consciousness separates him from the rest of his community. While Ellen sits hooking her rug, David makes his final exit from his family, and he enters his inner self, abandons the valley for the mountain and life for death.

In the early years of Parts One, Two and Three, the Canaan family and the Entremont society form an almost idyllic, protective circle of love around David. These Edenic days of childhood and literal isolation reflect the innocence and beauty that Buckler and David associate with the past and the way it was. Buckler returns to the past with a series of vignettes introducing the Canaan family in the rural simplicity of Entremont. Claude Bissell describes the Canaan family and the Entremont community as "wedded to the ancestral ways and the crude, monotonously repeated phrases which serve among them for human communication. The community, moreover, is primitive and unprogressive, and David can find no allies among his daily associates."⁵³ But when cast in the warm light of perfection and nostalgia, these family scenes symbolize David's halcyon days of youth when the family exists whole, bound by love and free from conflict. To create tension within his content, Buckler incorporates ominous signs to illustrate the disparity between life's ideal appearances and its disappointing realities:

Incidentally, their lives are all a sort of decrescendo (the idyllic part of them, coming at the first, may make for an apparently slow, conflictless, beginning; yet the "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" is supposed to be implicit almost immediately; but if you consider their peaks of peculiarly vivid happiness, I figure their balance of satisfaction is actually positive. 54

This early section dealing with David's childhood and family relationships establishes, in large part, the discrepancy that Buckler stresses concerning the ideal past and the disillusioning present, the family whole and the family disintegrated.

David's divided nature Buckler clearly reveals to the reader in "The Play." David, like the short story protagonists, possesses heightened sensitivities and a "word-shaped," imaginative consciousness that collides with the consciousnesses of his family and community. The duelling forces within David alternately alienate him and integrate him with the Canaan family and the Entremont community. Ironically, he can be both articulate and inarticulate, refined and crude, sensitive and insensitive, imaginative and literal. David never truly belongs in Entremont or anywhere else, for that matter. His inherently contradictory nature prevents both complete integration with his society and fulfilling love relationships. Indeed, one of the novel's cruelest ironies is that David **"was neither one thing nor the other"** (p. 171). The conflicting drives in David create a sense of guilt. In his "Plans For Work," Buckler summarizes David's character as fundamentally divided and the basis for his delusions and alienation:

The seed of his tragedy is a recurrent dichotomy in his nature. He is brilliant in school, but one ambition is substituted too readily for another. When he gets the right answer to an algebra problem four grades ahead of him, he is going to be the greatest mathematician in the whole world. When he

hears the fiddle music at the dance after the chopping frolic, he is going to be the greatest violinist. He has an affinity with truly refined people (like an epidemic germ in a remote place, though there has been no carrier); but he can identify himself, without self-consciousness on either's part, with the roughest of his neighbours. He never doubts that he will be a figure in the city, yet he loves this country place more profoundly than any of them. He has the family-feeling strongest, though in a sort of self-biting savagery he is the one sometimes who deliberately hurts the others most. He has a frightening seriousness and, at the same time, a clown's humor. He is vulnerably sensitive and irreverently coarse. He is never entirely "en rapport" with anyone, except Anna. 55

The fishing trip illustrates the sharp dichotomy in David's nature and introduces us to his relationship with his father, Joseph, and his brother, Chris. The understanding and inter-action between David and Chris parallel those in the short stories, such as "No Second Cup" (1933) and "The Clumsy One" (1950). David's slight build, fair complexion and word-shaped consciousness contrast with Chris's muscular frame, dark colouring and fundamental earthiness. But these differences in body and mind unite the brothers. David closes the gap between their intellectual and verbal skills with bawdy, farm jokes that Chris enjoys. Chris, meanwhile, compensates for David's physical weakness with his superior strength. Buckler's choice of names for the brothers suggests biblical references that reinforce their roles in the novel. As the imaginative and clever brother who promises to bring honour to the Canaan family and his society, David resembles the Old Testament David, the ideal King of Israel who composed poetry and music for his Hebrew race. Chris resembles his namesake, a man of giant stature who bore the Christ child across a stream. Saint Christopher, the Christ bearer, was adopted as the patron

saint of travellers and various classes of artisans and workers, including mariners and ferrymen. Thus, the physically strong Chris Canaan supports the frail David Canaan whom Buckler occasionally associates with Christ.

The scene where Chris carries David to the house after he has fallen from the barn rafters, for example, bears out Buckler's biblical allusion. Their different natures Buckler defines according to their dreams the night before the fishing trip. Although both boys dream about a failed quest for unity, David dreams about a search for a unified consciousness while Chris dreams about his need for a sexual union in the flesh.

In the same way that David and Chris mirror the brother relationships in earlier short stories, David and his father, Joseph, resemble the father and sons in such stories as "David Comes Home" (1944) and "Penny In The Dust" (1948). Joseph physically and mentally resembles Chris with whom he shares a strong, intuitive bond. Buckler describes Joseph as "the fearless, sober, inarticulate one whose stubborn strength is made pliant only by the tenderness for his family."⁵⁶ Like other Buckler father figures, Joseph belongs in the valley community, in harmony with the land and is fulfilled by the labour of his hands. The relationship between Joseph and David is a loving but slightly strained bond because of their opposite sensibilities and manners of expression. Joseph responds to the world literally through deeds, whereas David responds imaginatively through words. In Joseph's presence, David feels self-conscious about his idealistic visions and creative thoughts:

When he was alone with his father, he didn't know what to say. The quick things in his mind sounded foolish even to himself. Not that Joseph would laugh at them. There'd be an anxiety in him almost,

to listen, and to understand. But somehow David would be struck shy when he started to talk; and then, when he didn't speak true to his thoughts, he'd feel as if he were keeping a secret from the person he could most trust. (p. 27)

These inner tensions David hopes to escape during the fishing trip to the mountain when he and Joseph and Chris will achieve perfect harmony, "Just us together" (p. 27). They will be free from the valley reality which continually exposes David's physical short-comings and forces concealment of his imagination.

This fishing trip up the log road to the mountain anticipates and parallels David's final climb up the mountain in the Epilogue. In both instances, David's glorified expectations of harmony and perfection are ironically contradicted by reality and revealed to be illusions. As David nears the mountain on this childhood excursion with his father and brother, he becomes increasingly ecstatic, wishing to stop time and capture what he perceives as their ideal moment of togetherness. In an attempt to make ordinary reality as extraordinary as his illusions, David projects his exaggerated idealism onto everything around him. When fishing alone, with Joseph and Chris, David "let his mind not think" (p. 58), and his senses unite with all of nature into a metaphorical moment which transforms his divided self into wholeness. As he moves out of himself into everything around him, he decides that "this was the best time he'd ever had" (p. 59). These translations occur free from inhibiting self-consciousness, and, as Laurence Ricou suggests, when David's "thought is suspended, when thoughts themselves combine and interrelate until everything is fused in a visionary trance."⁵⁷ This metaphorical moment returns in his final climb, and then, as now, death contradicts his vision of wholeness.

When David comes nearest the mountain, he thinks he is finally experiencing his fantasy of an ideal. But the disruptive valley realities intrude, fracturing David's fragile sense of continuity with the news that Peter Delahunt and Spurge Gorman have drowned. "The moment he saw the other men, the day changed...Somehow David knew they wouldn't be going back on the mountain today at all" (p. 40). With the ideal day "burst and parts of it striking all around" (p. 41), David retreats from the "heartless" (p. 41) conversation of the men into his imagination. There he consoles himself with the fantasy that "He was going to be the greatest general in the whole world" (p. 41). This self-deceiving fantasy typifies what will become David's reaction to all psychological conflict and intolerable contradiction, in particular that on the mountain when he imagines himself to be the greatest writer in the world.

In addition to the irony involving David's visions, Buckler includes the irony that "Pete went through the war, without a scratch" (p.41) only to drown at home in seven feet of water. This illogical turn of events demonstrates Buckler's view of the "thesis of accidental determination" which makes Joseph's statement, "That's the way she goes" (p. 41), the only rational response. The ironic fate of Pete Delahunt reinforces Buckler's argument that the universe, in particular the natural world, is indifferent to man's existence and aspirations and acts blindly in relation to man's longings. Indeed, the senselessness of Pete's death supports the nihilism inherent in Joseph's comment and which causes David to flee from such horrifying truth into his illusions.

To underscore the irony in David's excursion, Buckler juxtaposes the fishing trip with the experiences of Ellen, Anna and Martha. Ellen

tells Anna her sailor story which Buckler had written earlier as his unpublished short story, "The Locket." The story points up the parallels between David and Ellen. David hides his longings from Joseph in the same way that Ellen once hid a runaway sailor, symbolic of her own youthful desires, from her pragmatic husband, Richard. When in her story Ellen equates the call of the sea with the sound of the train whistle, she foreshadows the climax in Part Six of the novel, "The Train," when the train bearing Toby to the sea passes by David in the field. Ellen's sailor story reveals how she struggled, as David will, with the conflict between her longings for adventure and her practical farm life. Like David, Ellen has the feeling "that everything is somewhere else" (p. 34). Only Ellen's love relationship with her husband, Richard, resolved those tensions and made bearable her country life. Ellen's sense of loneliness as a young woman mirrors David's, whose alienation is also intensified by the appearance of a sailor. Unlike Ellen, however, David will not be sustained by love, and he will suffer a lonely, desperate fate.

Ellen tells her sailor story to Anna whose innocent exclamation that she will one day marry a sailor who will die young like Ellen's sailor foreshadows her marriage to Toby Richmond and her fascination with life beyond the valley. As John Moss claims, the sailor connection to Ellen and Anna is of great importance: "For Ellen the sailor becomes David; for Anna, he becomes Toby. Yet they are the same. The identity between David and Toby is inextricably forced into union through Ellen's locket containing a picture of her young love."⁵⁸ Moss points out that "Ellen's sailor story provides a merging point of identity for the whole family," in particular Anna, Toby and David.

Anna shares, in part, her twin's inner struggle to accept the contradictions between actual experiences and idealized expectations. Like David, Anna seeks to capture in words the essence of all experience. Buckler tells us that they "do not act alike or think alike," but, in his mind, David believes that Anna alone "understood everything he told her, exactly."⁵⁹ As a child, David feels most comfortable with Anna because, with her, he experiences none of the anxiety and tension felt with others. Eventually, their brother and sister relationship disintegrates, revealing to David the ironic truth that their consciousnesses were not identical but complementary and mirror images of each other.

As a literary symbol, twins represent two opposites which can have a synthesizing, complementary function. Anna and David come to represent two opposite choices in life. Anna leaves the valley for Halifax where she marries Toby whose association with the sea links Anna closely with far away places, the war and, eventually, death by drowning. David, who tries in vain to escape from the valley to the outside world of the city and the sea, never marries and is kept out of the war by a weak heart that finally kills him. Although Anna and David take different routes, they arrive at the same destination of sterility and figurative isolation. The only difference between them is **David's vision of love and unity on the mountain moments before his death**. Anna, Toby's young widow living alone in the city and forever alienated from the farm, has no such **illusory escape**.

Martha Canaan resembles her son, David, physically, sharing his sensibility and love of beauty in her desire to adorn an otherwise drab farm life. Like the biblical Martha, patron saint of all good housewives,

Martha Canaan finds fulfilment in her home. The kitchen, a Buckler motif for the heart of a country family's simple goodness, is her single sanctuary where, alone but not lonely, she allows her imagination to flourish free from outside disturbances. Like David, she has a melancholy nature, and she often misinterprets appearances as reality. This flaw leads to her jealous quarrel with Joseph and results, indirectly, in his death and her own.

We first meet Effie Delahunt at her father's funeral, and Buckler shows us here how David, a victim of his own illusions, struggles in vain to recreate Effie's tragic and pathetic state into a fantasy of themselves as a prince and princess. Effie's genuine sorrow, however, overwhelms David's fantasy, contradicts his imaginary role as Effie's gallant knight, and forces him to abandon his illusions. As children, Effie and David appear highly sensitive to one another's feelings and, in different degrees, both are alienated from their society. In his "Notes on David and Effie," Buckler describes them as " 'different' " and this unites them.⁶⁰ Effie, " 'set apart' by her consciousness, [is] no whit less acute because it is not altogether explicit that her mother is subtly shunned." Unlike David who is capable of some social integration through his power of identification, Effie communicates only with him and Bess. Although David thinks that Effie occupies a central position in his life, he frequently sacrifices her feelings for his own. He fails to recognize this basic discrepancy in their relationship, deceiving himself that they are eternal soul-mates.

Buckler juxtaposes the disillusionment of the fishing trip with the Canaan's Christmas, a time of perfection when they are cut-off from the

outside world's disruptive forces and literally isolated at home. Having suspended their ordinary work, the members of the family now adhere more closely to David's perception of how their daily lives are made extraordinarily wonderful by the holiday. This magical time frame David divides into three special days: the day before Christmas, David anticipates the perfect holiday; on Christmas day, he experiences that perfection; the day after Christmas, he recollects that perfection in tranquility. Like the mountain time, the Christmas days exist in a "parenthesis in time" (p. 60) when objective reality reflects accurately David's idealistic inner dreams. The transformation, which unites humanity and the landscape, time and space, resembles the total identification of Buckler's metaphor and David's search for fulfilment and exact articulation. When, for example, Martha lights the kitchen lamp on Christmas Eve, David's sentience reaches an almost transcendental state of awareness: "In that instant suddenly, ecstatically, burstingly, buoyantly, enclosingly, sharply, safely, stingingly, watchfully, batedly, mountingly, softly, ever so softly, it was Christmas Eve" (p. 65). This moment of overwhelming euphoria anticipates David's ecstasy on the mountain when he seeks a similarly unifying light for his art but cannot recapture this perfect moment from childhood in language.

On this specific Christmas, David receives skates and the novel, Robinson Crusoe, gifts which illustrate his divided nature and foreshadow his future struggle between intuition and self-consciousness, uninhibited action and stultifying words. When he masters the art of crossing over his legs on skates, he immediately fantasizes that "he would be the best skater in the whole world" (p. 73). David's success on skates stems

from his unself-consciousness and his suspension of thought. When David moves beyond himself in such moments, he unifies his consciousness with his intuition and fulfils his imaginative longings. Robinson Crusoe's solitary existence prefigures David's future solitude, but David compares it to his family happily "marooned" (p. 75) in the exotic world of Christmas, innocently unaware of the novel's sense of exile and loneliness.

Buckler carefully undercuts the idyllic world of the Canaan Christmas with two small incidents, the appearance of Herb Hennessey and the family's ominous dreams. Buckler foreshadows David's isolation again when Entremont's 'type' character, Herb Hennessey, passes by the Canaan house. Feeling secure in the family relationships and the ecstasy of Christmas, David "felt only the sweetest, safest sort of exaltation: that such a thing could be, however incredibly, but not for him" (p. 65). Time and circumstance, however, make his statement wholly contradictory and, years later, when lonely as a 'type' himself, David would "wonder...if this now were some sort of justice for the unconscious cruelty of that thought" (p. 65). The family's dreams contradict the reader's and David's idealized perceptions and foreshadow the family's eventual disintegration. Martha dreams that she and Joseph are separated, and Joseph dies crushed under a tree. Chris dreams of Charlotte in the physical sense, but he remains unfulfilled. Anna dreams that a stranger comes to separate her from David. In his dream, David confronts Herb Hennessey cutting down a Christmas tree, a symbol of David's ideal perfection and his imagination. Meanwhile, a train whistle sounds out David's future entrapment on the farm. Only Ellen, whose future is her past and whose endurance triumphs over time and death, sleeps dreamlessly.

By prefacing the disastrous school play with the Christmas scenes, Buckler intensifies the dramatic irony of David's subsequent disillusionment and alienation. The school play, one of the most alienating events of David's childhood, exemplifies the destructiveness of his self-deceiving fantasies. When his society crushes his imaginative aspirations as an actor, David flees from the intolerable truth to isolate himself within his own consciousness.

The play introduces David to the dazzling power and beauty of words as "something no one else had" (p. 56) and as "a kind of refuge when the moment was bare, stripped right down to time and place" (p. 57). When his imagination cannot transcend unbearable reality, words capture and doubly translate the essence of experience, "as if he touched the very quick of the day" (p. 57). Words embody the consummate wholeness and beauty of Christmas, and they allow him ideal experiences and emotions which ordinary life denies him. On stage, words create an illusion of belonging, and David deludes himself that he has now captured the hearts and minds of the valley people in the audience who share in his glorious vision of fulfilment. For the first time, David feels a sense of total belonging, "This was better than the cosiness of doing anything alone. He'd never do anything alone again. He'd take them with him always, in their watching. Closer somehow because they followed" (p. 81). He exalts as he did the day of the fishing trip in his distinctive sensibilities which now unite rather than segregate him from the valley community. In David's mind, he and the valley people form "one great consummation" (p. 82) of himself. This dramatic world of make-believe David repeatedly declares "perfect" (p. 82), and he pities anyone, in particular his audience, who knows only the ordinary, real world. Reveling in the glory

of "understanding and showing them how everything was" (p. 81), David's euphoria casts an illusory light of fellowship out over everyone, "a shine like that went over everything now" (p. 81). **This magnanimous attitude returns to David on the mountain when he looks down on the valley to declare that the people there are the best in the world.**

David's understanding of the drama and his audience conflicts with that of the reader; this contrast in perceptions creates irony. As he sees himself forever integrated with the valley folks, David is, in the reader's view, standing alone on stage, separated from his society by the imaginary role of the Prince, watched by rather than included in the community. David's final declaration, "I will be the greatest actor in the whole world" (p. 82), bears out his delusions and pathetic self-deception. Deluded by his false sense of belonging and the power of words, David decides to transform art into life by acting out his dream. He kisses his Princess Effie, even though "that wasn't in the play, but that's how it would really be" (p. 82). Judd Spinney's crude jeer, "'That's it, Dave. Slap 'em to her!'" (p. 82), violently shocks David back to an unimaginative, bleak reality where "Shame struck first, then anger" (p. 83). David lashes out at the "goddam treacherous play" (p. 83) and the "foolish treacherous part of himself that listened to books" (p. 83). His inner reality is contradicted, according to Buckler, when "Suddenly the play turns sickly and flimsy in his mouth and he rushes away, grinding curses, and feeling in himself now the tough fibre of his father which his imaginativeness seems to have betrayed."⁶¹ The clear disparity between his expectations and his experience forces David into his own consciousness where he imagines punishing those "jeezless bastards" (p. 83) who have

humiliated him. Speaking the crude, ungrammatical language of the valley people, David sounds more akin to his rural society than he knows or wishes to recognize. Again, he is burdened with a divided nature that embodies two conflicting worlds. Words betray David in the play because human relations and understanding depend on simple love and not verbal articulation and exacting forms of art. His glorious vision of belonging in the valley through the power of art and drama dissolves in the face of true valley life and emotion.

When the play's magical, delusive spell vanishes, David deliberately fractures the family's unity by rejecting everyone's consolation and setting himself apart from their affection. Eventually, in his self-imposed exile, David feels a sense of guilt over his alienating, bitter behaviour, but the time for reconciliation with his family has passed, and the erosion of time has rendered him inarticulate. D. O. Spettigue associates David's "guilt at the failure to seize the offered moment in which harmony might have been restored" with the memory of ecstatic wholeness confronted with separation, dissolution and alienation.⁶² As Spettigue suggests, reconciliation eludes David because

the perversities of human nature wilfully distort emotion, preventing communication, until just the right combination of sense impressions and circumstance bursts the floodgates of remorse and longing, restores unity and duplicates in the present the desirable emotion of the past.

David, however, does not discover this combination of emotion and communication until his journey to the mountain. When it is too late, he understands how he "wilfully" inflicted suffering on those he loved simply because he could not capture that time for reconciliation and express his

feelings. Ironically, David, who places tremendous importance on words and verbal articulation, remains inarticulate on those occasions when words would rescue a shattered relationship.⁶³

On the day following the play, time has buried these guilt feelings inside David in the same way that the snow has "drifted over his tracks" (p. 86) made the night before and buried all trace of his flight through the landscape. The snow metaphor Buckler returns to frequently, in particular in the Epilogue where David himself lies buried in the snow with all evidence of his existence hidden. Snow and the colour white Buckler associates with a consciousness numbed by intense feelings, such as anger, frustration, fear and despair or loneliness. Then the distinct emotions and coloured images of the conscious, feeling mind whirl into a thought-suspended whiteness that blinds David to objective reality.

In Part Two, "The Letter," outsiders and other external forces begin to invade the positive, literal isolation of the Canaan family and to herald its ultimate disintegration. David gains awareness of his sexuality, the meaning of death, the past and the world beyond the valley. Chris's girlfriend, Charlotte Gorman, distances the brothers. Toby Richmond's correspondence with David undermines his relationship with Effie. Bess Delahunt unwittingly causes jealousy and discord between Martha and Joseph. Finally, Joseph's decision to build a new house climaxes all these changes in the family network.

The family's annual visit to the cemetery opens this section and casts a sombre light over the summer which David perceives as ideal. To transcend Charlotte Gorman's disruptive presence on the family trip, David lets his senses merge with the landscape's history where "the stain

of whatever had happened in any place remained for him there, however long afterward he came to it."⁶⁴ As yet a "young and echoless" (p. 89) child, David has no history "stain" (p. 89) of his own, but in time he stains his life with deeds and creates a past filled with guilt and inner blindness. His fall from the rafters will stain the tablecloth with his blood, his cheek with the scar and his relationship with Chris with alienation and misunderstanding.

Unlike Grandmother Ellen who peacefully accepts the knowledge of death, David struggles and fails to comprehend death's "inaccessible mystery" (p. 91). His word-shaped mind cannot grasp the meaning of death which has "no language" (p. 91) or the significance of the past which is only "the stain of the word 'ago'" (p. 91). His imagination focusses instead on the graves of the young men who unconsciously achieved "some bright extra thing" (p. 93) by "putting together the shiveringly matchless words 'died' and 'young'" (p. 93). Suddenly, this "bright extra thing" appeals to David as a means of fulfilling his imagination and linking himself with the outside world. These particular graves magnify David's wish to achieve something spectacular and create his sense of failure when he recognizes himself as a "watcher" (p. 93) rather than a participant in life. Unlike these young men, his private illusions and crippling self-consciousness will prevent him from ever knowing that "bright extra thing." David's acute longing for something special in his own life distorts his perception of his ordinary family, "The way his father moved the boiling kettle...was only an ordinary motion; why did he watch it as if his father were making some sort of miracle for him?" (p. 93). David's reaction illustrates Warren Tallman's claim that David attempts to

"sustain an illusion" about the members of his family who are actually, "very biblical, unmythical, ordinary human beings."⁶⁵

David's sexual experiences reveal to the reader the inner tensions in his character. Both he and Chris reach sexual maturity in the novel, and when criticized for this Buckler replied:

And speaking of precocity, I might mention that the earliness of development in the boys may seem exaggerated; but in Nova Scotia villages like this, it was the rule. Boys were often driving ox-teams of lumber at thirteen or fourteen. They were often married at fifteen or sixteen. And the girls: well, like Juliet.... 66

While Chris, who understands sexual experiences in purely physical terms, feels satisfied with his physical love relationship with Charlotte, David, who intellectualizes sexuality and feels a sense of loss after his sexual union with Effie, had only "thought about what it would be like, but he's never really thought about doing it" (p. 107). His sexual encounter with Effie only negates his private fantasy of marrying "the loveliest or richest or most famous woman in the world" (p. 113) and increases the conflict in his already divided mind with the illusion that Effie's love truly fulfils him. He fails to achieve a satisfying physical relationship because he cannot translate the sexual act into any language understood by his word-shaped consciousness. Again, his efforts to force human experiences into an art form fail because he does not know "the infinite language of human relations." With his illusions about sexuality blighted, David thinks he can find completion in Toby Richmond's letter which he thinks signals "some kind of turning point in his life" (p. 114). His relationship with Toby, however, proves as disillusioning as all his other friendships, and the turning point brings him full circle in his figurative isolation and frustration.

The seeds of fragmentation sown in Part Two grow rapidly in Part Three, "The Valley." The pivotal point of the six sections, "The Valley" lays the foundation for the irony of situation in its counterpoint section, "The Mountain." With the Canaan family now moved into the new home, David's self-imposed alienation begins here. He seeks a "cosy isolation of his own making" (p. 120) in the attic which prefigures the indestructible walls of absolute isolation he will build around himself later in life. From his attic window, David watches rather than participates in family and social life, but he never suffers "the isolation of real severance (that was intolerable)" (p. 121).

Anna's decision to finish her education in town marks another step in David's increased solitude and growing self-deception. Rejecting her offer to let him go instead, David prefers to fantasize that "he'd have the best education in the world anyway" (p. 131). He deludes himself with implausible schemes for personal success, "His certainty of that glossed over the contradiction between going away to get it and the unalterable feature of staying here; but that wasn't a thing he could make plain" (p. 131). Once again, David willingly steps outside common human experiences, alienates himself and then looks back on the rest of society through the window pane separating him from his community and family and distorting his perception of life beyond the window pane.

Having always dreamed of finding a close friend, David imagines that Toby Richmond possesses all the sensitivity he finds lacking in his family, his local, rural community and his young country chums, "What he'd been missing all his life had been a

reflection of himself anywhere. Now he had discovered it at last" (p. 142). Indeed, David thinks that Toby's consciousness will match exactly with his, and he deceives himself about their relationship while Toby visits the Canaan's farm. As Buckler writes, Toby's presence reveals to the reader those aspects of David's character which affect his future state:

Toby's influence on David...is enormous. He is the symbol of the outside world with which part of David is dichotomically fascinated; he splits him away from his family, causes him, to his shame, to "deny them thrice"; the means of revealing to him, in the blighting scene of the train, his (David's) true inchoate self-deluding personality; finally separates him from Anna, to make his isolation utter. 67

Although we learn from Buckler's commentary that David and Toby look and dress nothing alike, David is convinced that "He was like this city boy, too. He pictured himself in Toby's clothes. They looked like a part of him too, even when they lay over a chair" (p. 135). This fundamental contrast between Buckler's perception of David's relationship with Toby and David's view of the friendship the reader recognizes as ironic. Although David claims that their communication is "like a second language come full-worded to him without any learning" (p. 135), the reader knows that Toby's "unconsciously, shattering frankness" (p. 136) repeatedly crushes David's imaginative expression. His logical mind completely contradicts David's fascination with the mountain, and David's Greek words Toby considers "old language stuff" (p. 135). The totally social Toby "couldn't stand isolation" (p. 145), unlike Anna and David who "bear their part of isolation, from habit" (p. 145). In contrast to David's claims and perceptions, the reader sees clearly how his self-conscious behaviour and imagination handicap him as much with Toby as with any of the valley boys.

Desperate to establish a relationship with Toby, David betrays his private sensibilities and his relationships with his family and with Effie. Like the biblical Peter, he denies the people he loves three times. In order to match Toby's nonchalance and cavalier attitude toward the country, David makes the rural life as "discardable as anything but a basis for fun" (p. 140). Embarrassed by his family's plain rural speech and manners, David deliberately cuts himself off from the other members of his family and aligns himself with Toby. Later, when alone, David feels a sense of guilt for his rejection of his family, and he longs to be part of that close-knit group again. The time for reconciliation has passed and again time has rendered him inarticulate. To impress Toby further, David sacrifices Effie's self-respect by forcing her to have sex, "But he was glad it wasn't daylight. He was glad he didn't have to see the look on Effie's face: part shyness, part hurt; but worst of all, forbearance" (p. 145). When an editor at Holt, Emily Beck, criticized this seduction scene in the wet field at night as "tasteless," Buckler replied: "Of course it is. I winced as I wrote it, and the point was that David was wincing even as he enacted it; but it was part of his tragedy that he had to go through with it (Toby's influence again)."⁶⁸ Toby's amused but unimpressed response to David's performance with Effie finally reveals to David that "he could never outdistance Toby in anything he thought Toby would envy, however he might be willing to betray himself trying. Toby would always remain ahead, by not having to make the effort at all" (p. 146). David, at last, recognizes how Toby, like the young dead boys in the cemetery, lives unconsciously for the present

moment. Unlike himself, Toby will match the words "died" and "young" to achieve some "bright extra thing." Toby's departure, "that first moment after the illusion, when you have to go back to what you really are" (p. 143), returns David to his rural world and lonely self.

David's initial guilt over betraying Effie intensifies when, a few days later, Effie dies of leukemia. Words again fail the word conscious David whose "sense of guilt about Effie's cold and the wet grass was mistaken. The big word the doctor used, the one Bess couldn't remember, was 'leukemia'. But David never knew that" (p. 152). Time and death prevent any possible expiation of his guilt feelings, and no amount of fantasizing how it might have been can change the past or deny reality because "a sudden gust of fact would bare the pretense" (p. 149). As Buckler states, when Effie dies, David "experiences the first withdrawal inside himself."⁶⁹ Trapped and alone, David has nowhere "to run where it wouldn't be true. Effie was dead. He couldn't tell her anything" (p. 151). Later, when his sorrow fades into remembered grief and Effie into a memory, David's guilt feelings double. Deluding himself that he can expiate his guilt by recapturing the original intensity of his "death-sadness" (p. 151), David visits Effie's home. But time has completely erased his original feelings. Even making love with Bess cannot "shock back the immediacy of the death-sadness by the very shame of defiling it" (p. 151). The "voice" (p. 113) of his secret guilt eventually fades to an "echo" (p. 113), but the irrevocable past fills the present with guilt feelings which move him beyond childhood into adulthood, "The essence of childhood is that the past is never thought of as something that might have been different. He was never, even for a moment, all

child again" (p. 152). The irony in this line Buckler comments on:

"obviously he hadn't been all child all the time before, considering his various shenanigans."⁷⁰ In describing the realistic effect of Effie's death, Buckler writes that it

was meant to be one of sudden shock; and surely David "remembers her as long as any boy of fifteen would; vividly, and with crucifying guilt, for months. That he has nothing much more to do with woman is simply because this tragic affair "conditions" him; it is, because of his self-contradictory nature, what turns him towards the coarse, bitter relation with Ada [Bess]. (As the results of the fall...are what keeps him away from women much later).⁷¹

No longer the "young and echoless" child of Part Two, unstained by the past, David becomes an adult scarred psychologically by these early events. As critic J. M. Kertzer suggests, the tension between the past and the present is now measured by David's guilt feelings.⁷²

Part Four, "The Rock," presents the steady decline of the family and reaches the true turning point in David's life when he recognizes his tragic inner dichotomy and inherent isolation. David, now a young man of eighteen, tries but fails to escape from the plodding frustration of farm life by running away to the city. His love of family and the land, however, pulls him back and he resigns himself to his fate.

The rock moving incident, which precipitates David's flight and reveals Joseph's and David's opposite contradictory views of farming, finds its source in Buckler's short story "The First Born Son" (1941). According to Buckler, "the boulder scene...it seems to me points up the whole core of David's divided allegiance between loyalty to his family and the beckoning of the outside world; and running into the next scene of his abortive runaway, brings him the shattering knowledge that 'he is

neither one thing nor the other'." 73 \

Anger and self-pity overwhelm David as he tries to disprove everyone's opinion of him as a physical weakling. Joseph interprets David's silence as the result of fatigue or the customary silence between his son and himself whose "feelings weren't word-shaped, like David's" (p. 156). As Robert Chambers notes, Buckler creates tension and dramatic irony in this scene by "using a structure of alternating viewpoints, placing one interior monologue over against the other."⁷⁴ For Joseph, who feels only love between himself and the land and his son, the rock symbolizes the continuity between time and space, and the eternal relations between the family and the land, "that rock there is the one my father rolled out, and my son's sons will look at these rocks I am rolling out today. Someone of my own name will always live in my house" (p. 157). For David, meanwhile, who feels only bitter resentment toward the land, the rock symbolizes the deadening of his mind and spirit to "the pace of an ox" (p. 162). Having to move the rock epitomizes the contrast between the country and the city and emphasizes his need to escape:

Anyone to spend their youth in this God-forsaken hole instead of the city...the same damn talk... the same damn faces, everyday and everyday...the same damn coop of trees to look at...walking over and over in your own tracks, like a damned ox. In the city there'd be movement, and something to feed your mind all the time. (p. 162)

When sawing the log, Joseph makes an error in measurement and suddenly, David's "anger slipped fluent into his own language" (p. 165). David uses educated words to insult and alienate his inarticulate father, "We exhaust ourselves and then when we're halfway through you decide the goddam block's

too short! If you could ever decide anything in advance" (p. 165). At David's hostile words,

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

But Joseph understands fully David's common, valley language of "go to hell" (p. 165), and he strikes his son across the mouth. As David runs to the highway to go to Halifax, "the things he passed had no familiar voice. They were like objects seen from a train window" (p. 166). But, when his anger subsides, time reorders itself and the landscape appears familiar again. David's escape fantasy disappears entirely when he gets a ride from a city couple with whom he uses words to ingratiate himself, "They were all talking together as if they were alike. He talked to them their way" (p. 169). But recollections of his family's inherent goodness and the landscape's sensuous beauty cause him to abandon his flight. Standing alone on the bridge on the country road, David is "in a no man's land" (p. 170) between what might have been in the city and what certainly awaits him in the country. His one chance for imagined fulfilment has come and gone. His decision to return home transforms all future time and its possibilities into the limited, physical space of the Canaan farm, "as if time had turned into space, and was crushing against him" (p. 170). His brief journey and return reveal to David, for the first time, that his tragic inner dichotomy and illusions will always alienate him, regardless of geography or people. His love of the land holds him in the country.

Only Ellen understands how, for David, the land is "lovely but like a mocking...like everything was somewhere else" (p. 172). Despite his family's limited understanding of him and their unexpressive lives, the family provides the single human bond that keeps him from the isolation of real severance from people. Faced with the cruel truth of his divided nature and personal isolation, "he sobbed because he could neither leave nor stay. He sobbed because he was neither one thing nor the other" (p. 171). In this moment of clarity and self-recognition, David realizes the sharp disparity between his dreams and their realities. This bridge scene, an ironic handling of the Promised Land allusion, anticipates the cruel revelation David later experiences in the parsnip field when Toby passes him by, and David suddenly sees the horrifying irony of his whole life. To comfort her despairing grandson, Ellen gives her sailor's locket to David who immediately identifies with the sailor's perpetual loneliness and sense of adventure to the degree that he sees his own face in the sailor's photograph. Ellen's sailor, however, died young and achieved that "bright extra thing" that David longs for but will never know. Identifying with Ellen's sailor only heightens the clear disparity between David's actual life and his imaginary existence.

A year later, David plans to climb the mountain with his parents and Chris. Although David has confronted the true nature of his alienated and lonely existence, time and youthful hope have buried that awareness. David remains bound to his illusions and self-deception, convinced that "everything was this side of the future" (p. 172). Since the "conduit to childhood wasn't entirely sealed over" (p. 173), David still feels the "visionary enthusiasms" (p. 173) of reaching the mountain. The arrival of

Toby and Anna completely runs against David's idealized expectations of family solitude on the mountain and builds tensions in David. Toby, who now represents David's abandoned dreams, disturbs the fragile sense of contentment on the farm that David has cultivated since the afternoon on the bridge. David now aligns himself with his parents and Chris against Anna and Toby, a point that Moss neglects in his discussion of the novel's characters. As they drive up the mountain road together in Toby's new car, David regains his tranquility by numbing his consciousness with liquor. Simultaneously, he begins to adopt Toby's identity again in his own mind, "he was singing. He was saying the words in his head silently, taking the sound of Toby's voice for his own" (p. 177). When the numbing effects of the liquor fade, however, David's thoughts return to the tensions between the two groups in the car - - the rural life as represented by Joseph, Martha and Chris in the back seat and the urban life as represented by Anna and Toby in the front seat. The tension between these duelling forces peaks within David when Toby flippantly discredits his dream of one day attending university. Automatically, David retreats into himself where he imagines himself to be the best doctor in Canada (p. 178).*

David now feels alienated even from Anna who has adopted city ways, "time and separation had sealed them off from each other a little" (p. 178). When David shows Anna Ellen's locket with the sailor's photograph, Anna sees Toby's face instead of David's in the photograph. Toby, like Ellen's sailor, will die young, having experienced life's adventure only briefly. Crushed by Anna's unexpected and disappointing response, David now physically isolates himself from Toby and Anna, refusing to ride home with them in their new car. His decision to walk with Joseph

and the oxen symbolizes his rejection of the city and its technical, industrial advances and his loyalty to the country and its manual, antiquated style of labour. As well, David symbolically links himself with the past and the valley and separates himself from the present, the future and the outside world. When Anna and Toby depart, guilt feelings overcome David, but again the moment for reconciliation has passed and with it the ability to speak. Toby and Anna drive away, "ignorant of his urge to be with them, irretrievable by his penitence...they retreated into another time" (p. 182). Once more, David remains outside personal relationships, guilt ridden and alienated by his inability to capture the time for understanding and express his feelings.

In Part Five, "The Scar," David's fall in the barn prefigures his death on the mountain, and the scar, a symbol of his inner conflict, marks the beginning of his absolute isolation. He discovers the cathartic power of words, and he seeks personal fulfilment through art. But words again betray him, fail to expiate his increasing guilt and intensify his isolation.

At the hog killing, David is included in the group of burly farmers by his "ability to reshape and transcend their clumsy obscenities" (p. 185). David's clever mastery of language enables him to belong when his action would otherwise alienate him from the group. The hog's death does not disturb David at the butchering, but rather the suspended time of death "between preparation and the shot" (p. 184) which closely resembles David's suspension between the past and the future. David maintains his tenuous relationship with the men and feels a warm sense of belonging until Chris's statement, "'Dave don't like to see anything

killed'" (p. 189), shatters his sense of fellowship. David experiences the same feelings of shame and anger that he felt the night of the school play when words betrayed his private sensibilities to an insensitive audience. Chris's innocent words strike David with the same disarming force that David's words had struck Joseph, "they might have been Chris's hand across his face" (p. 189). Overwhelmed by blinding anger, David ignores Chris's efforts for reconciliation and retreats into his own angry whiteness, into the "calm, biting, beautiful part" (p. 190) of inflicting isolation and pain on others. With reality completely distorted by his irrational anger, David climbs the beams to the barn roof, determined to disprove Chris's ominous claim that his brother cannot stand heights. The climb, which anticipates his mountain climb, involves a temporary, illusory escape from valley conflict and a revelation that culminates in a tragic fall back to earthly reality. On the top beam, physically distanced from the farmers below and psychologically separated from his conflict, "The momentum of his anger" (p. 192) disappears. David's transcendence of the personal conflict allows for a crucial revelation: "being brothers became explicit" (p. 193). His new understanding of this particular family loyalty between brothers ends abruptly when he falls to the barn floor that was "magnetic as an eye to anything loose above it" (p. 193). The pull of the barn floor (the valley) exceeds David's ability to successfully escape it on the barn beam (the mountain). He returns to the farm and the valley world once again, his flight halted by his unconscious love of the land. The "sickle shaped scar" (p. 199), which brands him with the mark of a farm implement and designates him as belonging to the farm, symbolizes his second failed

attempt to escape the valley. This incident, like the bridge scene, scars David psychologically. In light of David's revelation about brothers, it is highly ironic that he and Chris never resolve their misunderstanding or re-establish their former closeness. The time for brotherly reconciliation passes while David lies unconscious after the fall, and he wilfully rejects Chris's clumsy, inarticulate efforts to be forgiven for his words in the barn. The guilt David feels about their estrangement stains his consciousness as his blood stains the kitchen tablecloth he lay bleeding on and which Ellen later hooks into her rug. Yet, tragically, David cannot verbalize his conflicting feelings of bitter spite, forgiveness and guilt to Chris, and in consequence he loses one more meaningful relationship.

As a result of his fall, David begins to suffer almost constant headaches, a "bleaching ache that whitened his senses" (p. 194), blurs all separately coloured sentience into one mind-numbing sensation of white pain and operates "like a weather in his brain" (p. 201). His pain suspends thought and releases him from his former psychological conflict. When the pain subsides, however, his senses recover, his thoughts return and his blurred feelings separate into distinct colours once again. Then his "blood would course colourful through the vein again" (p. 195), and he experiences sublime moments "shot with universality" (p. 195). During these moments of sublime vision when he is convalescing, David discovers through reading the cathartic power of words and the beauty of metaphor. David now believes that words offer him freedom from his personal struggles and loneliness:

Suddenly he knew how to surmount everything. That loneliness he'd always had...it got forgotten, maybe, weeded over...but none of it had ever been conquered. (And all that time the key to freedom

had been lying in these lines, this book.) There was only one way to possess anything: to say it exactly. Then it would be outside you, captured and conquered. (p. 195)

All his previous attempts with words and assumptions about the power of words have proved false, crushing, self-deceiving and a cause for guilt and increased alienation. The dramatic words of the play promised but failed to integrate him with his valley community. Angry words with Joseph and Chris intensified their alienation from him. Silence, used as a psychological weapon against those who needed forgiveness or understanding, filled him with unbearable guilt. Verbal misunderstandings created intolerable conflict and human suffering. In light of these contradictions, the reader should recognize that David's cathartic expectations of words in art will prove equally false and self-destructive.

In his first literary piece, a cathartic treatment of his conflict with Chris, David tries and fails to expiate his guilt. After writing only one "cleansing cathartic" (p. 196) line, David "felt as if he were going to cry" (p. 196). This emotional reaction Buckler intends the reader to interpret as sentimental and highly self-indulgent. The reader realizes here that David's word-shaped, artful approach to restoring fractured human relationships is impossible because art cannot substitute for human understanding and genuine expressions of love. When David suddenly uses the crude valley language to call Rachel Gorman a "stinkin' old bitch" (p. 198), he contradicts dramatically the artistic language of his writing and reveals, to the reader, his contradictory nature. Buckler portrays David as torn between being a literate, aspiring writer and being a crude, pragmatic farmer.

When real life, in the form of Chris marrying Charlotte, contradicts

his writing, David dismisses any reconciliation with his brother. Compared to the people and events in Chris's life, David's seems solitary and "narrative only" (p. 199) in the sense that motivation and response are more important than simple action. The words in his scribbler now have "a stupid fixity" (p. 199), with "nothing in them, to come alive as often as they were seen" (p. 199). Faced with this intolerable discrepancy between art and life, his expectations and his experiences, David destroys the words which, he believes, have betrayed his longings. The reader sees these same incongruities but, contrary to David's evaluation, knows that his alienation, self-deception and inner tensions cause his art to fail.

By the close of the fifth section, the Canaan family has further disintegrated, and a sense of loss touches the characters. Anna and Toby are engaged but move further away from the farm life and the family unit. Chris and Charlotte marry, but death and sterility destroy their marriage when the baby dies. Martha's unfounded, irrational jealousy of Bess Delahunt creates a misunderstanding between herself and Joseph. In reference to their quarrel, Buckler writes that "it seems to me that Joseph's intense preoccupation with reconciliation as he chops the keel piece, so that he fails to see it sway, is quite plausible."⁷⁵ His death bears out Buckler's view of "accidental determination" that "the apparently blind and capricious turns of their fortune are the inevitable outcome of circumstance."⁷⁶

In Part Six, "The Train," David becomes absolutely isolated when he sees that he cannot recapture the past, escape future loneliness or fulfill his imaginative desires. The novel's action now takes place within his consciousness, a psychological journey through complex perceptions.

Now in his mid-twenties, David lives alone with his Grandmother.

Chris has left his desolate marriage to Charlotte and begun a transient way of life, working in factories and joining the army. Following Joseph's death, Martha dies of a broken heart, figuratively and literally. As Buckler writes,

Martha's death (prepared for, actually, by several previous references to her heart condition) also seems to me to be exactly what would have happened, given her personality, in the nature of things: a sort of abdication of life (as I've noted in so many actual country cases) when her partner had gone, and his death had been almost by her own hand. It was another instance of how, in one way or another, all of them are finally trapped by their own nature. ⁷⁷

David has inherited his mother's heart condition, and, like the other members of his family, he will be trapped by his own nature. Throughout all of the family's despair and grief, David has reconciled himself to his solitude, but Entremont society regards him as a 'type' character, another Herb Hennessey. David, however, has discovered a special kind of contentment on the farm wherein his idealistic perceptions exist safely unchallenged by contradictory external realities and can exist outside time's eroding chronology, "These years were like a kind of suspension, before time became really movingly now again" (p. 227). David continues to fool himself, despite his confrontations with truth in the past, that "sometime, somewhere, just as surely as ever, everything was still waiting" (p. 227). Indeed, he denies all reality by imagining that time can be relived, "No blow or defect or unhappiness is ever accepted as truth, so long as time can always be made to begin at the beginning again" (p. 233). Buckler defines David's mental self-deception in the following way: "Although he never doubts that someday he will begin his

true life. That whenever he chooses he can become one of the gang again." 78
Of course, David never was "one of the gang" and, in consequence, never will be.

In addition to loneliness , David has accomodated himself to the constant headache that makes him less than physically whole, "the matching of physical effort to the day's task...became a kind of isolate career" (p. 227). By consciously possessing his pain, David denies it control and existence, and, as Buckler explains,

Because of his constant headache and the facial scar...the withdrawal into himself and into his books is accentuated more and more. He personalizes his illness and tries to defeat it by ignoring it, in a kind of combination of his mother's near-masochism and his father's stubborn will. 79

Similarly, David believes that by consciously isolating himself he controls his loneliness and, therefore, may leave it, like his attic bedroom in childhood, whenever he chooses. He proceeds deliberately to make absolute the initial and partial alienation caused by his different sensibilities and weak heart. Finding a "self-biting satisfaction in deliberately making himself lonelier still" (p. 228), he withdraws altogether from Entremont society and into himself. The physical pain that "isolated and crystallized him into a kind of absolute self-sufficiency" (p. 228) now sublimates and denies the psychological pain of knowing that he does not belong anywhere. Complete loneliness sustains him and makes fulfilling the otherwise small, ordinary satisfactions of a daily farm routine.

Buckler draws a direct correlation between David's physical pain and David's psychological suffering. When his headache numbs his consciousness, David tolerates his absolute isolation by means of self-deception.

His chronic head pain , like the alcohol on the car ride up the mountain with Toby and Anna, "brings its own anaesthesia: simply because the single day's freedom from it which would be enough to invalidate utterly the dull cumulative lustre of resignation never comes" (p. 231). Like the "bleaching ache that whitened his senses" (p. 194), isolation has bleached out of his life all colours of human relationships, so his loneliness touches him only whitely, stilly. Only when he leaves the farm does David feel his loneliness exposed and his protective shell of idealized illusions shattered by the outside world's contradictory reality. When the headache subsides, David's numbed consciousness awakens, and the psychological conflict, which makes his loneliness unbearable and reality intolerable, returns:

Then he'd have a stricken glimpse of the years gone by as of an utter emptiness. Their victories over handicap would seem entirely negative. (Until the ache grained back with such subtle gradualness that its reversing persuasion was unnoticed until it was complete.) (p. 231)

Having discovered in books a reflection of himself, David begins his search for a unifying pattern in his art. The books he reads, like The Mountain and The Valley, "had more to do with the shadow of thought and feeling which actions cast than with the actions themselves" (p. 244). Everything he sees "in an ephemeral instant" (p. 233) demands his exact articulation, and his failure to "see exactly and to record...everything exactly" (p. 234) fills him with a sense of guilt and frustrating incompleteness. Whenever he does manage to capture the essence of the instant, the complexity of all time and all space engulfs him and silences him. Nevertheless, David continues his search because this struggle, like

all the others in his life, left "no impression that was permanent" (p. 233), and he remains convinced that time and life will begin again for him.

David's artificial contentment dissolves when Anna and Toby visit the farm unexpectedly during Toby's leave from the navy. David has been kept out of the war by his weak heart, "It was like all the rest of the things that happened to others" (p. 246). Initially, David feels none of his former defensiveness with Toby, having resigned himself to his lonely, unadventurous life style. Gradually, however, David tries to make Toby's sailor life his own, and he deludes himself about his own identity and relationship with Toby. While singing and drinking together, David mistakes the liquor's anaesthesia and his desperate need to be like Toby for the ideal unification of their consciousnesses. He begins to fantasize that, wearing Toby's hat, they "look alike. It could be me" (p.253). Anna's voice shocks him back to reality and reduces his vision of becoming like Toby to an "act of indescribable foolishness" (p. 253). Later, when David and Toby go hunting partridges in the orchard, David again tries to take on Toby's identity by adopting his casual, indifferent attitude toward sex, and David suddenly feels less lonely, "He had the same good feeling then that he'd had when he tried on Toby's hat and they'd looked alike, and he'd thought, it might be me" (p. 255). Although David may resemble Toby when he wears his sailor hat, the similarity remains superficial and misleading because the two men are opposites, mirror images of one another. As well, the nonchalance that David displays toward sex quickly disappears when reference to Effie recalls a sexual relationship that was riddled with guilt feelings,

many misunderstandings and that ended eventually in Effie's death.

News of the war casualties suddenly gives Toby a "funny sort of brightness" (p. 259) that excludes David and even Anna. Toby now has the "bright extra thing" that David, as a child visiting the country cemetery, had recognized in the graves of the young men. Once again, David stands outside, looking in on other human relationships and experiences, alone and lonely. In spite of the telling incident involving the war news, David continues to perceive himself and Toby as close, personal friends. When riding on the bus to town for beer, the friendship he imagines between them erases his usual physical pain and emotional suffering. The people seem friendly, and the solitary figure ploughing on the hillside, who clearly symbolizes David to the reader, David feels bears no resemblance to him at all. With his self-conscious thoughts suspended, as they were on the first fishing trip with Joseph and Chris and when he learned to cross his legs over on skates, David decides that this "was the best day of all" because "there hadn't been any thinking about it" (p. 259). This superlative claim, which has been echoed on a number of occasions throughout the novel, springs from David's use of pure intuition and emotion rather than intellect and reason to enjoy the outing with Toby. With Toby as his friend, David sees his lonely, "black and white" (p. 259) life suddenly filled with the colours of human relationships. Buckler describes the David-Toby relationship in this way: "Now, in Toby, he [David] seems to find his own city-self, his own adventurous-self. * Borrowing each other's clothes, making trips to town for beer, hunting in the old orchards, he seems to have found for the first time a friend with whom there is no awkwardness or watchfulness." 80

With the illusion of friendship replacing figurative isolation and despair, David tries to capture in art his thoughts and feelings about being outside the war. His short story, "Thanks For Listening," involves a young man who, like himself, is trapped by his own nature. But "One sentence accomplished...didn't leave that much less to be told. The idea fronded suddenly like a million-capillared chart of the bloodstream. He felt the panic of having to encompass every bit of it" (p. 260). Claude Bissell compares David's reaching out to encompass the full impact of an idea and Buckler's metaphysical style.⁸¹ David, however, lacks the single shaft of light, the plan and the focus, that the successful artist needs to reveal the essence of life. Like the snow that will ultimately encompass all his sensations on the mountain, "the great flurry of how it was with everything blizzarded inside his head, the things that always came to him after his first line" (p. 261).

The story that David does write Alan Young describes quite accurately as "sentimental and self-pitying" and as "a key sample of the way David does write, as opposed to the way he thinks he writes."⁸² Having written the first line about the sailor bidding farewell to his girlfriend, "to drain the whole draught of the her-and-me" (p. 260), David "felt like crying. Oh, it was wonderful, to be able to do a thing like this..." (p. 260). David's assessment of his writing seems faulty and simplistic, and, as Young suggests, Buckler intended the reader to be "unimpressed by what David actually writes." Thus, David's appreciation of the story becomes highly ironic. Buckler's own evaluation of the story, which was originally submitted for publication some years before, supports the view that David's literary efforts are less than effective.

As well, the contrast between David's fictional treatment of war and Toby's actual participation shatters his creative spell. He now reads the story objectively, as the reader has, and throws it on the fire, "The whole thing seemed unutterably shameful. How could he have put down anything so damned sickly and foolish? War was about as much like that..." (pp.263-264). Later, when liquor numbs his mind and clouds his judgment, he "re-read the story off his mind. The validity crept back into it all over again" (p. 264). Self-deception again distorts his evaluation of his own writing, and the reader sees his view ironically.

When Anna and Toby climb the mountain, Anna is attempting to replace the reality of the war, separation from Tony and eroding time in the valley with the illusion of tranquility, unity and the suspension of time of the mountain. Her journey, which prefigures David's, is, according to Alan Young, intended "to underline ironically the fact that David had never achieved a fulfilled relationship with anyone and... in spite...of his desire to climb the mountain throughout the novel...he has yet to achieve his goal."⁸³ Anna's escape from valley reality is, however, as temporary and self-deceiving as the warmth of Indian Summer. When they return home, Toby is called back to the war, and her fear of being totally isolated from him materializes when he is later lost at sea.

Toby's departure forces David to confront the incongruities of his existence, his illusions and outward condition. He places himself self-consciously in the field which Toby's train will pass by, "When Toby sees me, he thought, he'll wave. Then I'll look up, as if I just happened to be here, and wave back" (p. 274). Once more, experience contradicts his expectations, "Toby didn't glance once, not once, toward the house or the field. The train went by" (p. 274). Buckler describes

the scene in the following way: "Toby is laughing and talking with another sailor and doesn't even look up. He [David] sees then how different from friendship with him is Toby's feeling for another sailor who also has about him the maybe-the-last-time brightness of men in war."⁸⁴ The loss of his only friend panics David, but even more alarming is his realization that "It was always someone else things happened to, that was the panic of it...A baring and frightening light shone suddenly on his own life. It was like a strip of daybreak striking down a long corridor" (p. 274). David now understands fully the shattering truth that throughout his life his illusions have deceived him with false promises of future fulfilment. Along with the reader, he sees that, in reality, his future will be as empty and lonely as his past:

This was the toppling moment of clarity which comes to everyone, when he sees the face of his whole life in detail. He saw then that the unquestioned premise of all his calculations had been built on was false. He realized for the first time that his feet must go on in their present path, because all the crossroad junctions had been left irretrievably far behind. (p. 274)

His moment of shattering self-discovery parallels that on the bridge, but now the revelation encompasses his entire life, past, present and future. He cannot escape the partial alienation that he deliberately made absolute after the fall, rejoin society or share in human relationships: "You could build a wall around yourself, for safety's sake, but whenever you choose you could level it. That wasn't true, he saw now. After a while you could beat against the wall all you liked, but it was indestructible" (p. 275). All of life, like the war and the train, have passed him by. All the trains that might have carried him to personal fulfilment beyond the valley have gone forever, leaving him standing in the field

alone. Forever outside the "maybe-the-last-time brightness" (p. 267) that unites the servicemen against death, he will never achieve that "bright-extra-thing" experienced by the young men in the cemetery. Buckler, in his "Plans For Work," describes this moment of truth as a

small thing, but suddenly he sees the whole barren corridor of his own life with an intolerable clarity. As empty, in his [sic] own way, as Herb Hennessey's - - the village recluse who was such an incredibly, monstrously, alien creature to them when they were children. He'd thought that any isolation you'd chosen deliberately, you could destroy deliberately; but now he sees that the most indestructible wall of all is the one you build around yourself, with your own hands. Even with Anna now, separate now by reason of a vital sadness, he is outside. 85

David now couples his emotional suffering with his physical pain to destroy the parsnips in the field, mocking symbols of his farm's self-sustaining loneliness, "He raised the hack high above his head, till the pain of his head ran freely down his arm and down his whole side...He slashed at the pulpy flesh of the parsnips blindly, wherever the hack fell, the whole length of the long even row" (p. 278). As the intense physical pain dissolves his anger, his mind returns to the whiteness of bleached sensation that he knew before Anna and Toby's visit had exposed his illusions. The **snow simile**, symbolic of his **numbed psychological state**, prefigures his death in the snow on the mountain,

In his mind there was only a stillness like the stillness of snow sifting through the spokes of the wagon wheels or the moonlight on the frozen road or the dark brook at night when the children have all taken their laughter home. (p. 278)

With the revelation ended and the anguish of his delusions buried in his numbing headache, David reverts to the thoughtless farming routine that has always sustained him in his figurative isolation. He begins to repair his own battered sensibilities as he pats

the torn flesh of the parsnips back into shape as best he could. Maybe if he put sods around them in the cellar, they wouldn't spoil. There was not trace of thinking on his face now. Nothing but the crusted smudge of a tear track he had wiped at with his dusty hand. (p. 278)

When he tells Anna that Toby did, in fact, wave from the train, David is responding to her desperate fear and love for Toby and not speaking from his usual self-deception. He clearly knows that he is absolutely isolated, "even with Anna...even with Anna now...he was outside" (p. 279). In this last moment of honest self-awareness, David acknowledges his irrevocable alienation and the irony of his situation. In time, he retreats from outside reality and the threat of nihilism into his subjective idealism and visions of love and belonging. Then, this second revelation, like the first on the bridge, becomes buried inside him, absorbed and forgotten, "Something unplastic, unbent, unshuffling in him, still drove straight ahead" (p. 279). This stubborn determination David inherited from Joseph who "would keep chopping as long as he could see, though his axe was dull and his feet were cold and the rest of the crew had given in to the blizzard hours ago: (p. 279). David's determined efforts will, like his father's, be defeated by the blizzard on the mountain and by accidental determination.

In the Epilogue, "The Mountain," we come full circle through the past to the Prologue's present time in which David is standing at the window, physically and psychologically separated from the outside world.

He continues to be the 'child' (p. 16) Ellen calls to, the child struggling to transform ordinary reality into ideal experiences. His earlier attempts to transcend the valley's ordinary, disturbing environment have failed, and his own conflicting nature and disillusionment with life have pushed

him further and further into absolute loneliness and toward an almost tragic fate: the fishing trip with Joseph and Chris, the play, the friendship with Toby, the flight from the farm, the fall from the rafters and the cathartic power of words. The Epilogue is, therefore, a culmination of all the disappointments as the final reality, death, strikes David in this final section.

David's death Buckler classifies as the novel's central irony and a logical conclusion to the dramatic irony of the entire novel. In a letter to Dudley Cloud, Buckler writes that

It was to be the crowning point of the whole dramatic irony (and, of course, the most overt piece of symbolism in the book), that he should finally exhaust himself climbing the mountain, and, beset by the ultimate clamour of impressions created by his physical condition and his whole history of divided sensibilities, come, at the moment of his death (prepared for, not only by long accounts of the results of his fall, but by the medical officer's advice to him at the time of his enlistment examination; and, more immediately, by the excitement, the panic, the climbing), achieve one final transport of self-deception: that he would be the greatest writer in the whole world. 86

Although David's death concludes the novel, Buckler wrote in the same letter to Dudley Cloud, "it actually happens to be the very first thing I wrote; the foundation of the whole thesis. (Later, I split the opening chapter and shifted that part to the epilogue." In this final scene, the false premises of David's whole life culminate in his dream of being a writer, articulating exactly the essence of experience, recapturing the past, expiating his guilt, beginning time again and integrating himself with all of mankind.

David's climb from the valley to the mountain symbolizes his final retreat from reality into illusion, his withdrawal into memory. In the valley,

the first of two stages in his climb, the frozen landscape reflects his numbed sensibilities that suspend him in a kind of emotional wasteland where static time is space, "a feature of the frozen fields" (p. 281). Emptied of all emotion, David turns completely inward, "the inside was 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 tendrill of interaction" (p. 281). The stillness of the "great white naked eye" parallels the white centre of Ellen's rug so that David is, 'at once, inside and outside her art, a silent stillness at the centre of the novel. Laurence Ricou cites this passage in his view that David 'remains a child throughout the novel, "This is not the eye surely, on the verge of a finished achievement, but at the beginning of an adolescent artistic consciousness."⁸⁷ Gradually, David's focus shifts to include external reality, and he begins to identify with the landscape, "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. 283).

This tentative relationship between David and the outside world is abruptly broken when his neighbour, Steve, meets him on the log road. David withdraws into himself, and he suspends his own thoughts and feelings to assume Steve's, "he could put their thoughts into words; and hearing them spoken, they'd be as pleased as if they'd been able to find the words themselves" (p. 283). By imitating Steve's bawdy jargon, David does, in fact, define Steve's thoughts and articulate them for the inarticulate Steve. David's true identity, however, remains hidden from Steve and others like him in the community who see him as a 'type' character.

When alone again, David begins finally to project his thoughts outward, but they are burdened with guilt feelings concerning his earlier impatience with Ellen and his detachment from the land. These mixed emotions carry him out of the valley, the home of his guilt, and onto the mountain. As he climbs the log road up the mountain, "the beating of his heart brought a kind of lightness to his body now" (p. 286), but David ignores the stress on his weak heart because "a brightness played over his thoughts, like the quickness of fever" (p. 286). Losing awareness of his physical state and the dangers of over-taxing his weak heart, David exists almost entirely within his consciousness, and, like Anna before him, feels that the valley below cannot touch or threaten him now that he has reached the mountain. Separated now from the valley where everything had seemed sterile and alienating, David's illusions ' control and transfigure reality. Safely away from the people in Entremont who afflicted him with self-consciousness and guilt feelings, David's "thought didn't fall back before them, as it did before the shrivelling light of their physical presence" (p. 287). David pretends that he truly belongs among the valley people, an ironic delusion anticipatory of his later declaration that they are the best people in the world, "Now they were out of sight, his own face moved kindredly among them. They were pliant in his mind's eye to whatever aspect he cast them in" (p. 286). David can have these romantic, idealistic thoughts ' only when he is absolutely alone with his private fantasies unchallenged by a contradictory reality.

Unopposed by the valley's truth, David's mind expands, and his senses merge to make everything appear metaphorically united and identified.

Time becomes space and stops. The blood of the hunted rabbit foreshadows for the reader David's death, but David fails to see the sign or acknowledge his own altered physical state. Although David experiences several moments of fatigue and spells of blackness, he is so overwhelmed by his senses that he remains oblivious to the pounding of his heart. Both details, the rabbit and his pounding heart, should prepare us for his death.

Looking down over the valley now, David identifies with a "momentary undulation" (p. 289) as a cloud passes over the valley, and "suddenly a breaker of exaltation rushed through him in just such a way" (p. 289). David now undergoes the first of two translations to another time when the past is brought forward and relived and the memory acts as an agent of creativity, "It was a thing that comes only once or twice ever, without hint or warning. It was the complete translation to another time. There is no other shock so sweet, no transfiguration so utter" (p. 289). David's sensations, which recall Proust's memorie involontaire in the madeleine incident, allows him to recapture time past and "begin again" (p. 289),

It was not a memory of that time: there is no echo quality to it. It is something that deliberate memory (with the changed perspective of the years between changing the very object it lights) can not 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)

David's transfiguration Buckler considers necessary to the creative process. It is not, as J. M. Kertzer suggests, a regression into the past. Kertzer claims that David "has chosen not to develop, not to go forward. This is ultimately life-denying, which is why the novel concludes with his death."⁸⁸

As a part of his fantastic experience, the transfiguration is riddled with delusions of grandeur and is the beginning of a series of ironic self-deceptions that culminate in David's final fantasy of being "the greatest writer in the whole world" (p. 299). As he relives his past, David imaginatively rewrites his past life of isolation and disillusionment into a marvellous account of self-fulfilment and social integration: he was "the best fiddle player in the whole world" (p. 290), "the most famous mathematician there ever was" (p. 290), "the most wonderful dancer people had ever seen" (p. 291) and "the only man who ever went every single place in the world and did everything in the world there was to do" (p. 291). Here Buckler clears the stage for David's final delusion by cataloguing all his earlier, equally foolish dreams. The reader should quickly recognize David's dream of being a writer as another in this series of inner illusions.

David's first translation is followed by a completely sensuous experience in which the voices of nature demand to "be heard exactly" (p. 291). This exactness of articulation, an almost mathematical exactness, reflects Buckler's own concern with equations, symmetry and finding the precise word for his writing. When the multiplicity of sound and image makes individual articulation impossible, David is filled with "a sense of exquisite guilt" (p. 291) that he cannot know everything exactly. As the

voices multiply infinitely and time starts to move faster, David sees that by moving out of his own consciousness into a consciousness of all existence he can expiate his guilt. He must first, however, experience a metaphorical relationship of total identification with universal reality,

They sounded and rushed in his head until it seemed as if he must go out into these things. 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)

David continues the steep climb which becomes progressively more demanding on his weak heart, and his sensations intensify to block his awareness of his failing body. He now faces the irony of the challenge of articulation as the faces of friends and family appear, demanding, like the natural world, to be known exactly. When the faces of everyone in the world appear before him, David thinks that, like the school play audience, this sea of faces "waited for him to give the thought to exactly how each of them was" (p. 295). But his vision of individual articulation proves false as each single thought "breaks down like a stream forking in the sand. Then the forks fork. The the forks' forks fork, like the chicken-wire pattern of atoms" (p. 296). Even the shapeless thoughts "behind every face, at every time...had a double accusing, because of themselves and of the things they mirrored" (p. 297). Overwhelmed by "the crushing screaming challenge of the infinite permutations of the possible ...the billion raised to the billionth power" (p. 297) and unable to capture exactly the infinite, David cries, "Stop!" (p. 297). Totally self-consciousness, he can only think of 'Myself screaming 'Stop,' thinking

of myself thinking of myself thinking of..." (p. 297). In his "Plans For Work," Buckler wonders if this scene becomes melodramatic:

when he goes from utter mind-stillness...to a series of immediacy translations at times when his heart was young, like an orchestra passing the melody from one instrument to another...to a heightened perceptiveness so frenzied that the cry of everything he looks at to be entered into fully and completely understood makes him scream "Stop!"...to the sudden deliverance of thinking that the answer is to tell it all and be the greatest writer in the world...even that, I humbly believe, will not sound like an hysterical immolation scene. With his father's dogged will still unbent in him, and unshuffling, I think it will transcend melodrama. 89

Buckler's poetic handling of the scene does allow it to "transcend melodrama" and to be read as a crescendo of emotion consistent with David's intensity and personality.

At the top of the mountain, David experiences his second translation by identifying with nature. In another time and space, David thinks that writing will capture exactly the essence of everything and everyone, "I will tell it, he thought rushingly: that is the answer. I know how it is with everything. I will put it down and they will see that I know" (p. 298). David discovers here the metaphorical relationship between subject and object that finally creates a unified consciousness, "He went out into them until there was no inside left. He saw now how you could become the thing you told" (p. 298). This method of articulating everything through identification strikes him as "gloriously simple" (p. 298). From all the infinite voices demanding to be heard, David sees that he has only to find "their single core of meaning" (p. 298). But David fails to accomplish this because his philosophy remains ironically and deceptively "gloriously simple." Although David's view that art springs from pure

metaphor has truth as an artistic credo, Buckler tells us that David "didn't consider how he would find it" (p. 299) or "how long it might take" (p. 299). Buckler accounts for David's failure to become a writer in the following way:

Well, for one thing, only one in a million, however potentially talented, in actual life ever does. And it was the crucial irony of the whole set-up that the writing business was just another instance of his fatal self-deluding blinding by transports of enthusiasm (as illustrated also in the "best fiddler" business, the best soldier, the man who had gone everywhere and done everything...) and his attempts at writing are rather pointedly referred to no less than four or five times. In one case, to the extent of a whole chapter. 90

Already evident in his story "Thanks For Listening" is David's inability to write effectively, even by his own standards, "The words he'd put in the scribbler before now had never fallen smooth over the shape of remembrance, or enclosed it all. But the minute he put the scribbler away the perfect ones seemed surely possible to be found the next time" (p. 299). Although David's creative success never materialized in the valley, the mountain's illusory time and space delude him with idealized, romantic visions of one day "becoming the greatest writer in the world" (p. 299). Recognized and accepted by the valley people, he will then be seen as the one person who "understands everything" (p. 299), expressing what they cannot. David has demonstrated his ability to translate and reshape the thoughts and words of the farmers at the hog killing and Steve, but he lacks the ability to unify all of these separate voices into one artistic vision of articulation. David's dream of belonging through art distorts his perception of the valley people who are no longer the people from whom he has deliberately isolated himself but "the best people in the

whole world" (p. 300). Critics J.M. Kertzer and D.J. Dooley suggest that such a childlike speech and thought as this renders David's revelations on art and his dream of being a writer ironic.⁹¹ David imagines that by writing kindly and lovingly about the valley people he will share in their relationships and expiate his sense of guilt at having alienated them,

He caught his breath. He felt the warm crying of acquittal again. Even my mother and my father and all the others who are gone will know somehow, 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 could 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)

David, of course, did deny them many times, and his thoughts and plans are only pathetically desperate efforts to absolve himself of past wrongs and expiate lingering guilt feelings. His subjective illusions distort the past and the present, but they make him feel more joyful and integrated. Laurence Ricou suggests that the Epilogue takes a "profoundly ironic view of where David is. He achieves an ecstatic peace, to be sure, but it is deeply coloured by his self-indulgent and fruitless dreaming."⁹² Alan Young, who supports an ironic interpretation, points to what he sees here as "a strong vein of irony involved in the portrait of David."⁹³ As well, John Moss writes that because his vision "to redeem, translate, absolve" is unbearable to the gifted man, "Death releases David from the tremendous responsibilities his vision imposes."⁹⁴

As always, reality intrudes upon David's vision, but this time it will destroy him physically. David's bifocal vision of the past and present, the valley and the mountain, innocence and experience fuse into a single

moment of ecstatic restoration of his shattered relationships with Chris and Anna. Ironically, at this precise moment when David feels most confident that as an artist he can expiate his sense of guilt, integrate himself wholly with his society, reconcile past family conflicts and recapture the past to begin his life again, the cruel realities of his weak heart and the strenuous climb determine his situation. Like Moses, David sees the Promised Land of total fulfilment and inner peace, but he never enters it. He has deceived himself about his physical health as well as his artistic abilities and creative visions. These final moments in David's tragic life reveal the irony which arises from the disparity between life's illusions and death's reality.

For the first time since climbing the mountain and losing himself in his romantic dreams, David feels the physical reality of the pounding of his heart. His awareness comes too late. [David falls, and "then the blackness turned to grey and then to white: an absolute white, made of all the other colours but of no colour itself at all. And then the snow began to fall" (p. 300). David, like the colour white, contains all the colours of individual identities but not one of his own. Like the "bleaching ache that whitened his senses" (p. 194), the snow now numbs his body and mind.] David's death creates the novel's final irony as it contradicts David's final dream of becoming a writer. Irony here is heightened by the mocking train whistle which reinforces our sense of David's lonely empty existence on the farm and his belief that "it was always someone else" (p. 274) who experienced life beyond the valley. [The falling snow becomes an ironic agent of transfiguration. Falling over David's body "smoothly and exactly" (p. 301), the snow illustrates the pattern David had sought

★
white
+
snow

for his words and his art. The snow, an agent of the indifferent universe, renders his human form indistinguishable from a fallen log on the ground. Soon, "the two outlines were one" (p. 301). Thus, David achieves his longing for a metaphorical state, and he does "become the thing you told" but, ironically, only in death.⁹⁵

Critic Gregory Cook believes that David's life ends triumphantly because we have just read The Mountain and The Valley, the novel he would have written, "And as he dies, it is clear that the novel David Canaan would have written is the one we have just read, and that Buckler has, indeed, written it."⁹⁶ R. E. Watters suggests that Buckler's "relationship to us can be that which David never lived to achieve for his people," a view which echoes and supports the interpretation of David as a buried artist figure.⁹⁷ These views rely on external speculation as there exists no validation for them within the novel. Such approaches to David's death, like the whole myth of the buried artist figure, require that the novel's pervasive irony be ignored. David Canaan does not write The Mountain and The Valley, literally or figuratively, or any other novel. He dies alone and unfulfilled on the mountain, and David's fate is, as Buckler planned, a result of his divided nature and self-deceptions:

And its tragic culmination in the climactic final scene, when, climbing the mountain, and beset by the clamor of impressions and the residue of his whole history of divided sensibilities, at the very moment of his death he achieves one last transporting self-delusion is, I think, an authentic and crowning dramatic irony.⁹⁸

[Buried beneath the snow, David cannot see the partridge rise "straight upward for a minute, exactly" (p. 302) and, thereby, mock his own search for the exactness of the spoken and written word: "And its grey

body fell swiftly in one straight movement, as if burdened with the weight of its own flight: down, between the trees, down sweepingly, directly, intensely, exactly down over the far side of the mountain" (p. 302).

Critics who consider David a buried artist often interpret the flight of the partridge as symbolic of David's sacrifice and triumphant Christ-like resurrection, or they interpret it as representative of the easier path David might have chosen outside the valley for his creative fulfilment.

Ian Atkinson, for example, suggests that "the plunge of the partridge down the mountain side symbolizes David's return to innocence and nature's return to harmony."⁹⁹ The grey partridge, however, is an ironic symbol

in relation to David's life as it blends the blackness of his death with the white of his isolation and numbed consciousness. Its flight is

burdened as David's transcendence of and flight from the valley were burdened with self-consciousness, delusions, guilt feelings, physical pain

and the limiting corporeality of life. The flight of the partridge down the far side of the mountain and out of the valley mocks David's earlier

unsuccessful flights from the farm and his final, fatal flight to the mountain. In his first draft of the novel, Buckler wrote that the flight

of the partridge was "like death," and perhaps, like death, the partridge marks the ironic end to David's life.¹⁰⁰ David never succeeds as a genuine

artist, and although his individual spirit dies with him on the mountain, his final vision of art endures, symbolized in the flight of the partridge.

Like the Old Testament David from whom the Messiah will descend, David

Canaan espouses the true vision of art and creative expression that may

some day be fulfilled by a genuine artist. David's perception of how art

is created, his understanding of metaphor and his desire to find life's

single "core of meaning" represent an enduring artistic spirit endorsed by Buckler. Although David dies a deluded and failed man who never achieves any of his illusions or acts on his revelation, his vision of art Buckler allows to symbolically endure as part of the creative energies in life.

David's moment of death coincides ironically with Ellen's completion of the rug which blends all time and all space into an artistic chronicle of the family and the valley community. The scarlet cloth from the cloak David wore the night of the school play suggests the blood and death on the mountain and emphasizes the continual tragic self-deception of David's life. Ellen's white lace in the last circle signifies her place at the "core" of her art and points to David's death in the snow. When finished, the pattern of her rug mirrors the landscape, and its concentric circles resemble an aerial view of the mountain. Thus, the target centre of the rug marks David on the mountain. Ellen's call to David, "'Where is that child?'" (p. 301), suggests that Ellen, like David, has moved entirely outside chronological time into her memory in which David is still a child. Laurence Ricou interprets Ellen's question to mean that "David dies in the spell of his childhood illusions," an interpretation that supports the view that David dies an ironic figure.¹⁰¹ As Buckler states, Ellen's "quiet endurance outlasts the endurance of them all."¹⁰² Yet Ellen will also die, and with the family disintegrated, there will be no one to receive her rug and continue the family line of art and relationships.

David remains as isolated in death on the mountain as he was physically and psychologically isolated in the valley. Only in death does he transcend the valley's reality for the mountain's idealism, discover a pattern for articulation, experience transformations of time and space and

feel an overwhelming sense of love and belonging. These revelations and transfigurations are, however, illusory and temporary. In Buckler's writing, they reveal his sense of the ironic nature of time, death and absolute isolation.

David's final delusion of being a writer Buckler links with his equally deceiving vision of love. The answer to David's isolation and tragic fate is to be found in his acceptance of Entremont's reality and through simple expressions of family and community love and not in art or words, the shadows of experience which never capture exactly the essence of life. David fails to recognize that words cannot completely articulate love and that human relationships arise from deep emotions rather than from language alone. David, who relied on words to unite himself with others, reconcile conflict and expiate guilt feelings, was rendered inarticulate by the erosion of time and his crippling self-consciousness. Buckler portrays words as powerful instruments capable of creating alienation or integration. When used in art, words may capture the essence of human experience exactly, but Buckler recognizes an inherent irony in the act of writing. As finite instruments of the human mind, words can never wholly contain the infinite language of human relationships. Epiphanic moments of visionary clarity can discover complete articulation, and of all the potential artists, "only one in a million, however potentially talented in actual life ever does" achieve such a level of exact creative expression.

As well as the contrasts in David's dream of creative success, Buckler stresses the dramatic irony of his vision of love. David dies a thoroughly happy man, overwhelmed with his revelation of family and community love and convinced that all the broken love relationships from

the past will be restored to wholeness through his art. In actual fact, however, David dies alone, figuratively isolated, unloved and misunderstood. His vision of universal love and personal fulfilment exist, like all his other earlier delusions, only in his idealistic consciousness, a product of his self-deceiving nature, riddled with incongruities. Throughout his life, David never felt integrated with the valley people, and the deaths of Martha, Joseph, Toby, Bess and Effie prevent any reconciliations. For years David has alienated himself from Anna and Chris. In spite of these truths recognized by the reader, David dies with a gloriously false vision of love, integration and personal achievement which momentarily triumphs over the intolerable realities of his life in the valley. The reader, of course, realizes the irony implicit in David's perfect dream of the family re-united and of time re-captured, and this recognition of incongruities and clear discrepancies results in an ironic interpretation of the novel. Buckler intends the reader to perceive David as an ironic artist who never creates any genuine art or expresses an authentic perspective of reality. As well, Buckler intends that we view love and human relationships as the only solution to life's alienating forces such as death and the erosion of time. In his content, Buckler stresses the complex inconsistencies which create irony and offers love as man's only salvation.

Notes

¹Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 24.

²Alan Young, "The Genesis of Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and The Valley", Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (1976), 89-96. The same point is made by Robert D. Chambers, Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975), p. 55.

³Esquire, (November, 1937), 10.

⁴Young, "Genesis", 89.

⁵BColl., Box 4, Buckler to Burton Rascoe, December 1, 1939.

⁶BColl., Box 4, Buckler to Edward Aswell, September 10, 1946.

⁷These three short stories remain unpublished in BColl., Box 3, but they were incorporated with minor changes into the novel: "The Trains Go By" in Part Six, Chapters xxxv, xxxvi, and xxxix; "Thanks For Listening" in Part Six, Chapter xxxvii; "Indian Summer" in Part Six, Chapter xxxvii. Buckler had already been successful in publishing stories with war themes: "On The Third Day" (1943), "The Finest Tree" (1944) and "A Sort Of Sign" (1945).

⁸BColl., Box 4, Buckler to Elizabeth Laurence, October 1, 1946.

⁹Young, "Genesis", p. 91.

¹⁰BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Jonathon Leff, Editor at Holt, March 20, 1952.

¹¹BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Jonathon Leff, April 15, 1952.

¹²BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Harold Ober, May 23, 1951.

¹³BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Naomi Burton at Curtis Brown Ltd., February 25, 1950.

¹⁴BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud at Atlantic Monthly Press, March 24, 1951.

¹⁵BColl., Box 15, Dudley Cloud to Buckler, May 4, 1951.

¹⁶BColl., Box 15, E. P. Shiverick, Trade Editorial Report at Atlantic Monthly Press, April 3, 1951.

¹⁷BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

¹⁸BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Eileen Jordan, November 26, 1951.
BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Harold Ober, August 15, 1951.

¹⁹BColl., Box 15, Harold Ober to Buckler, July 20, 1951.

²⁰BColl., Box 15, Harold Ober to Buckler, January 10, 1952.

²¹BColl., Box 15, Jonathon Leff to Buckler, March 4, 1952.

²²BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Jonathon Leff, March 17, 1952.

²³Ernest Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), New Canadian Library Edition.

²⁴Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 26.

²⁵Stuart Keate, "Good Earth, Good People", Review of The Mountain and The Valley, The New York Times Book Review, (October 26, 1952), 5.

²⁶Claude Bissell, "Letters In Canada: 1952 - - Fiction", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXII (April 1953), 290.

²⁷R. E. Watters, "Unknown Literature", Saturday Night, LXX (September 17, 1955), 33.

²⁸Edmund Fuller, Review of The Mountain and The Valley, Chicago Sunday Tribune, (October 26, 1952), 2.

²⁹Katherine Douglas, Review of The Mountain and The Valley, Dalhousie Review, XXXII (1953), iii, v.

³⁰Claude Bissell, Introduction to The Mountain and The Valley (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), pp. x, ix.

³¹BColl., Box 15, Emily Beck, Trade Editorial Report at Atlantic Monthly Press, April 25, 1951.

³²BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

³³BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

³⁴BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

³⁵BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, October 2, 1950.

³⁶BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Harold Ober, May 23, 1951.

³⁷BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

³⁸BColl., Box 2, Buckler, "So What and The Seven Paradoxes", p. 12. Unpublished article.

³⁹Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁰James R. Hewitt, Marcel Proust (New York: Frederick Unger, 1975), p. 6.

⁴¹T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets, "Little Gidding: V", in Collected Poems: 1909 - - 1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 221.

⁴²R. E. Watters, "Three Canadian Novelists", a public lecture published in Cook, Buckler, p. 42.

⁴³BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

⁴⁴BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁴⁵BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

⁴⁶Buckler's father was "the son of Joseph and Ellen (Kenny) Buckler. Ellen is, roughly, the Grandmother in the book." BColl., Box 11, Unaddressed fragment of a letter from Buckler, December 11, 1969.

Eilen Sarkar, "The Mountain and The Valley: The Infinite Language of Human Relations", Revue de l'Universite d'Ottawa, XL (July-September

1974), 354-361. The rug's pattern of circles, Sarkar suggests, structures the novel and reflects the "narrowing circumference of David's relations with the external world" which, ultimately, leads to his death. David uses his imagination to integrate but then, paradoxically, uses it to retreat from reality into his fantasy world.

⁴⁷Watters, "Novelists", in Cook, Buckler, p. 2.

⁴⁸Buckler, "My First Novel", in Cook, Buckler, p. 23.

⁴⁹Hewitt, Proust, p. 28.

⁵⁰BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Harold Ober, May 23, 1951.

⁵¹Moss, Patterns, p. 225.

⁵²Northrop Frye, Culture and Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 50.

⁵³Bissell, Introduction to The Mountain and The Valley, p. xi.

⁵⁴BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

⁵⁵BColl., Box 15, "Plans For Work", notes on The Mountain and The Valley, p. 4.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁷Laurence Ricou, "David Canaan and Buckler's Style in The Mountain and The Valley", Dalhousie Review, LVII (Winter 1977-1978), 690.

⁵⁸John Moss, Sex and Violence In The Canadian Novel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 94.

⁵⁹p. 26. BColl., Box 11, unaddressed fragment of a letter from Buckler, December 11, 1969, "Mona is my youngest sister. (I think I'm giving away no secrets if I say that she is kind of roughly the Anna in the book). Bob is Robert Simpson, her husband. (Not totally unlike Toby and Rex)."

⁶⁰BColl., Box 2, "Notes On David and Effie", p. 1.

⁶¹BColl., Box 2, "Plans", p. 5.

⁶²Spettigue, "The Way It was", p. 44.

⁶³Douglas Barbour, "David Canaan: The Failing Heart"; Studies In Canadian Literature, I (Winter 1976), 64-75. In Barbour's view, David's selfish "psychological revenges" and his tendency to fantasize corrupt his power to articulate, isolate him and cause him to betray those he loves.

⁶⁴p. 89. BColl., Box 2, one of the "stains" that David recalls is having seen an insane young girl pass along this road, an incident anticipated in an early unpublished sketch "One Days Like This."

⁶⁵Warren Tallman, "Wolf In The Snow", Canadian Literature, (Summer 1960), 13.

⁶⁶BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, March 24, 1951.

⁶⁷BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁶⁸BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1961.

⁶⁹BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 5.

⁷⁰BColl., Box 15, revisions of The Mountain and The Valley.

⁷¹BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁷²J. M. Kertzer, "The Past Recaptured", Canadian Literature, (Summer 1975), 78.

⁷³BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁷⁴Chambers, Ross and Buckler, p. 77.

⁷⁵BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁷⁶BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 2.

⁷⁷BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁷⁸BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 7.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 7.

⁸¹Bissell, Introduction to The Mountain and The Valley, p. xi.

⁸²Young, "Genesis", 91.

⁸³Young, "Genesis", p. 91.

⁸⁴BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 7.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁶BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

⁸⁷Ricou, "Style", p. 693.

⁸⁸Kertzer, "The Past Recaptured", p. 83. Buckler returns to this time and memory translation in Ox Bells and Fireflies.

Clara Thomas, "New England Romanticism and Canadian Fiction", Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Fall 1973), 80-86. Thomas suggests that David's "epiphany" resembles the transcendentalism and romanticism of Thoreau and other New England writers. Buckler was certainly familiar with the transcendentalists' writings as evident from his academic background, his library reading list and, in an early draft of The Cruellest Month, Paul Creed was a Thoreau scholar. In that same novel, Endlaw is an anagram for Walden.

⁸⁹BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 8.

90

BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Dudley Cloud, May 15, 1951.

91

Kertzer, "The Past Recaptured", p. 85. D.J. Dooley, "Style and Communication in The Mountain and The Valley", Dalhousie Review, LVII (Winter 1977-1978), 683.

92

Ricou, "Style", p. 693.

Gerald Noonan, "Egoism and Style in The Mountain and The Valley", The Marco Polo Papers One: Atlantic Provinces Literature Colloquium, ed. Kenneth MacKinnon (Saint John: Atlantic Canada Institute, 1977), pp. 68-78. Noonan also recognizes how David's "revelation" is "the most comprehensive of his delusions" and his "preoccupation with words" blinds him to reality and human relations.

93

Young, "Genesis", p. 95.

Alan Young, "The Pastoral Vision of Ernest Buckler in The Mountain and The Valley", Dalhousie Review, LIII (Summer 1973), 219-226. In this earlier article, Young suggests that David's portrait reflects the "double vision" of the pastoral figure, and his death on the mountain illustrates the irony involved in "the paradoxical triumph of 'ripeness is all.'"

94

Moss, Sex and Violence, p. 91.

95

L. M. Doerksen, "The Mountain and The Valley: An Evaluation", World Literature Written in English, XIX (Spring 1980), 45-56. Doerksen also recognizes the way in which David joins with everything around him in death.

96

Cook, M.A. Thesis, p. 91.

97

Watters, "Novelists", in Cook, Buckler, p. 47. The myth of the buried artist appears most notably in these critical studies of the novel: Margaret Atwood, Survival (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), pp. 186-187.

Ian Atkinson, "The Mountain and The Valley: A Study in Canadian Fiction" (M.A. Thesis, University of Guelph, 1969), p. 25. Atkinson suggests that "In David Canaan's life Buckler presents, through symbolic technique, an inevitable, ironic tragedy" and as the pharmakos, David represents the "artist-in-exile" and "Buckler's myth of the sacrificed artist."

D. J. Dooley, Moral Vision in The Canadian Novel (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1979), pp. 49-59.

D. G. Jones, Butterfly On Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 23-25.

Hugo McPherson, "Fiction 1940-1960", Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 711-712.

D. O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was", Canadian Literature, (Spring 1967), 40 - 56.

⁹⁸BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Harold Ober, May 23, 1951.

⁹⁹Atkinson, M.A. Thesis, p. 49.

¹⁰⁰BColl., Box 13, first draft of The Mountain and The Valley. Robert Stewart, "Buckler's David Canaan and Joyce's Stephen Dedalus", Canadian Notes and Queries, (June 1969), pp. 5-6. Using the Daedalus myth, Stewart attempts to interpret the partridge symbol to suggest that David resembles Icarus as well as Perdix who Daedalus threw off the roof of Athene's temple and whose soul was then transformed into a partridge. Although Buckler may well have been aware of the Perdix myth and the possible allusions surrounding the partridge, strict application of this myth fails to account for the irony and confusion of characters. For example, if David resembles Icarus, as Stewart claims, he cannot logically resemble Perdix as well. Stewart's argument that David in death "is saved from the torment of artistic death" in Entremont supports the buried artist view which, in turn, denies the essential irony of the epilogue.

¹⁰¹Ricou, "Style", p. 694.

¹⁰²BColl., Box 15, "Plans", p. 5.

Chapter III

The Cruellest Month

Following the acceptance of his first novel in 1952, Buckler turned quickly to beginning his second, The Cruellest Month. Suffering from poor health, financial insecurity and the death of his mother, Buckler took nearly eight years to write this novel and then waited another two years for its publication.

When Buckler wrote to William Raney at Holt in the fall of 1953, he was

half inclined to try a novel with a setting somewhere like Greenwich (which I know very well), with characters more articulate, if not more complicated, than the characters in the present book. (It is sometimes rather limiting to have to avoid all observation in dialogue which wouldn't come naturally to a rural spokesman; and there's always the danger of getting, stylistically, your silk purses mixed up with your sows' ears.) I don't mean to write about those chatterboxes which so many of the bright eyes nowadays seem to go in for, who keep flapping their tongues (and their wrists) at each other all the time about filigree little whimsies that couldn't be closer to nothing - - but well-rounded people with a certain urbanity (in the best sense of the word,) about their outlook. 1

During the next two years, however, Buckler progressed slowly "after several false pregnancies and much exploratory work and a long tiresome stretch of being physically more dilapidated than usual. I believe I'm truly enciente. Let's hope the thing won't be born with two heads".² Buckler's work was slowed by his farming responsibilities and his poor health:

Then, last winter [1954], which is usually the time I count on to make hay with the muse, I was ill most of the time, so the novel hasn't exactly gone on apace. I think I told you that the title was to be "The

Cruellest Month" (Eliot, of course: "April is the cruellest month/Mixing memory and desire"), and I have the contours of it concreted (if I may coin a verb) out of the ectoplasmic possible, and some of the actual words dredged up and morticed - - but none of it is shapeful enough to meet anyone's eye. (I have a silly complex, you know, about letting anyone see my writing in its underwear, as powerful as the Victorian lady's horror at showing her ankle). But I think (and I really mean that) that very soon it will be accreting at a much steadier rate. 3

By the summer of 1955, ill health again forced the novel into "abeyance" while Buckler wrote "short stuff as a kind of insurance."⁴

Finally, by 1956, Buckler had "passed the point of no return," and receiving the University of Western Ontario President's Award for the best Canadian short story in 1956 and 1957 along with Arnold Gingrich's high praise in Esquire gave him "a lift most sorely" needed.⁵ Buckler admitted to Gingrich that he had become "drugged and dragged with finishing the tortorous [sic] first draft of my novel."⁶ Although determined to finish the novel with or without outside encouragement, Buckler wrote to his agent, Von Auw, that he needed the advice of an editor like Edward Aswell because "writing here in N.S. is like working in an utter vacuum."⁷ In a letter to Ian Tyrhwitt, associate editor at Maclean's, Buckler describes his personal isolation in rural Nova Scotia:

There is no one here, absolutely no one, who has any interest whatsoever in writing, with whom I can discuss anything in that field, or draw the slightest encouragement from. That's why the friendliness of editors like yourself is so highly prized. Maybe it's only a mirage, but I often have the tantalizing feeling that if I could make a visit to Toronto as some of my friends there (notably Claude and Chris Bissell who came out so hearteningly for my book when a great many other Canadians would gleefully have driven a spike through its heart and burned it) keep urging me, and have personal conversations with you people, idea and treatment for

plenty of pieces might quite well be so much more readily and so much more satisfactorily threshed out between us. 8

The sudden death of his mother in January 1959 delayed the rewriting of the first draft, and financial considerations forced him to concentrate on publishing short pieces for the next several months.⁹ Finally, in the fall of 1959, Buckler submitted the first one hundred pages of a finished rough draft to his agent, Ivan Von Auw, with the note that "this novel of character" needed above all else "a first class editor."¹⁰ Von Auw found that the draft was "very awkwardly written."¹¹ Holt considered it "not promising at all."¹² Their negative reactions hit Buckler hard: "Perhaps the sensible [idea] would be to scrap the book entirely. But I've spent such endless hours on it and, though my own faith in it is confessedly at a pretty low ebb after this dash of ice water, something in me is still reluctant to let it go."¹³ Thus, Buckler undertook the critical revisions made somewhat easier by the financial support of a Canada Council grant in the summer of 1960. At last, Buckler had the economic security for "exclusive concentration" on the novel.¹⁴

In the spring of 1961, he submitted the novel, now entitled "The Cells Of Love," to the Doubleday "Canadian Prize Novel Contest."¹⁵ Once again Buckler agreed with Von Auw to "cutting by a good editor," but he declined any "sweeping changes in content" because "It's been so many years and so many tussels, in the making that it's gone sort of set." His sense that "this novel of ideas" may not be "especially marketable" proved sadly true, in spite of his willingness to "make almost any concessions to a publisher who'd clear it off the boards for me." Doubleday rejected his novel, "In spite of some really effective scenes, the novel as a whole

doesn't quite come off."¹⁶ Nevertheless, Buckler remained hopeful of finding a "sympathetic" editor who could "get the manuscript into a shape acceptable to him."¹⁷

Perhaps Buckler's most disheartening set-back came in May 1961 when Von Auw's "grave misgivings" about the novel forced him to resign as Buckler's American agent for "The Cells Of Love." In Von Auw's view, "the book does not come off as it stands and the style I found frequently irritating."¹⁸ Fortunately for Buckler, Jack Rackliffe, an editor at McClelland and Stewart, accepted the novel in the summer of 1961, and he then became the "sympathetic" editor Buckler had hoped to find.

From the first, Rackliffe thought Buckler's novel was "a truly marvellous piece of work."²⁰ Rackliffe, whose own health was failing rapidly, worked tirelessly as Buckler's editor.²¹ What he referred to initially as a "little batch of minor queries" quickly became, however, in Buckler's opinion, "very substantial changes."²² In his "batch," Rackliffe suggested that Buckler up-date the novel ten years, making the first visit to Endlaw in 1956 rather than 1946 and the second in 1961 rather than 1951.²³ Buckler flatly rejected Rackliffe's idea, arguing that the war "figures implicitly if not always explicitly in so many connections."²⁴ For example, Bruce Mansfield's absence from the farm and Rex's wound depend on the war interest. As well Rackliffe found the play motif puzzling, but Buckler explained that it "operated rather openly in the respect [to suggest parallel], because I feel life is so often like a play of itself." He did concede to omit "the nose-picking repetition," a motif he considered "the natural one with which to capsize the nonsense spectacle of dignity," but one which he agreed with Rackliffe, "indeed got tiresome."

Rackliffe identified the "wholly central quality of the book" as "the high pitch of emotional and mental tensions and alertness that it generated and demands," and he asked if this tone could be lowered.²⁵ Surely, Rackliffe asked, the characters "can't always be this subtle, this intense, this perceptive?" Although Buckler agreed to reconsider certain "specific passages," he refused to lower "the pitch of the book" because "characters only interest me in their revelatory moments of tension."²⁶ During this time with Rackliffe as editor, Buckler changed his title from "The Cells Of Love" back to his original title of "The Cruellest Month":

I also considered "Man Alone" - - with its dual meaning of "Man, alone" and "Only man..." but rejected it since man may not be understood in the generic sense but applied to one particular man. "The Cells of Love"...was supposed to cover (in a kind of double, somewhat ironic, application) sometimes prisoning aspects. But now...well, I just don't like it too much. Now I rather favour "The Cruellest Month," with the Eliot epigraph - - equally well. 27

Rackliffe, whose failing health forced him to edit much of the novel from his hospital bed, shared a warm relationship with Buckler who described Rackliffe as "a most conscientious editor, scrutinizing every line, and I found him extraordinarily congenial and understanding to work with."²⁸

Although Buckler and Rackliffe finished editing the text within six months, McClelland and Stewart privately delayed its publication, waiting to see who would publish the novel in the United States. Buckler, therefore, spent the next year of 1962 anxiously awaiting the galley proofs. But with their eventual arrival in 1963 came a new editor, Tom Walsh.²⁹ Entirely new editorial suggestions included renaming the novel "The Only Wear."³⁰ Frustrated with the events of the past two years and eager to begin a new book, Buckler agreed to some alterations in the Rackliffe edition. Two years after accepting the novel for publication, McClelland

finally announced September 7, 1963, as the date of publication for The Cruellest Month.³¹

Buckler's agent, Ivan Von Auw, however, had once again refused to promote the novel in the United States, and Holt, the original publishers of The Mountain and The Valley, rejected Buckler's second novel as a "minor offering."³² Determined to find an American market, Buckler began to offer independently his own book to American publishing houses. Over the next two years, from 1964 to 1966, Buckler approached seven publishers, but each rejected the novel for reasons similar to those expressed by Charles Scribner's and Sons, "in spite of its craft and professionalism, we can not undertake an American edition. The storyline did not generate enough enthusiasm among our editors."³³ This editorial comment came back to haunt Buckler. When the critics reviewed The Cruellest Month, they proved Buckler's hope "that September won't be the cruelest month as far as the critics are concerned" sadly true.³⁴

Critical response, in general, echoed what the editors at the various publishing houses had already claimed about the novel. Even Claude Bissell, one of Buckler's strongest supporters, admitted that the novel lacked "a strong centre" as well as the "poetry and vision" and the "immediate appeal of The Mountain and The Valley."³⁵ Critics, like Bissell, who judged Buckler's second novel by his first, found it deficient. The brilliant, metaphysical language of The Mountain and The Valley was now, according to R. G. Baldwin, "sometimes grotesquely difficult, almost self-consuming as it turns in on itself."³⁶ In Buckler's first novel, the intense psychological drama of strong characters compensated for what many critics considered a serious lack of action. But the characters in The Cruellest Month, F. W. Watt claims, "talk endlessly about themselves and

each other, but they are never really shown, presented, brought alive."³⁷
 For the same reason, Robert Harlow considers the entire work "a retro-
 grade step" in Buckler's career. "It's so bad that it is difficult, if not
 impossible, to take seriously."³⁸

The novel did, however, receive critical praise from Jack Sherriff
 who became "completely absorbed by the mental actions and reactions" of
 the characters.³⁹ Despite serious weaknesses, this novel Bissell considered
 a "most memorable" and "important book," and he defends the sometimes
 "tortuous and difficult" prose as "the kind of obsession that great writers
 have." Buckler, in a letter to Von Auw, comments on his writing style and
 tries to defend himself against those critics who accuse him of "over-
 writing":

Over-writing is never my intent. I never consciously
 strain for the fancy or the arresting or the outre
 or any of that jazz. What I do all the time (although
 I recognize that in its excesses it can be stultifying
 too) is try, sometimes for hours over a single
 arrangement, to find the absolutely accurate phrase
 for what I have in mind. If it turns out to be an
 unusual one, I can't help it. 40

Buckler's struggle to find the "absolutely accurate phrase" recalls David
 Canaan's search for exactness in The Mountain and The Valley. Although he
 may not have "consciously" written in a "tortuous" style, Buckler's writing
 style frequently obfuscates the narrative form. His language can, indeed,
 become "stultifying" when filled with excesses such as in this passage
 describing Paul Creed's confrontation with death. The news

was gentling, as all the final trickeries are. You
 were slewed around, with eyes in your back - - facing
 all that had or hadn't happened to you: a gallery
 with subtly shifted emphases, at once totally
 communicative and totally deaf; but numinously
 distinct in some opalescent light like the sun's
 light drawing water over a high wall of trees

in the primaeval secrecy before a change of weather. (p. 178)

This particular passage more closely resembles the lyrical and metaphorical language of poetry which, when forced into prose, often confuses more than it elucidates. The piling up of images blurs our original focus and demands imaginative leaps more suitable for poetry than prose. Ironically, Buckler was a great admirer of Ernest Hemingway's writing style and felt some writers would do well to emulate Hemingway's clean, straight-forward prose style.

Early reviews reveal that several factors influenced critical attitudes toward The Cruellest Month. For nearly ten years, critics had anticipated Buckler's next work, and their expectations were deeply affected by the international success of The Mountain and The Valley. In consequence, the first novel became the yard-stick by which to measure the success or failure of The Cruellest Month. Buckler's first novel about a close-knit rural family in the Annapolis Valley had seemed entirely consistent with the image of its author, a Nova Scotian rustic, a "farmer who writes." Now, the chatty, urban sophisticates of The Cruellest Month sharply contradicted that romantic picture of Buckler, and reviewers were seemingly reluctant to accept this new direction and identity taken by Buckler. Claude Bissell explains Buckler's shift as "an inevitable stage in the development of an artist." Buckler's first editor, Jack Rackliffe, however, had been impressed by the differences between his two novels, and believed that "this book could not remotely have been predicted or extrapolated from the earlier book."⁴¹

In his second novel, Buckler turns to what he terms "the challenge of nihilism which, at times, seems to be the only logical creed."⁴²

This statement refers to the philosophic view that life is meaningless, an attitude that Buckler rejects in favour of love and human relationships. The challenge begins when man is overcome by the absurdities of his existence and the intolerable contradictions of life. He may then turn, in despair, to the philosophy of nihilism and perceive life as chaotic and empty. This modern perspective of irony springs from man's disillusionment when his idealized longings are contradicted by reality. A direct result of adopting this view of life is alienation and the loss of human relationships. Therefore, Buckler rejects nihilism and believes that love relationships, however flawed by illusions or self-deception, express a genuine belief in mankind and the continuity of life. Buckler suggests that when faced with the challenge to accept a philosophy of nihilism, man must not despair but search for and find significance. Furthermore, Buckler argues that because a true nihilist would consider suicide the only logical response to an absurd existence, nihilism is an untenable philosophy.

The title for Buckler's novel and the epigraph from The Wasteland embody this world view and one of the work's central ironies:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain. 43

The season of rebirth, April mocks the novel's seven characters who are trapped by their own contradictory natures and the cycle of life and death. The spring renewal of the lilacs marks the erosion of time and man's inability to recapture the past or halt time. In Eliot's poem, the lilacs symbolize youth, first love and spring, but, in Buckler's fiction, they serve as symbols for lost youth, past time and personal

loneliness. In her study of The Cruellest Month, Bernita Harris recognizes a conflict between an optimistic symbolic pattern of rebirth and Buckler's pessimistic narrative pattern of death.⁴⁴ Harris quotes Buckler as being "deeply impressed by the irony of rebirth in nature and the rejuvenation of the earth in spring in contrast to the wintry desolation one feels in one's heart and soul so well expressed in Eliot's opening lines."⁴⁵ Alan Young, with reference to Harris's study, argues that,

such ironies in The Cruellest Month collectively smother the positive vision inherent in the "Wasteland" pattern, Buckler's nihilistic tendencies amounting to an indulgence in bitterness that ultimately unbalances the complex system of irony and ambivalence intended to derive from the juxtaposition of the cycle of rebirth against the continued living death of the characters. 46

Harris and Young both acknowledge the irony which arises from Buckler's symbols, narrative and characterizations. The patterning of the contrasts serve to structure the novel.

In addition to the challenge of nihilism and the pattern of rebirth, Buckler describes the central irony of the novel as the contrast between the expectation and the experience, appearance and reality, "The way people continue to fool themselves" about themselves, and "The question of change; do people, ever, much? The tempering of the fire, and its somewhat ironic results. When you see someone made over the way you'd thought you wanted them to be, do they seem suddenly worse?".⁴⁷ Buckler's comments here reveal his deliberate use of irony to reveal to the reader how his characters deceive themselves by misinterpreting appearances as reality and how they suffer disillusionment as a consequence. To illustrate this discrepancy between the

imaginary and the actual, Buckler moves inside his characters to discover "the patterns behind appearance," and invests the novel with "a rather high content of travail...(the point is that its characters are not really exceptional cases: look beneath anyone's facade and you find much the same thing)."⁴⁸ Behind their facades, Buckler explores their subjective perceptions and impressions of the world. By juxtaposing those private views with their outward condition, Buckler reveals to the reader the incongruities that create irony. The character's stream of consciousness reveals to the reader particular sensitivities and attitudes, and that information allows the reader to compare and contrast the character's thoughts and actions, his expectations and experiences, his public and private persona. If inconsistencies arise, between any of these versions of reality, then the reader identifies irony within the context of the novel. In The Cruellest Month, Buckler uses stream of consciousness as the basis for his ironic disparities in his narrative, and the reader sees disparities between Buckler's presentation of the character and the character's own sense of himself.

In delineation of character we discover that everyone has isolated himself to some degree after an experience has shattered his idealism and exposed him to a contradictory and intolerable reality. According to Buckler, the novel is intended to explore how different characters create protective facades and alienate themselves after their despair: "The story proceeds on different levels. It is shown how contrastingly each character reacts to the big loss that has made his or her abdicatory 'retreat' instinctive."⁴⁹ Buckler combines the theme of isolation with love so that "on another level there is

the development of personal relations amongst them." Each character is, to some degree, alienated and living a life of self-imposed solitude because the divergence between his expectations and his experiences isolates him figuratively from the world around him. As well, the "big loss" involves some measure of guilt as he feels responsible for his circumstances and the suffering he may have inflicted on others. Although the character's understanding and evaluation of his loss and his sense of guilt are often distorted by his self-deception and misinterpretation of appearances as reality, he isolates himself physically and psychologically from the rest of society. He intentionally alienates himself in order to avoid further disillusionment and guilt feelings. This bitter, self-imposed form of figurative isolation is, according to the novel, "simply the unreasonable way all serious people punish themselves for the knocks they get. And what's the classic punishment? Solitary confinement" (p. 138). Buckler suggests that man commonly despairs of life's contradictions and absurdities and responds by retreating from human relationships, adopting a nihilistic view of existence and constructing a cell of absolute isolation. This reaction Buckler considers to be the tragedy of modern society and one that only deepens man's despair. In his novel, Buckler depicts this process of alienation as an impossible solution to the problems confronting mankind and the philosophy of nihilism as an illogical attitude. The theme of isolation, therefore, includes the challenge of nihilism and involves an intellectual argument against that point of view. To emphasize his faith in love and his rejection of nihilism,

Buckler allows each character to escape from his absolute isolation by discovering a love relationship which proves to be a meaningful alternative to nihilism. Although he may continue to delude himself about his new relationship, his perceptions, and his own nature, the Buckler character has a faith in love, however flawed or imperfect. Buckler believes that the novel's "essential stance is positive...in the before Peale sense."⁵¹

Buckler again sets his novel in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia as he focusses on Endlaw, a farm transformed into a summer hotel. An anagram for Walden, Endlaw exists outside society, as geographically alone and isolated as its owner, Paul Creed. Part one of the novel occurs in September 1946 when the four main characters are still unaware of their inevitable fortunes and natures; Paul Creed, an educated, widely travelled man now retired at Endlaw; Morse Halliday, a successful American writer from Connecticut; Kate Fennison, the spinster daughter of a widowed Boston professor; and Letty Spence, a widowed earthy Nova Scotian working as Paul's housekeeper. In part two, which occurs five years later, Kate and Morse return to visit Paul at Endlaw, each having suffered the "big loss" and retreated into personal isolation. As "A Nest of Amputees" (another of Buckler's alternate titles for the novel), they have lost part of themselves and "their mainspring has snapped."⁵² Paul has lost his identity and, with ironic detachment, faces the prospect of death through heart disease. Morse, who has lost his writing talent, reacts with bitter cynicism. Kate, who has lost her youth and her father, reacts with sentimental idealism. Letty, who thinks she has lost the possibility of a romantic relationship with Paul, reacts with domestic chores. Three slightly younger guests arrive at Endlaw, and they too are "amputees."

Bruce Mansfield, a farm labourer at Endlaw who has abandoned his medical career following the death of his wife and child, reacts to his losses with peasant stubbornness; the handsome Rex Giorno, who is losing his good looks and self-respect, reacts with thoughtless accident and psychological strain; his wife, Sheila, a wealthy Greenwich socialite who has lost her love for Rex, reacts with resignation and infidelity. Each character believes that at Endlaw his losses can be overcome. In part three, the renewal each person seeks involves the game of truth, "Plain Speaking," which forces each of them to undergo painful self-scrutiny. Finally, in part four which focusses on the forest fire, the novel takes on an energy and pitch missing in the other sections. An unprecedented forest fire in spring, which the reader recognizes as incongruous and the irony of situation, symbolizes, as well, the purging and tempering process undergone by each character in part three. Paul, convinced that love conquers death, plans to marry the illiterate Letty who then adopts an absurd way of speaking in an attempt to please Paul. Morse's sudden conversion to sentimentality is as inaccurate as his original cynicism and fails to please Kate whose new identity as Mrs. Halliday contradicts her old-maid silliness. Bruce, unable to abandon the dead for the living, rejects Sheila, remains loyal to Molly and plans to be a child psychiatrist to expiate his guilt about Peter. Sheila and Rex, reunited under the pretense of Rex's suicide attempt, have no greater affection for or understanding of each other but stay together for their common past and future.

The dualities of life and death, past and present, truth and deception, guilt and innocence, alienation and love are subject to Buckler's ironic treatment as they were in The Mountain and The Valley. As well,

Buckler pursues his view of accidental determination which continues to involve unexpected events.⁵³ Whereas his first novel resolved few of these tensions and concluded with the alienation and death of David Canaan, his second novel offers love as a solution and marriage as a comic ending.

To unite the events and psychological tensions of the narrative, Buckler uses the motifs of the deer, the play and the law. The motif of the deer Buckler claims to employ as a "revelatory" agent.⁵⁴ When each character sees the deer, he experiences a "vaulting insight" (p. 264) into his situation. There is, however, a tension associated with the deer motif and Buckler's intentions. The deer's natural grace and beauty contrast with a death-coldness which reflects the indifference of the natural world. The deer embodies incongruities that the reader recognizes as elements of the motif's irony. The symbolism of the deer Buckler seems to make deliberately complex and ambiguous. When, for example, Paul sees the deer, he associates it with the tortured artist. His "vaulting insight," however, concerns death and rejuvenation rather than art. Similarly, the deer motif Buckler associates with innocence, natural beauty and the past. Although Buckler allows the exact meaning of the deer motif to remain ambiguous, it consistently signifies personal revelations.

The play motif reflects Buckler's sense of parody that "life is so often a play of itself," and that in "moments of shocking reality... life is apt to take on for the participant the unreality of a play."⁵⁵ The countless references to the play, the actors and the audience emphasize how the characters' lives and speeches are scripted and frequently arranged. The play motif contrasts the way we expect the drama of life to unfold with the way it actually occurs. With this disparity, the play motif often

turns on itself to emphasize Buckler's deliberate attempts to show life as a dramatic parody.

The law motif fulfils another of Buckler's themes involving the way in which each man is trapped by his own nature and is accountable for his past. As well, it reinforces how man's system of law and order remains subject to the greater, more powerful forces of nature and the laws of an indifferent universe. Each character has judged himself guilty of a certain crime and incarcerated himself in a cell of "solitary confinement" (p. 138) and guilt. Bruce, for example, is guilty of carelessness concerning the accidental deaths of his wife, Molly, and son, Peter. Rex considers himself guilty of cowardice and a self-inflicted war wound. Sheila considers herself guilty of having fallen out of love with Rex. At Endlaw, which is not, as its name implies, without law or the end of law, they face the various laws involved with love, death, marriage and human nature. Eventually, a verdict is reached and each character sentences himself according to his crime and his inherent nature. Bruce finds himself still guilty of causing the deaths of his wife and child, but he sentences himself to a career in medicine in an effort to absolve himself. Rex, who commits a version of the courtroom's crime of passion, is found innocent and regains his self-respect. Sheila's verdict shows her to be innocent, and she now will continue on in her relationship with Rex. Regardless of the solution, the reader knows that each character remains caught by his own nature and answerable to the past. As Buckler's title, "The Cells of Love," implies, each character suffers from the sometimes imprisoning aspects of love.

The disparity between Endlaw's appearance and its reality and the guests' expectations and their experiences creates a central irony in the

novel. Outside society's order, Endlaw, like the natural world and the universe in which it exists, stands indifferent to all human aspirations and ideals. The people at Endlaw, however, invest this rural retreat with their own special visions, deluding themselves that Endlaw will fulfil their longings. Eventually, they recognize their perceptions as incongruous with their external reality. Although Endlaw appears to the characters to be a kind of mountain retreat where the disabused can fit together the "unalloyed fabrics of Time, Place, and Sentience" (p. 110), the reader knows from Buckler's narrative that it has the intolerable realities of the outside world. Having discovered Endlaw by accident, the characters begin to participate in its renewal process and experience the "rein of accident," where, according to Buckler, "life is nothing but a reign, a rain, and a rein of accident."⁵⁶ Through events at Endlaw, Buckler tries to "emphasize [the] accidental feature in life" and we see how incongruous events and circumstances create tensions and result in the irony of situation in Buckler's plot and characterizations.⁵⁷

Paul, Kate and Morse, who form a triumvirate reminiscent of the David, Anna and Toby relationship, perceive Endlaw as a "Home for the Incroyables" (p. 8). Paul views Endlaw as his personal sanctuary which keeps life's absurdities in abeyance, "the one pocket in the universe that nothing could ever turn inside out" (p. 10). But his ideal, however, is contradicted when death enters Endlaw. Advertised as a "quiet cave wherein to mind their own business. Good shelter, board, view. No telephone. No entertainment. Come sort yourself out, if you dare. Bring no Cadillacs, cats, or bitches" (pp. 8-9), Endlaw, in the reader's view, offers painful self-examination rather than emotional or mental tranquility. Morse, for example, considers Endlaw "the very domicile of peace" (p. 11),

but he discovers intense artistic and personal conflict. Kate believes that at Endlaw she will find a lost youth and new identity, but she eventually realizes that "Endlaw had more the features of a cul-de-sac than of a launching pad" (p. 76). Sheila perceives Endlaw as a "simple innocent spot" (p. 56) similar to the place where she and Rex spent their honeymoon, but Endlaw becomes the scene for her adultery when she honeymooned with Bruce Mansfield. At Endlaw, the farm formerly owned by his parents and the home of his childhood, Bruce Mansfield hopes to return to the innocence of the past and escape his guilt feelings. He discovers instead an illicit love affair with Sheila, a married woman, who reinforces his attachment to Molly and Peter. With the telling insight of a child, Rex's hostility toward Endlaw as a "God-forsaken place" (p. 87) proves well-founded when his visit heightens his paranoia and psychological suffering. Indeed, Endlaw, inhabited by this disillusioned and despairing group of nihilists and lost souls, is a God-forsaken place.

Paul Creed, a clever, sophisticated middle-aged man, emerges as the novel's hero who isolates himself at Endlaw in order to be totally independent. To maintain his independence and his belief that he "belonged entirely to himself" (p. 16), Paul rents "people a few months at a time...and then he's only too glad to set his consciousness on 'simmer' and cocoon for the rest of the year" (p. 16). This solitary, insular life at the apparently ideal Endlaw recalls the ideal world of contemplation and beauty sought by David Canaan. Like David, Paul is a bachelor, conscious of time's movements, deluded by a desire to be a writer, scarred by chest pain and heart disease, bereft of family, living in self-imposed solitude outside the mainstream of society with a mother figure.

Unlike David who denied reality and therefore died self-deceived, Paul acknowledges his delusions and loneliness and opposes the absurdities of existence and even death, to a degree. In many respects, Paul's life at Endlaw represents the cabin David Canaan dreamed of building where he would one day write his novel. Buckler allows Paul to escape David's sad fate by discovering love and an understanding of human relations.

As his name implies, Paul Creed has met personal loss and the challenge of nihilism with a logical philosophical view that man's life is futile and life itself a farce. Paul's creed of nihilism includes a "laugh and let live" (p. 234) philosophy which embodies an irreverent attitude and refusal to be serious about anything. The grin and the fart represent his insolent response to intensity, "the natural one with which to capsize the nonsense spectacle of dignity."⁵⁸ Paul views life with an emotional detachment he mistakenly thinks will protect him from the big losses suffered by others. His decoy grin "so farcically unsymptomatic of the pith behind it" (p. 17) contradicts his feelings and identity. Robert Chambers aptly describes Paul as "the calm centre within the novel, a still eye around which rage the psychological tempests of the other characters."⁵⁹ Paul's relationship to his house guests, who mistakenly perceive him as invincible and fulfilled, resembles that of a benevolent father to his wayward children. This paternal role, which denies him a strong, vibrant identity, distances him, in many respects, from the other characters and separates him even when surrounded by his guests. Like David Canaan, he assumes the identities of those around him, and so he fails to create his own. Paul's character identity is repeatedly defined by the "way things happen" to him, and a certain absurdity renders his serious experiences comic; therefore, "his tragedies are never without this wacky element."⁶⁰

The bee incident, the fertility dance and his relationship with Letty exemplify the inconsistencies that he and the reader recognize as part of his complex, "wacky" existence. He confronts and endures the absurdities of the universe by perceiving life as comic, a series of accidents and contradictions. Buckler's own "thesis of accidental determination" corresponds directly with Paul's view of life and decides "the way things happen" to him. The "simple accident" (p. 199) of forgetting his tie-clip in the Montreal hospital, for example, sets Paul on an unexpected course of action.

Paul's entire system for solitary survival and his illusions of being invincible collapse when he learns that he will die soon from heart disease. He and the reader recognize the discrepancy between his expectations and his experiences, the ideal and the real. Suddenly, Paul cannot grin at his own intense response to dying or mock his own serious thoughts. He suddenly sees himself as mortal a victim of the ravages of time. He is not immune from suffering the big losses or from feeling intensely serious about life. This reality of death strikes in the spring, the season of renewal that mocks man's mortality. Paul recognizes the irony of situation as well as self-deception, how his alleged freedom from human relationships amounts to nothing but a self-made prison of absolute isolation where books have been the flesh and talk the touch (p. 63). The personal relationships, so long neglected and avoided, are now impossible, and his identity, concealed by his detached attitude toward life, are lost. In retrospect, Paul sees "the most punishing insight of all" (p. 63) that "he'd had his freedom far too long not now to be forever bound by it. Mere act or not, he would keep on defending it" (p. 63). He also sees how a relationship with Kate Fennison could have saved him from

his lonely situation, "He saw Kate's face. He saw that if he'd let her love take charge of him, it could have been as if life were a baffle of equations in x and y and suddenly you were good in algebra" (p. 63).

But, like David Canaan, Paul retreats from self-awareness when death becomes a reality, deluding himself that he can still survive in total isolation. Paul's self-deception deflects pity for his suffering onto the perversity of fate. Paul calls himself "Bruce Halliday," a combination of names representing what Paul (and Buckler) may have considered the ideal pairing of farmer and writer, cultivators of the land and the word. We view his action only as a pathetic effort to fool himself and "death with a false name" (p. 171), and his illusions shatter when "for the second time he saw what a self-delusion his self-sufficiency had been. It was nothing" (p. 171). Still loyal, however, to complete independence, he decides to die alone, sustained in death as in life by his absolute isolation at Endlaw. But Endlaw is not "the one blessed wall this staring [death] could not penetrate" (p. 197), and the death-stillness that now haunts Paul invades his sanctuary and contradicts his perception of himself:

To be by himself had always given him an insulation impenetrable. Now, for the first time in his life, he knew the unspeakable nakedness of having the stillness at the heart of all things stare at the stillness inside him right through the wall of being alone. (p. 197).

As he looks death full in the face, Paul recognizes how the bones of his lonely life are unprotected by the flesh of human love.⁶¹

In the "Plain Speaking" game in part three, Paul reveals his entire philosophy of life and love to the other players, and he sincerely tries to explain how he recognizes the nihilism that makes suicide "the only rational act" (p. 234) in an absurd world. Yet he simultaneously

acknowledges the "fool's consciously foolish belief" that "courage and tolerance and compassion can be called good things with any reason" (p. 234). This ironic perspective leads Paul to contemplate death, life's meaning and truth, and to question man's longing for immortality,

He was grinning again, but thinking: And the fool knows that all these silly antics for grasshoppers - - one man makes noises with a horn and the others clap their hands together - - amount to nothing, yet why does everything inside him go still when he knows he has to leave it? (p. 235)

Still viewing life with wry disillusionment and acutely aware of his impending death and the erosion of time, Paul rejects Kate's overture to remain with him at Endlaw. Contrary to Alan Young's statement that "Paul's letting Kate go is arbitrary and totally misjudged," Paul's reasoning is based on the clearly understood knowledge that he will die soon.⁶² Unlike the lilac bush, their relationship cannot be transplanted or renewed in spring. What does contradict his decision, however, is his later proposal to Letty, but then Paul's delusions about the prospect of spiritual renewal through Letty affect his judgement.

With all the guests gone from Endlaw, Paul begins to resign from life altogether and, in particular, from the world of words. He destroys his notebooks which now epitomize his empty life, "They'd once proposed to encapsulate the lessons of a lifetime. He glanced at the occasional line; they were no more than a coreless scattering of tangential chaff, whether nonsensical or serious" (p.272)). Again, art in Buckler's fiction fails to compensate for love or capture exactly the essence of experience. Along with the notebooks go the "jottings" (p. 272) for the novel Paul had hoped to write. Deluded by his own esoteric vocabulary and notes, Paul never approaches the realm of a true artist. Among other things, he lacks

what the true artist, Morse Halliday, possesses: the ability "to constrict himself to pin-point at will" (p. 274). Paul, like David Canaan, lacks the clear focus, a pattern, from which to write about life. As Alan Young suggests, Paul's "defensive isolationism" prevents him from being an artist because "the true artist, Buckler implies, must involve himself with others ...and not merely 'rent' other people, as Paul does."⁶³ Buckler explains Paul's failure to write a novel and the significance of his notebooks:

The original idea was that these "fragments" were to indicate that Paul's perspective did resemble Morse's in some ways - - but that whereas Morse's was more often focalized, Paul's was more often darting, and (the big difference) whereas Morse's seriousness was usually of a piece, Paul's was being continually upended by the nonsense-aspect-of things' [sic] insinuating itself. 64

Paul's nihilistic philosophy of the grin and the fart defeats his creative aspirations and places him outside sincere human experiences. Although Paul shares Morse's insolence, he remains alienated and deluded by his perceptions of personal invincibility. Buckler's argument that only "one in a million" aspiring writers ever actually succeed may apply to Paul Creed, as well.

Appearing late in the novel, Paul's artistic aspirations carry minimal significance except as they reinforce his preoccupation with words, his unfulfilled illusions and the requirements of being a genuine artist. This life-long dream of being a writer recalls David Canaan's and, like David, Paul deludes himself about his talent. The reader is intended to agree with Paul's objective evaluation of his notebook, jottings and final decision to destroy them. They are self-indulgent, obscure mind-games typical of Paul's word-shaped consciousness. His rejection of this writing is not, however, as Alan Young says, "arbitrary" and "one of the more bitter

ironies of the novel."⁶⁵ Rather, it is a clear-sighted, honest appraisal of both his work and his life, "This little guano island that was all there was to show for his whole life's consciousness" (p. 273). When Paul discovers one passage about nature mocking man's mortality, he is justifiably moved. His response, however, is based on subjective identification and not objective evaluation. He remains incapable of transcending his own self-consciousness and nihilism, and, therefore, he is incapable of becoming a true artist.

Two "accidents" occur to reverse Paul's solitary fate and rescue him from isolation. The appearance of the deer, here a symbol of rejuvenation, inspires him to "outwit his blackmailing heart" (p. 275). Donating his body to science will be his last insolent act against his ironic fate, "That stand against invasion he'd engarrisoned all his life, that lifelong trick he'd perpetuated on himself - - by what final stroke of freedom from it could he fly more neatly in its face than this?" (p. 275). By donating his body to scientific research, Paul actually continues to dedicate himself, his flesh and blood, to the search for knowledge and truth. He believes that this act will contradict, to some degree, the crushing reality of death, compensate for his illusions about total independence, and be his trick against fate. The reader agrees with him, in part, but recognizes this decision as another of his foolish attempts to defeat death and expiate his guilt feelings about alienating himself from everyone around him.

The second "accident" is the forest fire which threatens annihilation and gives Paul a focus on life for the first time. According to Buckler, the forest fire, "threatening physical annihilation, finally

precipitates the attitude each of them really takes toward abdication and toward their allegiances and toward each other when the chips are really down."⁶⁶ Love, rather than truth and lonely self-sufficiency, suddenly becomes Paul's insolent weapon against fate. "When the chips are really down," Paul replaces his ironic detachment with the artist's "snow-blind ardency" (p. 274) and fights to save Endlaw, now a living being in Paul's eyes,

It was something, someone almost that, giving back his will to live, he'd risk his life to save. He'd never fought like this for anything in his life before. Physically. Angrily. The shrug become second nature, he'd never known what a glorious intoxication it was to fight for something in anger. His blood was pounding, but his heart felt newly indomitable. (p. 286).

The fertility dance he and Letty perform to stamp out the fire causes them to be "literally and figuratively stripped," and this affirmation of life and belief in individual courage strengthens Paul.⁶⁷ It also proves, according to Buckler, "Morse's dictum that the way things happened to Paul...cf. the bees...was a definition of him, even his tragedies are never without this wacky element."⁶⁸ Paul's decision to reject his creed of nihilism leads to his emotional freedom as well. He decides that he loves Letty whose simple beauty reflects the grace and spirit of the deer and the natural setting of Endlaw. According to Buckler,

It is Letty's solid down to earthiness as against the more sophisticated fevers of the others, even against Kate's (though Letty's simple courage in all things is not the courage of a clod: she doesn't muck around in her feelings as they do, but her feelings are none the less complicated for all that), which restores Paul's identity. The background for this is a circumstance of their firefighting to save the house, in which both are literally and figuratively stripped. 69

Paul's revelation of love is nevertheless still subject to ironic interpretation, as he now sees the intensity of their fertility dance and fire-fighting as comical. Furthermore, with the "first rain" (p. 289) that promises the earth renewal after the fire, comes Paul's "first exploratory spit of pain" (p. 289) that promises him death. The reality of his fatal heart disease and the mocking rain contradict his earlier feeling that his heart was "newly indomitable," and the reader considers the disparity ironic.

This forest fire scene with Paul and Letty demonstrates that Buckler can allow the action to unfold freely and the characters to operate naturally. Perhaps the presence of Letty Spence, a familiar rustic character, accounts for Buckler's treatment of the scene. The battle to save Endlaw includes complex symbols which sustain the narrative and reinforce the themes. In the initial moments, Paul abandons the word and word games for life and life games of survival and loyalty. The wind in Buckler's fiction frequently symbolizes the arrival or threat of death, figurative isolation and guilt feelings. Here, the strong winds carry the fire, the threat of death and annihilation, and illustrate the power and indifference of the natural world. The brook, which protected Endlaw from outsiders, is now powerless against the wind's force and the fire's energy. The boat offers escape to the island, but neither Paul nor Letty make this symbolic, but backward, trip from the fiery inferno of Endlaw across the River Styx to the safety of the island, a symbol of total isolation. They choose, instead, trial by fire and undergo purification by fire rather than renewal by water. Eventually, they baptize each other using a tool of the earth, the garden sprayer, and they make their last stand against the elements in the garden, an appropriate setting for this middle-aged Adam and Eve battling to save their Eden. The lilac,

symbolic of youth and friendship, Paul now curses; he rejects Kate's relationship and youthful dreams for Letty's mature love and earthiness. The insolent grin and fart, Paul's traditional weapons against adversity, he now replaces with his own masculinity and strength as he beats back the flames with his trousers. Letty takes up her broom, symbol of her role as matron and housekeeper, and, using her skirt, a symbol of her femininity, helps Paul to save Endlaw. The fertility dance, of course, Buckler uses in an ironic sense since Letty and Paul are actually old and barren, but it does symbolize their rebirths. When Paul collapses and appears dead, Letty, a kind of earth mother and creator, breathes life into him with her kiss, a symbol of their sexual awakening. In the final moments, Letty's plan to improve her grammar anticipates the novel's final irony. Meanwhile, the fierce fire, which purged and strengthened Paul and Letty, has been overcome by the gentle rain of Eliot's poem. Buckler's multiple images and symbols the reader comes to recognize as ironic and as a culmination of his stylistic techniques. The scene succeeds on a literal and figurative level as its preoccupation with contrasting symbols and metaphors reaches heights of extended meaning.

Misunderstandings now appear in Paul's relationship with Letty. Having rejected the world of words for the world of deeds, Paul rejoices in Letty's simple beauty, but Letty, in a misguided effort to please Paul, plans to adopt the world of words, "I must stop sayin' 'ain't", she thought - - I know better'n that" (pp. 291-292). Endlaw's urban guests have helped to corrupt Letty's simple, rural speech, and her aspirations to speak correctly contradict his idealizations of her as "the beautiful monosyllable of home" (p. 296); also Paul's plans with Letty contrast

with the "crowning trickery in thought" (p. 295) which distorts his perception of reality, "You never could believe that what you thought at any given moment could be wrong, for that was all that consciousness consisted of: what you presently believed; and thought was nothing but the sound of that belief" (pp. 295-296). Paul's delusions, the "crowning trickery in thought," recall how Buckler described David's final self-delusion as "the crowning point of the whole dramatic irony." Paul's past life of absolute isolation now seems to him incredible, "that old inviolate, self-sufficient, nohow seducible hero. Oh, I've really tricked myself ten ways from Sunday!" (p. 297). Yet, Paul's definition of love as "the walls of an invisible house which sprang up to enclose them at any alien trespass" (p. 297) suggests to the reader that the need to be self-contained are still integral parts of his nature. Paul continues to deceive himself about Letty in the same way that he always fooled himself about his solitude and being inviolate. His sense of peace and perfection is, therefore, as vulnerable as the "tricking morning" to objective reality.

Charmed by his own illusions about Letty and filled with the "sparkle of unification" (p. 296), Paul's grin no longer reflects his nihilism but simple happiness. His dreams of perfection and unity shatter abruptly, however, when Letty, having misjudged Paul's reason for loving her, speaks "proper grammar. She'd show him she could talk as proper as 'they' did if she put her mind to it" (p. 298). Language betrays Letty and creates a dramatic irony when she thinks she speaks correctly, "She stressed it again. 'Just as soon as you've drank your coffee" (p. 298). Letty's language fulfils Buckler's

original idea (vide this "tricking morning,")...
that the ending too should be, again for want of
a better word, ironic: Letty's absurd self-

launching into the cult of grammar (and a cockeyed grammar at that)...which would becloud the wide simplicities which Paul really loved her for, with a kind of grotesquerie...was meant to underline the idea. 70

What Letty understands as a clear demonstration of her love for Paul, he interprets initially as a betrayal of all his dreams for them. He immediately recognizes how Letty's own obvious self-deception makes his present situation ironic. But the grin which replaces his initial wince suggests that he accepts this reversal as comic and simply the way things always happen to him. Letty's actions simply represent another "wacky element" characteristic of all his disappointments and upsets. His grin of amusement reflects, as it did after the fertility dance, his recognition of life's incongruities the presence of comedy in tragedy, the nonsense inherent in dignity. Paul has reassumed his ironic perspective and laid aside his idealism about love and Letty.

Despite the verbal ambiguity and discrepancies we consider ironic, the closing lines urge a positive interpretation of the Paul and Letty relationship. The "faultlessness" (p. 298) of this April morning which "mocks the one alone" (p. 298) suggests that a human relationship, even one affected by disillusionment and misconceptions, is still preferable to absolute isolation and nihilism. Two people together in love share the "one inimitable safety" (p. 298) from guilt and the erosions of time. In the face of absurdities, Paul's commitment to Letty demonstrates his faith in "the fool's consciously foolish belief" that courage, tolerance and compassion are truly meaningful. Paul, like all "funny grasshoppers," struggles against the blows of fate and the big losses. Paul, who maintains his integrity and something of his nihilism, sees the inconsistencies in her behaviour, but he accepts it as a part of an existence already riddled

with inconsistencies. His relationship with Letty he acknowledges as ironic, but love, not the grin and the fart, will be his insolent act against his fate because, "the one true insolence is not the grin or the fart, but the sign between two people who recognize precisely how things are. That two, not one, make up the unit of that insolence" (p. 194).

In an early version of the novel, Buckler's own intentions are made even clearer.⁷¹ This earlier draft is essentially the same as the final draft except for the character Paul Creed who originally suffered from impotence rather than heart disease. His impotence parallels the spiritual and emotional sterility of The Wasteland. Buckler's decision to emphasize Paul's psychological isolation and heart condition rather than sexual anxiety may stem from his comment that, "I know what plaintive reading physical symptoms make, and, in a kind of nervous tic, I'm usually tempted to bend backwards in a spasm of facetiousness."⁷² Buckler avoids "facetiousness" by treating physical afflictions - - David Canaan's head aches and Paul Creed's heart attacks - - as psychological states. As well, Buckler was probably strongly influenced by the sexual attitudes of the time which would have considered impotence a rather controversial topic, and the heart may represent the problem of love in more general terms than impotence.

Originally an architect who combined artistry with manual labour, Paul was rendered impotent by a fall from a high girder at the age of twenty-one, an accident clearly reminiscent of David Canaan's fall. Paul's scar becomes the invisible, "terrible secret" of his impotence which prevents him from sharing in loving relationships. (Buckler later transfers this impotence to Rex Giorno whose mangled foot is a symbol of impotence). An intellectual and a disciple of Thoreau, Paul recognizes his impotence as "the trick of fate" and accepts it with what Buckler calls "solipsistic

sensitivity."⁷³ Paul rejects Kate's sophisticated, intellectual manner, which cannot restore his masculinity in a physical way, for Letty's natural earthiness, which cures him immediately. Of this surprise decision involving Kate and Letty, Buckler writes, "Paul's trouble, he discovers (to compound the irony but to liberate him from the decoy grin way of life), has been psychological all along. He finds, in Letty's uncluttered soundness and loyalty, a potency and a home."⁷⁴ In light of this early version, Paul's surprising sexual union with Letty and his almost instant rejuvenation derive from Buckler's original idea of sexual impotence. Their union literally and figuratively causes Paul to reject the isolated life of the intellectual for a physical life of love. His choice grants him an identity and stresses love's transcendence over alienation and nihilism.

In both versions, Paul correctly interprets Letty's misguided efforts to speak grammatically as an honest expression of love, but the earlier ending lacks the positive vision of eternal unity included in the final version:

He winced.
 And then he was oddly touched - - differently but almost as keenly as when a sudden shaft of broadheartedness in something you read or see on the stage takes you unawares and, for the time it lasts, fills you with the certainty that nothing else in art or life has any place beside its kind of claim. And then he grinned. 75

Paul's moment of "broadheartedness," which contains references to the play motif and the shafts of light which reveal patterns in art and truth in life, Buckler undercuts with allusions to its temporality and Paul's ambiguous grin. In a letter to Jack Rackliffe, Buckler writes of his struggle with the novel's ending lines:

My God, Jack, I've had a "seige" with this new ending. To rework only ten lines looked like duck soup, but it didn't prove so. I tried first to keep the "irony" (rather reluctant to give up the mild "you can't win" twist) and protect Letty (I agree with you about that) at the same time. But it refused to come right. So finally I decided that I was probably trying to rework the unworkable and finally took another tack. I scrapped the irony (telling myself that maybe it was scrap-irony anyway) and simply wrote it straight. 76

This particular passage from The Buckler Collection shows us how preoccupied Buckler was with irony in this novel, and how concerned he was that he had difficulty handling irony in certain parts of the novel.

Love also rescues Morse Halliday and Kate Fennison from their isolation, but the reader recognizes irony in their misinterpretations of reality. Kate's romantic idealism conflicts with Morse's cynicism, but their loneliness draws them together. Kate believes that in marriage she will escape her loneliness and regain her lost youth. Morse believes that a sympathetic audience and a unifying light will restore his writing talent. Although Kate becomes Mrs. Halliday, we and Morse know she is still an old maid. Although Morse regains his creative energy, we and Kate know his romantic idealism is as deceptive as his initial pessimism.

Buckler presents Morse as an artist and uses him to voice many of his own views about writing. The title of Morse's first novel, "Each In His Own Cell," is reminiscent of Buckler's early title "The Cells of Love." In terms almost identical to those used by Buckler in his article, "My First Novel," Morse describes his struggle to capture "thoughts and feelings in a net as coarse as words" (p. 149), his battle with "this infernal time business," (p. 149) and the "staggering multiplicity" (p. 149) of truth. For Morse and for Buckler, truth is "the only thing I really have any conscience about" (p. 230). Morse's lengthy attack on the critics "who just wait for a writer to have his

entrails exposed to hold their little torches against them" (p. 150) shares something of Buckler's keen sensitivity to negative reviews and his frequent appeals for a "sympathetic" editor. The hypocrisy and false piety of critics enrage Morse whose books, like Buckler's The Mountain and The Valley, had been strongly criticized for their open presentation of sexuality. Like Buckler, Morse offers realism as his defense, "There was a fair amount of sex in my books, sure, because I had the idea there was a fair amount of it in life" (p. 150). Morse's view that "what identifies people is the kind of thing that happens to them" (p. 14) partially corresponds with Buckler's interest in "the way it was" and "the way things happen to people." When describing himself and his life on the farm, Buckler frequently uses ironic and comic stories. For example, the bee incident appears in one of Buckler's letters to a friend. In keeping with Buckler's psychological style, however, Morse places greater importance on motivation than on action, "that finger-drumming most people distract themselves with so they can't hear what's going on - - the ocean currents - - inside them" (p. 133).

Morse, however, does not entirely reflect Buckler's view of sentiment, that it is "the only thing that saves us at all."⁷⁷ When Morse considers savage cynicism the only truth and sentiment a betrayal, his fiction lacks the compassion and scope of Buckler's. And when Morse adopts blatant sentimentality as the guiding force for his writing, he crosses Buckler's "very, very thin line between sentiment and sentimentality."⁷⁸ Buckler strikes a balance and finds truth by turning Morse's bitterness about the way things happen into irony and Kate's sentimental view that "what identifies people is simply the thing that troubles them"

(p. 14) into compassion.

Morse initially considers Kate's idealism dishonest, and his "writer's gloat that far-outshadowed any sympathy toward the living circumstance" (p. 238) causes him to treat the suffering inhabitants of Endlaw simply as characters for his novel. His cynical façade, like Paul's decoy grin, has neutralized his emotions and isolated him from human relations. "Reckless savagery" (p. 200) rules his behaviour, and Morse identifies himself as "the guy who brandishes the truth about things and puts the bullying world to shame" (p. 250). But Morse's narrow view of truth, that what identifies people is simply the way things happen to them, blinds him, in our view, to the complex nature of people and distorts his perceptions. His assessment of himself and Paul as insolent heroes "for sticking to the grin and the fart to the bitter end" (p. 250) proves totally false when both of them turn finally to love relationships. His view of Paul as absolutely invulnerable blinds him to the death-stillness and loneliness that eventually invade Paul. His desire to destroy the deer symbolizes his blindness to the natural beauty and grace that contradict his cynicism. He rejects the psychologically tortured Rex because "he triggers nothing" (p. 189) when we know that Rex's "reign of accident" causes the novel's crisis. Rex's attempt to shoot himself contradicts Morse's version of reality, and he discovers that "There's always some damned accidental thing to upset the whole appplecart" (p. 248). A writer "can prove a hundred different things with the same people, each contrary to the others. So don't try to prove anything at all. Just give the facts" (p. 248). Although Morse now echoes Buckler's view of accidental determination, he limits his truth again,

"I want to draw the line under these people as of this moment...and get the hell out of here before I hit on something else about them that'll throw a monkey-wrench of surds and minuses into the whole damn business" (p. 248). Although convinced that he has found the true ending for his novel about the Endlaw characters, Morse lacks compassion because he understands human conflict only as it supports his negative view of life.

The ironies that riddle Morse's cynical truth also riddle Kate's sentimental truth. Actual experiences contradict her idealized expectations and force her to deceive herself. When her father dies, Kate retreats to Endlaw where she hopes to find total freedom from her lonely spinsterhood. But her understanding of freedom is, Buckler tells us, that "which only the chronically bound ever know" (p. 74). To realize her dream that "just one year - - would be enough to contain the whole of living" (p. 75), she chooses Morse as her partner and exchanges incarceration in a cell of family duty for the cell of love and marriage. In turn, Kate will inspire Morse to write again, and instead of having children, she and Morse will publish works of flesh and blood. Her inspiration will make Morse "pregnant" (p. 188) with his next novel, "'This book you're pregnant with,' she said. 'Is it far enough along it has features?' 'Yes,' he said. 'The characters are still in embryo, but I can see their story gene.'" ⁷⁹ The art that Morse and Kate create, however, is still-born when both of them lack the single vision of truth, and they distort reality.

Although Kate inspires Morse, his sardonic views persist. To perfect their love and his art, Kate sets out to convert Morse to her idealism that people's "flesh spells out things too" (p. 191) and possesses a "happy insolence...against its bones" (p. 191). Her ability

to see "behind things" (p. 40) clashes with Morse's superficial vision which sees only the bones of people and events. Kate, for example, feels compassion for Rex whose anxiety around the forest rangers illustrates Kate's philosophy that what identifies people is the thing that troubles them. This tension between Morse and Kate peaks during "Plain Speaking", but Kate's desperate and pathetic need to fulfil her longings keeps her loyal to Morse, "Kate sat there, half-hating everything Morse said; yet thinking proudly-foolishly: If the Athenaeum Club could see me now" (p. 229). Kate finally sees how deceived she has been about ever tapping Morse's sensitivity. She recognizes how self-deceived Morse is when he heartlessly twists life into art, people into characters and human tragedies into plot lines following Rex's failed suicide attempt. Kate realizes then how life's deeper truths remain hidden from Morse who demands that art imitate life and embody all truth. She sees how "You could be so wrong about yourself...about everything" (p. 251). Disillusioned with her dream of creating pure art with Morse and of marrying Morse, Kate offers herself to Paul. But, unaware, she deceives herself again when she "misread his dismay" (p. 258) for rejection and decides to marry Morse after all.

As Morse and Kate leave Endlaw, the deer appears, and their thoughts reveal to us their opposite nature. Kate's own love of beauty and idealism continues to deceive her in the same way that the deer's "challenging grace" (p. 276) proves false, "its hair was not silken but coarse" (p. 276). Like the timid deer, Kate seeks "escape from a greater danger" (p. 276) of isolation to the lesser danger of an imperfect marriage with Morse. Meanwhile, Morse, whose cynicism preys on sentiment, keeps "the cross of an imaginary gun's telescopic sight focused exactly over its heart" (p. 276).

The deer is also symbolic of the tortured artist figure, and Morse's reaction suggests a kind of self-destructive approach to his art.

The forest fire tempers Kate and Morse, reverses their identities and riddles their relationship with conflict "When the chips are really down," Morse chooses to save his art from the fire, and Kate chooses Morse over Paul. In desperate pursuit of her new identity as Mrs. Morse Halliday, Kate follows Morse through the flames, and her courageous flight transforms her into a woman of flesh and blood. Her sudden vitality replaces her word-shaped consciousness with an inarticulate, physical awareness, "in every limb of her mind she felt a strange new firmness" (p. 281). Having found her own inner strength and her own flesh, Kate no longer needs Morse. We view the discrepancies between their perceptions of themselves and Buckler's presentation of them as ironic. The fire seems to temper Morse's savage literary banter into "accents of penitence and exultation" (p. 282) and replace his love for the novel with love for Kate. Although Morse is once more "writing-talking" (p. 283), he has adopted Kate's romantic idealism as the "ending for the book. Absolutely right this time" (p. 283). But his view that individual courage can always defeat the blows of fate makes his version of truth as distorted and false as his former pessimism. Morse's art will fail because he refuses to accept the inherent limitations of art to capture truth. In our view and Buckler's, his version is only a delusory attempt to prove his new theory. Morse casts Rex as the romantic and gallant hero who transforms the love triangle of Bruce, Sheila and Rex into "a sort of family trouble" (p. 283). But we recognize irony in the disparity between Morse's version and Buckler's narrative which tells us that Rex caused the fire and behaves unheroically.

This glaring contradiction between Morse's illusions and reality is parallel to that between his artistic credo and his relationship with Kate. His conversion to the sentimentality that Kate has now abandoned parallels Letty's adoption of the world of words abandoned by Paul. Both Morse and Letty change to please their partners, but they fail to see the contradictory nature of their behaviour.

With Morse now on the "side of the angels" (p. 284) and herself tempered by the forest fire, Kate accurately sees Morse's conversion as undesirable and "absolutely false" (p. 284):

You'll never get it right, she thought. No writer ever gets it right. How can they get it true to life when life's not true or faithful to itself? ...or people to themselves? When there's no consistency in anything? One day ago, I was concerned with Rex. He almost turned the tables in my heart against you. He bores me now. There's your consistency. (p. 284).

Morse demonstrates Buckler's comment about the ironic affects of the forest fire, "When you see someone made over the way you'd thought you wanted them to be, do they seem suddenly worse?" The irony and absurdity that Kate perceives in Morse's philosophy of art and in their relationship do not, however, overshadow her need to escape loneliness in the role of wife. Like Paul, she consciously accepts the disillusionment in order to escape a worse fate of absolute isolation. But, in our view, she fools herself. What she believes is "a wifely look" (p. 284) Morse clearly recognizes "as plain and simply silly as the most proverbial spinster tickled by the prospect of a man" (p. 284). Contrary to her fantasy of escaping her spinster look and regaining her youth, Kate remains imprisoned in the cell of her inherent nature. As Buckler claims, this is Kate's "tragic paradox: that however perceptive she is about her own condition...

well, this is an old maid's whimsicality."⁸⁰ Despite the incongruities and self-deception that undercut their relationship, Morse and Kate do find a significant measure of happiness with each other. They consciously reject a world that threatens Kate with loneliness and Morse with a creative void. They choose, instead, their deceptions about themselves and settle for love that however flawed saves them from absolute isolation and adopting a nihilistic philosophy.

In the second group, Bruce, Sheila and Rex form a love triangle which resolves itself ironically when they seek human relationships that replace loneliness and disillusionment with love. Despite their five years of marriage, Rex and Sheila maintain alienating façades. Sheila's calm, reasonable manner conceals her deep dissatisfaction with Rex whose handsome, child-like face hides the emotional and psychological torment of a secret past, a self-inflicted war-wound and growing insecurity. Rex symbolizes the "reign of accident": his adoption, his meeting of Sheila and Bruce, his suicide attempt and the forest fire all happen accidentally and support Buckler's view of accidental determination. With his physical beauty waning, Rex confronts the contradiction that Paul discovers, the "cold-faced fact that he had built almost nothing; and that what little he had built had been built on sand" (p. 82). His "talent for making up his own memories" (p. 84) and rejecting "any memory of himself that doesn't jibe with his self-image" (p. 85) causes habitual self-deception. Rex cannot, however, completely sublimate his guilt feelings about his self-inflicted war-wound. At Endlaw, he gradually feels "nakeder and nakeder" (p. 82), and his psychological pain increases to the point of attempting a botched suicide. However, this drastic measure is actually

motivated, like his war injury, by his overwhelming and irrational love for Sheila.

Sheila feels the "curious poignancy of things going on inside people, unapprehended" (p. 86) and has the insight to see "the patterns behind appearance" (p. 138). We see her, however, exercise her sensitivity and awareness with Bruce Mansfield rather than with Rex who needs them more. Sheila is, as Buckler intended, "scarcely ever reasonable where Rex is concerned."⁸¹ She understands him only as a predictably fanciful child, and she was "simply drugged and dregged with the perpetual weight of knowing exactly what was coming next with him" (p. 89). The ironies and inaccuracies implicit in her view of Rex appear when he reacts totally unpredictably to her request for a divorce, his war-wound and her pregnancy. Sheila's reaction to her own fate with Rex and Bruce is to take "what fare comes along. At its face value. No whys at all. Or hardly any. I never measure my own little universe against any final check" (p. 139). Sheila's resignation and unquestioning acceptance of the way things happen complement the thoughtlessness of Rex and his "reign of accident."

But Sheila's intellectual approach to love curbs her physical expression of emotion, alienates her from the physically motivated Rex and makes her, like Kate, "too much of a delver."⁸² Sheila's love, like Kate's grief for her father, is spoiled by continual mental handling which, according to Buckler, "is the nature of woman and I do feel that each paragraph makes some pertinent point about them and sets up the irony later on."⁸³ Buckler's comment emphasizes his conscious use of irony in his delineation of characters and plot, but it clearly typifies his rather simplistic and stereotypical perception of women and treatment of female characters. Kate's and Sheila's intellectualization of love fails

them "when the chips are really down." Often events have unexpected results. Kate's spontaneous decision to follow Morse through the fire contradicts, we think, her feelings for Paul. Similarly, Sheila's instant decision to remain with Rex after his shooting incident contradicts, in our mind, her rationalized rejection of him and her affection for Bruce.

Rex's and Sheila's involvement with Bruce Mansfield begins with an accident. Sheila's immediate intimacy with Bruce following their car accident seems overly confidential for a first meeting, but it is, supposedly, consistent with Buckler's personal experience:

I recall from my close-range observation of the Greenwich-Sheila type (during my summers working in the hotel there and sometimes when, incongruously enough for a hick like me, I was asked out to the Greenwich homes) that very tendency to divest themselves of the most startling confidences. 84

Nevertheless, their conversation reaches such extraordinary heights of cleverness that their brilliant literary allusions, their silly analysis of American-Canadian relations and their egotistical self-indulgence culminate in an unbelievable scene. The following passage illustrates how Buckler seems more concerned with touting his own cleverness and stating his own point of view through an artificially structured encounter than with creating a wholly credible exchange between Bruce and Sheila:

And if you want to know the rivers of Afghanistan and what Portugal imports, I can rattle them off to this day. You know, we were talking about the difference between Canadians and Americans. That hasn't got a patch of difference between being rich and being poor. Remember what Fitzgerald said? And never mind what Hemingway answered. (p. 100)

Bruce Mansfield, a character similar to David Canaan, has deliberately alienated himself from everyone after the accidental deaths of his

wife and child. At Endlaw, he lives inside his guilt, "a walling up of himself away from his sorrow, a sort of stoicism."⁸⁵ Bruce deceives himself that by returning to the land and the world of his childhood, he will expiate the guilt feelings associated with the accident and his shortcomings as a father to Peter. The way in which Molly and Peter die proves to Bruce that the way things happen is more important than the action itself, a philosophy echoed by Morse and Paul. Bruce also argues that an absurd world renders man insignificant, but he recognizes, as Paul does, "the fool's consciously foolish belief", "That's the one crazy wonderful thing about people. That they do pick themselves up and have it again, whether it makes sense or not" (p. 137). But Bruce, who excludes himself from those who react with "blind courage" (p. 137), refuses to believe that courage has meaning. In consequence, he has lost his comic vision of life and, unlike Paul and Morse, has no insolent grin or fart view by which to sustain himself or deflect the many absurdities of life. Bruce's protective relationship with Molly recalls that of David and Effie, and his relationship with Peter is derived from Buckler's short story, "The Rebellion Of Young David" (1951). Peter, whose character parallels Rex's, was so isolated from his father by secret guilt feelings that only his near-fatal jump off the barn roof reunited him with Bruce. Only then did Bruce learn how he had always misunderstood Peter. When he recounts this experience to Sheila, we see the significance, but Sheila misses obvious parallels between Peter and Rex and Bruce and herself.

The Bruce and Sheila relationship balances the relationship of Morse and Kate. Sheila sets out to restore Bruce to emotional wholeness and his medical career and to move him out of his self-imposed alienation back into human relationships. She looks behind his nihilism and solitude

to see them as "simply the unreasonable way all serious people punish themselves for the knocks they get. And what's the classic punishment? Solitary confinement" (p. 138). She sees accurately how Bruce's "nothing matters" (p. 139) argument deceives him all the same, "He can't act on it" (p. 139). or "stay convinced about it" (p. 139) because then suicide would be his only rational response. Instead, Bruce has rededicated himself to the land, a symbol of life and enduring faith in mankind. As she gradually draws Bruce out of his lonely cell into their love affair, Sheila unwittingly increases Rex's sense of figurative isolation and mental anguish. Her inner blindness and the false impression that she alone understands Rex are symbolized by the target practice scene, "her last shot had gone fair through the heart, aim as she had between the trees" (p. 168). Her aim here is as inaccurate as her perceptions of Rex and their relationship.

When she and Bruce consummate their love at the Endlaw pond, the timeless perfection they sense is as illusory as their future together. They may feel and appear innocent in the natural world, but we know from Buckler's treatment of their characters that Bruce and Sheila are far from innocent as they betray Rex and Bruce's deep loyalty to Molly. According to Buckler, "the love bits...may be a bit gaga in spots; but again this was in large part to set up the later irony."⁸⁶ Buckler quite justifiably considers this love scene excessive in its language and imagery. But he carefully contrasts the first encounter's glorious sense of permanent affection with the later disillusionment and rejection that they suffer eventually. The reader is intended to recognize the disparity as indicative of the irony in their relationship.

The later irony which Buckler refers to arises from their illusions of love juxtaposed with their real life experiences. Bruce and Sheila make love, as Alan Young suggests, "against another allegiance: Bruce to the memory of Molly and Peter, when Sheila's money sticks in his throat; Sheila's still to Rex, when, for instance, Morse baits him so devastatingly."⁸⁷

The tension between their dreams and their actual circumstances begins when Rex tells Sheila that his war-wound was self-inflicted and a direct result of his love for her. In this moment of "shocking reality" (p. 220) words suddenly fail the articulate Sheila, "she was in a play in a dream when the other actors shout at you but no one has shown you the answering lines"(p. 220). With her perceptions of Rex and their marriage contradicted, Sheila begins to face reality and to love Rex once more.

The Truth Game finally shatters the relationship between Bruce and Sheila. Her conversation Bruce "misread completely" (p. 229) and he slowly pulls away from her back into his memories of Molly. Verbal irony continues to create misunderstandings as Rex misinterprets Sheila's promise to have a child as her plan to divorce him and marry Bruce. Sheila speaks of hating the "guilt seeder" (p. 231) when, in fact, she has seeded Rex with guilt feelings all along. These verbal ambiguities destroy the bond between Bruce and Sheila who reaffirms her loyalty to Rex when the others attack him verbally. We see their renewed self-deception when Rex's bungled shooting, like the forest fire, "precipitates the attitude each of them really takes toward abdication and toward their allegiances and toward each other when the chips are really down." Sheila's loyalty prevents her from abandoning Rex for her own fulfilment, and Rex pretends that Sheila's affair with Bruce was a mild infatuation.

With the appearance of the deer, Sheila sees "how little, how very little, happiness mattered" (p. 264) in life's overall scheme. Although the deer precipitates Sheila's revelation, the exact meaning of the deer Buckler leaves ambiguous. Sheila's "vaulting insight" (p. 264) into happiness recalls what Kate had wondered earlier, "if people are half as unhappy as they think they are" (p. 251). Measuring her "own little universe" (p. 265) against that of others, Sheila suddenly discovers that the happiness she had always sought is really as insignificant as her identity. She and Rex will have a baby, and "how little did it matter, in the end, who your mate was" (p. 265). Sheila, like Kate and Paul, recognizes incongruities in her life and love, but, trapped by her own loyal nature and love for Rex, she settles for an imperfect love. As Sheila returns to her former resignation and assumes "a face of stoicism" (p. 265) that mirrors Bruce's original expression, she also voices Bruce's "nothing matters" argument. She courageously deludes herself that with a child to love him, Rex will "lose that anarchy of his completely" (p. 265). Sheila's sense of renewal, however, verges on defeatism and despair and becomes ironic when she immediately imagines herself defending Rex from their child, "the way she's defended him against Morse" (p. 265). At the mere mention of the baby, Rex has carelessly thrown out his cigarette which starts the forest fire. As Alan Young suggests, Rex remains "essentially hollow and irresponsible, and one cannot share Sheila's optimism in their projected future together."⁸⁸

Rex's shooting accident serves to reunite Bruce with his true allegiances: Molly, Peter and medicine. As irrevocably bound to his past and his guilt as Sheila is to hers, Bruce's mind leaps backward with the sighting of the deer. Here Buckler makes clear the symbolic meaning of the

deer and the associations are valid. Bruce's thoughts return to his childhood world of innocence, and he decides to become a child psychiatrist in order to help children like Peter who can no longer experience such a world of natural beauty and innocence. But Bruce's sense of renewal is overshadowed by his sense of guilt associated with being an inadequate father and husband. Self-deception and uncertainty arise when he thinks, for a moment, of how Sheila "could domesticate his fervours, make him grin at them...the spine of this one threatened to crumble" (p. 268). Although Bruce has moved out of his self-imposed isolation at Endlaw and discovered love, his renewal has far more to do with the dead than the living. His rebirth remains questionable in the light of his second thoughts and continued guilt feelings. Presumably, Buckler intends the reader to strongly admire Bruce's decision to become a child psychiatrist, but to interpret this sudden solution as rather simplistic and tinged with self-interest. Bruce's glorious vision parallels David Canaan's wonderful mountain top vision, and the reader suspects that Bruce's answer may be as self-deceiving and disappointing as David's. Although love again defeats personal isolation and nihilism, its victory remains qualified by irony: Rex and Sheila have a long-standing love relationship, "by far the most binding" (p. 265), which will survive complete with self-deception and manipulation. Bruce, driven by guilt feelings, returns to his old love of medicine, Molly and Peter. In both cases, a problematic love relationship surpasses the loneliness and despair of the human condition and the tragedies of the past. Although the past may not be inescapable, it can be resolved and incorporated into a meaningful present and promising future.

Buckler develops his irony through verbal ambiguity and misunderstandings. The characters themselves devote extraordinary amounts of time and energy to self-analysis and then Buckler, as omniscient narrator, adds often lengthy insights and tensions to his characterizations and circumstances. The characters' speeches are frequently loaded with hidden or ambiguous meanings, dramatic contrasts and complex underpinnings that we recognize as part of verbal irony. Rex, for example, with his mangled foot and self-conscious beauty, tells Bruce that Sheila "can't stand anything the least bit defaced" (p. 93). Morse refers to Paul, an emotional amputee, as entirely whole in his identity (p. 118). Kate's declaration to Morse that "I'm going to change" (p. 123) refers literally to changing her clothes to go fishing, but it figuratively means that she will be changing her entire life style. When Paul speaks to Morse and Kate about "The break I should have given thought to long ago" (p. 205), he is thinking of his own death, but they understand him to mean an extended leave from Endlaw. These verbal ironies occasionally take on a bitter tone calculated to privately stab at the souls of the other characters. When, for example, Rex asks Morse to autograph one of his books, Morse offers to write, "'To Rex, who asked for it - - always'" (p. 130). Sheila accuses Kate of being so deperately lonely that she has taken up with Morse (p. 131). Similar misinterpretations occur when Rex and Sheila argue, when Paul asks Kate and Morse to leave Endlaw and when Bruce and Rex converse after the car accident.

These verbal ironies culminate in the truth game, "Plain Speaking," when Morse demands that everyone speak only the simple truth and say only exactly what he means. The characters, of course, attempt to speak without

ambiguity but succeed only in limited ways. The game of truth is an academic fantasy of brilliant social banter and intellectual chit-chat which culminates in each character undergoing intense self-scrutiny and psycho-analysis. Buckler's staging of this scene is highly artificial, and the dialogue is stilted and contrived. The many revelations and disclosures, which Buckler presumably intends as startling truths, seem self-indulgent and rather obvious, if not to the character himself then certainly to the reader. Clearly, part of Buckler's strategy in his presentation of "Plain Speaking" stems from his belief that the search for truth and simple, honest speech resembles a game of chance and that truth often contradicts appearances and often conflicts with reality. Nevertheless, the emotional and mental games which Buckler carefully orchestrates and subjects his characters to surpass any genuine quest for truth or search for self-knowledge. Buckler seemingly means the words "Plain Speaking" to be taken as entirely ironic. While every one misinterprets everyone else's appearances, in particular Bruce and Sheila, Morse delivers a lecture on the virtues of plain and simple truth, explaining how "nothing is plain except surfaces" (p. 230). His statements here, of course, take on greater irony in light of the closing scenes after the forest fire when he discovers what he believes is the absolute truth for his art. Sheila condemns the "guilt-seeder" (p. 231), unaware she is one herself; Bruce argues for "being some use in the world" (p. 233), having abandoned a medical career; Paul conceals his despair behind his jaunty statement "laugh and let live" (p. 234); Rex functions as drunken, cuckolded husband unaware that he is gradually winning Sheila back. The game of "Plain Speaking" becomes the centre for the novel's verbal ironies, and in their speeches of truth and self-awareness,

the characters gradually reveal far greater truths about themselves than they realize.

The ambiguities of the truth game lead ultimately to the irony of situation in the closing scenes of the last sections. The lilac scene between Kate and Paul, for example, is filled with misunderstandings and verbal ambiguity as their seemingly innocent statements about transplanting the lilac bush actually refer to their own relationship and the impossibility of staying together. While Paul secretly longs for a love relationship with Kate and struggles with the contradictory knowledge of his heart-disease, Kate "misread his dismay completely" (p. 258) and concludes that he has no interest in a relationship with her. By juxtaposing their streams of consciousness, Buckler reveals, to the reader, the tensions and contrasts of dramatic irony. The tensions also arise from the contrast between the meaning and the significance of the spoken word. Morse still refers to Paul, whom we know is actually overwhelmed by the prospect of death, as "indestructible" (p. 277). The forest ranger swears to Kate that the fire will never cross the creek and endanger Paul when, in fact, it will surround and engulf Endlaw. Morse's conversion to sentiment and his speech on courage fail to capture truth in art and, more importantly, contradict Kate's new realism. Paul, meanwhile, assumes that because Kate did not return to Endlaw, she must have missed the forest fire all together. Letty's attempt to speak grammatically contradicts Paul's expectations of their relationship, as well as Letty's own understanding of what is correct grammar. These examples illustrate to the reader how Buckler uses language and words to create misunderstandings between characters.

Buckler uses language to define each character's nature and the truth behind his façade. Like the play motif, language and the character's self-consciousness about language illustrate how words and a word-shaped consciousness can distance an individual from reality and transform events into phrases. The inhabitants of Endlaw divide into two groups which portray Buckler's views on verbal and emotional articulation and language. Paul, Morse and Kate share a relationship based on witty, intellectual banter that emphasizes words over deeds. They "were confident that they could get on top of anything with words" (p. 20). Paul understands death as the word "notify" Morse can only relate to human tragedy as a pattern for his fiction and Kate lives a life based on books and ideas. Bruce, Rex and Sheila rely on words also, but physical actions frequently surpass their use of language. In ways reminiscent of David Canaan, Bruce combines the educated language of the city, "He wanted her to know he'd read Fitzgerald" (p. 100), with the local rural idiom of "' you can kiss...my...ass...and scratch my hole and '" (p. 233). Paul, for all his intellectual talk, reveals an earthiness equal to Bruce's when he completes the obscene poem with, "'And take my cock for a jumpin' pole!'" (p. 233). Rex's childish language and verbal tantrums belie his adult guilt feelings and mental torment. Buckler's patronizing handling of Rex's character emphasizes this childishness but also increases the problems in point of view. When, for example, Rex suffers intense psychological anguish following the target practice with Bruce and Sheila, Buckler again steps in as narrator to describe Rex's stream of consciousness in language strikingly uncharacteristic of him, "And now the transubstantiation took another form. The quintessential perfume of lonesome and apprehension had like a vapour so attenuated that even the naming of it with noun or the description of

it with adjective would make it sound too falsely substantive" (p. 166). When free from Buckler's intrusions and allowed to speak and think in his own voice, Rex sounds like a young boy, inarticulate and awkward. Sheila uses language to break down the protective façades of the other characters, in particular Bruce, and to wage verbal wars with Rex and Morse. Unlike the other articulate, word-shaped characters, however, Sheila strikes a balance between verbal and emotional expression. With Bruce, she talks her way into a love relationship that she then consummates physically. As well, she uses words of compassion and an act of love, her pregnancy, to resolve her difficulties with Rex. Letty, who speaks through her hands and represents the physical world, moves between these two groups. She and Bruce embody the "soundness of the 'natural' country person weighing more than the specious complexity and chatter (like people who can fart at will) of the sophisticated."⁵⁶ The illiterate Letty, who speaks in the local idiom, describes the Endlaw guests with an honesty and a perception the others lack:

They don't know what an honest day's work feels like. Nothin' but talk, talk, talk. Talkin' ain't livin'. Workin's livin'. Makin' things and doin' things for people. They never made anything you could lay your hands on...All they've ever done is wag the air around with their tongues. It's like they're jist feedin' off the smell of things. (p. 25)

Buckler clearly intends the reader to find Letty's speeches refreshing and frequently amusing. Although her bursts of earthy wisdom are welcome breaks from the often stultifying speeches of the other characters, they seem equally contrived and manipulated. Indeed, her speeches almost become quaint, and Buckler's handling of her character verges on patronage.

Although the characters express different and conflicting points

of view, their speeches are, as Alan Young and other critics note, "almost interchangeable," "abstract, analytical and consciously clever," and the characters themselves "are subjected in an equally artificial manner to various encounters."⁸⁹ These problems with language Jack Rackliffe had noted as the novel's "high pitch of emotional and mental tension":

Does this ever become too much so? (1) Does the reader himself sometimes consciously (or unconsciously) crave some relaxation of the tension, some bit of neutral "passage work" which would permit him to unwind a notch or two, to stop being perpetually on his toes? i.e. does he say, "Surely they can't always be this subtle, this intense, this perceptive? They must have their moments of unawareness, moments when their reply to a brilliant statement is not an equally brilliant statement of their own but instead a well-meaning but languid "Huh?" 90

Rackliffe may have been referring to any number of passages, but these exchanges between certain characters typify the intensity he criticized. In answer to Paul's statement that he has lost his identity, Morse delivers a clever response which seems unbelievable and contrived:

'Identity!' Morse exclaimed. 'What the hell kind of an answer is that? Say life's whole eternal landscape was spired here and there with little steeples of special individuality, as I like to fancy its being... and say I was a junior angel cruising around, way up in the blue. I could pick out Leonardo's and Caesar's and Dostevski's - - and yours, in a minute.'" (p. 119)

A simple farewell becomes a physics quiz in this exchange between Paul and Kate: "'I know we'll manage,' she said. 'But we'll miss you.' 'Not really,' Paul said. 'What's Boyle's law for psychophysics? A body weighed in absence suffers a loss of weight equal to the weight of its own volume of ...?'" (p. 120). Buckler's answer to Rackliffe's charge "that characters only interest me in their revelatory moments of tension" accounts for his intense characterizations and style of writing, but it fails to take into

consideration a serious lack of credibility. As Rackliffe implies, the reader does find the characters' levels of awareness and burning conversations tediously clever and intellectual and the characters themselves two-dimensional and often unappealing. These further selections from conversations between Paul, Kate and Morse are so similar in style and tone as to be indistinguishable:

And Plato gets not one scintilla closer to the riddle
than Dale Evans. But that's not my point. (Paul Creed, p. 19)

Look at him now. Just sitting there grinning. Old Papa
Lisa. That bloody decoy grin. That bloody matador's
cape of his! (Morse Halliday, p. 17)

And its always been such pleasure to watch him with the
literary matadors. Just when they've thought they had him
down and their little capes fluttering all over the
place, the old bull's made one surge to his feet and
driven a horn right through their guts. Shish kebab!
(Kate Fennison, p. 12)

There is a striking similarity between Kate's speech about Ernest Hemingway and a statement Buckler once made about Hemingway which suggests that Buckler may have been writing in a voice remarkably close to his own: "Hemingway rises about every ten years or so, like the old bull whose dominance of the hero is threatened, to demolish the Bright Boys with the bangs."⁹¹ This strong resemblance between Buckler's voice and that of his character may account for the almost identical speech patterns and styles of the characters. For the most part, Buckler speaks in this one intellectual, verbally clever voice which expresses his personal point of view rather than various and different perspectives of the individual characters. This style, however, identifies Buckler as a widely-read, well-educated and sophisticated author, which for Buckler was seemingly important. His close identification seriously limits his narrative

distance and perspective. Presumably, Buckler intended these stunning exchanges which flash between the resident intellectuals at Endlaw to favourably impress the reader, but his intentions fall short of their mark. The reader feels initially challenged, then disbelieving, and, finally, bored and annoyed. Buckler's abstract and intellectual dialogue leaves the reader as unimpressed as David Canaan's Greek words left Toby Richmond. The words quickly become "old language stuff."⁹²

Coupled with the intellectual language of the novel are the abstract mathematical and scientific terms which Buckler uses as images, symbols and metaphors. In the opening scene, for example, Buckler describes the Endlaw lake as being "still as theorems" (p. 1) with the island at its "geometric centre" (p. 12). Such mathematical terms clearly stem from Buckler's academic background, but their full significance may be lost on readers who lack the precise knowledge of mathematics. These allusions Buckler employs ironically to demonstrate that life, unlike the sciences, cannot be reduced to basic theorems. He counterpoints emotional human relationships with the logic of mathematical equations, "What Einstein in the behaviour department, with some $E=mc^2$ for the heart, might not one day prove that?" (p. 138). Time is "just multiplication. And multiplication is just a lot of adding" (p. 140), and Endlaw is "exempt from the arithmetic of time" (p. 13). Life becomes a "battle of equations in x and y and suddenly you were good in algebra" (p. 63). The seeming exactness of geometry, algebra and theorems to explain the human condition Buckler associates with the limited power of words and their inability to capture exactly in art the full meaning of life. Buckler's search for the exact word in creating an image or phrase parallels the

mathematician's search for the exact value of \underline{x} and \underline{y} in creating an equation. The scientific and mathematical terms, however, prove as deceptive and inaccurate as art in translating life into theory. All the equations that Morse draws about Rex, for example, work well enough in their abstract form of algebra, but they collapse when applied to the concrete forms of real life and Buckler's view of accidental determination:

That was my big mistake. I thought the whole thing was like in algebra. You know algebra. You solve your equations for \underline{x} and \underline{y} and then it's duck soup. You can substitute those values in any other equations that \underline{x} and \underline{y} turn up in. But not in this business of life and love, if you'll pardon the expression. Not there you can't. You could solve every past equation that ever existed, you could get the value of every past variable ...and still you couldn't substitute those values in any future equation. Occasion. Because you'd always run into that damned arbitrary monkey-wrench. That accident. That \underline{z} ... (p. 149)

Buckler emphasizes the irony inherent in his absolute mathematical symbols and images by arranging his characters' relationships into geometric shapes and algebraic equations which, ultimately, break down when subject to accident. Paul, Kate and Morse form one triangle until Kate and Morse and then Paul and Letty form two new equations of marriage. Rex and Sheila, a married couple, begin as the algebraic equation of \underline{x} and \underline{y} until Bruce, as the accident \underline{z} , substitutes a new value and creates a new equation. These three characters also form a love triangle until another accident, Rex's bungled shooting incident, breaks their geometric shape into different forms. Bruce plus Molly and Peter equals a new career in medicine; Rex plus Sheila equals a baby and a new family. Buckler's purpose in using these symbols is to illustrate how "in the business of life and love," the variables of human experience are infinite and frequently ironic. The

factors affecting life and love, therefore, become as infinite and intangible as the language of human relations. They defy the artist's struggle to articulate exactly and the mathematician's efforts to calculate precisely finite equations. Thus, the accident, "that z," prevents the artist and the mathematician from ever deciphering an absolute truth and creating an exact equation. Therefore, the artist and the mathematician must choose one pattern, one truth, one value to arrive at an answer. This Buckler recognizes as the fundamental irony of art and the artist's eternal struggle.

In conjunction with the mathematical images and metaphors, Buckler uses physics and chemistry to explain his view of human relations. Rex, for example, acts as a catalyst whose accidents speed up events and reactions in the novel. Morse describes his new novel as a study in insolence which "electrolyzes each ion in solution to its pole" (p. 190). In chemistry, an electrical charge draws the positive and negative ions to opposite poles. In The Cruellest Month, these polarities occur when an accident forces the characters to choose partners opposite to them. The forest fire, an action Buckler describes as precipitating "the attitude each of them really takes toward abdication and toward their allegiances and toward each other when the chips are really down," causes Paul and Letty and Morse and Kate to join forces. Buckler presents characters of different chemical properties to create certain reactions, and in the final scenes of the novel, he combines the four elements of earth, air, wind and fire in the forest fire to illustrate the power of the physical universe. By the close of the novel, each character has passed the "ultimate test of insolence" (p. 190) that "Electrolyzes each ion in

solution to its pole" (p. 190). That final act of defiance against a fate of isolation and nihilism is love, "the most extraordinary thing."⁹³

The Cruellest Month, like Buckler's first novel, "celebrates...the expression, love" as Buckler repeats his sense that "the only thing in this world that saves us at all is feeling."⁹⁴ As victims of the cruelest month that mocks their mortality and finite existence, the characters struggle against their alienation to gain some renewal in love, however self-deceiving and illusory. For all the nihilism and cynicism the characters espouse, their actions illustrate Buckler's view that there is "something in people that still instinctively honours courage."⁹⁵ Buckler's belief in "the fool's consciously foolish belief" stands as the final positive statement. The irony of the human condition, the absurdity of life itself, demands compassion, tolerance, courage and an enduring faith in the importance of human relations.

Notes

- ¹BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney at Holt, September 7, 1953.
- ²BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Stewart Richardson at Holt, March 1, 1954.
- ³BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Stewart Richardson, July 7, 1954.
- ⁴BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, June 16, 1955.
- ⁵BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney, May ?, 1965.
- ⁶BColl., Box 6, Buckler to Arnold Gingrich, September 19, 1958.
- ⁷BColl., Box 6, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, October 22, 1958.
- ⁸BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Jan Trewitt, February 25, 1956.
- ⁹BColl., Box 6, Buckler to Keith Knowlton, editor at Chatelaine,
January 26, 1959.
- ¹⁰BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, September 24, 1959.
- ¹¹BColl., Box 9, Ivan Von Auw to Buckler, October 27, 1959.
- ¹²BColl., Box 9, Robert Lescher at Holt to Ivan Von Auw, January 4,
1960.
- ¹³BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, January 12, 1960.
- ¹⁴BColl., Box 6, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, February 6, 1961.
- ¹⁵BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, March 20, 1961.
- ¹⁶BColl., Box 9, Ivan Von Auw to Buckler, April 13, 1961.
- ¹⁷BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, May 1, 1961.
- ¹⁸BColl., Box 9, Ivan Von Auw to Buckler, May 24, 1961.

¹⁹BColl., Box 9, Ivan Von Auw to Buckler, July 27, 1961.

²⁰BColl., Box 9, Jack Rackliffe to Buckler, September 27, 1961.

²¹BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, January 31, 1962.

²²BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, April 30, 1962.

²³BColl., Box 9, Jack Rackliffe to Buckler, October 27, 1961.

²⁴BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, November 27, 1961.

²⁵BColl., Box 9, Jack Rackliffe to Buckler, September 27, 1961.

²⁶BColl., Box,9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, October 14, 1961.

²⁷BColl., Box 8. Other titles considered by Buckler were Memory and Desire, Love and Marriage, The Troubled Ones, The Amputees, Look Behind Any Face, As Dreams Are Made On, By Accident, Laugh and Let Live. Buckler was attracted to the themes of love and loss as well as to the use of paradox and irony.

²⁸BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, April 30, 1962.

²⁹BColl., Box 9, McClelland and Stewart to Buckler, February 12, 1963.

³⁰BColl., Box 9, Buckler to McClelland and Stewart, March 7, 1963.

³¹BColl., Box 9, Diane Mew, editor at McClelland and Stewart, to Buckler, August 19, 1963.

Ernest Buckler, The Cruellest Month (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

³²BColl., Box 9, Ivan Von Auw to Buckler, October 3, 1963.

³³BColl., Box 9, T. J. B. Walsh, Trade Editor at Charles Scribner's and Sons, to Buckler, December 1, 1964.

³⁴BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Diane Mew, September 20, 1963.

³⁵Claude Bissell, "Various Kinds of Love", Dalhousie Review, XLIII (Winter, 1963-1964), 566.

³⁶R. G. Baldwin, "Creed and Craft Expounded", Queen's Quarterly, LXXI (Summer 1964), 277.

³⁷F. W. Watt, "The Price of Detachment and Independence", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIII (1964), 396.

³⁸Robert Harlow, "Sound and Fury", Canadian Literature, (Winter 1964), p.58.

³⁹Jack Sheriff, "Connection of Character and Place", Amethyst, (Winter 1964), p. 54.

⁴⁰BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Von Auw, October 30, 1959.

⁴¹BColl., Box 9, Jack Rackliffe to Buckler, September 27, 1961.

⁴²BColl., Box 7, Buckler to Vance K. Henry, March 17, 1962.

John Lyon, "The Challenge of Nihilism: Problems of the Artist in the Works of Ernest Buckler", (M.A. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1975). Lyon suggests that Buckler views love, art, work and memories of the past as the only values which can respond to the challenge of nihilism.

⁴³T. S. Eliot, The Wasteland, in Collected Poems 1909 - 1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 63.

⁴⁴Bernita Harris, "A Comparison of the Symbolism and Imagery of Ernest Buckler's The Cruellest Month with T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland", (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1969), p. 5.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶Young, Buckler, p. 43.

⁴⁷Ernest Buckler, "My Second Book", in Ernest Buckler, ed., Gregory Cook (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), pp. 80-81.

⁴⁸BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections to The Cruellest Month.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰BColl., Box 7, Buckler to Vance K. Henry, March 17, 1962.

⁵¹BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections to The Cruellest Month.

⁵²The image of the amputee appears in the short story "The Concerto" when Dave Carter, a concert pianist who has accidentally amputated one of his fingers, manages to perform a piano concerto with Mona. Dave learns that their feelings for each other create a far more important concerto of love. Again, human relationships surpass art and restore the amputee to wholeness.

⁵³BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, October 14, 1961.

⁵⁴BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Harris, M.A. Thesis, p. 6.

⁵⁷BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections.

⁵⁸BColl., Box 9, Addenda and Corrections.

⁵⁹Chambers, Ross and Buckler, p. 85.

⁶⁰BColl., Box 9, Addenda and Corrections.

⁶¹ This bone metaphor reappears in "The Rebellion of Young David" (1951) when David comes across the animal's skeleton. Buckler associates death and isolation with the bones of an individual and love with the flesh.

⁶²Young, Buckler, p. 41.

⁶³Ibid., p. 42.

⁶⁴BColl., Box 9, Addenda and Corrections.

⁶⁵Young, Buckler, p. 42.

⁶⁶BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰BColl., Box 9, Addenda and Corrections.

⁷¹BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections.

⁷²BColl., Box 15, Buckler to Jonathon Leff at Holt, April 1, 1952.

⁷³BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections, original chapter 4.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Jack Rackliffe, January 31, 1962.

⁷⁷Cameron, Conversations, p. 11.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹The metaphor of conception used by Morse and Kate to describe the creation of the novel (pp. 160, 187-188) Buckler also uses with reference to writing The Cruellest Month. BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney at Holt, September 7, 1953, "The thing I told you about last fall turned out to be a false pregnancy. But I believe that I am really in the family way now. At least, no different egg has descended since I was first had by the current idea. The foetus' features are not yet clearly distinguishable out of the general polyo, but I have a great many notes made (if that isn't mixing metaphors and obstetrics, what is?) and I hope that soon I'll be able to proceed with the actual photography." Buckler clearly incorporates much of his own perspective into his characterizations and his own voice can heard frequently throughout the novel. This may account for the similarity in the characters' speeches.

⁸⁰BColl., Box 8, Addenda and Corrections.

⁸¹BColl., Box 9, Addenda and Corrections.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid. This passage suggests Buckler's identification with Bruce Mansfield, "a hick," associating with a socialite. Both are rural Nova Scotians whose academic abilities took them to the city for a university education. Buckler's poor health terminated his Toronto career and caused him to return to the family farm in the same way that the death of Bruce's wife and child caused him to abandon his medical career and return to his

family farm at Endlaw. Sheila's statement that Bruce's extraordinary dedication must apply to either medicine or writing recalls how Buckler associates these two professions in the short story "The Doctor and The Patient" (1961) when a doctor and a writer exchange careers. Also, when Paul visits Montreal, he merges the two professions in the name "Bruce Halliday", to a certain degree. Buckler apparently associates the dedication and demands, both intellectual and personal, of the physician with the artist.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Young, Buckler, p. 41.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 43.

⁹⁰BColl., Box 9, Jack Rackliffe to Buckler, September 27, 1961.

⁹¹BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Bob ?, February 17, 1950.

⁹²Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley, p. 136.

⁹³Cameron, Conversations, p. 11.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Buckler, "My Second Book," in Cook, Buckler, p. 81.

Chapter IV

Ox Bells and Fireflies (1968), Nova Scotia: Window On The Sea (1973)

Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse (1977)

Although Ox Bells and Fireflies, which was published in 1968, is Buckler's last major literary work, it had clearly existed in his mind years earlier.¹ Recalling the rural simplicity and idyllic world of his childhood and short stories, this "fictive memoir" fulfils one of Buckler's sincerest hopes,

And someday I'd like to do a straight reportorial account of the cores of village life as I've known it here. With a lighter, attemptedly more humorous (though still sympathetic and understanding) approach than the novel has. There are thousands of interesting things about their ways and speech and customs that the novel didn't even hint at.²

While still revising The Mountain and The Valley in early 1952, Buckler had "all sorts of ideas flitting around in my head about my next book."³

At this time Buckler was debating writing

a non-fiction about the myriad, fast-disappearing, unduplicated-anywhere facets of life in a N. S. village as I knew it in my younger days, written in the light vein of the old Esquire letters. (One piece of this kind had outstanding success several years ago in Maclean's and the Atlantic came very near taking another.) Or maybe a more sophisticated novel, with a background of Greenwich's Belle Haven district, where I spent a good deal of time working in the 20's. But of course all this will have to wait until the present book is revised and out of the way.

After choosing the latter as his subject for his next novel, The Cruellest Month, Buckler remained devoted to his plan of writing a non-fiction.

By 1953 he hoped to publish this material not as a book but in a magazine as an "expurgated series of sketches of experience as I've known it in what is commonly supposed to be the even-tempered drone of small village life but is anything but."⁴ But by 1961 Buckler clearly saw this memoir material as book length.⁵

By late 1963, Buckler reported to his agent, Ivan Von Auw, that "I have a third book in project and if I should get the Canada Council fellowship which I've applied for, (and I've good reason to hope that I may be as lucky as I was with the first), it should be finished in fairly good time."⁶ After receiving a three thousand dollar Canada Council Senior Fellowship, Buckler began "squaring off to tackle the project in earnest. Some work has already been done on it, and I am hoping that it won't take me too long to wind the thing up."⁷ It was not, however, until 1968 that Ox Bells and Fireflies was published by McClelland and Stewart.

In 1952, most critics had considered The Mountain and The Valley an indication of Buckler's unique literary talent and future success as a novelist. The Cruellest Month, published eleven years later, made them question their earlier opinion of Buckler's abilities. Ox Bells and Fireflies, however, immediately redeemed Buckler in the eyes of many critics. According to Claude Bissell, a long time supporter of Buckler's, this third book was "one of the important Canadian books of this century. Canadians have few masterpieces; this is surely one."⁸ In designating the work a regional idyll, Desmond Pacey compared it with L. M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables (1908) and Stephen Leacock's Sunshine Sketches (1912) and proclaimed it "one of the classics of its kind."⁹ Critics such as D. O. Spettigue, who recognized the bond between Buckler's

first and third books, agreed with Pacey, adding that Ox Bells and Fireflies "confirms Buckler in the tradition of reminiscent sketches forming a rural idyll."¹⁰ Buckler's prose style again received particular attention. Claude Bissell continued to describe Buckler's "great intensity" of style as "metaphysical - - a rarity in the flat landscape of our prose." The "passages of great and poignant beauty" far outweigh Buckler's occasional "overreaching" for the exact word. In contrast, Desmond Pacey preferred "lithely idiomatic...anecdotes of character" to the somewhat "over-written" and self-conscious descriptive passages. When compared to the style of Buckler's two earlier works, Gregory Cook considered that of Ox Bells and Fireflies "generally more relaxed and casual."¹¹ Buckler's customary "strength of simile and juxtaposed clusters of imagery evoke from the reader constellations of thought and feeling," according to Cook.

Buckler's poetic style controls the narrative line, and, as Cook and Bissell suggest, the similes and metaphors reach "metaphysical" levels of beauty and meaning: "The blue half-shell of a robin's egg lies on the ground beneath...like a tiny fallen sky" (p. 26); "the sound of the waking orchard has the voice of healthy flesh harboring the mind's flock" (p. 197); "icicles fringing an eave...a flock of blackbirds gusting the air...a strength of log chains hanging from a nail...a clench of warping-bars" (p. 200). In his description, Buckler frequently personifies his subject, the natural world or domestic objects, to heighten its significance and transform it into a living being which inspires deep emotional reactions, "Latches, hooks, and door buttons, entrusted to hold against the night, lighten their grip" (p.211); "The lake wakes...from dreams of drowning and the tombstones grandfather the slopes of distance"

(p. 211); "all weathers long the pantry hummed itself" (p. 190); "the dining room held itself in constant preparedness for dining-room company" (p. 191). Buckler catalogues such images and descriptions throughout the memoir to create one central vision of beauty, perfection and innocence. The minute detail that Buckler supplies with each passage of description identifies his creativity with that of the poet who employs a single image to illustrate and represent multiple impressions. In this passage, for example, the single image is the daylight, but Buckler accumulates multiple images and metaphors in his description, "The sun reads the earth's palm. The day is all hand, making a gift of itself that has everyone's name on it" (p. 210). Buckler sustains his metaphors as well, creating elaborate and extended images which contain allusions to his mathematical interests and personification:

Beech leaves, students of the sun, expand their just-discovered shapes millimeter by millimeter, keeping the tiny leaf with all its serrated points always in perfect scale with the map of the finished one held before them in the hands of the warmth - - and the leaves of the cherry tree, quickest learners of all, knowing exactly in each rim cell when completeness has been reached, stop there and bask in their accomplished goal like theorems. (p. 210)

Buckler's work becomes a "gallery of 'still lifes' that were the nouns for each unstated adjective floating within" his consciousness (p. 113). His ability to capture the spirit of the environment and the people reflects the creative inspiration that David Canaan sought; and Buckler, "mused with the sense of self and peace" (p. 224) is an artist "become the equal and duplicate of everything" (p. 224). Thus, Buckler creates metaphor, uses poetic language and an illuminating light of artistic patterns to articulate the whole of his experience. The intensely poetic nature of his writing allows for the exactness of his language and defends him

against charges of "overreaching." The passages and chapters devoted to anecdotes of local personalities and family events maintain the descriptive techniques while establishing a thread of narrative and recognizable characters. Buckler's language seeks to recapture a time and place, to invest the past with a living energy and engaging beauty which possess a poetic vision brought forward through time and re-experienced.

In many ways, Ox Bells and Fireflies may be considered the book that David Canaan wanted to write (had he been a talented, genuine artist) about the valley people whom he perceived as "the best people in the whole world." David's desire to articulate "what they couldn't express" parallels Buckler's longing to write "thousands of interesting things about their ways and speech and customs."¹² According to Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies is

A book which aims to give a comprehensive picture, descriptive and analytical, of Nova Scotia village life as I witnessed it at the time of my childhood and after, in the vicinity of historic Annapolis Royal. This way of life, with all its distinctive customs, institutions, values, tasks, recreations, idioms of speech and behaviour, atmospheres, and textural variety, has now vanished forever. I should like to triangulate it so to speak, within the mingling stream of heritage, material change and social mutation. 13

In order to present a comprehensive picture, Buckler admits to having crossed the line between pure fact and fiction,

The background is literal fact: but whenever a touch of the imaginative (which is quite different from the imaginary) seemed to focus the truth clearer than any clinical photography of strictly literal detail, I have tried to supply it. 14

With a "touch of the imaginative," Buckler focusses his regional narrative on the way it was to reveal the personalities and the experiences of the

Norsteaders, his fictional subjects. But because the imaginative touch can easily become sentimentality, Buckler carefully controls his recollections with various tensions. The irony that he coupled with tragedy in The Mountain and The Valley, he yokes with nostalgia in Ox Bells and Fireflies. As Desmond Pacey suggests, Buckler applies "just enough ironic shading" to make the content credible and to save the work from the "saccharinely sentimental":

If the writer is sufficiently skilful and honest to weave into his predominantly bright-coloured fabric a few contrasting threads of ironic grey or somber black, the resulting tapestry can be convincing and memorable. This feat is accomplished in Ox Bells and Fireflies. 15

Buckler replaces the intricate characterizations and psychological portraits of his earlier works with a flowing narrative that, according to him, "would be nearer the novelistic, using fact, incident and character as the prism of the theme."¹⁶ Within this unconventional form, he creates a pastoral elegy for the way it was some sixty years ago in rural Nova Scotia. Since this work lacks a conventional plot structure, Buckler relies largely on the focal point of Norstead to link the various subjects recalled in the twenty-one chapters. These topics express the intense human relationships and strong morality of his rural community. Buckler strives as he did in his short story "The Quarrel" (1949) to reveal "the extraordinary intricacy of feeling and loyalty in the members of a close-knit country family, contrary to common supposition that they are inarticulate emotionally as well as verbally."¹⁷

The basis for Buckler's ironic tone can be found in his pairing of opposites, the presence of tensions, contrasts and contradictions.

We recognize as central to Buckler's tone the conflict between the book's content, which speaks of euphoric immutability, and its elegaic form, which expresses mutability and loss. Although the work appears to be an exuberant celebration of the past, it is closer to a dark eulogy. This tension magnifies both moods and creates a sense of irony that, as Desmond Pacey suggests, saves the work from sentimentality. Buckler emphasizes in his content the tensions and contradictions between the past and the present, childhood and adulthood, the comic and the tragic, the rural life and the urban world, emotional and verbal articulation. By juxtaposing these opposites, Buckler points up the incongruities that we recognize as irony. The misinterpretation of appearances as reality involves the reader, the Norsteads and the village of Norstead. We are cautioned by the narrator not to confuse the villagers' simple appearances with their complex realities, and Buckler intends us to see how the seemingly "even-tempered drone of small village life...is anything but." When Mark, as the narrator, discovers that his longings are contradicted by reality and his idealized expectations are shattered by his disillusioning experiences, he recognizes, as we do, the irony involved in his life. Generally, in other work, Buckler adds to this conflict of characterization by deliberately contrasting his presentation of the hero with the hero's perception of himself and his circumstances. The reader then sees how the hero is self-deceived and pathetically unaware of his distorted point of view. In Ox Bells and Fireflies, however, Buckler's presentation of his protagonist, Mark, confirms, rather than contradicts, his sense of himself and his situation. Indeed, Buckler and Mark seem to view life from the

same perspective. The reader, therefore, considers Mark's narrative to be true and his interpretations valid. The only discrepancies are those between Mark's childhood idealism and his adult disillusionment, and Mark and the reader both recognize the irony which arises from those contradictions. Mark's narrative is intended to express that awareness to the reader who is meant to share in Mark's deep sense of loss and assessment of the past and the present.

To eliminate from the reader's mind any questions about an unreliable narrator or inconsistent points of view, Buckler quickly establishes a sense of credibility and authenticity for Mark. The reader is asked to believe his description of Norstead and his version of truth for two reasons. First, Mark once lived in Norstead, and his personal experiences validate his memories and, unlike the stranger (and by implication the reader), he sees accurately the reality behind the appearances of the villagers, "A stranger giving their sing-song appearances (man's or woman's) only a skimming glance would see none of this. None. But in some degree or other it was there" (p. 125). Second, Mark claims his recollections avoid the falsely sentimental because they spring from the heart rather than the head, "The heart, far less misty-eyed than the mind, despite its sentimental name is a far sounder witness" (p. 21). More importantly, he not only recalls the past, but he relives it, "You are not seeing this place again through the blurred telescope of the mind: you are standing right there" (p. 21). Thus, Mark and Buckler assure the reader that he can believe this interpretation of Norstead and the city, the past and present. There is no discrepancy between Buckler's view and the protagonist's, a disparity

we saw frequently between Buckler's narrative and David Canaan's accounts in The Mountain and The Valley. The irony in this work, therefore, most commonly arises from the incongruities we recognize, in the subject matter, between opposites, the elegaic form and the euphoric content, and the narrator's idealized expectations and his disheartening experiences.

Although a "fictive memoir" steeped in nostalgia, this work has a central duality similar to that in Buckler's other writing. The title suggests the contradictory aspects of life that Buckler returns to again and again: the fireflies represent infinite freedom, while the ox bells are associated with the past and represent some degree of physical captivity and, frequently, herald death. Mark recalls the idyllic days of his childhood when, living in literal isolation in Norstead, his subjective idealism was fulfilled in his surroundings. He experienced the unconditional freedom he longed for and Norstead confirmed, rather than contradicted, his fantasies. The only exception to this perfect life was death which conflicted with his visions of permanence and immortality. These forces of time, death and age conspire eventually, and Mark leaves Norstead for the city where he no longer experiences his former rural perfection. In this urban environment, Mark is figuratively isolated and despairs of achieving personal fulfilment. He sees the search for meaning as futile and his existence as absurd. Faced with the challenge of nihilism, he adopts that philosophy, but he off-sets that negative view with positive recollections of his childhood, ideal love and human relationships. This combination of nihilism and nostalgia allows Mark to endure his hopeless situation in the city. In his narrative, Mark intends us to recognize the incongruities between man's aspirations for completeness and his confinement in an incomplete world as ironic and the cause of alienation.

The book's fabric Buckler weaves from the threads of his recollection about Norstead, its inhabitants, the seasons, farming, school, domestic ways, politics, sex and human relations. To establish a balanced narrative, Buckler sought to

blend the atmospheric...with the concise unadorned narrative detail (which in the country can range all the way from the somber to the hilarious in a single day): to blend these so there should be no disturbing clashes of style or effect: so that one didn't cancel the other out. 18

The "atmospheric" qualities arise from Buckler's prose-poetry which rests essentially upon highly imagistic and metaphorical language. His poetic techniques reflect the keenly sensuous mood of the pastoral world, the harmony of human relationships and man's complete identification with the environment. Buckler deliberately "juxtaposed clusters of carefully selected and particularly allusive detail, solid or atmospheric (e.g., the variant shades of weather and season that were such a subtle determinant in so many situations), which will summon up their whole context."¹⁹ The narrative detail about behaviour and events joins with and supports the atmospheric poetic style to make form and content complementary. The characters are as colourful, dynamic and vital as Buckler's imagery and their lives as harmonious as Buckler's metaphors. In this passage, for example, Buckler uses the metaphor of language to express the relationship between an inarticulate husband and wife: "Your gaze met your wife's. The years you'd been as one with her had never been so lettered on the air of any room before" (p. 109). The local idiom that Buckler uses for his characters creates an aural dimension to their already well-drawn personalities and contributes to the atmosphere of the text:

A group of men have gathered to help another lay a new sill under his barn.

"Hadn't I better hitch up the team and snig her closer the foundation there?" he says. "I don't want you fullas to come over here and lift yer guts out."

"Hell, no. There's six of us here. If we can't raft a sill that size into place, we ain't fit to pick shit with the hens. Come on, boys. Come on there, Willis. You only bin married two days, yer back can't be that weak!" (p. 221)

This passage illustrates Buckler's ability to translate the local dialect and capture the speech patterns of the rural people, to depict the farmers' interactions and to convey the family spirit of the rural community. As well, Buckler expresses the somewhat bawdy but, presumably, genuine sense of humour and comedy running through the characterizations. Buckler catalogues his characters in the same way that he lists the objects and sensations of the environment, and he, thereby, enlivens his narrative. His collection of people includes the man whose ruined testicle is preserved in a jar on the parlor organ (p. 271); the man who curses at his sons to stop swearing (p. 271); the man who raises pigs only to buy votes at election time (p. 271). These brief, succinct glimpses of character grant the entire work an immediacy and a vitality that capture the reader's imagination and add another colourful dimension to the recollection.

In his earlier work, Buckler rarely, if ever, revealed the humorous, anecdotal flair which appears in Ox Bells and Fireflies. Frequently, the comic experiences recounted in this memoir appear much earlier in Buckler's correspondence, either as autobiographical reflections or local stories. Buckler intended, however, that "The autobiographical elements would be restricted to a minor feature in the objective portrait."²⁰ When coupled with the serious, "somber,"

facets of village life, the comical, "hilarious," anecdotes establish various tensions that Buckler believes balance his perspective on the past. Buckler, for example, juxtaposes an unexpected romantic interlude between a husband and wife (p. 226) with a mother's grief at the remembered death of her son (p. 227). The yoking together of such contradictory emotions and circumstances indicates Buckler's ability to recognize and understand the duelling forces which often make existence seem absurd.

In addition to his development of strong and appealing characters, Buckler further unifies his narrative with references to nature's cyclical time structure, to memory and through a continuity of narrative voices. The time pattern in this book parallels that used in The Mountain and The Valley and The Cruellest Month. As the voice of memory, Buckler resembles Grandmother Ellen who stood as a figure from the past and whose reflections united the past with the present. The book's time frame moves between the past and the present tense, depending upon Mark's figurative place in time. When, for example, Mark relives the past, he speaks in the present tense in order to convey exactly the intensity of the moment and the sense that the past has been brought forward to be re-experienced in the present. In the chapter entitled "Memory," Mark describes his visions of the past in the present tense: "I stand quietly in the doorway" (p. 39); "I see the swirling blizzard" (p. 39); "I hear the ox bells cool as ax glint in the swamp" (p. 41). When, in the following chapter, "Wildcats, Tetrizzini, and Bee Beer," Mark switches to the past tense to describe the way it was, he easily dramatizes the the ironic disparity between the past and the present, and he signals to

the reader that he has returned to the here and now from his transcendental state of memory. Speaking about his childhood, Mark now uses the simple past tense, "We never knew what a tiresome moment was" (p. 42); "We breakfasted on oatmeal bubbling like lava" (p. 43); "As we ate, our thoughts sprang ahead to the fun awaiting us outside" (p. 43). Throughout the work, the shift in verb tenses notifies the reader where Mark stands in relation to the past. The present tense juxtaposed with the past heightens the contrast between the two time frames and allows us, as the spectators and readers, to enter the past with Mark and experience his world of innocence first-hand.

Buckler speaks autobiographically through the persona of Mark, and Buckler's identification with Mark places him simultaneously within the book as the narrator and without as the author. The book's opening statement makes their relationship clear,

I'll call the village 'Norstead,' the boy 'I.'
 They stand for many. The time is youth, when
 Time is young.
 I was ten and I had never seen a dead person.
 I did not think about any of it with these words,
 but this is the way I remember it. (p. 3).

Buckler attempts to draw distinctions between himself and the various narrators by taking on the personae of Mark, the Mother and the Father. The unmistakable identification and autobiographical strains, however, often reduce these three supposedly different points of view to the one espoused by Buckler. In contrast to his earlier work, Buckler includes himself in this book by introducing the central character, Mark, in the first person "I" and concluding with the first person plural "we." At other times, Buckler changes into the third person "he" and "she." Alan Young suggests that "this multiple point of view thereby permits us to

see the world of Norstead from a variety of angles, distances and perspectives" and that it allows for "more distanced analytical passages."²¹ A multiple point of view also allows the reader to compare and contrast different perceptions; here the views are consistent with one another.

The structural variations in Ox Bells and Fireflies alter Buckler's themes to some degree. The country, now epitomized by Norstead, continues to represent man's ideal state of humanity while the city and other villages represent states of disillusionment and absolute isolation. The close-knit rural family remains a positive form of literal isolation but now includes the entire neighbourhood of Norstead. Eventually, however, external forces such as urban influences, modern advances and time fracture the unity of Norstead. The usual conflict between the country and the city recurs, but that former tension between a love of the land and dreams of urban fulfilment Buckler now replaces with complete devotion to the rural world and utter condemnation of the city. Like his fictional predecessors, the child narrator, Mark, possesses heightened sensibilities and a word-shaped consciousness. The alienation caused by the failure to communicate fully occurs now between urban dwellers rather than family members and rural folks. The emotionally articulate Norsteaders share their sensibilities fully, and Mark and his family enjoy a simple and intuitive relationship. Personal misunderstandings appear only temporarily in a reworking of the short story "The Bars and The Bridge" (1958) in chapter sixteen. The 'types' in Norstead are depicted sympathetically but simply in chapter eighteen. Syd Wright and other 'types' in Norstead "kept to themselves until it was too late to break from this shell that made them as if invisible" (p. 179). Buckler

seemingly has shifted the responsibility for their isolation from society to themselves. Syd's lonely existence, for example, stems from a self-deception in his inner life.

The book's opening sequence typifies one of Buckler's central conflicts which is created when external reality contradicts Mark's inner illusions. Mark, as the adult narrator, recalls his childhood confrontation with death in an incident reminiscent of David Canaan's aborted fishing trip to the mountain. After dreaming that there "is no shadow then on anyone or anything of their not lasting forever" (p. 8), Mark awakens to a natural environment that seemingly manifests his longing for eternal happiness and perfection, "I know we are forever mingled with the sun's pulse (or the wind's or the rain's) and forever unconquerable" (p. 12). But this wholly metaphorical state of identification with the natural world collapses when the "great sabled presence" (p. 130) of death intrudes. Suddenly, Mark is alienated from his environment, "There is nothing like the snow in the dream or the sun in the dream. They have retreated inside themselves, inside the ring of deafness, where they only talk to each other. In silences" (p. 13). Death is the intolerable end to man's frail mortality that makes his imagined immutability and vision of permanence ironic. Mark's childhood belief in Norstead's immutability continues to be repeatedly contradicted throughout the book by the reader's knowledge that Norstead is actually "no more place." Mark's perception of Norstead recalls Paul Creed's perception of Endlaw in The Cruellest Month. There, Endlaw, Paul's version of Norstead, is also invaded by death to make ironic his understanding of himself and his paradise as indomitable.

Similarly, Mark's future alienation in the city undercuts his own feeling of eternally belonging in Norstead. Standing in the past, the child Mark looks at a bleak urban society beyond Norstead and feels immune to such an empty and meaningless existence,

I think (exquisitely safe) of people I have seen in town looking as if their faces were dragging themselves behind themselves. As if their bodies had gone out. How could they ever let themselves fall into that dreadful numbness, as if they didn't see what they heard or hear what they saw? (p. 32)

Mark's mistaken perceptions parallel David Canaan's when, still a child and not yet isolated, he looked out from his snug home at Christmas at the lonely and pathetic figure of Herb Hennessey; he felt "the sweetest safest sort of exaltation: that such a thing could be, however, incredibly, but not for him."²² And, like David's, Mark's sense of security proves illusory. Although the way it was then in Norstead once appeared to be an eternal now, time's erosion has contradicted a sense of permanence. At the same time that Mark is speaking of Norstead's enduring qualities, both he and the reader know the village and its virtues no longer exist. Contrary to the narrative, Norstead is only a memory and, despite its immutable appearance, was no more immune to external forces and the ravages of time than any other place. This ironic view of Norstead makes the village a believable victim of time and fate. But because Buckler's romanticism (whether real or imaginary) has elevated Norstead to an almost mythical status, its ultimate fall from that ideal state takes on tragic proportions that overshadow its rather ordinary fate.

In the final chapter, Mark has grown up and left Norstead for the city where individual isolation has replaced belonging and where a nihilistic perspective has buried the romantic idealism of his youth,

"And all days we are asleep, sleep walking among the things that now are all alike, shorn to their one feature of going from one moment of sameness to the next" (p. 300). Buckler focusses on the differences between Mark's idealized expectations as a child in Norstead and his actual experiences as an adult in the city: fertility and sterility, human relations and isolation, faces of brotherhood and faces of stone, sentience and numbness, the earth and concrete streets, morality and immorality, the innocence of youth and the experience of age, the eternal and the infinite. This central dichotomy is encapsulated in man's vision of a wasteland, an absurd and meaningless state of existence,

We no longer see the things we used to see: our own pulse in the lapping lake, our own snugness in the kitchen fire, our own eyes in the window pane. We see things we never used to see: the iron in the band of winter-cloud behind the factory chimney, the prison eyes in the dry blade of weaving sidewalk grass, the death mask of time in the rag of newspaper blowing down the gutter. (p. 300)

This conflict between the past and present circumstances forms the basis for Buckler's irony and leads to the disillusionment of the narrator and the destruction of Norstead. Buckler deliberately develops this irony in order to heighten dramatically the sense of loss and to cast a tragic light over the entire work.

This central force of opposing perceptions is caused by the disparity between the way things are and the way things ought to be. In Buckler's terms, this stands as the contrast between the way it is now and the way it was then in Norstead, the disillusioning present and the ideal past. Buckler's recollection of the past becomes synonymous with Norstead, the Edenic world where man is in harmony with himself, his

community and his natural environment. The Norsteads were "miles and guiles away from the wide world" (p. 20), safely and happily isolated from external corruption and united within themselves. Even death, the ultimate force of isolation and the cause of human despair, united these people, "we cried for one another's death then, because each of them was a part of our own" (p. 131). Then the seasonal cycle determined man's time which seemed "held and motionless, in a trance of benignity" (p. 131). Mark's childhood relationship with time recalls David Canaan's transcendental state on the mountain. In Norstead, Mark felt that "Time was neither before you or behind you: you were exactly opposite the present moment. It made a rushing sound that the sound of your consciousness was in total chorus with" (p. 103). His sense of eternal nowness creates a metaphorical world wherein "Things luxuriously, idle, come out of themselves and touch each other" (p. 293).

The urban world in which Mark now lives as an adult does not allow for such metaphorical relationships:

"The" points to something particular. "And" connects two things that are different. In the city, so much is alike that only a few "the"s are found, no more than a handful of "and"s is needed to couple them. Here the "the"s were numberless, the "and"s infinite. (p. 212)

Time has betrayed Norstead, desecrated that utopia and corrupted its inhabitants. The way it once was has been replaced by a present society epitomized in the roadside lunchroom with its "bowl of stagnant water where the feet of two small turtles clutch stuporously for footholds on each other, not knowing each other from rocks" (p. 31). The utter desolation and absolute loneliness symbolized by these two creatures form the core of modern life and the tragedy of the human condition. Man now

lives in a world where life is meaningless and absurd, "Now your very flesh splits, and these are separated beyond hand-reach. A draft of longing searches you. You burn with home-sickness, the only flame that smokes its chimney white. In Norstead it was not like that" (p. 85). Juxtaposing the ideal past with the emptiness of the present emphasizes the contradictory, elegaic tone of the book:

The air is as still as the Bible; pure and clear as the brook in psalm. The velvet afternoon light sprawls in this once and total gift of itself, bemusing the senses. I glory in its dreamy ambience.

(Not yet the ravage of the perfect moment by the need to grasp it entire, knowing that all you ever find in grasp's palm when its fingers open up again is echo.) (p. 33)

Here, Mark's disillusioned view of life places him within the context of modern irony as he sees life's paradoxes and incongruities as beyond understanding and man's existence as, therefore, futile and chaotic. In order to survive, Mark adopts a nihilistic philosophy towards existence and his present condition and finds strength in his beautiful memories of past love and innocence.

The deliberate irony that Buckler develops concerning the past and the present involves an unintentional irony as well. Buckler's intensely pessimistic view of modern society and highly affirmative recollection of the past may strike the reader as excessive. He may take exception to the author's generalized description of modern horror, and doubt that the past was such a golden age. As Alan Young suggests, Buckler's "extremely bitter" tone concerning modern life may be the book's one weakness, "The reader may all too readily disengage his sympathies if he considers that the book's vision is distorted by an

exaggerated hostility towards the present and over-sentimentality in its presentation of the past."²³ If the reader's awareness about the present honestly contradicts Buckler's personal impressions, then an unconscious irony arises that undermines the central thesis of Buckler's work.

The contrast between appearance and reality, according to Buckler, stems from "what is commonly supposed to be the even-tempered drone of small village life but is anything but."²⁴ Thus, as he did in The Cruellest Month, Buckler looks beneath the surfaces and behind appearances to discover and portray the true shape of life and people, "I am striving hard to accomplish more than just a surface picture. I want to catch the intangible and quintessential spirit of how life precisely was there and then."²⁵ To prevent his characters from becoming two-dimensional, Buckler draws on this tension between the appearance and the reality of his Norsteads. Mark offers his membership in Norstead society and his depth of understanding as his credentials for accurately interpreting the "there and then" for the reader. According to Mark, a stranger's comprehension (and the reader's) could only be an ironic misreading of their appearance for their reality, "A stranger giving their sing-song appearances (man's or woman's) only a skimming glance would see none of this. None. But in some degree or other it was there" (p. 125). By looking behind their appearances, Buckler and Mark discover a complex and often contradictory reality,

I should hope that the trenchant humor of certain other characters (who might have sat for Leacock) would enliven the book as it lent such colour to the fabric of their days - - but the book would not be the conventional exercise in rustic anecdote.

Except as they were individualistic to a degree, these characters were not "characters" after the "quaint" or "cracker-barrel" stereotype. And however inchoate their expression sometimes was, they were as charged with depths and intricacies of thought and feeling as the more sophisticated. Even in this small cross-section of life they represented every conceivable psychological mode and subtlety had its embodiment. 26

The Norsteads themselves were paradoxical and complex characters that "no single description can contain" (p. 19). Their rough exteriors belied sensitive interiors:

Sometimes rough as oaths, they yet had a kind of poetry - - if poetry can be taken as the bottom skin of whatever in all its differences is all itself. One mood could turn them frivolous as wrens; another could hold them speechless in its galling fist. But they were always intensely alive. (p. 20)

As Desmond Pacey points out, Buckler's rural characters are "for the most part more independent, honourable, industrious and vivacious than they probably were in fact," but subtle irony curbs the sentiment.²⁷ What seems to be an indestructible vivacity is repeatedly undercut by the "great sabled presence" (p. 130) of death. Early in the book, Mark yokes death with youth, innocence with experience, "I was ten and I had never seen a dead person" (p. 3). Coupled with death is the view of accidental determination which underscores not only man's frailty but Buckler's own ironic perspective as well. Incongruous circumstances introduce death into the seemingly Edenic world of Norstead: "powerful" (p. 278) App dies from a skating accident; "lucky" (p. 281) Guy is struck down by a freak bolt of lightning; Jake, who could intuitively "outwit a task's opposing forces" (p. 283), drowns in Lily Lake. Although these Norsteads may have lived in harmony with nature and measured their time by the passing seasons, the natural world's cycle of renewal and indifference toward man mocks

humanity's sense of immortality.

Buckler's cast manifests the virtues that he commonly associates with the country people. Their inherent naturalness Buckler equates with the way it was in Norstead, 'Each face was written and readable in the same language as its neighbours'. A clear stream of well-being flowed through everyone. Unhappiness was only a parenthesis, as happiness is only a parenthesis now' (p. 84). Work was 'wealth for the senses' (p. 129), and mental illness unknown, 'They were simply too busy with growing things, too purged by fresh air and friendship, to go crazy' (p. 129). A Norsteader's words 'were tools as blunt and honest as the work tools of the field, not tatting shuttles' (p. 161). Like Letty Spence's words, their words were 'sometimes halting and out of joint, it was nothing more to snicker at than the little air-bubbling of the learned that, for all its ease and slickness, ranks them with the people who can fart at will' (p. 277).

To substantiate his praise, Mark compares his people to those in another village of Claymore and urban centres. The selfishness, materialism and artifice that he sees in the Claymore population only raise his (and supposedly the reader's) already high estimation of the Norsteaders, 'To look at them and their like was to see better what Norsteaders and their like were not' (p. 265). In a chapter filled with scathing anecdotes, Mark catalogues Claymore's moral failings which parallel those of the city and differ sharply, of course, from the strong moral standards of his own village of Norstead.

As though to further reassure the possibly skeptical reader that his narrative is accurate and fair, Mark occasionally qualifies his

commendations by pointing up certain faults in his subjects. But he sometimes discredits his attempts to project a balanced narrative when he repeatedly finds even the faults of the Norsteads praiseworthy. Admitting that his Norsteads were not always pure "gold," Mark proceeds to extol "the ore they were flawed with" (p. 264) because "neither the good in them nor the bad in them was counterfeit" (p. 265). Although they were "Imperfect as all men and not to be represented as saints of any kind, they yet had something in them that never held its hand back from any honest thing which went to them with its hand out" (p. 277). Such biases arouse some suspicion in the reader that the narrator's nostalgia may be distorting his perceptions and recollections.

The same vices that Mark condemns in Claymore he judges as only "surface quirks" (p. 267) in Norstead, and even then they "(resembled those in Claymore on occasion only)" (p. 276). His conclusion that the Norsteads "were as large as life" (p. 276) shares something of the ironic magnanimity expressed by David Canaan when he described the valley people as "the best people in the whole world." Often, Mark fails, in our view, to be objectively realistic about his characterizations, preferring instead the perfection he remembers from his ideal, subjective perception. Thus, the irony which arises from contrasting appearances and reality may have inconsistencies which undercut the reliability of Mark's views. The superficial view attributed to the stranger Mark seems to possess when looking at other societies. If, as he argues, living in Norstead qualifies him to accurately interpret its appearances, then he, like the stranger, can have only superficial understandings of those societies to which he does not belong. Despite the full chapter of bitter

anecdotes used to support his assessment of Claymore, the reader is less than convinced. Whereas Mark condemns Claymore solely on the basis of its immoral appearance, he looks behind the similarly flawed appearances of the Norsteads to find them redeemable.

While Mark argues against the stranger's misinterpretation of the Norsteads' "sing-song appearances," he simultaneously judges city people by the "meaningless mysteries of all those faces" (p. 32). Using their appearances as his only yardstick, Mark measures their urban reality as an "empty history" (p. 32), "everlasting nothingness" (p. 32) and "dreadful numbness" (p. 32). Even though Mark places himself within an urban society and describes its horrors in detail, the reader senses that Mark always remains outside his adopted community as a spectator, judging appearances as a reality. Bound to the past by nostalgia and blinded by sentiment, Mark seems trapped within his memory, unable and, perhaps, unwilling to understand the city as he does the country and Norstead. When defining urban sterility and isolation at the end of the book, Mark's language reveals his predilection for judging the physical appearance and obvious behaviour of the city people as the complete state of their humanity. In sharp contrast to his treatment of the Norsteads, Mark fails to look behind their faces and actions to discover a psychological truth, even his own,

We try to escape. We talk fast, we smoke, we drink.
 But time's rhymes have turned against us too. To
 smoke is to choke a little, to drink is to stink a
 little. To screw is to rue. Pain stains our brains.
 Words are now curds. The fair air is now bare. (p. 299)

Clearly, Ox Bells and Fireflies never represents itself as a psychological novel addressing the modern human dilemma, but even as a "fictive memoir"

the reader feels a slight imbalance in Buckler's handling of the present way of life and in his depiction of the past. To convince the reader that his recollections are accurate, he may overstate his case and perhaps undercut his own argument. Although the reader does not discount Buckler's credibility entirely, the exaggeration in the author's views raises serious doubts that undermine the book's strengths.

Although the unintentional irony weakens the book's forcefulness by creating a conflict between Buckler's and Mark's perception and that of the reader, Ox Bells and Fireflies survives as a masterful elegy for the way it once was. The deliberate irony Buckler establishes through the disparity between Mark's subjective idealism and objective reality, the way it was then and the way it is now and the contrast between all appearances and reality. These tensions rescue the book from overwhelming sentimentality while intensifying its sense of loss to tragic proportions. As Buckler's last major work, Ox Bells and Fireflies eulogizes not only a past time and another place but Buckler's own life and times in rural Nova Scotia as well. The conflict between the past and the present, the infinite and the finite, however, is never truly resolved. As the book closes, Mark and Buckler escape from an alien, disillusioning society into memory where idealized perceptions of the past offer comfort and happiness, "...then there were: sap spiles and ostrich ferns. Burdock burrs and Luna moths. Dragonflies and cornflowers" (pp. 300-301). The fireflies of freedom epitomize an earlier time, harmony, beauty and joy, "And faces in the doorway and faces in the doorway..." (p. 302). The reader may sense that Mark's final vision here is the same kind of glorious vision experienced by David Canaan on the mountain. The recollected memories of the landscape and the mention of "faces" suggest that Mark, like David,

longs to recapture time and relive events which are now forever lost. Also implied is the expiation of guilt. Mark's memory, therefore, may be as self-deceiving and illusory as David's revelation. Buckler's memory process may strike the reader as escapist and an ineffective way of dealing with the present and an urban world. But perhaps Buckler intended that his reader escape isolation by reading Ox Bells and Fireflies.

The idyllic vision that Buckler presents in Ox Bells and Fireflies continues in Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea.²⁸ Published in 1973, this work combines Buckler's text with the photography of Hans Weber to create what superficially could be termed a coffee table book. Buckler's poetic text, however, elevates Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea to a literary level that complements Weber's photographic artistry. As Alan Young suggests, the book stands as a "unified whole as far as the relationship between text and visual images is concerned."²⁹

Although the artistry of Buckler and Weber match in strength, their individual perspectives of Nova Scotia are often contradictory. Weber's seventy-three photographs dwell on the economic hardship, rugged landscape, physical struggle and solitary bleakness of the ocean province while Buckler's text presents an Edenic vision of rural life similar to that in Ox Bells and Fireflies. This tension between the photographs and the text, the eye and the ear, provides a central structure to the entire work. As Alan Young suggests, "the photographs qualify the dominant joyfulness of the text...and assist in preventing any overflow into sentimentality, always a danger when Buckler's idyllic impulses flow freely."³⁰ The disparity results from

Weber's photographs capturing the unadorned reality of Nova Scotia and from Buckler's text manifesting the subjective idealism of his consciousness and imagination. Buckler's vision of his home exists more as an aesthetic landscape of the soul than as a geographical place. Like Norstead, Buckler's Nova Scotia symbolizes man's desired state of harmony and fulfilment. The Edenic world that Buckler's text depicts is the deeper truth that Buckler sees behind the apparent bleakness and despair of Weber's photographs. In this work, Buckler's romantic individualism is fulfilled in the Nova Scotian environment, and he translates that vision of inner beauty and peace into words which attempt to capture the essence of Nova Scotia exactly. When writing about the city, Buckler distances himself and moves closer to a modern ironic perspective that echoes the voices of nihilism from his other works. Yet Buckler draws back from such despair and nihilism and returns to his belief that the natural world and loving human relationships will ultimately redeem man's condition. Indeed, in this work Buckler's enduring faith in mankind, sentiment and love controls the narrative and, in some ways, contributes to the spirit of his poetic language and technique. His text embodies a glowing affirmation of life that generates a creative energy and strength for the work.

The book's title indicates that there is but one point of view on Nova Scotia, that of the sea surrounding the land. From their window, a contemplative and symbolic stance characteristic of Buckler, these two artists view the land with reference to the sea that fills their visions and dictates the Nova Scotian way of life. The image of the window creates the sense that Buckler and Weber are, at once, members of the environment

they describe and aliens, separated by the pane of glass and their artistic sensibilities. Thus, they are simultaneously within and without their art, both the created and the creator, and part of a complex point of view that Buckler would certainly find appealing. Their discriminating perspective, however, fails to recognize fully the urban realities of commerce and industry.³¹ As the title suggests, the artists clearly intended to focus almost exclusively on the land and the sea, the two elements that form the spirit and substance of Nova Scotia:

To speak of Nova Scotia is not to speak of its thoroughfares of traffic, business, learning... These are the same here as everywhere: where the din of striving and the tin of words deface the face and put the price tags on it. The heart of this province is, rather, the province of the heart: in its enclaves of farm and seaside village. (p. 96)

Buckler's attitude here recalls his bitter condemnation of the city and complete affirmation of the country in Ox Bells and Fireflies, and the reader senses that Buckler may take the same approach to the subject of Nova Scotia. Buckler avoids such repetition by concentrating on the country, by limiting his evaluation of the city to specific issues and areas and by recognizing certain positive values in the urban setting.

Buckler's text, divided into five sections, expresses common Bucklerian themes which Weber's photographs loosely reflect. For example, the text of section two, "Masts and Anchors," Weber complements with photographs of the sea. Section five, "Counterfeit and Coin," ends with a photograph of an old farm house emblematic of the way it was in Nova Scotia. Because the photographs are untitled and only casually bound to the text, the correlation between the word and the image depends upon the reader recognizing the links between the two. In this way, Buckler and Weber

draw the reader more deeply into the book, forcing him to interpret the work through his own imagination and, to some extent, participate in the creative process of translating the word and the image into an aesthetic understanding.

In section one, "Amethysts and Dragonflies," Buckler's text takes the form of prose-poetry of the kind we find in Ox Bells and Fireflies,

The sap (by its own command) rising in the sugar maple.
 The apple (by its own map) shaping itself on the bough.
 The daisy forming its own petals as no human conjurer could.
 The earth itself living out what it was born with, totally
 without artifice... (p. 16)

By personifying each of the subjects that he sees in the natural world, Buckler invests nature with an energy and a life force which operate independent of man and indifferent to man. The simplicity of his phrases and the exactness of his language mirror the honest beauty and the precision of creation in the natural world. According to Douglas Loch-head, the "Amethysts and Dragonflies" chapter "is a superb prose poem. In an intoxicating build-up of detail, by means of short sentences and ingenious word combinations, Buckler miraculously evokes the land, the people, the sea."³² Buckler catalogues the sights and sounds of Nova Scotia and anthropomorphizes the province which, like Norstead, is "nearly the last place left where place and people are not thinned and adulterated with graftings that grow across the grain" (p. 12). The province itself has conflicts and contains many complex contradictions, "It is grounded in the sea, but rooted in the land" (p. 12). What seems to be a disjointed landscape of "caples, coves, lochs, bays, and harbours" (p. 12) in reality "remains a whole" (p. 12). Its flawed beauty makes it "the more beautiful" (p. 14), and it is at once the face of Genesis and Ruth, Greco and Rubens; its life resembles the life in both Faulkner and

Hardy. Its ironic nature Buckler emphasizes by juxtaposing the contradictory, myriad forms of the life cycle: amethysts in rocks and snow apples in the valley, a black bear and a child's grave, the December blizzard and the April breeze, the farm tools and shotguns, and sunrise and sunset.

The Nova Scotia that Buckler knows is synonymous with the country which continues to epitomize man's ideal state and the unity of the close-knit family. The mountains "chat like uncles with their nephew valleys. Even the rocks have no stoniness. Houses (though their eyes may be as different as brothers' from cousins' or great-aunts') agree with each other, noddingly, and swap kinship the day long" (p. 12). Buckler catalogues a rural Nova Scotia which "is a dictionary where the seasons look up their meanings and test them. It is a sea-son where men can man their own helms" (p. 13). Again, Buckler unites language with his environment and continues to associate words and their meanings with experience. His playful manipulation of season into "sea-son" illustrates his predilection for revealing the double strengths of a word and his ability to create a simple and meaningful metaphor from a single word. In contrast to his idyllic landscape, the pavement of "cities or near-cities...beat the faces blind" (p. 12). Isolation exists only in the city where "man is forever lonely because he never sees his thoughts and feelings corporified outside him, so that the crush of their edgelessness is lessened" (p. 13). Unlike the country where man identifies with and is reflected in the landscape, a city denies man such identification and metaphorical moments when external reality manifests his longings. Here, in a city environment, Buckler moves closer to the modern nihilistic view

that life has become irrevocably absurd and man's state hopeless. Once again, Buckler takes responsibility for interpreting the reality behind the "sing-song appearances" of his subjects, "Some of the place names sound quaint. But the people are not" (p. 13). Like the Norsteads, the rural Nova Scotians are "not shuttered by the city wariness, not scoundreled by the lie of openness assumed, not mineralized by the poison pellet at the core of all tyrannical ambition" (p. 13). These critical outbursts enumerating the unlimited vices of the city and its inhabitants are, fortunately for the reader and the work itself, kept to a minimum. Otherwise, Buckler runs the risk of creating unintentional irony of the kind common to Ox Bells and Fireflies.

In Buckler's shortest section, "Masts and Anchors," the sea becomes a "metaphor for everything" (p. 26). While the land articulates peace, beauty and fellowship, the sea is "forever lonely...unfeeling and implacable" (p. 26). The tension between these two forces Buckler has earlier fictionalized in The Mountain and The Valley and in such short stories as "The Locket" (BColl.) and "A Sort of Sign" (1945). Although Buckler, as a literary artist, may perceive the sea metaphorically, the country people of Nova Scotia "do not toy with metaphors or the toys of words" (p. 26). Here, Buckler's creative and imaginative sensibilities which make him an artist set him apart from his community. His word-shaped consciousness expresses his aesthetic visions, but the Nova Scotian fisherman and farmer rely on physical actions to articulate their lives' poetic relationship to the sea. They are "not poets (except as there may be poetry in the hands of men who take their lives in their hands daily), for them only the real is real" (p. 26). In this sense, Buckler's

merging and blending of prose, a form of language suited to the physical life of the country person, with poetry, a form of language designed for the imaginative mind of the artist, reflects the relationship of the poet to the men of Nova Scotia. It is the responsibility of the poet, in this case Buckler the prose-poet, to recognize and translate into words the poetry inherent in the deeds the men who live with the sea. He is, in effect, articulating experience for the inarticulate, expressing what they themselves cannot express. The divergence of verbal and physical articulation Buckler recognizes as the fundamental difference between rural and urban people. Weber's photographs emphasize these human and seascape qualities that Buckler introduces into his text. The loneliness and isolation of the sea Weber illustrates with figures of solitary fishermen. Wives shown waiting for their return Weber follows with a photograph of a widow's walk, and the men's life-long attachment to the sea Weber depicts with photographs of young and old fishermen.

In the third section, "Man and Snowman," Buckler looks away from the sea to the land. Taking the form of a short story, this section focusses on the final days of an old farmer, his memories and his family relationships.³³ Buckler now personalizes the contradictory nature of the sea which "infixes some nameless and unslakeable yearning in a man's eyes" (p. 49) and the land which "yokes the facts of memory to his every breath" (p. 49). Unlike the fisherman with a "single-hearted gaze" (p. 49), the farmer embodies the land's "thronging assembly" (p. 49). This clear dichotomy between the nature of the sea and the land recalls the inherent differences between Toby Richmond, the sailor devoted to the exotic world of the sea, and David Canaan, the farmer bound by his love to the land.

This short fiction echoes the themes and style of all Buckler's work, his central concern with the close-knit family united with love and the rural life style. The old farmer and his grandson, Paul, however, share a special relationship as both possess a word-shaped consciousness reminiscent of David Canaan's. Buckler handles this story of old age with the same sensitivity he used in the characterizations of Ellen in The Mountain and The Valley and Dr. Fennison in The Cruellest Month. The old farmer is as much a product of the landscape and the natural world as the snowman is outside his bedroom window. Their metaphorical relationship is underscored when the children place the old man's hat and pipe on the snowman. Eventually, the old man's life ends with the arrival of the spring rain that melts the snowman, but Buckler couples his death and the sense of loss with a sense of renewal to create an ironic tone which tempers the sentiment.

To establish a further tension between the past and the present and to intensify the sense of loss, Buckler interweaves the way it was once with the way it is now. He contrasts the youthful innocence of the old man's grandchildren with the experience and wisdom of the aged grandfather. The sleighbells that once rang for the old man's marriage to Ellen now announce his need for the "chair" (p. 50). His childhood friends have either died or now aimlessly while away their remaining days. His wife, Ellen, has long since passed away. The incongruities involved in the contrast between time past and time present, the grandfather's memories and the grandchildren's activities outside, parallel the recollections of the narrator Mark in Ox Bells and Fireflies. Playing the memory game, the old man counts off his years in groups of five, an ironic application

of the children's counting seconds in their hide and seek game. As he drifts in and out of his memory-dreams that restructure his life's pattern of experience, a tension develops between the way it was then and the way it is now as revealed by his family's conversations in the kitchen below. Buckler moves in and out of the old man's consciousness as he recounts the grandfather's recollections and then relates the comments and thoughts of the family members. Each of the old man's dreams Buckler follows with a brief exchange between members of his family that heighten the sense of loss, the erosion of time and the elegaic tone involved with the past and the present, appearance and reality. When, for example, the grandfather lying in bed upstairs relives in his memory "the power and thrust" (p. 54) of youth, the family in the kitchen below is discussing his failing health and diminished faculties. These instances of verbal ambiguity add to the overall irony of the sketch and resemble Buckler's technique of juxtaposing conflicting streams of consciousness in the short story "The First Born Son" (1941) and in the rock moving incident in The Mountain and The Valley.

In the block of years numbered "25," the old man remembers leaving the farm as a young man for a brief career in the city, an experience reminiscent of many other of Buckler's protagonists. The promise of exciting fulfilment in the city once again proves cruelly false, and the isolation and sterility of the urban life he rejects ultimately for his former country home and Ellen. The remaining years revolve contentedly around his farm and family until Ellen's death shatters that unity. Buckler's description of Ellen's death as a numbing and isolating force echoes that in his other work, "He saw the gaping socket of unrelatedness

inside him, now that she was forever out of sight" (p. 61). Death destroys the ability to experience metaphorical moments, creates the overwhelming sense of "unrelatedness" and denies personal identification with the environment. In contrast to Ellen's wrenching death, the old man passes away in a "wash of total serenity" (p. 63) symbolized by the falling rain and melting snowman. As a metaphor for the grandfather's physical death but enduring spirit, the snowman disappears, but its eyes of coal, the pipe and the hat of the grandfather remain. In the same way that the old man's life and work prevail over death, the hat is "drenched dark, but with the darker sweat stains on the band still showing" (p. 63). His grandson, Paul, inherits his word-shaped consciousness and "constitution" (p. 63), a continuation of the cyclical nature of life in death. The potential sentimentality that may have undermined the effectiveness of this final scene Buckler suffuses with a gentle irony surrounding the old man's inability to recall his seventieth birthday. Not until the final lines does the reader learn that, in fact, the old man has died a few days before turning seventy. Furthermore, Buckler balances the shadow of death with the naturalness of the life cycle wherein winter gives way to spring and old age to youth. Even the old man's age of three score and ten years signals the naturalness of having lived a designated length of time. Paul, who embodies his grandfather's spirit, symbolizes this cycle of life in death and reinforces the affirmation of Buckler's attitude toward the old man's death.

As the central section of the book, "Man and Snowman" forms both the literal and figurative core of Buckler's text. Rural Nova Scotians derive their physical and spiritual strength from their country

environment whereas the city holds only loneliness and isolation. Man's life cycle follows nature's. The way it was in the past continues to be contradicted by the way it is in the present, but memory allows that past to be recaptured. Loving human relationships, which form the bedrock of personal fulfilment, are as eternal as the land and the sea. Here, love has clearly prevented absolute isolation.

"Faces and Universes" encompasses the spirit of Buckler's text and speaks of personalities and elements which collectively create the singular world of Nova Scotia. Having once more restated his focus on the province of "the heart" (p.96), Buckler catalogues the two faces of his home: the one "melancholy beyond description" and the other a "deep-toned chord" of joy (p. 97). This divided perception reveals that Nova Scotia is neither "Elysium"(p.96) nor "Shangri-la" (p. 111); Buckler demonstrates here his ability to balance his appreciation of the landscape and to split his focus accurately. Life's inconsistencies prevail in Nova Scotia as elsewhere, "starker than anywhere else, are the reminders of how inexorably one's address shifts from the letter to the tombstone; of what useless armour is the scarecrow, Thought, against the crows of Time " (p. 96). With this in mind, Buckler introduces the various faces of Nova Scotia through dramatic vignettes that are, however, "in no way theatrical" (p. 98). Although undeveloped and unidentified, these individual voices create a medley that echoes much of Buckler's fiction. Buckler practices the artistic theory that to articulate the whole of experience the artist casts a revelatory shaft of light on individual moments. Thus, the artist uses the microcosm to illustrate the macrocosm, the single to represent the many. As David Canaan discovered, "A single beam of light is enough to light all the shadows, by turning it

from one to another."³⁴ Buckler turns his revealing shafts of light on a young David Canaan asking his father about moving a big rock (p. 98); a father, like Joseph in the short story "David Comes Home" (1944), who discovers a horseshoe belonging to his dead son, David (p. 99); an Ellen figure reliving the past as she hooks a rug (pp. 104-107) while a child, reminiscent of Anna Canaan (here a great-grandson), asks her about her wrinkles. Other sketches recall the colourful characterizations and themes of Ox Bells and Fireflies: a husband and wife drawn closer by the sudden death of a neighbour (p. 99); politics discussed in earthy, amusing colloquialisms (p. 101); the spirit of friendship (p. 101); childhood innocence (p. 101); aged wisdom (p. 104). Even Buckler's magical Christmas appears here from the point of view of a man returning home from cutting logs on the mountain, a scene that echoes many in Buckler's fiction (pp. 102-104). From this multitude of personalities, Buckler draws his central figure of Nova Scotians as people shaped by the "constant interplay of their senses with what is everlastingly intrinsic and near; until finally they come as if to have a common bloodstream with it" (p. 109). Thus, the Nova Scotians experience metaphorical relationships with "each particle (each a universe) that surrounds them" (p. 109), and they never know that absolute isolation, "that terrible echo chamber of monotony" (p. 109) that others in the city know.

Nova Scotia, like Norstead, contains a basic disparity between a "repetitious" (p. 112) appearance and a "thousandly different" (p. 112) reality that remains "unencompassable by any net of words the tongue throws out" (p. 112). Thus, the Nova Scotian experience defies the artist's attempts to articulate exactly its essence and nature, but

Buckler continues his admittedly futile efforts to capture in words the infinite and inexpressible. In the land and the sea, "the heart meets its match in every sense of the word" (p. 112). Buckler's use of the word "heart" implies that he perceives his province as the manifestation of his own philosophy which recognizes that "heart" has "the same letters as earth."³⁵ Buckler argues that the "heart is what we live by; I don't think we live by mind, I think we live by heart." Thus, for Buckler, Nova Scotia transcends the geography of a specific place to become a spiritual and imaginative state of being, a way of life for him who loves natural beauty and honest humanity as Buckler himself does.

In the fifth section, "Counterfeit and Coin," Buckler broadens his focus to include the "'progress'" (p. 125) that may desecrate the "spirit" (p. 125) of his home. His wholly negative assessment of "the new Babel and steel" (p. 125) society mirrors that in Ox Bells and Fire-flies. But now Buckler finds solace not in escape through memory but in the knowledge that the traditional way of life still survives in some districts of the province. His more balanced judgement includes "faith" (p. 126) in the young people of Nova Scotia who, like the old man in "Man and Snowman," reject "the fat and fictions of the plush-lined occupation" (p. 126) for a way of life that "is not too implausible an echo of the ploughman's whose touchstone is the candid and the candid only" (p. 127). Although Buckler espouses the belief that through the youth the "essential Nova Scotia may yet survive" (p. 127), he undercuts his theory by adding ambiguously that it "may not" (p. 127). By casting this shadow of potential doom over the preceding celebratory chapters, Buckler creates an ironic tone that intensifies both the sense of joy and the sense of loss.

Buckler appears to have greater faith in the landscape and the sea defending Nova Scotia's spirit than in the people themselves. The "wild hawthorne" (p. 127) will break "dauntless through the wilderness of chrome" (p. 127), and the "the sea will never lose its fierce dominion" (p. 127). Yet Buckler concludes the text with a repetition of the father and son conversation from section four about moving the big rock, a passage which returns us to the humanity of Nova Scotia. In what amounts to a very brief exchange, Buckler subtly reinforces his firm belief in the rural close-knit family held together through generations by a love for one another and the land,

"Dad, did you lift that great big rock up onto
the stone wall?"
"No, my father did."
"Could you lift it?"
"No."
"Could anybody?"
"No."
"Were you ever scared of him?"
"No. Never." (p. 127)

Thus, in deceptively simple lines of dialogue, Buckler captures the spirit of the land he loves, illustrates the father and son relationship he so frequently writes about and alludes to the nucleus of human life: the past, the land, the generations of family, the continuity of the rural life style, the wonder of childhood and the wisdom of adulthood, the power of language and the abiding love of mankind. With these life sources, death can be spiritually defeated. Man no longer needs to view his existence from a negative perspective, and the nihilism inherent in his view, he can replace with faith in humanity and the natural world. While the intolerable contradictions of life remain unresolved and unresolvable, this belief quiets man's longing for the infinite. Mortality

continues to victimize man, but when placed within the eternal framework of love and the natural cycle, death becomes a tolerable reality. For Buckler, Nova Scotia epitomizes this strengthening faith and symbolizes the fulfilment or the potential fulfilment of man's longing for the infinite and the absolute.

Buckler's final work, Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse, appeared in 1977 and is a collection of comic verse, epigrams, limericks, satirical essays and autobiographical sketches.³⁶ In 1978, it was awarded the Stephen Leacock Award for Humour. Whirligig, as Claude Bissell points out in his introduction to the book, "will come as a surprise to Buckler readers" and as "a disconcerting aberration to critics who like their authors to move in a straight line, with an upward flourish at the end."³⁷ Although the book's bawdy, satirical humor contradicts the sombre, psychological seriousness of his earlier work, Buckler had sown the seeds for Whirligig's variety throughout his career. In his earliest days as a writer in the 1930's, Buckler had contributed humorous letters to Esquire and continued to write light satirical verse and prose for Saturday Night, the Star Weekly, Maclean's and The Atlantic Advocate. Many of Whirligig's pieces are up-dated or slightly revised versions of these original publications.

Whirligig did, indeed, surprise critics who considered Buckler an entirely serious writer. Although most, like Ronald Conrad, assessed the work, in general, as "good fun," the critics praise rang hollow with ambiguous, apologetic, even embarrassed, notes.³⁸ As Conrad suggests rather equivocally, by publishing material that other writers might have relegated to the drawer, Buckler demonstrates "a valuable truth: writers are at least as human as the rest of us, and, as such, are not to be

categorized." Claude Bissell's statement that Whirligig "is a book that Ernest Buckler had to write" sounds more like an explanation and a disclaimer than praise for the author's shift in style.³⁹ With seeming relief, critic Joe Kertzer concludes his review of the work with the comforting thought that "Buckler is still best known for The Mountain and The Valley, and his latest book will not challenge the dominance of that fine novel."⁴⁰ One critic, Lorraine Weir, makes her displeasure with the book extremely clear when she wonders "why Buckler - - and McClelland and Stewart - - saw fit to publish the collection of undergraduate humour."⁴¹ This final publication by Buckler is, indeed, a divergence from his usual style and subject matter, and, as other critics point out, would have been better left scattered throughout magazines and journals.

In Whirligig, Buckler continues to focus on the individual's relationship with society, but he abandons the darker psychological conflict characteristic of his novels for a light-hearted, laughing look at humanity. The irony that Buckler uses in his earlier work is, in these particular selections, closer to satire and parody. He moves easily between his satiric pieces, which seek to reform society, and his despairing view, which sees man as beyond redemption. In all his sketches, however, Buckler relies on the humour created from exaggeration to soften both his moralizing and his condemnation. The role of the narrator Buckler shares with his fictional counterpart who represents a kind of modern Everyman, struggling to survive in a world of cultural and social pretension, trendy self-help systems, rampant commercialism and baffling male-female relationships. His idealistic expectations are continually contradicted by his experiences of society. Determined to integrate himself with his community, the narrator continues to reach

out to those around him, and he deludes himself that he will eventually match his consciousness and values with those of society. His repeated failure to adapt and integrate himself results in laughter and varying degrees of sympathy on the reader's part. The narrator's inability to fit into his community stems largely from the self-deception that he can and must adapt, yet humour makes his failure comic rather than tragic. Although he may be alienated by his strict moral code, he prefers the preservation of his own morality to social integration. The bitter recriminations that Buckler heaped on society in Ox Bells and Fireflies especially remain, but they are subtle and frequently give way to a comic view and amusing satire which, according to Claude Bissell, kill 'not with a sword, but with a chuckle.'⁴²

In his short fiction and novels, Buckler's presence remained hidden within his art except for certain autobiographical details. In Ox Bells and Fireflies, Buckler muffled his voice with various narrators. Not until Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea did he begin to speak clearly in his own narrative voice. In Whirligig, he blends the seemingly true voice of Ernest Buckler, farmer and writer, with that of an imaginary narrator, a kind of alter-ego. The anonymous narrator, however, represents Buckler's sensibilities and experiences only to a degree. As Claude Bissell points out, Buckler is a bachelor while the narrator is married, and his wife is "only a literary convenience" for Buckler.⁴³ Although more of a farmer than Buckler, the narrator enjoys less success as a writer than Buckler does at this stage in his career. The narrator's speeches reveal a literary education unequal to Buckler's, and his casual attitude toward writing lacks Buckler's deep respect for

his own work. While Bissell separates the two voices according to such obvious differences, he neglects other important similarities. Both Buckler and his narrator reveal a propensity for ribald language, false self-deprecation and sexual and cultural chauvinism. Despite the superficial differences between them, the reader suspects that Buckler identifies closely with his alter-ego whose presence shields him from direct criticism and frees him from responsibility for some rather questionable and unattractive commentaries. This accounts, in great part, for the book's weaknesses and shortcomings.

A mixture of prose and poetry, the text includes satiric but affectionate sketches of rural life, sardonic poems and essays on contemporary issues and biographical material. Buckler demonstrates that as a comic ironist he uses laughter to register his awareness of life's absurdities and his determination to persevere. His laughter, of course, will not change his situation in any way, but it is the only alternative to despair. In conjunction with this attitude is satire which creates laughter for both Buckler and the reader. Thus, Buckler wears the hat of the satirist and the comic ironist. Through his narrator, Buckler, the satirist, clearly states his own moral standards which include honesty, rural simplicity and the valuing of sincere human relationships. With this moral code, he satirizes the commercialism, pretension and hypocrisy of modern society, both urban and rural. Buckler's own morality stands against the immorality of the absurd world. In this sense, Buckler writes from a satiric point of view which hopes to reform the society around him, but which, he knows, will ultimately fail. Thus, the pervasive tone in Whirligig is closer

to irony than satire. Underneath the satire which creates laughter runs a serious sense which interprets society as morally irreparable and life as hopelessly absurd. Yet Buckler adheres to his own moral code, aware that he cannot improve or change society but determined, nevertheless, to meet the logical challenge of nihilism straight on and laughing. His laughter arises from satire and signals his sense of humour.

Buckler once again praises the traditional rural values over urban materialism and pretension. While the rural sketches simultaneously satirize urban sophistication and rural simplicity, Buckler reveals his deep admiration for the country naturalness and his continued condemnation of the city. In the poem "Proud Flesh" (p. 28), for example, Buckler satirizes the uneducated "country folk" who diagnose everyone's illness with enthusiastic but bizarre home remedies. Although Buckler's humour undercuts the seriousness with which these people take illness, he stresses the fundamental humanity that is the basis of their concern and actions. This same tension involving praise and satire appears in the book's finest sketch, "Is The Line Busy? or Pinter Country" (p. 29). Buckler juxtaposes the highly impersonal, illegal system of CIA "bugging" (p. 29) with the Rural Party Line (RPL). The complex system of listening on the RPL Buckler makes wholly laughable through understatement and exaggeration. Again, his underlying message is that such behaviour stems from the rural community's honest affection for its members.

Buckler or his narrator condemns most heartily the urban society in all its false values in "Education at Mimi's" (p. 117) when both the narrator and his associates entertain delusions of literary and romantic grandeur that are ruthlessly shattered by experience. Failure to adhere

to social artifice again alienates the narrator in "A Wasted Life" (p. 122), but Buckler intends the reader to view the narrator's ultimate isolation as positive and the idea of a wasted life as ironic. Commercialism comes under attack in such pieces as "Voices When Soft Music Dies" (p. 71) wherein two families live out a television commercial and in "Bestsellers Make Strange Bedfellows" (p. 21) when Sex and The Single Girl is in serious competition with Robert Frost's In The Clearing. Buckler condemns false values in several pieces, but one of his best sketches "Leave Your Leisure Alone" (p. 74) captures the spirit of the common and inept man ensnared in the doomed struggle to meet fashionable but impossible and meaningless goals. These sketches clearly illustrate Buckler's ability to satirize and reduce society's pretensions through humour.

In the autobiographical pieces, Buckler speaks in his own voice and attempts to laugh at himself as well as others. In "Artist's Life" (p. 79), Buckler satirizes an author's anxiety over supplying a publicity photograph and biographical material for his publisher. Like his fictional artist figure, Buckler himself seemed overly self-conscious about his public image, and, at one time, his publisher had requested of him "A casual shot of me 'in my haying garb' if one were available. I'm afraid one isn't (my helpers would have murdered me if I'd asked for time out to have my picture taken!) - - but I'm enclosing a couple of likenesses at the wood pile (another of my natural habitats) which I hope, may serve the purpose."⁴⁴ "Muse In Overalls" (p. 84) is a satiric look at his own life as a farmer who writes and at the myth of rural tranquility leading to inspiration and creativity. This piece parallels Buckler's personal

experiences as a "farmer who writes, not a writer who farms." While writing The Cruellest Month, Buckler wrote to his publishers about his struggle to operate a farm successfully and also write a novel. Buckler gives the impression in this particular letter that his farming seriously hampers his creativity, yet he invests the passage with romantic and pastoral qualities which idealize his farm life and reveal duelling forces,

The summer has been such a hectic one that I haven't made an actual start on a second novel. But I've been churning some ideas around in my head while I waited for the calves to suck or moved around the marsh ditches, and when the press of husbandry lets up on me somewhat with the clamping down and insulation of winter, I will try to drain off the buttermilk and transfer whatever kernels have cogered onto paper (straining out the mixed metaphors at the same time). 45

Similarly, the narrator in "Muse In Overalls" condemns his way of life on the farm, but he admits finally that he has been deliberately ironic throughout the sketch. In fact, he would never leave the naturalness of his country home, "If one is looking for laughs, it may not be the home where the boffolas roam, but - - the elaborate cuteness which seems to be the occupational disease of writers in-the-country notwithstanding - - I'll 'schtich' with it" (p. 88). Buckler's description of life on the farm in this piece attempts to disenchant the reader, but the solicitous tone creates an ambiguous tone. While the "elaborate cuteness" of Buckler's word games - - "boffolas" and "schtich" - - may be rather amusing and an unexpected stab at himself, this sketch has all the artifice and quaintness that Buckler satirizes in "Artist's Life" (p. 79). Critic Lorraine Weir refers to this self-conscious playfulness as Buckler's "country cuteness" which undermines the effectiveness of Whirligig.⁴⁶

Nostalgia surpasses satire in another autobiographical piece, "The Best Place To Be" (p. 10), as Buckler recalls his earlier days at the University of Toronto. The catalogue of memories and his fondness for that time separate this piece from those of satire and comic irony and link it more closely with Ox Bells and Firflies. This autobiographical sketch also suffers from the "elaborate cuteness" of academic word games, "glasses (ground by Spinoza for Cyclops?)" (p. 11) and "I found even Lotze lotsa fun" (p. 11). As Lorraine Weir suggests, this "Undergraduate humour" is "hardly the calibre of wit one expects to see between hard covers, much less from a respected novelist, author of at least one 'classic' work."⁴⁷ Recalling his early days as a reviewer for The New York Times in "Bestsellers Make Strange Bedfellows" (p. 21), Buckler satirizes the incongruities of a writer's success. His analysis of popular taste is amusing, but his deference to "Joe Reader" as the final judge of a book's worth seems to contradict his earlier condemnation of popular taste. According to Buckler's statistics, this same Joe Reader held The New English Bible and Oh Ye Jigs and Juleps in equal esteem.

Buckler's obsession with language appears in the form of puns, anagrams, limericks and word games which complement his satire. In "Alienated: A Dateline" (p. 41), Buckler's narrator reuses the letters of one word to form another in the same sentence, "Cares scare you. Your fare is fear" (p. 41), and "he's ruder than Durer" (p. 41). While the initial effect proves mildly amusing, these linguistic gymnastics quickly become tiresome and gratuitous. Similarly, the satire of Buckler's poems depends upon manipulated word structures that lack real literary merit or sophistication; books are seldom "radioactive" (p. 56), an "ounce of

prevention is worth a pound of curare" (p. 48) and "The rhino's horn is quite unique;/ It's Afro-disiac so to speak" (p. 127). Buckler satirizes figures such as T. S. Eliot who "wrote not with a zing but with simper" (p. 99), Shelley "whose verses weren't terribly selly" (p. 99), Nureyev who is "uptights" (p. 63) and Di Milo who is "not all there" (p. 63). Religious institutions come under fire in "I Am Not, Nor Have Ever Been, A Christian Scientist" (p. 47), "The Methodist disputes the Copt, the Copt the Rosicrucian,/ And so continues to pile up confusion on Confucian" (p. 47). Buckler clearly has no illusions about poetic excellence, but his verses ring with such self-consciousness and silliness that they merit little serious consideration. One wonders what possible purpose a poem like "Next Question" (p. 51) could have,

Why do we speak of a weasle,
But never of a measles?
Why of stump
But never of a mump?
It's one of those quirks lingu lar
That make the English tongue so singular. (p. 52)

Buckler's chauvinistic treatment of women in his fiction gives way in his poetry to blatant vulgarity and sexism: Miss Greer needs a "Germaine course of acupuncture" (p. 65); Emily Dickinson needs to get "properly laid; cock treatments were effective long before shock treatments" (p. 108). Buckler attempts to show himself as a liberated, witty, sexually aware bachelor who finds "nothing lewd" (p. 55) in sex, but his bawdy, tasteless brand of bathroom humour sadly contradicts his urbane self-image. In the prose piece "Nobody Likes a Smartass" (p. 109), the narrator deliberately tries to be a verbal wit with such lines as "Men seldom pant/ For girls who read Kant" (p. 109), but his quips only characterize him as an arrogant pseudo-intellectual "smart-ass" (p. 109). If Buckler intends the reader to

appreciate the narrator's wit, he, thereby, satirizes the characters in the sketch who do not. Unfortunately for Buckler, the reader recognizes an unsettling similarity between much of Buckler's writing in Whirligig and the narrator's annoying speeches. If Buckler uses this sketch to intentionally satirize himself and his writing style, then the reader must wonder why he would choose to be seen as a "smartass." Whatever his intentions, the reader can only feel that Buckler too frequently emulates the irritating and foolish manner of his narrator.

Although Whirligig, generally, lacks the stylistic and literary strength of Buckler's best work, certain selections stand out as superior - - "It's Not The Thought, It's The Card" (p. 14) and "Is The Line Busy? or Pinter Country" (p. 29). Not surprisingly, they involve the rural traditions and way of life that Buckler knows best. Whirligig reveals another aspect of Buckler's writing career that had remained hidden behind the more serious fiction. Although this selection of prose and verse adds little to an understanding or appreciation of his other work, it reaffirms his loyalty to traditional rural values and his concern with the state of humanity.

Finally, Whirligig demonstrates both Buckler's ability to laugh at humanity as well as his talent for satiric wit. Although the narrator's desires may not be fulfilled and although he remains alienated, he nevertheless maintains his own moral code. It is through his narrator that Buckler clearly reveals his own morality. While the predominant style is satiric, the thrust of the pieces is comic. Buckler's efforts to reform and redeem society through satire may fall short of their mark. Only when satirizing the rural way of life or those values associated with the country

life does Buckler allow his deep affection to replace his utter condemnation. Buckler's use of satire and comedy create a tension that is common to Buckler's work and which, in this work, gives a much needed structure and sense of complexity. Whirligig manifests Buckler's desire to redeem society and his individual heroes and presents his view that mankind is figuratively isolated in a seemingly absurd world.

Although Whirligig cannot be considered a literary masterpiece, it illustrates nevertheless the range of Buckler's creative expression and reveals once again his abiding interest in human nature. In Ox Bells and Fireflies, Buckler's narrator adopts a nihilistic philosophy towards life but balances that negative, hopeless view with his romantic nostalgia. He suffers the despair common to modern society but manages to tolerate the incongruities and disillusionment of his existence through his recollection of past love relationships. In Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, the narrator also recognizes the many disturbing contradictions that afflict mankind and cause alienation, but he rejects any sense of nihilism. Although the past still has enormous significance for him, he now looks to the future for spiritual and emotional consolation. He believes that life is meaningful and that man will triumph over despair and discover the true value of human relationships.

Notes

- ¹Ernest Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968).
- ²BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney, September 7, 1953.
- ³BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Harold Ober, January 21, 1952.
- ⁴BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Gerald Anglin, editor at Chatelaine, September 23, 1952.
- ⁵BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, March 20, 1961.
- ⁶BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, November 1, 1963.
- ⁷BColl., Box 9, Buckler to Ivan Von Auw, February 24, 1964.
- ⁸Claude Bissell, "A Masterly Return To Innocence and Wonder", Globe and Mail (November 9, 1968), p. 27.
- ⁹Desmond Pacey, "Earthy Idyll", Canadian Literature, (Spring 1969), p. 91.
- ¹⁰D. O. Spettigue, "Reminiscent Sketches", Quarry, XVIII (Summer 1969), 53.
- ¹¹Gregory Cook, "Mystery and Oracle In All Things", Dalhousie Review, XLVIII (Autumn 1968), 413.
- ¹²BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney, September 7, 1953.
- ¹³Ernest Buckler, "My Third Book", published in Ernest Buckler, ed., Gregory Cook, p. 117.
- ¹⁴BColl., Box 11, biographical sketch to McClelland and Stewart.
- ¹⁵Pacey, "Earthy Idyll", 91.
- ¹⁶Buckler, "My Third Book", in Cook, Buckler, p. 117.
- ¹⁷Ernest Buckler, Introduction to "The Quarrel", XXXVI Chatelaine (July 1959), 65.

¹⁸BColl., Box 7, Buckler's Interim Report to Canada Council, July 17, 1966.

¹⁹Buckler, 'My Third Book', in Cook, Buckler, p. 117.

²⁰Ibid., p. 117.

²¹Young, Buckler, p. 46.

²²Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley, p. 65.

²³Young, Buckler, p. 47.

²⁴BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Gerald Anglin, September 25, 1953.

²⁵BColl., Box 7, Buckler to Canada Council, February 27, 1965.

²⁶Buckler, 'My Third Book', in Cook, Buckler, p. 117.

²⁷Pacey, 'Earthy Idyll', 91.

²⁸Ernest Buckler and Hans Weber, Nova Scotia: Window On The Sea (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

²⁹Young, Buckler, p. 51.

³⁰Ibid., p. 50.

³¹Marjorie Major, A review of Nova Scotia: Window On The Sea, Canadian Authors and Bookman, L (Fall 1974), 28.

³²Douglas Lochhead, A review of Nova Scotia: Window On The Sea, University of Toronto Quarterly, XLIV (Summer 1975), 397.

³³BColl., Box 2. The main theme of 'Man and Snowman' resembles a much earlier piece 'The End Came Quietly At...' which Buckler describes as 'A study in the enormously misunderstood quiescence of the very old.'

³⁴Buckler, The Mountain and The Valley, p. 299.

³⁵Cameron, Conversations, p. 11.

³⁶Ernest Buckler, Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

³⁷Claude Bissell, Introduction to Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 7.

³⁸Ronald Conrad, A review of Whirligig: Selected Prose and Verse, Canadian Book Review Annual (1977), 182.

³⁹Bissell, Introduction to Whirligig, p. 9.

⁴⁰Joe Kertzer, "Windmills and Turnpikes", Canadian Forum, LVII (December 1977 - January 1978), 39.

⁴¹Lorraine Weir, "Country Cuteness", Canadian Literature, (Spring 1979), 85.

⁴²Bissell, Introduction to Whirligig, p. 9.

⁴³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁴BColl., Box 5, Buckler to Gerald Anglin, September 23, 1953.

⁴⁵BColl., Box 5, Buckler to William Raney, September 7, 1953.

⁴⁶Weir, "Country Cuteness", p. 86.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 86.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explained how Ernest Buckler's fiction embodies an ironic perspective related directly to his central theme of isolation and how that understanding may enhance our appreciation of his work. I have suggested that criticism which intends to elucidate the meaning and significance of the Buckler canon must consider thoroughly the irony which structures and unifies his work. I have shown that Buckler's intentional use of irony affects our accurate interpretation of his work, our appreciation of Buckler's writing and our emotional and intellectual responses to the works themselves. Internal evidence for my theory was found throughout Buckler's work in various kinds of irony involving language, situations and events, plot structure, themes and writing techniques. External evidence, in the form of Buckler's letters, interviews and commentaries from The Buckler Collection, offered further support and explanation of his deliberate use of irony and his concern with isolation. As well, it allowed us to evaluate fully his literary success with respect to those intentions and plans. Our knowledge of Buckler's beliefs and attitudes arose from a complete reading of his work, published and unpublished, and from close references to The Buckler Collection. Our awareness of Buckler's philosophy, gathered from internal and external sources, enabled us to recognize accurately the presence of irony in his work.

In light of Buckler's ironic style and, in particular, his content where he emphasizes the recognition of incongruities, we can regard him as a twentieth-century writer working within the complex structure and perspective of irony. Along with the psychological

nature of his novels and short stories, this concern with isolation places Buckler's fiction alongside other modern ironists such as Thomas Hardy and James Joyce. Buckler's attitude toward life resembles the philosophy of other twentieth-century writers who consider alienation and isolation the tragedy of modern society. Our recognition of irony, as well as the philosophy from which it emerges, is as essential to an understanding of Buckler's fiction as it is to the fiction of Hardy or Joyce. I have demonstrated that when discussing Buckler's writing an awareness of irony must be the object of sound critical analysis. The role of irony as a literary device in his work is to express his view that life is characterized by irreconcilable tensions and oppositions, that the intolerable contradiction between the ideal and the real alienates man from his environment, isolating him in bitter loneliness and despair. Human relationships, then, become the only solution to this condition. My exploration of Buckler's views has revealed the scope of his creative and intellectual philosophy as well as elucidated the literary techniques used to express his ironic perspective.

In this thesis I have demonstrated how the recognition of irony clarifies much in Buckler's work, particularly in his themes, characterizations and plot structures, in order to comprehend the true meaning and significance of his fiction. I have suggested that the ironic perspective which structures and unifies his work expresses the modern twentieth-century view of mankind, allowing its sense and value to transcend regionalism and articulate universal truths. Buckler's art, an expression of his love for and faith in mankind,

and the power of love to make life meaningful, becomes his final act of affirmation against a nihilistic philosophy and complete despair, absolute isolation and his own mortality. The purpose of this thesis has been to interpret the writing of Ernest Buckler according to this perspective and demonstrate how irony affects our understanding of his work.

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Ernest Buckler Manuscript Collection, No. 99
 Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
 University of Toronto

Box 1

Fan mail arranged by books i.e. Letters re The Mountain and The Valley.

Box 2

Early pieces, sketches, poems, miscellaneous items. Radio plays.

Box 3

Short Stories.

Box 4

Correspondence relating to Ernest Buckler's professional career, 1937-1949.

Box 5

Correspondence relating to Ernest Buckler's professional career, 1949-1956.

Box 6

Correspondence relating to Ernest Buckler's professional career, 1957-1961.

Box 7

Correspondence relating to Ernest Buckler's professional career, 1962-1968.

Box 8

The Cruellest Month.

Box 9

The Cruellest Month.

Box 10

Ox Bells and Fireflies Manuscript and correspondence.

Box 11

Ox Bells and Fireflies. Biographical and bibliographical notes on and by Buckler. Photos.

Box 12

Ox Bells and Fireflies. Revised proofs and correspondence.

Box 13

The Mountain and The Valley. Draft 1 and page proofs.

Box 14

The Mountain and The Valley. Draft II. Book reviews on The Mountain and The Valley.

Box 15

The Mountain and the Valley. Typescript for Henry Holt, Publisher. Letters to Holt about The Mountain and the Valley.

Box 16

Articles: "The Sound and The Fury." Book reviews by Buckler. "Maritime Letter" for Saturday Night.

Box 17

Plays. Score and text for Christmas in Canada. Some short stories.

Box 18

"Ajax"correspondence. Business letters.

Box 19

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Box 20

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