

THE REGIONAL NOVEL IN NOVA SCOTIA

THE REGIONAL NOVEL IN NOVA SCOTIA:  
A STUDY OF RADDALL, BUCKLER AND BRUCE

by

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## INTRODUCTION

It is inevitable that a country as large and as disparate in its various aspects as Canada should be subject to the forces of regionalism. We accept this as a matter of fact and often of convenience in all consideration of our national life, political, economic and sociological. The heterogeneity of the whole is so great that comprehension becomes difficult if not impossible, and in thinking of it we merely generalize; therefore, to enhance our understanding it becomes necessary to distinguish and to accept the limitations that difference and variations impose on us, and on the depth and validity of our perception. We make vast groupings into areas which we designate the Atlantic provinces, the Central provinces (Quebec and Ontario), the Prairies, the Pacific, and in such ways we transcend even the historical provincial boundaries.

But these large areas represent certain geographical and even historical facts. It may be that, dazzled with this vastness, we possibly forget that regionalism may also be found in a much smaller area. Two great modern examples of what are called "regional" novelists, Hardy and Faulkner, seized imaginatively upon "counties" whose actuality was relatively narrow in comparison with, say, the huge expanse we think of when we say "the Prairies". Hardy's Wessex and

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County cover a very small territory judged on a purely physical basis, however limitless appear the artists' worlds created within the regional boundaries.

This simply demonstrates some of the problems arising out of trying to make a definition of the term "regional" as applied to the novel, because the connotations are limitless. It is probable that the only way to achieve a workable solution is to be to some extent arbitrary.

In the first place, the regional novel in Canada simply cannot be pinned down in terms of smallness or largeness of physical size of landscape. Such writers as Frederick Phillip Grove and Sinclair Ross are regional writers, but the Prairies which form the background of their work constitutes a vast area. What is implied to the Canadian reader by the term "Prairie" is a way of life in a particular place, a place where the land itself has created a special form of isolated living, and the writer, in coping with that condition, created an individual and society with attitudes and characteristics different from any developed elsewhere.

At the other end of the scale of size come the regional writers under consideration in this dissertation, the Nova Scotia writers. Here, comparatively, the local areas which the authors have made into their spiritual habitat are small sections of one of our smaller provinces

where, it is true, the sea beats along the shore, but the isolation is not less real, merely different. The land itself, though varied, is restricted in size, and still further diminished, narrowed down in turn by each writer, Raddall with the widest view, geographically speaking, and Buckler, with the smallest and most tightly enclosed.

Just as in the Arctic tundra, the arid desert, the mineral-laden shield or the fertile Prairies, so in Nova Scotia the land and its resources created its own way of life. But the Nova Scotian writer has great advantages over writers concerned with many other Canadian regions, primarily because the history of Nova Scotia goes much further back, and is more closely connected with the very origins of Canada itself: the early French settlements, the English victory over the French at Louisbourg and later Quebec, the Loyalist settlements, the war of privateers both during the American Revolution and the War of 1812-1814, Confederation in 1867, and the activities of the sea ports of the province both great and small in the two World Wars. Over three and a half centuries have elapsed since Champlain founded Port Royal and opened the Annapolis valley. Obviously the people who conquered, settled and created this land have a historic past of which they are not only proud but very much aware. In comparison, the Western writer has only shallow soil to dig in.



Although the economic difficulties of the Maritimes have meant that Nova Scotia has had to endure a constant drift of young people to central Canada and to the West, those who remained are very conscious of their own family background and their relationships in a way which the inhabitants of great industrial cities have long since lost. The pattern of relationships and the interlocking of families within any given settled area are constantly and, given the way of life and attitude, unavoidably present in the Nova Scotian consciousness, as both Raddall and Bruce have shown. A region is not only land, its natural resources, and the sea which confronts it; a region consists of the people who live within its boundaries, their ancestral past, their family genes, their kinfolk relationships with other families, their customs, prejudices and religion. The way of life which is established in such an area is not totally dependent on its geography but on the quality of the people who for whatever historic reasons settled and stayed there. In Nova Scotia the hazards of settlement, the dangers both physical and political, demanded a vigorous and hardy community, proud and resourceful. Tough New Englanders, Westphalian farmers and energetic Scots from both Highland and Lowland, plus the remnants of the original Acadians were the major groups who established themselves along the sea coasts and then gradually moved inland as the land was cleared for settlement.

The effect of these tenacious and deeply rooted

people on the perceptive writer is undoubtedly immeasurable. An instinctive and deep-seated love of the past, an appreciation of all the elements both physical and spiritual, which go to create a world rapidly vanishing or already buried in time, are essential qualities of the regional writer. He must love his region with passion, and ardently wish to know and understand its totality so that time becomes a major factor in all his thinking, no matter what actual date he chooses to make his fictional present.

Ernest Buckler sums it up when he states that his aim was "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 . . . I should like to triangulate it, so to speak, within the mingling stream of heritage, material change and social mutation".<sup>1</sup> Patricia Barclay, in an interview with W. O. Mitchell, defines the regional writer thus:

He is the man who knows, and understands, a certain district, a way of life, an ethnic group; and who writes about it in a way that brings his subject to life for those who have never known it or awakes a nostalgic recognition in those who have. He is an interpreter of his own particular corner to the rest of the world, and hence his title, "regionalist".<sup>2</sup>

To a great degree the regional novel tends to deal with an agricultural community. This is certainly true of Hardy, and equally of Buckler and Bruce; it is less true of Raddall. But insofar as the regional novel deals with a closed community, on the edges only of the great currents of

world affairs, it is a term certainly to be applied to much of Raddall's work.

Since the very existence of Canada has depended upon its original land clearing and farming communities of our earliest settlers, the historical and the pastoral inevitably mingle. The sense of heritage, of familial history, of relative peace and easy communal relationships plays its part in the "remembrance of things past" with which the regional novel is so closely identified.

In his most valuable concluding chapter in The Literary History of Canada, Northrop Frye states:

At the heart of all social mythology lies what may be called, because it usually is called a pastoral myth, the vision of the social ideal. The pastoral myth in its most common form is associated with childhood, or with some earlier social condition -- pioneer life, the small town, the habitant rooted to his land -- that can be identified with childhood. The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

Frye points out the very real dangers of sentimentalization in these backward glances. The three authors under consideration here try to save themselves from this by a determined interweaving of dark with light, by a recognition of man's inhumanity to man, his weaknesses as well as his strengths, within family and community. What all share is something more than mere nostalgia, a truly profound love of the land and sea which form the basic understructure of the mythic worlds they have created.

The fact is that all Canadians, with the possible exception of the most highly urbanized among us, must come to terms with both the concept (carried within us) and the actuality of the hundreds of miles of wilderness which extend northwards from our populated southern fringe. This distinguishes the Canadian mentality from both the European and the American. To make any visual image of the totality of Canada, it is inadequate to think in terms of our larger cities, even though the drift of population is away from the country toward the metropolis. It is possible to theorize, tentatively at least, that the Canadian carries easily a double image of his country: the city in which he lives, and the wilderness to the north to which he escapes when he can. They represent the two halves of his imaginative view of Canada. One might well argue that his mental and spiritual health depend upon maintaining these elements in proper balance.

To quote again from Northrop Frye:

From the deer and fish in Isabella Crawford's "The Canoe" to the frogs and toads in Layton, from the white narcissus of Knister to the night-blooming cereus of Reaney, everything that is central in Canadian writings seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world.<sup>4</sup>

In other words Canadian authors from the very beginning have been especially aware of the wilderness surrounding them. Frye suggests that the early communities, isolated and detached from their cultural sources are "communities that

provide all that their members have in the way of distinctly human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting -- such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality".<sup>5</sup>

This phrase, "garrison mentality", has many connotations. Frye defines a garrison as a "closely knit and beleaguered society and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter".<sup>6</sup>

No one would question the validity of this definition. Yet it would be wrong to imply (as the term seems to imply) that the inhabitants of these isolated communities found the wilderness surrounding them an object in itself of fear. The early settlers and pioneers had to be brave men, else they would not have left their settled worlds in the first place. It is worth noting that in the novels to be discussed none of the characters displays fear of the wilds or of the forces of nature. There is rather a calm acceptance, a recognition of certain dangers and menaces which must be dealt with through understanding and experience. The love of place which characterizes all three authors is not for village or community (though it may include these) but extends outwards to embrace the untamed land and sea.

Frye suggests that the real terror comes when the

individual tries to pull away from the community, with a self-consciousness which is or proves to be inimical to peace of mind. Thus the fear becomes a psychological or even metaphysical one, as the individual consciously stands apart from his group to pursue ends which the others cannot understand or appreciate. Buckler portrays such an individual in his David Canaan whose struggle to become a writer isolates him. Raddall's Neil Jamieson, functioning on a far less symbolic and poetic level, also isolates himself from his background by a denial of all that his heritage stands for. Both represent, of course, the twentieth century -- in the concepts of the authors and in their view of the communal life. If this tends to be nostalgic, one must also recognize that it represents an awareness of the values of the past, that past which alone has made possible the present in which Canadian authors may live and create in their own community in Canada today.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Gregory M. Cook, in a review of "Ox Bells and Fireflies", Dalhousie Review, XLVIII (1968-69), 413.

<sup>2</sup>Phyllis Barclay, "Regionalism and the Writer", Canadian Literature, No. 14 (Autumn 1962), 54.

<sup>3</sup>Northrop Frye, The Literary History of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). Edition of 1966-67, p. 840.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 846.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 830.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 830.

## CHAPTER I

### THOMAS H. RADDALL

Probably no other modern Canadian writer has so steeped himself in the history of his chosen region as has Thomas Raddall. He was born in England (in 1903) but in 1913, ten years of age, he came to Halifax. In 1918, at fifteen, he enlisted as a wireless operator, and in this capacity he served in ships and on shore at coastguard stations, for four years. Later, choosing a less itinerant life, he became bookkeeper and accountant for a paper company, until 1938, when he gave up other occupations to devote himself entirely to writing.

The parallels with Conrad leap to mind. Like Conrad, Raddall has utilized his sea-going experience to form the solid and relatively unfamiliar background for such a major novel as The Nymph and the Lamp. In Tidefall it is impossible not to see his own memories of himself when young in the figure of the dreamy wireless operator Pascoe, who is in love with the North, and who yearns to write the story of Hudson. Raddall's experience at sea, his acquaintance with ships and seamen, with the economics of small costal trading, with lumbering and lumbermen are imprinted on almost every page of his writing. Such a body of know-



ledge sets the writer apart from the academic writer whose experience of the world of hard physical labour is usually limited to summer jobs during his undergraduate days. It also stamps everything that Raddall writes with an absolute, not relative authenticity; in other words his setting, scenery, natural descriptions spring from his own observations, his own mental sketches from life. No amount of literary research could possibly have given him this material.

Research, however, is also part of the Raddall canon. Clearly he has fallen in love with his chosen region, and has devoted a vast amount of time and energy to a study of the historical origins and developments of Nova Scotia. Out of his wide readings of the documents and memoirs of that past have come his historical novels: His Majesty's Yankees, 1942, Roger Sudden, 1944, Pride's Fancy, 1946, The Governor's Lady, 1960, Hangman's Beach, 1966, as well as a large number of his short stories with an historical background, including two of his most famous, "The Wedding Gift" and "The Trumpeter".

With so intimate and extensive a knowledge of the Nova Scotian past, it was inevitable that his profound sense of the continuance of racial and familial characteristics should affect his way of looking at, and talking about characters he creates in his more modern novels, i.e., novels whose action takes place in the twentieth century. In The Nymph and the Lamp, Carney, is a singularly solitary

person with neither kith nor kin, yet he spends the first weeks of his first leave in ten years travelling to Newfoundland, by mail steamer to Port-aux-Basques, by train to St. John's, and eventually by coastal steamer to the unnamed fishing village where he had been born, the illegitimate son of a Norwegian sailor. Carney is seeking his mother who had later married, and then sent him off to an orphanage in St. John's. He had never seen her again, but now searches for her, only to find that she had died long since. He makes a final plea:

"The Carney girl -- would there be any of her folks hereabouts?" The woman echoed this through the doorway. Again the old voice, like a whisper from the grave itself.

"He says there's none. Her folk died long ago. She was a fine upstanding' gal, he remembers that. Her folk were big people quiet like. Never had much to say. No Carneys left here now. That's all he knows. 'Course he's gettin' old now and forgetful like."

"Yes, of course." Carney turned away quickly lest she see his tears. All the charm of his romantic journey had vanished with that final whisper through the door.'l

Carney himself exactly fits this description of his maternal family, since he too is "big" and "quietlike" and never has much to say.

Similarly Isabel Jardine, though she is alone in the world, has come from a village in the Annapolis Valley, called Scotch Springs. The nearby Market town of Kingsbridge Isabel remembers as "the magic place of her childhood" to which her parents drove on Saturday afternoons.

When Isabel applies for a job with Mr. Markham, the local merchant, she gives her name and he says at once, "Jardine -- you wouldn't be one of the Jardines from Scotch Springs?".<sup>2</sup> As he is about to offer her some work she protests that she would not put another girl out of a job, . . .

He snorted. "You're a Jardine, no mistake. Jumping to conclusions. Proud as Lucifer. Come down off that high horse, girl."<sup>3</sup>

A little later he remarks:

"Those Jardines," he said abruptly, without opening his eyes. "Good stock, Scotch. Proud lot. Hard-working. Honest. Moody, though. Minds up in the clouds half the time. Give the shirt off their backs for a whim. All of 'em gone now. Sad."<sup>4</sup>

The consciousness of ancestry and its influence is to be found in both the other novels of Raddall's which are under consideration here. Tidefall (1953) has as its protagonist a ruthless adventurer called Sax Nolan who after making a fortune in rum-running during Prohibition days in the United States returns to Nova Scotia to revisit the home of his childhood. In Sax Nolan's case it is the place not the people which has drawn him back. But like Carney he asks some questions about his parents.

His first casual inquiries revealed that his parents had drifted off long ago to some other poverty-stricken corner of the coast, no one knew where, as they had drifted to the cape in the first place. Even the familiar shack far out of town at Herring Point was a ruin. No loss, the people said. A shiftless man and a sour silent woman, they remembered that. Inwardly Sax was relieved. No call for his charity there. He had never loved them, indeed he had despised them, for he had known even then that

the world was divided into two kinds of people, the smart ones and the fools.<sup>5</sup>

In the mixture of motives that hold Sax Nolan in Port Barron one at least springs from his heritage: his burning desire to dominate the town, just as during his childhood the Caradays had done. After he had had his first discussions with the banker about the possibility of buying the Carady business, he once again remembers his boyhood, "dragging a small handcart with fresh lobsters or the first run of mackerel to sell at the kitchen doors of merchants and other white-handed folk who touched fish only with knife and fork".<sup>6</sup> The boy of the shiftless and despised parents, the boy of the menial chores yearns to have his revenge. Although in his struggle upward in the social scale he succeeds in achieving both money and power, yet he remains a man feared and disliked; there is primarily, as his wife Rena remarks, something ferocious and "uncivilized" about him.

In The Wings of Night, Raddall has created another anti-hero, one Neil Jamieson, who also returns home full of hatred and hostility. But Neil's ancestry is upper class. He sprang from one of the formerly wealthy families who had thrived on the lumber trade in Victorian times and had built large mansions, now for the most part in a state of decay. In the great houses the elderly survivors live miserably on old age pensions in their kitchens. It comes

as a horrible shock to Neil to find the houses empty of the fine furniture which has all been sold, so desperate is the poverty. Yet it is clear that even if they had the means to move they would not go.

In the Ontario bush I had seen dead towns, old saw-mill towns from which every living soul had fled when the last of the big timber within handy reach had gone to stumps . . . .In each of those ghost towns there must have been a little group of mill and timber owners, a sawdust nobility of the Oak Falls kind, though not so old-founded and pride-rooted as the Jamiesons and the rest. But they had cleared out with the common herd and let their houses go. Only on the east coast, especially places like this where the tale went back two centuries, would you find old families clinging as they had, clinging and rotting away on small annuities and the sale of run-down timberland and the memories embalmed in old silver and furniture and books of ancient photographs.<sup>7</sup>

Neil's grandmother, of course, is full of stories of the past, especially of the very first Jamieson -- the only Loyalist in his family -- who had come from Carolina to settle in Nova Scotia. Neil thinks sourly, "there always has to be one maverick".<sup>8</sup> She praises the heroism and endurance of these first settlers, and then begs Neil to emulate their achievements and settle down to his inheritance and rebuild it. It is this inheritance that Neil both implicitly and explicitly rejects, although in various ways he is almost trapped into staying. His final and total rejection is symbolized by the very dramatic scene after his grandmother's death, in which he sets fire to the old house and in this holocaustic way, attempts to cut himself wholly

off from all aspects of the past. What Raddall is emphasizing here is the very powerful bond that unites the Nova Scotian to his past and the strength of family ties and personal ancestry.

Raddall can treat this theme not only tragically or dramatically, but humorously. In a short story entitled "Before the Snow Flies", the elderly hero, one Hamilton Pintle, sets out in his new sloop to sail away to the Spanish Main or in other words Florida and points south. However, he keeps stopping at innumerable villages along the shore where he always finds kin folk and he wastes so much time in this manner that it is too late to get away.

Ham and Duncan stayed at home, absorbed in family genealogy, bandying Pintle pedigrees back and forth for hours on end. On the third afternoon the minister and his wife came to call, but it made no difference except for a few polite complaints about the weather between generations. Afterwards in the privacy of the parsonage, the good man joked about "the Litany of Pintle". "Was that it?" said his spouse, for she was a foreigner from Ontario. "I thought we'd walked into the eleventh chapter of Genesis."<sup>9</sup>

Raddall states it very explicitly in another short story entitled "A Muster of Arms". The time is World War II and the place Pine County, Nova Scotia. The government has ordered a total register of all firearms, and the point of the tale is that all the local citizens not only have modern hunting equipment but every gun any member of their family has ever possessed, to the utter dismay of the RCMP

officers who have to cope. The local minister outlines the situation;

"You know, the trouble with you and Quinn is that you're from the West where everything was born yesterday. The East has a settled history going back three centuries. You're up against the fact that these people have roots going down out of sight -- out of your sight anyway -- and they're proud of their roots because they have clung to their own soil all this time. They don't depend on books for their history. They've got it right in their own heads, family tales passed carefully from generation to generation, and a family pride as fierce as anything in Norman England."<sup>10</sup>

Obviously Raddall sympathizes deeply with this kind of pride and memory; as a result heredity plays a large role in his novels. A man's motivations are to be found not only in his personal psyche but in his genetic background, personal honesty, faith, environment, and attitude imbibed from early childhood and passed on to succeeding generations to continue the traditions and deepen the roots.

The land itself, its structure, formation, appearance, seasonal changes, rigours and beauties, also dominates these novels. What strikes even a casual reader is the strength and variety of Raddall's descriptive passages. Probably because of his early experiences up and down the Atlantic coast, Raddall seems to be able to visualize the whole of the eastern seaboard as if one were seeing it from some point out in the Atlantic and looking westward from the ocean to the land. There is an awareness of the totality of that region, from Cape Breton northwards to the Gulf of the

St. Lawrence and then further north still, past Newfoundland and Labrador to the Arctic Circle and the polar regions.

One could quote endlessly to illustrate this point, but two examples may suffice. The first is from The Nymph and the Lamp:

Then came times when the great silent cold of the Pole reached down and gripped the land and sea and all was still as death. Then the blood seemed to shrink in the veins as the red alcohol shrank in the thermometer. By day the sun had an odd grey tint. The sun, which had long lost its heat, now lost its last thin brilliance and crept like a pallid moon across the southern arch of the sky. The sea had a viscid surface that gleamed and moved with the waves like the skin of some enormous reptile slowly shuddering with the cold; and because actually the sea was warmer than that Arctic air it gave off wisps of vapour that merged and formed a solid bank toward the horizon."<sup>11</sup>

The passage proves more than Raddall's facility in the use of words, for in his use of imagery he gives the impression of having seen and felt what he describes. The air of authenticity strengthens the reader's belief in Raddall's artistic integrity. The same comment, except perhaps for its greater emotional content, could apply to a passage from Tidefall in which Pascoe talks about his passion for the North:

"It's rugged along the Strait but kind of wonderful, all that rock and ice and sky, and that terrific feeling of challenge you get when you first touch the fringe of the North -- the real North, I mean . . . After you've been a few months up there your face points true, not magnetic. You know you're only on the fringe of it and the rest is a mystery. You hanker to get further up and find out what it's all about, what's behind the next hill or the other island -- what's behind the northern lights."<sup>12</sup>



Undoubtedly much of the richness and strength of Raddall's The Nymph and the Lamp derives from his powerful descriptions of that strange world of Marina (Sable Island), a community imposed upon the wild storm-tossed sandy island far out in the Atlantic, where the wild ponies run along the shore, and only in the inner hollows of the dunes can one be out of the sight and sound of the sea. Everything has a kind of intensified force within this narrow world so enclosed, yet at the same time exposed to all the elemental forces of nature: the booming sound of the ice cracking on the lagoons, the ice fields that are blown southward toward the island in March, the flaring northern lights, the departure and the return of the great flocks of birds, the storms, the winds, the rain and the sun.

In Tidefall, as one might expect from its title, the central symbol of nature is the great tidal movement of the sea in the Bay of Fundy. Port Barron to which Sax Nolan returns, and Gannet Head, where Rena takes refuge from her husband, are both so placed that they must live in constant awareness of that force. On their picnic visit to the Head, Rena points out the islands -- "terrible places" she calls them -- where in the old days before there was either lighthouse or radio station many ships had been lost.

With the blink of sunshine and the vagaries of the air currents over the sea, the islands swelled and shrank, dwindling sometimes to a white dot on the horizon and then rising swiftly, towering, shining with every fold of their ice walls magnified; now Frigate, now Topsail, now the Whales, and other

white ghosts beyond, where Dutchman and Goat and Inner Bald and Outer Bald stretched on to the northwest.<sup>13</sup>

Rena remembers the tales her father had told her of the shipwrecks; in the old days before this lighthouse was built the people went out each year in the spring to gather up the bodies of dead sailors wrecked on these wild shores, in order to bury them.

Although Sax Nolan in his sea-going adventures travels north and south and across the Atlantic, yet in the end it is the wicked strength and power of the Race which destroys him, as he misjudges his course, ironically enough on his way to stage a perfectly safe shipwreck.

The Race was a thing that lived on a fixed schedule with the tides. At high tide when all was slack, the passage between Dutchman and Topsail and the Whales was a passage like any other, in which the water had no movement except the surface waves created by the winds. As the tide began to fall the great surge out of the Funday began to break and toss in a tentative manner over the main shoals, still quite deep, that lay about mid passage. And as the water dropped and the other shoals began to drag at the belly of the outgoing flood, the area of the overfall, with its confused masses of water swirling and leaping, grew until it occupied the whole length of the passage from Dutchman to a point well towards Gannet Head.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly it is precisely the fact that Sax has mistaken the ebb for the full tide which brings him to destruction. The mysterious rise and fall of the tide is paralleled in the rise and fall of Sax Nolan; the tidefall indeed symbolizes his ruin.

In The Wings of Night, Raddall moves his setting inland from the sea. Oak Falls, a small decaying town, is upstream some fifteen miles from Port Seaforth. Instead of the sea and the problems of coastal shipping, the central concern is with the forestry industry: the hardwood forests now destroyed, the current rather precarious pulpwood industry, the cut-over woodlands, the decaying dams, the old logging trails. The owner of the mill and leading citizen of the town, Senator Quarrender, is the chief object of Neil Jamieson's hostility, although his mill is the sole source of employment in the town. The economic destitution of the old families and the personal aggrandisement of the Quarrenders form the basic social structure of the town. Neil, however, escapes from this, whenever he can, into the hinterland by canoe, with his chosen companion, an elderly Indian guide. Here on the last piece of timberland owned by the Jamiesons Neil builds a cabin, with logs dragged out of the lake; they had lain submerged for fifty years but still retained the J mark.

The cabin becomes for Neil at least a temporary means of escape from places, people and situations he dislikes and distrusts. His old friend Jim Pelerine remarks:

"You hang around the woods with that dam' Injun much longer you'll be wearin' a feather in your hair and eatin' stewed beaver tail and such. Something's eatin' you, Neil. What is it?"

"Just a hankering for four walls and a roof of my own, someplace where I won't be falling over

town and village people all the time and breathing their kind of air."<sup>15</sup>

But Neil's paradise is spoiled by the arrival of Steve Quarrender, and this in turn leads rapidly to the tragic event of Steve's death and Neil's arrest.

There is an alternative Eden in The Wings of Night -- the small badly run farm of the Pendergrass family. Raddall creates an atmosphere of innocence and love in this world hidden away at the end of a ten mile lane leading out of Oak Falls. Most of the farms on the Back Road are uninhabited and abandoned, but some still support life. "The men had the springy look of hunters," so Neil remarks. It is an easy-going and pretty self-sufficient life that Bob Pendergrass has created for himself.

Significantly Raddall creates two contrasting scenes to emphasize the difference between the idyllic world of the Pendergrass family and the corrupt world of the Quarrenders. When Neil first visits the farm he finds most of the family, father and young children and the twenty-two year old Tally swimming in their own small lake. The water is cool and fresh with "that clean taste of spruce gum and sunned rock and lily root that you find nowhere but in such a lake in the Canadian woods".<sup>16</sup> The innocence, happiness and contentment he finds there are in marked contrast to the swimming party by the sea to which Neil has been taken by Steve Quarrender, with its subsequent disclosure of the liaison between Steve

and Mrs. Derwent. Even the food eaten on both occasions demonstrates the contrast; Mrs. Pendergrass produces a splendid supper of veal stew, fresh corn, homemade bread and rhubarb pie. Bob Pendergrass remarks proudly, "Pritty high all this is my own raisin', barrin' the tea".<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Derwin offers only hastily made tuna sandwiches and "sugary doughnuts from the bakery in town and coffee hot from an aluminum percolator".<sup>18</sup>

Neil, however, is aware that the Pendergrass Eden does not offer much in the way of a solution; he recognizes that Bob is fundamentally a lazy man.

I had a hunch that his part in raising the food was precisely his part in raising a family, a matter of seeding and letting the womenfolk take care of the rest.<sup>19</sup>

Yet he meditates, "The world lives in a queer jangle nowadays. Maybe you have to go up the Old Back Roads to find people who still have the secret of tranquility".<sup>20</sup> In the end it is with Tally Pendergrass that Neil finally escapes from his past, his tragic inheritance, to make a new life in rich Ontario.

When Isabel Jardine returns to Kingsbridge to start a new life amid the scenes of her childhood, it is a quite different kind of farm scene which is presented. Kingsbridge lies in the rich Annapolis Valley with its great apple orchards, and its equally rich flow of tourists looking for the Evangeline country. Even so there are poor areas, such

as Scotch Springs which had been settled by a group of Scots who had arrived too late to obtain the good farm land of the Valley. For three generations they had clung to their subsistence farming and then the young men had given up to move west. Yet the Valley itself is prosperous and tranquil, and Isabel is happy to return to it.

When she put out the light and ran up the blind she saw the leaves of the apple trees gleaming faintly in the starlight. The night was warm and through the open window came a familiar smell of ploughland, of fresh grass and the massed foliage of the orchard. The town's lights were out. In the darkness nothing moved. There was one word for it -- peace. Whatever else had changed, this remained, the massive calm of the land itself, gravid, expectant, waiting to put forth blossom and fruit as it had waited every May since the first hopeful settler cleared a patch in the forest and planted seed. This is it, surely, she told herself. This is what I've wanted all this time. I was a fool to have left it, ever.21

In every book he writes Raddall displays a romantic love of nature that is almost Wordsworthian. Seacoast, wilderness, farm lands, rich or poor, are to be found as settings, as background for the emotional dramas he presents. But these settings are not merely a backdrop of painted scenery. However lovingly painted, with a naturalist's eye and a passionate attention to detail, these settings always have a meaningful relationship with the characters. These people are related to the natural world in which they live by a variety of ties, in the main by ancestry and inheritance. Probably because Nova Scotia contains no great commercial and industrial city like Montreal and Toronto,

city life as such plays little part in the Raddall novels. Halifax is there, certainly, but mainly as a port city with which the characters have very slender relationships, if any.

Yet, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, Raddall, in spite of his romanticism, is sufficiently realistic to be very much aware of the economics of the Maritimes. The "boom and bust" economic swings of late Victorian times form a large part of the structure of The Wings of Night, for instance. Neil's forerunners had grown rich on the hardwood forests, but when the trees were gone, their wealth had disappeared also.

The loggers and the sawmill men, the spoilers of the big forest, my grandfather with the rest, had drifted away on the river of time like their own slabs and sawdust. Their mills and camps had gone to dust. Here and there one of their rough logging-dams hung on like a grin of rotten teeth; the rest had vanished. And the forest had come back. It had outlived and outdone them after all. That old yoke in the maple fork was a symbol. Whenever I thought of it in these nocturnal bivouacs about the lakes and streams I seemed to hear a sound of mocking laughter in the woods.<sup>22</sup>

One aspect of Neil Jamieson's battle against the Quarrenders revolves around the timber lands, now useful for growing pulpwood. He tries to interest the Toronto financier Luther Kinnoul in a scheme to build a new mill at Port Seaforth. Though Kinnoul at first refuses, in the end, he does indeed force old Sam Quarrender to sell out at a relatively low price, and by this means effectively destroys his economic

power. In the revenge theme of the novel, Neil achieves a victory over Sam's avarice as well as the totally different kind of revenge in the accidental shooting of Steve Quarrender.

In Tidefall, also, the economics of the depression are a means to ruin Sax Nolan. The total stoppage of trade in salt fish and lumber is what drives him to try to rig his final shipwreck, the wreck which he plans in order to obtain the insurance money. Sax has never lacked courage, but he lacks business judgement, or is simply blinded by his dream, the desire to show them all. What money he has gathered he won by rum-running, by insurance rackets and finally by plain theft. The great economic tidal wave of the depression ruins him, financially, just as the tidal force of the Fundy Race destroys him physically.

Economic forces also play a part in the plot structure of The Nymph and the Lamp. When Isabel goes to work for Mr. Markham, she learns the details of the life of a small entrepreneur. He runs the local hardware store, but he is also a "pioneer" -- the first man in the town to own an automobile, to install a gasoline-electric plant for lighting his house, the first to have a hot-air furnace. He is a shrewd business man whose major interest is making money; as a result he is involved with the whole economic basis of the life of the Valley: pulpwood, canning, apple farming



and the fruit industry. The school teacher Brockhurst points out that Markham is over-extending himself and that the boom is sure to end, as indeed it does. Mr. Markham is left with his house and his store, but he is, as he remarks, "right back where I started fifty years ago". Through the mouth of Brockhurst, Raddall is able to outline the flaws and limitations of Maritime economy.

Similarly, the technological advances in the world of radio communications mean the forthcoming end to the world of Marina; the radio directions for shipping will no longer be necessary, and the station at Marina will exist only for weather reports and/or communications between the island and the mainland, a necessary link since the lighthouses are to be maintained. One radio operator alone will be sufficient. Skane remarks to Isabel, "Do you realize that Matt's station was built in 1905? In the radio game that's as old as Noah." This makes Isabel's return to Carney and to Marina all the more poignant, since she is rejecting the advancing modern world, about which Raddall is ironical:

Isabel knew none of the phrases that were to become so worn and shabby in the time to come, and it did not occur to her even vaguely as she looked from the hotel window that she was gazing upon the brave new world, the world fit for heroes to live in, the world of the lost generation, the world made safe for democracy in terms of jazz and bootleg whiskey and money that grew on bushes, the era of wonderful nonsense that could ignore the slump of '21 and go on to the crash of '29.<sup>25</sup>

It is in such a context that Carney stands out as a character of basic simplicity and honesty, yet with something monumental and heroic about him. The author indeed creates an almost mythic quality in his presentation of a man of courage, honesty, self-discipline and self-sacrifice, a being of magnificent size. Captain O'Dell, in the final pages of the novel sees him thus:

O'Dell saw Carney start, and throw up a hand to shield his eyes from the water glare. And in that attitude, with the clipped golden beard and hair gleaming in the sun, he looked -- yes, by Jove, he looked like one of those Norse kings, right out of the Heimskringla!. You sought for the winged helmet and long war ax and saw nothing but the bit of gold, Ran's tribute, slung by the cord upon his breast.<sup>26</sup>

John Matthews suggests in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of this novel that Marina is a symbol of Canada. But it might better be taken as a symbol of the Maritimes, or even more narrowly of Nova Scotia. As Matthews remarks, "It is a place which is built on the shifting sands of the past; wrecked ships stud its shores, and the bones of buried sailors emerge from the sand as the dunes change their shape in the wind".<sup>27</sup> Considered in this light, the world of Marina does indeed dominate "the imagination and acts as the central image in the structure of the book". It is a place where the struggle to maintain existence is a struggle against the elements of nature primarily; but at the same time the means to continue such a struggle are

supplied totally from the mainland; it is not and cannot be economically viable; when that subsistence is withdrawn, the place itself must (at some unspecified future time) cease to exist as a human community.

The challenges such a world presents to Isabel, brought up in the tranquility of the fruitful Annapolis Valley, cannot be met by any transference of mainland values. Isabel is forced to jettison such values; her agreeing to omit the marriage service is the first symbolic step in this direction. Her restless searching for "something to do" signifies the emotional disturbance created by this new existence, and learning to operate the radio transmitter is one further step forward and away from her past. Matthew's withdrawal leaves her more and more lonely and unsupported; the inevitable next step into a passionate love affair with Skane, with all its overtones of guilt and betrayal, is a logical development. The physical wound she receives puts an end to this phase of her life, and instinctively she tries to obliterate it all by cutting off communication with both men and with all that Marina stands for. Kingsbridge represents a return to conventional values, a quest for protection and support in her own past, but she finds that in this life she can only function but not truly live. In the end Marina and Carney offer her the one great chance she has to live in accord with her own deepest emotional forces; her own tides sweep her back to Marina.

In neither of the other two novels under consideration, does Raddall create figures of such heroic and even mythic proportions as in The Nymph and the Lamp, unless it is perhaps on a much slighter scale in the person of Tally Pendergrass who, as has been suggested, seems to symbolize an Edenic goodness and sweetness, springing as she does from an uncorrupted world lived close to nature. The evils of unchecked materialism and greed are to be found in Sax Nolan and the older Quarrender. It is interesting and worth noting that in the characters of Neil Jamieson and Steve Quarrender one can see the "sins" of the fathers working their way out in the distortions of character and psychological flaws of the two young men. Inherited pride, independence and a sour anger against life give Neil the strength to fight against his fate, while Steve's inheritance of money got by fraud and trickery has led to a weakening of moral fibre which always seeks the easy way of self-indulgence.

It is a curious fact that Raddall who has so painstakingly studied the history of Nova Scotia, even to its smallest local detail, has been so much less successful as a writer of historical novels than in his three contemporary ones. He has a whole group of the former to his credit: Roger Sudden, The Governor's Lady, Hangman's Beach, etc. Each is carefully plotted, devotedly researched and historically accurate down to the smallest detail of seamanship or

domestic life. But basically none of them comes alive; it is as if the author's own authentic gift were bound down like Gulliver in Lilliput by a thousand small chains made up of authentic detail. Only in the short stories, like "The Wedding Gift" and "The Trumpeter" does the story-teller conquer history to create a work of art. Raddall's short stories are a very mixed bag, but allow him to give scope to that genial sense of humour and vivid awareness of the many inherent ridiculous facets of human nature which make him an appealing writer. It is a sad commentary on our treatment of Canadian writers that many of these highly successful stories, such as "The Pied Piper of Dipper Creek", "Champeen Liar", "Muster of Arms", "Tit for Tat", for example, exist only in books now out of print. When Raddall made a selection of short stories for the New Canadian Library, a volume entitled At the Tide's Turn, he did not include any of the above, but chose a very lack-lustre collection of historical odds and ends brightened only by the afore-mentioned "The Wedding Gift" and "The Trumpeter".

Nevertheless, Raddall's powerful sense of the past, as well as his genuine love for what is surely one of Canada's most beautiful provinces, has given his best writings a sincerity and authenticity which are very evident even in his contemporary novels.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Thomas H. Raddall, The Nymph and the Lamp (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1963), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas H. Raddall, Tidefall (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas H. Raddall, The Wings of Night (Garden City, New York: Doubleday [Book Club edition], 1956), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas H. Raddall, "Before the Snow Flies" in his Pied Piper of Dipper Creek (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1943), p. 313.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas H. Raddall, "Muster of Arms" in Muster of Arms (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart), p. 234.

<sup>11</sup>The Nymph and the Lamp, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup>Tidefall, p. 203.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>15</sup>The Wings of Night, p. 191.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 100.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-38.
- <sup>21</sup>The Nymph and the Lamp, pp. 247-8.
- <sup>22</sup>The Wings of Night, p. 81.
- <sup>23</sup>The Nymph and the Lamp, p. 300.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 293.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 314.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 329-330.
- <sup>27</sup>John Matthews, Introduction The Nymph and the Lamp, p. vii.

CHAPTER II  
ERNEST BUCKLER

Unlike Raddall who ranges along the seacoast and into the forests, Buckler has stationed himself in the Annapolis Valley, where his own family has deep roots. As Dr. Bissell points out, in the introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Buckler's first novel, The Mountain and the Valley, this area has an ancient history going back as far as Champlain and the first settlements in New France. It is a fertile and pastoral land, now given over largely to fruit growing, but of course containing many small towns and villages, many poor subsistence farms as well, which stretch upwards along the fringes of the forested heights. Just as the sea is the timeless element for Raddall, so the land is for Buckler, with its steady rhythms of pastoral life, the slow inevitable cycle of the changing seasons.

Out of this basic farmland setting Buckler never strays. Central to his purpose in all three of his novels is the evocation of particular and special way of life, although this is to some extent muted and kept subordinate in his second novel, The Cruellest Month. If the total effect at times becomes slightly claustrophobic, the author does supply a means of escape through his symbolic



use of the mountain which slopes up behind the farm (as in The Mountain and the Valley) creating at once a "terra incognita" and an ultimate mystery. It is significant that it is in the act of climbing the mountain, turning his back on the valley and the farm, that David, his first hero, meets his death. If the farm in the valley is rooted in an earthly reality, however transmuted and poeticized, the mountain with its forests and heights is a purely romantic symbol.

Probably inevitably, because so much of his work is symbolic, one tends to think of the setting of The Mountain and the Valley in imagistic terms, as a series of concentric circles from which at the outer edge certain tangents shoot off -- the valley road, the railway, the mountain. The perimeter of the farm itself is this outer edge, but within are other circles -- the close self-sustaining life and work of the farm, the tightly woven ring of family relationships (father, mother, grandmother, two brothers, a sister), the new house that Joseph builds for his family, the kitchen where so much of the family life is lived, and even the circular rug which old Ellen is making and which symbolizes in its basic materials and its colours so much of the life and events of the Canaans.

The rug is a particularly useful symbol, since the rags which are hooked into it represent not only the various members of the family, but also special events:

the grey stripes come from a new work shirt of Joseph's which he wore for the first and only time on the day he died, brown from a stocking cap of Chris's worn when, as a small boy, he was taken into the woods by his father for the first time, or pink from a hair ribbon of Anna's which had been a clue to her whereabouts the day she got lost up the log road. Thus each of the concentric circles of the rug is related, directly and indirectly, to a whole multitude of associations and memories: people, events, situations, and since time has lost all chronological sequence in Ellen's confused mind, time itself has disintegrated into rags and becomes arranged into an impressionistic pattern of familiar history akin to life itself and traceable only by the initiated. The colours themselves move significantly from the dark outer border, to the grey of the shirt, and onwards till the final white centre, formed of lace from a dress Ellen herself had worn as a young woman in a grander society. The rug, as D. O. Spettigue notes in his long study of Buckler, "The Way It Was",<sup>1</sup> assumes something of the role of Lily Briscoe's painting in To the Lighthouse, as a symbol of organic unity.

The concentric circles of coloured clothing in the rug expand from a point of white, as David's consciousness struggles against the nightmare of expanding detail, only to contract again sharply to the point of lace and the snowflakes which are, in terms of the novel, the achieved unity, and in terms of David's potential, the irony of another buried life.<sup>2</sup>

The novel is carefully structured. Prologue and Epilogue form a unity, based on the afternoon of the day that David's life ends. Ellen and David are here the sole remaining residents of the farm. The whole central portion of the novel is divided into six parts. The first three parts ("The Play", "The Letter", "The Valley") are devoted to David's childhood and adolescence; this is the world of vividness and aliveness, of seeding and growing, of experience, feeling and development. In spite of all personal differences, the family is united and moving forward. The end of this paradisaal state is foreshadowed by the first separation, when Anna is offered an opportunity to go to town and live in the doctor's house as a companion to his wife and, at the same time continue her education. This ending is also underlined by the death of Effie, David's young sweetheart. Eventually David comes to terms with his sense of guilt about Effie, but it marks a stage in his moving on into a new aspect of life. The chapter and the section ends:

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.<sup>3</sup>

But the real break in the cresting wave of time comes when Joseph is killed by a falling tree, and Martha on that same sad afternoon of symbolic severance in their close relationship is struck by a severe kind of heart attack, a forerunner of her death.

Since poor Chris has been trapped into marriage with Charlotte, David is now left alone with only his grandmother, and from this point on the movement of the novel is downward into resignation and isolation. The circles which had expanded begin to contract again. David finally reaches his paradoxical solitude full of joy, artistic discovery, self-realization and dread, which is, ironically, paralleled by the growing confusion and disorientation of old Ellen's mind groping for a state of reality all her own.

David is the central character of the novel, and we see much of the action and feel much of the emotion of the story through his eyes and heart. He is depicted as a person of extreme sensitivity and awareness, acutely self-conscious and analytical, reacting violently and extremely to both family and external relationships and situations. His is the central consciousness of the novel, and as Dr. Bissell points out, here is "another portrait of the artist as a young man . . .struggling in his obscure way to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race".<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning, as a child, David fiercely resents any form of intrusion into the family circle; whatever he has planned must develop as he had dreamed. But life has a way of altering the shape of things, as for example the great fishing expedition that David is to make with his father and brother. "I hope we won't meet anyone, David thought. Just us together."<sup>5</sup> But they do meet the loggers with the

sad news of the deaths of two men. This event seems to set a pattern of personal frustration for David. Even the most guarded plans, the most secret hopes and aspirations, the most familiar situations and the closest ties go awry, and do not mend themselves easily, if ever. David's desires and temperament are occasionally at odds and cause frustrations and tensions even in relationships which, because of their closeness, should be inviolable, as in the cases of Chris and Effie. At other times emotional shock may be completely beyond David's control, as on the occasion of his parents' death, or Anna's move away from the village. One way or another, nothing seems to develop successfully for David.

On the other hand, for all his suffering, he has the rewards of the artist in his own creativity, no matter how awkward or difficult the creative process may be. He fulfils the romantic vision of the function of the artist, because of his belief that the artist may achieve a kind of mastery over the intense complexity and fluidity of life by his own inner magic, by the artistic ordering of life's experience. There is a related symbolic connection with the figure of Adam in Eden who has complete mastery over all living things, and who exercises that control by the naming of the animals. So David tries to "name", or analyse, evaluate and describe feeling and relationship, sometimes

with relative success, but in general with a mounting frustration.

The problem is a metaphysical one; what is involved seems to be the driving necessity for the writer to express the totality of all experience, to assimilate and articulate everything that has happened to himself, and to those he knows, and to the world around him, in all the wholeness and the immensity of what they mean. The sheer expanse of a lifetime's experience becomes apparent to David, in its full magnificent and final summation, ironically only in the last afternoon of his life, as he begins to climb the mountain, and his memory spreads all before him in a series of sensuous and visual images. "Shape and colour reached out to him like voices",<sup>6</sup> and "He could think of anything now. Everything seemed to be an aspect of something else. There seemed to be a thread of similarity running through the whole world. A shape could be a sound; a feeling like a shape; a smell the shadow of a touch . . . His senses seemed to run together".<sup>7</sup> Although his breath labours and his heart pounds, he perseveres onwards and upwards, and is rewarded first of all by a moment's exaltation in which he seems to stand outside time the present, and to experience "the complete translation to another time", something well beyond the ordinary operation of memory. Events, sights, situations, feelings and most especially faces come to him,

each bearing its own gift of individuality. This essential quality of insight into the past carries with it its own obligations.

All the faces there were everywhere else in the world, at every time, waited for him to give the thought to exactly how each of them was. (What about the Englishman or the Frenchman or the Micmac who might have stood on this very spot exactly how long ago?) There was the listening fact of the presence outside him of every eye, every lash, every smile-wrinkle of every cheek that had ever been; possible to be known, but unattended, because he had never seen them . . . .And the frightening clarity . . . .I could realize the whole content of everything there is, he thought, if they didn't swarm so.

The density of such memory and thought experiences begins to press upon him, and his mind moves into a nightmarish consideration of the chemical and mathematical concepts involved. Time and place begin to merge together, to infiltrate each other, and as though in a frenzy he cries out to his spinning thoughts, "Stop!" They do not stop, but add another dimension, that of the might have been. "He heard the crushing, screaming challenge of the infinite permutations of the possible."<sup>9</sup>

But at this moment he has arrived at the very top of the mountain. When he gazes at the world below him, he experiences a kind of epiphany. All the noises quiet down, and his illumination is complete. "It wouldn't be necessary to take them one by one. That's where he'd been wrong. All he'd have to do . . .oh, it was so gloriously simple . . .was to find their single core of meaning. It was manifest not

differently but only in different aspects, in them all. That would be enough. A single beam of light is enough to light all the shadows, by turning it from one to another."<sup>10</sup>

Not only are David's artistic problems now apparently solved, but his emotional ones also. In his exaltation he makes vows of "rapprochement" with his brother and his sister. But at this moment his heart fails, and he dies.

With David's death on the high mountain, the romantic tragedy is complete. It may well be that, for Buckler, so dazzling a moment of total understanding, and with it a complete absolution from the guilt of all life's wounds, could only be achieved in an almost superhuman state. In Eliot's words, "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality".<sup>11</sup> If David represents the symbolic Adam, then Buckler seems to suggest that all earthly Edens are subject to change and decay, and the human mind, even at its most perceptive, is a limited and fallible instrument by which to grasp the total meaning of life's phenomena. Virginia Woolf's "shower of atoms" can only be perceived, and only partially understood, within strict limits of time. At the moment of epiphany, the body fails.

An epiphany is basically a religious experience and it is easy to find in the novel other examples of Buckler's use of religious symbolism and allusion. Joseph donates the land for the church; the Bishop comes to the Canaan's house,



and places his hand on David's head; Ellen has pictures of the Virgin which she brings from the old house to the new. But far more powerful are the Biblical overtones throughout the novel. The very names carry this kind of connotation: Joseph, Martha, David, Christopher, Anna. Canaan, the family name, suggests the promised land and the pastoral setting also adds to this effect, enhancing an Edenic symbolism. By such means Buckler elevates the particular and purely regional into the symbolic and universal.

Beautiful and touching are the pictures the author draws for us of the simplicity and peace of the life of this farm family, the steady love between husband and wife, the closeness of the ties that bind all the family into one unit. Yet Buckler is especially aware of the variations of mood that are a part of all relationships, even of close ones. When Martha, on that final afternoon with Joseph, becomes hurt and angry, Joseph is helpless to change the situation. "Martha was his weather. Her moods settled into the very grain of him."<sup>12</sup> Their devotion is total, though un verbalized, and it is this basic fact which makes the sadness of their parting so poignant, ending with Martha's terrible whisper when she finds Joseph dead, "Joseph, you forsook me . . .you forsook me . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Buckler pours all of his poetic intensity into his descriptions of the countryside in all its variations of

season. In a series of magnificent word paintings at the opening of Chapter VII, the magic of the differing times of year is not only described but closely related to the feelings and the loves of the people.

They would never need to see another spring than that, to know spring thoroughly. From the first day Martha left the kitchen door open, to dry the scrubbed floor . . . through all the days between: the day of the rushing sound in the dark spruce mountain (that husky sussurant night Joseph looked down at his nakedness as he stood by the bed, and felt in one instant's edification everything there was in the feel of man and woman and of having children), the day of the wild roses on the stone wall . . . until the last one, when dust first dulled the plough-share's moist gleam.<sup>14</sup>

The same relationship is established for Anna on that warm autumn day of Indian summer when she and Toby climb together to the top of the mountain. Anna feels, standing there beside her husband, as if this minute is to be the peak of her whole life. She too has her prophetic vision, but for her it is a vision of Toby drowning at sea. Sky and sea seem to interchange.

The sky was cold and lonely and had no breath in its blue lips, and the broken fingers of the trees couldn't reach up to touch it. The sun crept into the cores of the trees. The whole afternoon seemed full of all the things that lived without feeling or breath: the mateless sun and the memoryless trees and the tired road and the bruised sky and the chill breeze that was the breath of all the dead things in the world, moving bare as a ghost among the withered leaves.<sup>15</sup>

What Buckler achieves in passages such as these is an almost total empathy between person and scene, something more spiritual, more metaphysical than Raddall's careful yet

loving studies of nature. At the same time Buckler presents many realistically observed pictures of farm life: the killing of the pig, the cutting up of meat, the digging and sorting of potatoes, the hauling of logs; all establish the working life of the farm people.

Although for the most part, the world he creates -- or remembers -- is land-locked, there are, as has been suggested, means of escape, by road, by river, by train or by car, and finally of course upward by the road leading to the mountain. It is also apparent that he is aware of the distant presence of the sea, and this presence is brought to us in various ways, through David's abortive sea story suggested by putting on Toby's cap, or in the prophetic vision of Anna already referred to. It is more directly suggested by the intrusion of the two sailors, Ellen's almost mythical one whom she sheltered many years ago, and Toby himself when he joined the navy. Buckler utilizes the fact of the ever-present, surrounding sea in Nova Scotia life, almost as a ghostly visitant, and it adds its own poetic effect to the general atmosphere, and enhances the regionality and the isolation.

Buckler appears much less overtly interested in the historical past of his world than Raddall. Yet there are glancing references to the historic past of the region, mainly coming from Ellen. She asks Anna, "Did I ever tell

you about the Governor of Annapolis -- or Port Royal, then -- who died on a journey back from France? They put his body in the sea, but they brought his heart on and buried it. I'll take you to Annapolis sometime and show you the very spot".<sup>16</sup>

From Ellen, too, we gather a little about the family's past. Her husband Richard was apparently the original homesteader. It is suggested that Ellen married beneath her, and small objects treasured, like the cup of her grandmother's that Queen Anne drank from once, or the lace on the dress that she ripped to pieces to form part of the rug, support this idea. David makes some contact with this remote English family of Ellen's and one of them who is a don at Oxford sends him books. But Buckler insinuates these hints of the past in an off-hand manner. They represent a very minor element in the total picture, one of the fragments of material, so to say, that he weaves into his tapestried story, his circular rug.

What contributes most strongly to the cohesion, the organic quality of this novel, in spite of its episodic structure, is the particular essence of Buckler's highly poetic and highly individual style. The whole range of human emotion analyzed and presented is intensified by the special nature of Buckler's prose. It is an extraordinarily vibrant style, rhythmic, imagistic, sensuous, yet capable

of moving from the bluntly factual to the highly rhapsodic. One could quote endlessly to prove this. Here he is speaking of the "evocative light" of autumn:

But the albino light, simmering patiently in the aspic air like a sound after the ear for it is gone, lacquered them like the shells of pumpkins piled before the shop. It hung clearly and expandingly between the branches of the chestnut tree before the house, bare now as a tree a child draws. The bones of the tree seemed to have a luminosity of their own. It diamonded the bits of glass on the ground, prodigally and sadly, because it would not come again. It furred a strand of the wire fence with light distilled pure and memoryless from the light of autumn. It steeped in the shingles. It hung hazy and most nearly tangible, over the river. There it was like the face-light of someone forgotten, and remembered again on waking from a dream.<sup>17</sup>

A passage such as this, with its unexpected verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and its steady rhythms, demonstrates Buckler's descriptive ability; but this can be seen throughout the entire novel. The powerful sensory images are fully sustained, and make the novel memorable for this quality alone, even were there not other successful attributes. Claude Bissell is reminded of Dylan Thomas and the beautiful evocations of "Fern Hill"; this is a just comparison. Bissell calls the novel a "magnificent paean to the wonder and innocence of youth",<sup>18</sup> but it is much more than that. From youth to death, from growth to decay, from love to estrangement, Buckler masterfully handles all these themes, and in a style which enhances them with its poetic power.

After the splendid symphony of The Mountain and

the Valley to read The Cruellest Month is to experience an extreme disappointment. What, one asks, has gone wrong? This is a tale of a modern Walden; indeed the name of the remote Nova Scotia farm, Endlaw, is an anagram of Walden. The name has further connotations of personal freedom, freedom from the pressures of city life, and modern social conformity. Paul, the proprietor, supplied food and lodging, and his own enigmatic presence; otherwise, "there were no diversions except the steeping primacy of woods, lakes and fields; you were on your own. But you were continuously free to fit together the pure, unalloyed fabrics of Time, Place, and Sentience, as never before".<sup>19</sup>

To this lonely place come a strange assortment of paying guests: Kate the forlorn spinster, Morse the American novelist, Sheila and Rex Giorno, that mismated pair, and Bruce whose life has been psychologically paralyzed by the accident which killed his wife and child. They are all looked after by Letty, the down-to-earth housekeeper.

The problems with this novel are multifold. In the first place, any novel which is structured on an isolated place, and a chance assortment of characters thrown together, depends basically for its interest and ultimate success on the empathy established between the reader and the characters portrayed. They must be firmly established as real, whatever that ambiguous word may mean in any context; they must have

authenticity as human beings. And the reader must become not only interested but deeply concerned about their fate -- a fate not only emotional and moral, but even physical, as they master or are defeated by some outside circumstance, in this case a forest fire.

A perfect example of this type of narrative structure is Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls, with its guerilla band of gypsies hiding in the mountains, the American commando hero, and the ever-present threat of the encircling Fascist army. But the locale may be anywhere, and a remote Nova Scotia farmhouse may serve as well as any other place, provided that the reader is caught by and involved in the vicissitudes of life, and in the experiences and dilemmas of all characters, whatever their origins, position or state of mind.

It is in this area, the creation of character, that the greatest weakness of this particular novel of Buckler's lies, in striking contrast to his success in The Mountain and the Valley. With the exception of Letty, and possibly Bruce, who both have a kind of authenticity from their native connection with the place, the other people in the novel, for all of Buckler's care, never really come alive or cease to be stereotypes. Morse is not a Hemingway hero, but a watered-down version of Hemingway himself, without that author's supreme self-assurance or special magic. It is

through Morse and his complexities of art that Buckler tries to analyze the problems of the writer; he makes Morse a kind of black mirror image of himself, since his interests and techniques are the opposite of those of Hemingway. Unfortunately Morse's soul-struggles remain banal to the point of boredom. The articulate novelist conveys much less of the inner life of the creator than the young David in The Mountain and the Valley, trying to formulate his thoughts, however tentatively, and to put them down on paper.

Morse talks endlessly about the problems of the writer, as in the following passages:

"It's like this. You break up a clump of rhubarb into ten parts and transplant the parts and you get ten new clumps of rhubarb. Identical. Break a man up into ten parts and transplant the parts and what would you get? Ten entirely different men. According as each is the seed of a different self. According to which got the rain. The rain of accident. The bloody blasted reign -- that's r-e-i-g-n -- of accident. So here's the switch. I want to draw a line under these people as of this moment . . . and then 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."20

A little later he says:

"This business tonight was pure accident. He was just blind drunk, that's all. But I'll say this for him. He's shown me what accident can do. That was my big mistake. I thought the whole thing was like in algebra . . . You solve your equations for x and y and then it's duck soup. You can substitute those values in any other equations that x and 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 z . . . ."21

For the reader it is somewhat ironical that a moment later he asks Kate whether he is boring her. She says not; but what reader would agree with her?

The long section in Chapter XXXVII of The Mountain and the Valley in which David, left alone while Anna and Toby go off to visit Ellen, tried to write a story about the war, expresses far more faithfully the true experience of the artist.

Then the great flurry of how it was with everything blizzarded inside his head, the things that always came to him after the first line: How you could love the land's face and the day's face, but how they never loved you back; the sun would come out brighter than usual the day your father died, and the wind would cut, as blind and relentless as ever, the night your brother was lost in the woods . . . .How a man could be trapped by his own nature . . . .How, though you cut open his flesh you still couldn't penetrate the skin of separateness each man walked around in . . . .How this place had aged, with change . . . .How the knitted warmth between its people had ravelled, until each was almost as alone in his own distraction now as the city people were . . . .22

If Morse as a character is a failure, the same can be said with equal truth about two of the female characters, Kate Fennison and Sheila Giorno, who in spite of the author's care in their delineation, remain stock characters, the Professor's daughter and the rich American girl. Kate is

continuously aware of herself and of her position as the loving daughter of a distinguished academic; her devotion to her father, her martyrdom in accepting the ties that bound her to him, her too acute sensitivity to what the community in which she lived might or would think of her -- all these are drawn for us. On her first visit to Endlaw, the author remarks, "Kate Fennison was not quite yet a professor's daughter".<sup>23</sup> Such a remark arouses instant queries in the reader's mind. Being a professor's daughter seems to Buckler to be a fate worse than death. But this is to establish a kind of categorization which is fatal to creative success. Kate is kind, sensitive, intelligent; she is drawn emotionally to Paul, but when he deliberately does not respond, turns towards Morse and marriage with him. The ordeal by fire which Morse forces upon her at the close of the novel gives her new insights into herself. "In every limb of her mind she felt a strange new firmness."<sup>24</sup> So we are to suppose that Kate's transformation from Professor's daughter to author's wife is a remove to a higher form of existence.

For all her self-analysis, there is a curious emptiness about Kate which makes one hesitant to believe in the new firmness or indeed in the marriage solution. She seems to epitomize a certain essential quality in all these characters save Letty, an apparent inability to cope with

life without being crippled by it. Yet if one thinks of a major author, like Chekov for instance, who also deals with people unable to master themselves or their destinies, the difference in quality of artistic conception or shaping becomes sadly apparent.

Even less convincing is Sheila, either in her marital relationship with the egregious Rex or in her love affair with Bruce, though the latter gains validity through his need for some sort of human confessor who will give him a final absolution from his destructive guilt. There is a functional purpose for Sheila in this way, and since Bruce has the solidity of all Buckler's Nova Scotia characters, she develops a certain opacity in her relationship with him. But this is only tentative, and fades away with her decision to remain with Rex after the cathartic experience of his self-inflicted wound and her discovery that she is pregnant.

In contrast to these stereotypes, Letty is as real as the Nova Scotia soil. Buckler seems to have an unerring ear for the sound of the local dialect, and an understanding of the instincts and feelings of the local people. Letty at the cemetery, at her sister-in-law's house or working around Endlaw is always fully in focus: It is Letty who, undistracted by any intellectual passion for self-analysis, truly loves Paul in her own selfless way. The whole relationship develops in the firefighting scene at the end

of the book, a scene that is climactic, exciting, tender and comic. It is typical of Letty, that when Paul collapses and she thinks he is dead, she kisses him and calls him back into consciousness, and expresses her feelings in her own inimitable way.

He opened his eyes and she saw him living there in them. Right here again. Her face, in a glorious tumult of the inexpressible, expressed her completely. Its springing phrases of strength and delicacy, eye-moulding the irrelevant flesh, were far more beautiful than beauty's single frozen sentence.

It's not a work face at all, Paul thought. And he knew that she loved him as no one else had ever done.

"Paul!" she said. "You scared the liverpins outa me."<sup>25</sup>

But it is the enigmatic Paul who is the central character in the book. He is depicted as a man who has been a wanderer much of his life, and who finally has settled in the remote abandoned Nova Scotia farm. He has a small annuity, but ekes out his money by taking in summer visitors, assisted by Letty, his cook-housekeeper. A major part of the book is concerned with Paul's battle with approaching death. Although he shares in the constant verbal clowning of Kate and Morse, he is a man who never admits anyone into his own inner reserve. He is therefore extremely secretive about his health. It is his desperate determination to be alone that makes him send all the others away, rejecting Kate's possible love as he has hitherto rejected all other binding ties. Letty alone, in the crisis at the end, manages to

break through his reserve; she alone offers him relief from his inner anguish.

It is curious how absorbed Buckler seems to be with the subject of death, particularly death from heart disease. David, in The Mountain and the Valley, battles alone with an awareness of his own sickness. Paul with Letty finds someone to share "this dark knowledge he'd borne so long alone".<sup>26</sup> It is also rather strange that, after creating one hero, David, who is set apart from others not only by his hyper-sensitivity but by his relative physical weakness, Buckler should more or less repeat the pattern, on a higher social level, in Paul. And perhaps it is significant too, as indicating Buckler's range of values, that Paul consistently rejects the complex verbal patterns of the others, though it is a game he plays with them, and plays well. He fights his own desperate battle silently, and in the end finds in the non-verbal relationship with Letty a sense of freedom and of home-coming. Buckler here, as in the earlier novel, shows his acute awareness of the dichotomy between the intellectual and the physical.

In contrast to Paul's central position, Bruce is a relatively minor character, but he is interesting because through him Buckler narrates a complex study of a particular kinship, that of father and child, a subject which deeply appeals to him. There are many passages in The Mountain and

the Valley which develop this theme, but this special situation he had already dealt with in a story published in the Atlantic Advocate in 1951, entitled "The Rebellion of Young David".<sup>27</sup> In this short story, however, a happy ending to the misunderstanding between father and son is achieved, unlike the tragic death by accident which ruins Bruce by inflicting upon him a paralyzing sense of guilt. Within the structure of the novel, the story of Bruce and his family have a necessary function as explanation of Bruce's despair, but in spite of this the Bruce-Molly-Peter story remains extrinsic to the central issues of the novel. Bruce relates to the land itself, which once belonged to his father, but not to any others within the story except Sheila. He achieves psychological release, but no happy ending.

Other short stories in the Atlantic Advocate also display characters or narrative elements which re-appear in The Cruellest Month, for example, "Glance in the Mirror",<sup>28</sup> and "Cleft Rock with Spring".<sup>29</sup> The first is a variation on the theme of life-love-writer, a search for place, integrity, insight and truth. Sheila in "Glance in the Mirror", represents both the outsider with money and love itself. She is responsible for the growing conflict and for Jeff's final realization that a "few stuffy old words were less important than any kind of love". In The Cruellest Month, Sheila's role has been divided between Sheila Giorno (money) and Kate (love), and similarly Jeff's part between Rex Giorno and Morse.

The second short Story, "Cleft Rock with Spring", again recalls the same theme -- the rich outsider, city-bred, sophisticated Madge and the "homemade" Jeff. Their basic conflict, misunderstanding and resolution are very much like a rehearsal for the roles of Sheila and Rex Giorno.

In the novel Rex is the odd man out in this group. A wounded hero, though this proves to be a sham, he is almost totally ignored by the others, in spite of his pathetic efforts to be accepted. He is totally unintellectual; he has risen in the world entirely on the strength of his good looks and sex-appeal. Buckler depicts him as a failure, who, though apparently unaware of it, is constantly being both judged and defended by his wife. But the author too has failed primarily because Rex never really comes alive. He has functional purposes, since his unexpected self-shooting brings a resolution to his relationship with Sheila, and his carelessness in throwing away a lighted cigarette, as they depart, sets off the forest fire which brings the novel to its highly dramatic close.

Yet the novel, on the whole, has very little movement; the author seems mainly intent on exploring ways of thinking and feeling, and only toward the end provides any catalyst of action. This comes as a welcome relief after so much analysis, and the writer's style rises to meet it.

The wind tore tips off the geysers of flame and scattered them in the roiling air like brazen leaves. The wilder flames had ridden ahead on the wind deeper into the woods, to pillage. These were the vicious father flames that had stayed to eat. The great gust of wind that had cleared the smoke at the top of the hill revealed the woods like a house stricken to its timbers. Tattered sails of flame tongued out from the tree masts. And the fist of heat that makes the stun of a great burn so different from the smart of a small struck hardest where it was absolutely invisible.<sup>30</sup>

The Cruellest Month met with mixed reviews. In an almost purely adulatory one, Claude Bissell states that the theme of the novel is "Love as a stubborn fact of human existence", and he finds the prose, "which in the first novel could be at times tortuous and difficult, has become far more complex, intense and involved". He notes the frequent use of mathematical metaphors, but he qualifies his admiration at the end by observing that "the poetry and the vision so beautifully captured in the first novel have not been completely captured in the second".<sup>31</sup> Robert Harlow in Canadian Literature is far sterner. He calls this novel a "retrograde step", and states firmly, "It is not a good book; in fact it is so bad that it is difficult, if not impossible, to take seriously".<sup>32</sup>

A more balanced and more objective judgment is given by D. O. Spettigue, who regards the novel as falling into certain Canadian patterns of thoughts or of interest, notably the longing for a vanished past, or what he calls "the Edenic



image". After examining the structure of the novel, which he relates variously to the Decameron or The Tempest, with Paul cast in the role of Prospero, he points out that there are romantic elements in the use of concepts of withdrawal into an isolated place, and the use of such archetypes as the purging and refining fire, and the sick heart. Equally romantic is the tendency of the characters to merge into one another, as in Paul's use of the name "Bruce Halliday" while he undergoes his medical examination in Montreal. Spettigue remarks, "In some sense he is both [Bruce and Morse], and this accounts for his enigmatical anonymity. The element in him that would like to be savage author lives vicariously in Morse (who also is Kate's lover as Paul would be), as the element that would be the first Adam in this garden of man is displaced by Bruce".<sup>33</sup>

"Time and place", notes Spettigue, "make up the essential grid of Buckler's novels." By relating The Cruellest Month to The Mountain and the Valley, it is possible to demonstrate certain basic elements in Buckler's thought, notably the theme of exile from Paradise, and this, Spettigue suggests (as does Frye), is a recurrent concept in Canadian fiction.

The point is, for Canadian literature the here and now is the place of knowledge, and knowledge is the fruit of the archetypal fall. The person who knows can never be content with this environment, and can never escape it. One hears, in The Cruellest Month, echoes of The Mountain and the Valley in the images of the great good time and the great good place that were one's childhood in rural Canada -- and one realizes that one is hearing them from generations of Canadian writers. In The Mountain and the Valley too there was a fall to mark the loss of that time and place, after which place becomes bondage and exile and time the one inexorable fact. Endlaw in The Cruellest Month is the place where, for a season, the garden seems to be regained, but where in fact man must labour and must come again to knowledge. Those who return to the stream of time are returning to a slightly lower world, a world longer and farther exiled, but they return there renewed by their contact with the terrain and themselves.<sup>34</sup>

These are interesting and perceptive statements, but one is left with the uneasy feeling that The Cruellest Month is being overvalued simply by its juxtaposition with the earlier novel. Judged singly, on its own merits, the question remains whether or not it can really stand such a depth of symbolic probing. No one could deny Buckler's passion for the land, or his concern for the vanished past; these elements he has developed in the full power of his poetic thought in his first and last books. But his attempt to relate his lost world to modern sophisticated living is not a success; the whole feel of the novel is of something forced and artificial. It never becomes the full organic whole which The Mountain and the Valley so very triumphantly is.

Much more difficult to judge and evaluate is Buckler's third book, Ox Bells and Fireflies [1968]. Strictly speaking it cannot be called a novel; the author names it a "memoir". He invents a place. "I'll call the village 'Norstead', the boy 'I'. They stand for many. The time is youth, when Time is young."<sup>35</sup> Within the pages there is a wide mixture of material: some short tales or episodes of family life that are complete in themselves, like "Seven Crows a Secret", or "A Man", and many more chapters that are concerned with the work ways, tools, and habits of a world already vanished, but lovingly remembered. Many are amusing; some are sad; all exhibit a fully stored memory and an extraordinary eye for detail.

Buckler's nostalgic passion for the past is here given full rein, and one feels that he has resurrected objects and characters in order to re-examine them, outside the time of their existence, but within their own now rapidly receding world. The very free form he has chosen for this book allows him to pick and choose incidents and people which illustrate particular aspects of this vanished past, and to explicate them in detail, without the necessity for weaving all together within the framework of a narrative structure. In fact, in this way he is behaving rather in the manner of old Ellen in The Mountain and the Valley, as she dips into her rag bag and meditates on each scrap of material she pulls

forth. The world of this volume is very much the world of the first novel in time, place and atmosphere.

What is noticeably different, however, is the general tone. The author is clearly in a much more relaxed mood, and though certain of the story episodes seem to have an autobiographical flavour, in none is there the highly wrought, intense egotism that is so marked a characteristic of young David Canaan. It is as if the author were freer now and could distance himself more comfortably from his material, thus enabling him to study it more calmly.

Many episodes of the speaker's own childhood seem to repeat experiences already incorporated in The Mountain and the Valley. Speaking of Norstead, the author remarks:

It was a sixteen-mile hush of forest away from Champlain's first landfall at Port Royal. Port Royal itself was hushed with history, solemn as a mountain with it. A joke goes around that one of the new crop of villagers was lately heard to remark: "Last night I had my first drink of Champlain." I had my first drink of Champlain from my grandmother . . . .

I listened to her, and I could feel the earth give a sort of tremor when Champlain, bringing Time with him, set the discoverer's foot on this whole timeless land.<sup>36</sup>

The reader at once remembers old Ellen and her talk to Anna, previously mentioned. Similarly the whole episode of the planting of potatoes and other vegetables inevitably recalls the closely united work of Joseph and Martha on the Canaan farm. At times what Buckler seems to be doing here is to reveal in further detail his source material for the earlier

book.

There are, however, differences. The number of people described and discussed is much larger, because here the writer seems to be concerned with a whole community. Many individuals are examined, as if a roll-call were being read, from hard-working farmers and their wives and children, to the postmistress and the rural mail-man, the school-teacher and the electoral returning officer. The portraits are realistic, but drawn with affection and humour. Norstead contained its share of true individuals with all their pride and independence, "But never so stiff with this as to look the other way if someone needed help".<sup>37</sup> Unlike the inhabitants of lesser places, "the apartness of village life . . . didn't warp, curdle, ossify or capsize their minds . . . 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".<sup>38</sup> Buckler lists some of these people by name in the chapter entitled "A to Z". The whole book, however, is a monument to their way of life.

Methods of working the land, or of dealing with animals, the design of houses with the centrality of kitchens emphasized, the social festivities, weddings, funerals, joys and disasters are all recounted. Relationships, of parents

and grandparents to children and to each other, of children to their playmates, of young people to their sweethearts, are all defined with a kind of double vision, realistically with small vignettes interspersed to illustrate ways of doing and thinking, yet poetically, too, to show the delight or the sorrow which lie at the heart of these experiences.

Although the vocabulary of these people is sparse, they manage, nevertheless, to express themselves, as for example when a man shows a friend a new field he has made and planted: "Well, by God, ain't that a pretty sight! And a year ago that was just alders and hardhacks!"<sup>39</sup> Buckler says of them, "Their talk could be a dull rosary of empty shells they ticked off like parrotry or like a flash of eyelight that showed the whole blood-mesh of feeling behind it".<sup>40</sup> In the chapter entitled "As the Saying Went, or Slugs and Gluts", Buckler examines their set phrases which express so much of their modes of thinking. But their paucity of expression does not lend itself to any easy flights of fancy, and they lack the imaginative rhetoric of the Irish. Yet, as Buckler points out, "their talk was no measure of them".

Since birth they had seen the wind and heard the sun and touched the voice of the rain. They had learned from this the art of instant translation. From sense to sense. From self to self. So that half a dozen words from one man was all that was needed to set up a whole mirror of responses in the other. "Come see the colt." "Yes, he died in the night." Words as simple as that could be charged with whole courts and zodiacs of meaning.<sup>41</sup>

Buckler is particularly concerned with the close relationship of marriage, which he portrays as more than the merely physical, as something which is not only a working partnership but a long intimate comradeship. "Love", he says, "played no pranks, wore no finery -- and in its thousand simple forms was more than sex the invisible breadstuff of the spirit."<sup>42</sup> This quality is shown in the marriage of the Canaans in The Mountain and the Valley, and again in the smaller portraits in Ox Bells and Fireflies. What is emphasized is the awareness each partner possesses of the good life each of them has built in ways that are separate but intermeshed and united. This feeling strongly knits the whole family and all its possessions together, work, relaxation, the food they grow and eat. "Everything around us seems to be the fruit of us."<sup>43</sup> Such love is inexpressible in words, but demonstrated by the mutuality of effort and by simple acts and gestures of care, protectiveness and generosity.

Offsetting all this warmth is the chill of loneliness, for those whose family circle has been destroyed by death, or for those who have always been solitary, or for those unfortunates who had to live in cities. "In the city, the tight imperious mouths and the taut impervious eyes batter you until you feel a ghostliness inside you like the lettering on a discarded wrapper tumbled by a heedless wind."<sup>44</sup> How different is Norstead, where you knew everyone you met, and no

one was a stranger. The author notes that unhappiness there is a mere parenthesis, and they do not suffer from loneliness. "These people suffered all the pains there are, but nothing in them ever had to die alone."<sup>45</sup>

Buckler tries to protect himself from the charge of mere sentimental reminiscence in two ways. First he points out that memory is often "misleading and treacherously sentimental". But he then goes on:

The heart, far less misty-eyed than the mind . . . is a far sounder witness. Once in a while it leaps of its own accord -- through the skin, through the flesh, though the bone -- straight back to the pulse of another time, and takes all of you with it. 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.<sup>46</sup>

In a very Proustian way, he notes that these returns to the past are always involuntary, "no pressure of will can force them", but whatever their immediate cause, "it is only this sleight of heart that can unlock 'ago' like the master key of dream".<sup>47</sup>

The second method by which Buckler tries to offset the utopian, idealistic picture of Norstead is to point out the shadows to be found, not, it is true, in Norstead itself, but in other places where there are villages inhabited by tight-fisted, mean and malicious people. He describes such a world in the chapter, "Like Spaces, Other Cases", his metaphors exuding satire. He says of these villagers, "they



were nothing but their own dry bread", "their laughter sounded like sandpaper on glass",<sup>48</sup> and he draws a horrifying picture of a dull, sottish people. In a lighter vein, he describes with relish their petty quarrels over how much to spend on a funeral wreath, or the price of aprons at a church sale. In this way, Buckler shows us that he is aware of the hateful quality of many small communities, and the dark side of human nature.

Although this is amusing, one feels that it is the author's ritualistic bow toward the sacred demands of realism. His heart and soul are enmeshed in the memories of his lovely Norstead where the people are generous, trusting, proud and endearing. If what he has drawn for us seems at times wistfully arcadian, it none the less has its own ring of truth, of authenticity. Even were it not so, one would be enticed into believing in it all, folk ways and communal assistance and family relationships, simply because the author embroiders the basic patterns all over with his own baroque ornamentation. Subject and style fuse together to create something warm and living, but also rich and strange.

Besides these three books, over the years Buckler has written a substantial number of articles and short stories, published in various Canadian journals: Maclean's, Saturday Night, the Atlantic Advocate. As already noted,

some of these were other handlings of themes which appear in the novels; many are amusing trivia. Curiously, there are few traces in them of the highly wrought style which forms so important an element in his major work. Nor does he appear to have mastered the actual form of the short story, as Raddall has. Buckler's short stories lack the firmness and drive of Raddall's best work in this field. They are slight and episodic, and need the magic transmutation which they undergo when Buckler incorporates them into his longer works.

Pre-eminently, Buckler's style is the real hallmark of his creative effort. It demands attention from the reader; it is difficult, brilliant, and takes some getting used to. Yet it is not totally unfamiliar, since there are echoes in it of a number of twentieth century masters: Joyce, Eliot, Proust, Woolf, Dylan Thomas. It is clear, however, that he is no mere imitator. Like these writers he has a passion for language and in his own way shows himself a master of poetic prose diction. It is as if, like them, he has caught the spirit of the time; like them he is imagistic, fluent, flexible, symbolic, and sometimes precious. Like them he is concerned with nuances of feeling, and like them he forces his language to carry a heavy weight of related associations. It is by this advanced stylistic method that Buckler, for all his concern with the past,

relates himself very closely to modern literary movements. And it is for this reason that his work stands apart from that of his fellow Maritimers, and therefore, in the opinion of many, towers above them.

NOTES  
CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>D. O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was", Canadian Literature, No. 32 (Spring 1967), 40-56.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Buckler, The Mountain and the Valley (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1961), p. 152.

<sup>4</sup>Claude Bissell, Introduction, The Mountain and the Valley, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup>Buckler, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 295-6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 298-9.

<sup>11</sup>T. S. Eliot, Burnt Norton.

<sup>12</sup>Buckler, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 118.
- <sup>18</sup>Bissell, Introduction, The Mountain and the Valley, p. xii.
- <sup>19</sup>Buckler, The Cruellest Month (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), p. 110.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 248.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 248-9.
- <sup>22</sup>The Mountain and the Valley, p. 261.
- <sup>23</sup>The Cruellest Month, p. 12.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 281.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 290.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 293.
- <sup>27</sup>Buckler, "The Rebellion of Young David", Macleans, LXIV, No. 22 (November 15, 1951).
- <sup>28</sup>Buckler, "Glance in the Mirror", Atlantic Advocate, XLVII, No. 5 (January 1957).
- <sup>29</sup>Buckler, "Cleft Rock with Spring", Atlantic Advocate, XLVIII, No. 2 (October 1957).
- <sup>30</sup>The Cruellest Month, pp. 280-1.
- <sup>31</sup>Claude Bissell, Dalhousie Review, XLIII (1963-64).
- <sup>32</sup>Robert Harlow, Canadian Literature, No. 19 (1964).
- <sup>33</sup>D. O. Spettigue, op. cit., p. 54.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-6.

<sup>35</sup>Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-7.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

CHAPTER III  
CHARLES BRUCE

Like Buckler, Charles Bruce is a Nova Scotian by birth, but unlike his fellow novelist, he has not spent his working life in the Maritimes. He began his writing career as a reporter on the Halifax Chronicle, but later joined the Canadian Press and rose to be its head. In this connection his latest work, News and the Southams, published in 1968, is a history of the Southam newspaper kingdom. Yet, though his working life has led Bruce far away from the shores of Nova Scotia, in his poetry and his fiction he has returned unerringly and imaginatively to that region which is for him a landscape of love.

In a foreword to The Channel Shore (1954), his first novel, Bruce states:

You will not find the Channel Shore, so named or in an exact geography, on any map or chart. But there is a province of Nova Scotia. Two provinces, perhaps. A land of hills and fields and woods and moving water. And the image of that land, sensuous with the sound of seas and voices, in those who live or have lived there: a country of the mind, the remembering blood. If it is necessary to locate the Shore, consider these twin lands: and take the edge of any county, on the coast of either one.<sup>1</sup>

A statement such as this is full of echoes of Buckler and Raddall, but it should not be so regarded, but rather as demonstrating the strength and power of the region which is

homeland and heartland for these three writers.

That the setting is very important to Bruce is evident in the care with which he outlines the geography of his community, for all his assertion that it is not to be found on any map. Upshore, downshore, north, south, east or west are constantly referred to, and there is a particularity of place names and positions, as in the following passage:

At the top of the hill the land levelled out. From there a person could look east and west along the northern fields and pastures of almost all the places at Currie Head, separated by line fences and the untidy hedges of young wild-apple trees the years had grown there. You could look west to the cross-roads, where the school-house road branched north from the shore to the school and the church, and beyond the cross-roads to the farms stretching away to the neighbouring district of Leeds. You could look east across the fields and woods of Currie Head to the district of Katen's Rocks. Or let your sight drift out over the down-sloping lower fields and clusters of pitch-roofed farm buildings to the stretch of sea they called the Channel. And beyond it to the Islands; west to the Upper Islands opposite Morgan's Harbour, or east along those island coasts, merged by distance, to the mist of the Lion's Mane, thirty miles away to the southeast where Channel met Atlantic.<sup>2</sup>

Since The Channel Shore is a long leisurely novel, there is ample room for such exactitude of detail. In the course of the narrative the reader becomes acquainted with the general pattern of land, farm, building, and with the life that is lived there. The life is very much the same as that lived in Buckler's Norstead: work on the land repeated in a cycle. Bruce calls it, "a pattern repeated with small differences through the seasons, month after month and year after year.



Snow, sun, cloud, and frost. Planting, haying, digging, woods work, and for the few at Currie Head who still ~~bothered with the Channel~~, the brief season of fish".<sup>3</sup>

In his use of the pastoral world of Nova Scotia, Bruce stands somewhere half way between Raddall and Buckler -- close to Buckler in his creation of a community of farmers, independent yet ever willing to help a neighbour, and akin to Raddall in his interest in and love for the sea. In Bruce's world, farmers are also at times fishermen, and the sea is much closer, more intimately connected to their way of life than it ever is in Buckler's novels. The great elements for Buckler are the mountain and the valley, for his people live inland, but Bruce's world, as his title implies, lies among farms which run down to the sea. Farmers have their fisherman's huts along the beach, full of their gear. In earlier times, there had been great mackerel runs along the shore; then a man could make money fishing. But the mackerel no longer came, and all that remained were the herring to be netted, cleaned and salted down, sold eventually for very little money. Many farmers had, in fact, abandoned any kind of fishing, but for men like Richard McKee, the month he could spend herring-fishing was "the core of a life that for eleven months was concerned with chopping wood, cleaning stables, ploughing, getting in the hay".<sup>4</sup>

In this world, the sea is always present as a background of sound, a scarcely heard but continuous susurrations, which the author describes variously as "the old deliberate murmur of surf on stone",<sup>5</sup> or "the whispered rumour of swell on gravel".<sup>6</sup> At times this sound is intensified to suit a mood or situation. When Grant and Anna are at the parting of their ways, he hears the sea sound. "The low grumble of Katen's Rocks was a slow distant undertone to the soft lapping of swell on packed sand at the Channel's edge. Grant sat without speech or movement until the sombre rise and fall of it seemed like something inside his skull, without beginning and without end."<sup>7</sup>

Bruce uses the shore itself and all its associations in a multitude of ways: as a symbol of the passing of time and the changes in economic life (for instance the disappearance of the mackerel, and of the big sailing ships), or as a romantic and wistful element in the nature of such men as Richard McKee and Stewart Gordon, or as the setting for certain central scenes in the narrative structure of the novel, such as the afternoon Anse Gordon waits unavailingly for Hazel. Other equally or even more important scenes, dramatic and highly emotional, also take place on the shore: the meeting between Anna and Grant at which he tries to explain his confusion of mind caused by his uncle James' statements about mixed marriages, a meeting which turns out to be their

last; and of course the final dramatic confrontation between Alan and Anse, the resolution of the emotional tension set up by their curious relationship.

The seashore and the sea itself, as well as farmland and woodland, are all components of Bruce's setting. Yet time too is an important factor. Buckler's phrase, "the pure unalloyed fabrics of Time, Place and Sentience"<sup>8</sup> may be used to describe the essential structural elements of most novels. Bruce uses time less impressionistically than Buckler, but introduces some variations of straightforward chronological time which echo the connotations of Buckler's word, "fabric".

The narrative structure of The Channel Shore makes use of time in an almost, but not quite circular way. The prologue (not so named) takes place in 1945, with a chance meeting of Bill Graham and Anse Gordon in London at the close of World War II. This accidental meeting sends them both, in their quite separate ways and lives, back to the Channel Shore, Bill as an outside observer of the actions of the main characters, and Anse to take up once more, however briefly, the life of the Shore which he had abandoned in 1919. The main body of the novel is divided into three parts, each carefully placed in time: Part One, Summer-Fall 1919; Part Two, Winter 1933-1934; Part Three, Summer 1946. But each of these sections is separated from the next by short passages,

1945, 1946, and in conclusion, again 1946.

By these means, although the reader is swept backward and forward in time, the events and the actions of the characters and their consequences are made explicit in relation to two global events, the two World Wars; yet the wars themselves are treated only peripherally. Anse and Grant join the armed forces in the first conflict; Anse and Alan are both involved in the second. The first of Anse's many acts of selfishness and cruelty to his parents is mentioned in connection with his war service. He does not come home on his embarkation leave, though naturally eagerly looked for. The author states:

Josie was not a demonstrative woman, but something in her had broken three years ago. Anse . . . .They had known he was free on embarkation leave. She could still see Stewart in his cane-bottomed chair at supper-time, starting up at the sound of wheels, hurrying out to watch Adam Falt approach from Cope-land. But Adam's waggon had not stopped at the Gordons' gate with the dark grinning passenger they watched for.<sup>9</sup>

The wars and war-service simply serve as milestones of time. The full dramatic action of the novel takes place in the community of the Shore. Anse's mysterious comings and goings are central to the main theme, but except for the first instance, have little connection with war. When he returns in 1919, he rapidly becomes bored with the familiar farm life and starts an affair with Hazel McKee who is not at

all the kind of girl he would normally take an interest in. "It was this impulse to the unusual, sprouting in a mind already beginning to feel the nagging of the humdrum and the habitual, that caused him to ask."<sup>10</sup> Hazel who belongs to the respectable, Puritanical world of the Protestant end of the Shore, is a surprise to Anse, for she flings herself into his arms with passionate eagerness. But it is she who has the courage and resolution to withdraw from him. It is her rejection that sends Anse away in a fury, without a word to anyone, unaware that Hazel is pregnant.

This affair in itself constitutes only a small interlude in the overall texture of interlocking themes, a mere dramatic event which brings about a sad recognition of the tragic element in life. Yet the fruit of this somewhat unusual relationship, Alan -- considering the individuals, their character and their upbringing -- contributes directly to the cumulative effect of overlapping relationships in Bruce's narrative.

It is apparent that the focal concern and the central theme of the novel is the father-son relationship established between Grant Marshall and Alan, Hazel's child, when he married Hazel after Anna's death. This marriage, entered into willingly as a generous act, and perhaps partially as a kind of expiation for his denial of Anna, gives Grant the rich reward of having Alan as his legal son, although Hazel dies.

Grant spends the next twenty-six years establishing a close and tender relationship with this child, as he grows up into boyhood and young manhood. The vital question that the author raises here concerns the very nature of fatherhood: is it merely a physical matter, or can it be built up of love, care, and kinship of mind?

The question becomes crucial to both Grant and Alan, when Anse suddenly returns to the Shore, after the chance meeting with Bill Graham, the incident with which the novel opens. Grant's marriage to Hazel, and later his marriage with Rennie Fraser, the birth of their daughter Margaret and his steady rise in wealth and prestige within the community have for the most part silenced gossiping tongues. Yet this is not altogether the case; the whole middle section of the novel deals with Alan's slow discovery of the truth of his parentage, although he remains uncommunicative on this subject. Anse's return, however, at once sets up violent tensions between Alan and Grant, who believes that Alan knows nothing of his true parentage. The situation becomes one of anguish for all except Anse who undeniably enjoys it, and sets himself to win Alan away from Grant, and from the established world of the Shore.

The struggle becomes, in a sense, almost a conflict between sea and shore, for Stewart Gordon's two-masted schooner, reconditioned by Anse, becomes symbolically for

him a means to draw Alan away from the dull life of farming, and allows him to offer, in his own indirect fashion, a full working partnership, as fishermen, to the young man who is, by blood, his own son. It is only after Alan, equally indirectly, has refused this private offer, that Anse openly challenges Grant, and openly before the entire community assembled at its annual shore picnic, declares his relationship with Alan in two separate statements: "If I'd known I'd planted a crop here, I'd have stayed to watch it grow", and when Alan strikes him, "Well -- I can't cut down my own flesh and blood".<sup>11</sup> Alan's answer, "No. But I can",<sup>12</sup> not only hits Anse's pride and egotism, but also finally settles the crucial issue of fatherhood. Whatever the blood heritage, Alan has opted for the closer ties of love and shared interest in life on the Shore. His relationship to the Gordons is publicly accepted, and the way cleared for his future marriage to Margaret, Grant's daughter. For Anse, there remains only one thing to do, to run away once more, and this he does by means of the ship which he had rebuilt to capture his son. Alan's rejection of Anse could represent a triumph for the established morality of the Shore community, a point of view, a way of life as well as judgment, choice and means of comparison with Grant.

The relief to all concerned in the conflict is expressed in Richard McKee's thoughts that evening:

The final satisfaction to Richard's mind was that in the end Anse Gordon had destroyed himself. In the end the word and the act that pronounced his claim and established it had destroyed whatever threat there was in it. Established the emptiness of fact in the face of warm and living truth. Established the link between Grant and Alan, and perhaps Hazel, as a thing deeper and more telling than the accident of blood.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, although the resolution of Alan's problem is spiritual rather than physical, Bruce is very much aware of the heritage of blood. The Marshalls, for instance, are descendants of clerks, civil servants and such inland folk; James Marshall ignores the presence of the sea and concentrates on being the best farmer in the neighbourhood. "James came of people who were all clerk and farmer, who didn't know a gunnel from a thole-pin."<sup>14</sup> It is typical that Grant, like his uncle, has no interest in the sea, while Alan, the grandson of Stewart Gordon and Richard McKee, feels at once the fascination of sailing in Anse's sloop, "the lift and scent of the hull, the freshness of the wet wind, the fluent curve of sailcloth, the march of rolling water".<sup>15</sup>

At the other end of the social spectrum, the Katens demonstrate an inheritance of bad blood. Felix, the father, who is believed to have a shady past, runs a small store selling tobacco, candy and pop, as well as other commodities. The store became a social centre for the young, however disapproved of by their elders. But the Katens also sold rum under the counter, and were suspect in other ways. The



author says, "In Lon particularly the bad blood was dark and obvious".<sup>16</sup> Yet there is a mystery about the genetic inheritance. Why should that proud malicious spirit, Anse, be born to the gentle Stewart and the courageous Josie Gordon? And why should the third generation of Katens produce someone like Buff who is a friend and admirer of Alan's, someone in whom, "the sardonic Katen face was softened by an habitual cast of friendly curiosity and faint puzzled surprise"?<sup>17</sup> It is Bill Graham, the outside commentator, who makes the author's own answer, when Grant expresses annoyance at the friendship between Alan and Buff:

"Well, if you don't like someone you don't like him, that's all . . . . But you sound kind of like someone talking about Jews, lumping a race or a family all together. You can't like or dislike on the basis of a whole race. Or a family. It's the person. I don't like Lon much myself. But I think quite a lot of Buff. Don't you think -- well, nobody's a copy of his father, good or bad. All kinds of things get scribbled in, from other people, other generations. Or edited out. You can't figure inheritance on a slide rule . . . ."18

It is clear that just as much as Raddall, Bruce is deeply interested in and concerned with genealogical background, as among other things a means of reaching into the past. He states: "In continuity, when it didn't trap you, there was something, a warmth, that people like Bill Graham searched the past for, taking an obscure and private pride in their knowledge of it".<sup>19</sup>

As well as by genealogy, the past is brought into the present by memory and reminiscence. Sometimes this is presented in the musing thoughts of older people who knew long dead actors on this same scene, or sometimes by direct story-telling, as when Alan and Margaret take Alec Neill some loaves of bread, and he tells them tales of Richard McKee and his son Joe, or an apocryphal and funny story about James Marshall. Grant Marshall, for his part, has always longed to know more about his father, Harvey, but is unable to ask. He listens in, however, when young Bill Graham and Stan Currie question Hugh Currie about the past, and about the history of what is known as "Grant's Place". Grant had never heard the story.

He hadn't known that this land Uncle James had bought was a part of history, of tradition at the Head. What had the land meant to Bill Graham's great-aunt Fanny, with Rob Currie forever gone? The Yankee mate. Was that romantic love, or escape from the piercing reminders, the familiar things? No one would ever know. But what they knew was enough.<sup>20</sup>

The author suggests that the busy men of this community did not often talk about the past, since their concern was naturally with the present and the future. He notes, however, that "when they did look back, there was warmth in it".<sup>21</sup>

Bruce manages to recall the past and make it come alive in the present by means of yet another device: the use of objects and the wealth of association which they convey. When Alan explores the loft of Richard McKee's workshop, he

finds various ancient articles in an old sea-chest, including a brass plate, pitted like a thimble, which turns out to be a sail-maker's palm. Richard is an expert at many of the old skills, now almost forgotten. The things which Alan handles give him a sense of the past which is both revealing and sad. "For the first time, he was conscious of glimpsing yesterday, today and tomorrow as part of a continuing whole. It put things in balance, and in a kind of abstract way was comforting when you thought about it."<sup>22</sup>

Margaret has a somewhat similar revelation one evening when she visits Josie. When she lights a kerosene lamp for Josie (who has refused to instal electricity) Josie mentions a "slut", such as was used fifty years ago. This, Josie explains, was a saucer of fish-oil and a lit rag.<sup>23</sup> As Josie recalls her own hard-working girlhood, in her mind Margaret reviews the whole economic history of Nova Scotia, its sad decline from the impoverished but proud independence that Josie remembers, the economy of the original settlers, to a world of wages and industrialized products in which there were no opportunities for the young, and therefore many left to find what they wanted.

Yet somehow some of them stayed. Margaret meditates that the story of the Shore was "the story of a strange fertility. A fertility of flesh and blood that sent its seed blowing across continents of space on the winds of time, and

yet was rooted here in home soil, renewed and re-renewed".<sup>24</sup> For Margaret, this is a kind of epiphany, and for the first time she identifies herself not merely with the close circle of family, but with the whole community. For here the sense of home and of time are united and deepened.

Time took care of everything, one way or another. But the manner in which it took care of things depended on people . . . time in itself was not enough. Life was shaped, slowly, by the character of people, but it took time. That was what Richard must have meant, time and people. You had to put some faith in both. Margaret shook her head in her old habit of trying to find words in which to pin a thought. If people were all right, time would work it out.<sup>25</sup>

People in all their variety, with all their individuality and idiosyncrasies are of principal concern and naturally of major interest to the author. Indeed the main strength of Bruce's novel lies in the power and subtlety of his character portrayal. This is demonstrated not only in the main characters, Anse, Grant, Alan and Margaret, but also by the portraits of the somewhat lesser people who also play their roles and make their contributions. Richard McKee, that silent man, is shown as a tower of strength to his daughter and his grandson; Stewart Gordon, a born loser and ineffective farmer, comes across with a kind of gentle charm; Josie Gordon, whose life is basically tragic, displays magnificent dignity and integrity in the face of adversity.

Of the four main characters, Anse and Alan are

undoubtedly successful. Anse's arrogance, his unconcealed (except where politic) contempt for the residents of the Shore, his egotistical desire to play a central role in some kind of malicious drama within the community, are all portrayed, not by mere description but by action. Alan, who resembles him in feature, has inherited none of this basic evil. In his own right, apart from real or acquired inheritance, he is a definite personality, sensitive yet enquiring, obedient yet independent. He follows his own lines of reasoning and feeling, and this projects him, at fourteen, into finding out for himself the truth about his parentage. It is typical of the natural reserve of both Grant and Alan, that Alan does not reveal to Grant what he has discovered. What is produced is not revelation but decision. He announces that he intends to stay on the Shore, and finish his schooling under Renie, rather than accept his father's plans for a prolonged visit to Halifax which could only result in an alienation of Alan from home, family and the Shore community. As a young boy, therefore, Alan shows more spirit than Grant was able to summon in his twenties, when faced by James Marshall's interference in his love affair with Anna.

Admittedly the situations are different, but Grant, who is the central character in the book, shows himself in this very personal matter, too easily influenced by James. Yet later, after Anna's death, he has the courage to defy

his uncle, by moving into the Gordon household where he becomes the prop and mainstay of that stricken family. Such a vacillation, though psychologically motivated, undermines to some extent the concept of Grant as hero. Yet it is clear that the author does intend him to be taken as admirable: a strong, immensely competent man, with the Marshall flair for business opportunity, as in his judgment about the possibilities of the backwoods, as a source of pulpwood. At the same time, he is a man of tenderness and compassion in relationship with those he loves; yet Alan resents Grant's habit (rather like James!) of making decisions without consulting the parties concerned.

In his conversation with Renie, in which he tells her about Hazel, Grant denies that his life with the Gordons was any sort of atonement, yet adds, "I didn't feel entirely guilty. . . .At least that wasn't the whole of it. I was mad, sore. Hardly knew what at. But free".<sup>26</sup> Speaking of his marriage to Hazel, he remarks, "We'd have been all right, if she'd lived . . . .All right. In the end we both learned something. Not a damn thing matters but what people can do for each other, when they're up against it". To this, Renie asks, "That's your religion, is it, Grant?" He replies, "Yes".<sup>27</sup>

Despite all Bruce's care to create someone heroic in Grant, there remains some doubt in the reader's mind. He

epitomizes much that is best in his community, but also some of its weaknesses -- in his concern about ill-natured gossip, for instance. For all his goodness of heart, what he lacks is a certain geniality, a sense of humour perhaps, which is to be found in others like Frank Graham or Alec Neill.

On the other hand, Margaret, Grant's daughter, is a thoroughly believable character. Even as a child her personality is strong and persuasive, eager, responsive and determined. Her unhappiness when she finds herself in love with Alan in what is, on the surface at least, an incestuous position is readily understandable. In typical Marshall fashion, she confides in neither father nor mother, but eventually seeks advice from Richard McKee, no blood relation of her own. The virtue she has to learn is patience.

Interestingly enough, Bruce accomplishes something that not many even prominent and successful writers manage -- all his female characters are well drawn and distinctive: Jane Marshall, Eva McKee, Renie Fraser, Josie Gordon, and even, at the very bottom of the social scale, poor Vangie Murphy.

Bruce also examines the interplay of human relationships in minute detail, with meticulous attention to the ebb and flow of feeling between two loving people, as between Alan and Grant, for example, when Grant decides to send the

boy away from the Shore to save him from possible gossip about his birth. Since he makes no explanation to Alan, and drops all his plans for joint projects, the boy is deeply hurt, yet the relationship endures and even deepens. The subtly changing relationship between Alan and Margaret is also dealt with skilfully; their growing love must remain unexpressed until time and event change their situation. The tensions that are built up by Anse's return affect all three most closely concerned, but Renie too suffers at this time with a sense of being excluded from what is most central to the other members of her family; she is lonely and unhappy.

Although Bruce obviously does not make any attempt at the kind of totality which haunts the mind of Buckler's David, he does very clearly see that life is a matter of relationships which, however stable, can never be static, of lights and shadows, of the intermingling of character and situation, tragedy and comedy. Although the heart may be lonely, life consists in being part of a community. Buckler's great image of the expanding and contracting concentric circles is here replaced by the image of the interlinked circles, a kinship of separate families, in which past and present are tied together in a complex pattern. The stress is always on feeling.

The communal life drawn by Bruce in The Channel Shore is closely akin to that of Buckler's Ox Bells and Fireflies -- the willing service to others in need, the lending out of



labour and machinery, the rallying round at times of danger or death. Yet this novel lacks the curiously religious quality of Buckler's writing, especially in The Mountain and the Valley, as for instance the spiritual symbolism of the Canaan's farm, by means of which Buckler moves his presentation from the particular to the timeless and universal. In contrast the folk who live on the Channel Shore are a pious lot, with James Marshall as perhaps the perfect symbol of a rigorous Puritanism, but it is useful to note that he is presented in a most unsympathetic manner. He is a cold man whose one weakness is his love for Grant, the son of a beloved brother. Yet though he dislikes Alan, and begrudges him the name of Marshall, he is totally unable to speak out against him, out of malice. Apart from the Katens, the Channel Shore community has a basic decency, a respect for strength of purpose and an inner reserve, all of which go along with a certain tolerance of individual quirks and oddities.

Bruce, indeed, seems to equate religion with a moral and social code; his people have worked out a way of life which establishes a communal brotherhood. Grant's statement, "Nothing matters a damn but what people can do for each other, when they're up against it"<sup>28</sup> seems to sum up the heart of the matter. This basic humanism is an essential quality of Bruce's community, binding it together, and expressing itself

in action, or occasionally in a kind of homespun philosophy, as in Richard McKee's statements, already quoted. There is the true Scottish respect for learning, even though its pursuit at higher levels means leaving the Shore. It is a hard-working respectable but non-affluent life that is lived there, but it is free and independent, and this is what they cherish. Stan Currie, as he drives Bill Graham to the station (at the end of the novel) meditates aloud on the life of the Shore. People came there, in the first place, as a rebellion against overlords:

"I'll bet you most of them ended up here because they couldn't stand being pushed around. Highlanders, lowlanders, Irishmen, Catholics, Protestants, loyalists, all kinds . . . Only one thing they all had. They will not take a pushing 'round. Not for ever. They'll stand most anything from land and sea. That's all right. Nobody else is telling them . . ."29

Stan sees the movement by the young away from the Shore as another act of rebellion, but he sees it as ending in frustration, since the ordinary man has nowhere to go but to the cities where he becomes a wage-slave. Stan himself has rejected this and has returned to the freedom and independent life of the Shore. Bill Graham, who is perhaps the author's alter ego, knows that he will never live on the Shore, but feels an inner certainty that for him it will always be "home".

In his portrait of this small world of the Channel Shore, Bruce is obviously more realistic than Buckler, far

less intense, and less poetic. Yet his prose style has its own poetic quality which comes out mainly in its rhythms, its long slow cadences, rather than in any unusual or startling images, or powerful descriptive passages such as Raddall provides. There is also a strongly romantic emphasis on the importance of emotion, even in a way of life which is based on ceaseless physical toil. Many passages might be quoted to prove this point. For instance, when Grant hears some story, at last, of his father's boyhood, it satisfies some inner longing of the heart.

You couldn't nail this feeling down to any sense of logic. One laughing glimpse or two across the darkness of a generation. But this was enough.

He did not really think of it, but he could see, hear, feel, the colour and light. The talk, the laughter, and the anger. The work, the sweat, and the wind cooling the sweat. Burning hayfields and spring freshets, the snow and the frost. The whole moving dream of the Shore, a generation gone.

And in this last he saw the face and heard the laughter of Harvey Marshall. Harvey, a Marshall, touched by the thing that pulsed in the Grahams, the Curries, the Neills, the McKees. The thing that was not exactly warmth, not sentiment, not . . . The thing that was alive, that was not cold doctrine or property or measured pride, but simple feeling. Life and death and achievement and failure. Laughter-wrinkles in a man's face, and the taste of tears. He was not thinking consciously of all this as it touched himself. This was not thought but feeling . . . From this day on he would know without thinking that all he did, and all he dreamed of, were woven into that.<sup>30</sup>

After the long rich amplitude of The Channel Shore, Bruce's second novel, The Township of Time (1959) must come as a disappointment, though not so extreme a one as was

Buckler's The Cruellest Month. In a curious way, Bruce's later work is more akin to Ox Bells and Fireflies. In both cases, these authors seem to have assembled the basic material out of which they created their earlier novels, and moulded it together in their own individual fashions. Like Ox Bells and Fireflies, The Township of Time cannot be called a novel. Bruce has chosen to name it "A Chronicle". It consists of a series of short stories, based on the lives of the early settlers and later inhabitants of the Channel Shore, from 1796 to 1950.

Seven of these stories first appeared in the Atlantic Advocate at various times from 1955 to 1958. All are concerned with different generations of the families whose modern representatives are to be found in the pages of The Channel Shore, or with families who gave their names to places along the Shore.

The first two, "The Sloop 1786", "Tidewater Morning 1787" tell the stories of Colin Forrester and Richard McKee at the time of the very first settlements on this part of the Nova Scotia coast. Here Bruce moves into Raddall territory, with references to the patchwork of settlements established by different groups. Those who had the hardest time were the southerners, refugees from the Carolinas, Georgia, even Florida, set ashore with little in the way of equipment or supplies, and with few practical skills. It is among these folk that Colin finds himself a bride, Lydia. Their six

daughters fulfil the laughing projection of the first Richard McKee; they become the great-grandmothers for the whole north shore.

It is Richard McKee's story that is told in "Tidewater Morning 1787". He and his friend John Cameron had come to the new world in Simon Fraser's regiment. After the war was over, they were given land in Nova Scotia. It is on a transport en route to Halifax that he meets Colin Forrester still wearing the faded green of Tarleton's Legion. When Richard's wife dies, he decides to leave the country and his so painfully cleared fields. But he pauses on the way to say good-bye to John Cameron, the one person in the world who would understand his going. There he finds another tragedy, with John dead by accident, and his wife Primrose left alone with a small son. That son, Richard McKee Cameron, and another son, John Cameron McKee, born to Richard and Primrose who have solved their personal griefs by marriage, later marry two of Colin Forrester's daughters, and thus fulfil Richard's prophecy, and establish the next generation of farmers on the coast.

"Pond Place 1800-1" and "Juniper 1813" continue with the stories of this second generation. With "Cadence 1834" the author reaches the third generation. This is the story of Naomi Neill, grand-daughter of Colin Forrester. It is a tale very like Raddall's little masterpiece, "The Wedding

Gift". Both are concerned with determined young women who manage to make the most of a bad storm which maroons them for the night with the young men they wish to marry. "Nomie" has to teach her stuffy young man, Francis Harvey, a lesson in good manners and in real values. But as is usual with Bruce, the sense of close-knit patterns woven by time is also conveyed in Francis's meditation after Naomi falls asleep:

The girl's off-hand talk about her grandfather, dead now, and old McKee and Judge Baillie. Old Richard McKee from the Tidewater. Richard as a six-year old. Where? Somewhere in Scotland, most likely. Then, a young man, in this country. The flesh aging, the trails becoming roads. Fields and pastures somehow opening in the woods. And children like Naomi, the third generation now, primitive still, but . . . . How will it be when Naomi Neill is eighty?<sup>31</sup>

Though Francis Harvey, who in later life becomes an Attorney General in Ontario, cannot see into the future, the author gives us a picture of Naomi at eighty, in a later tale entitled "Duke Street 1896". Here Naomi has summoned young Andrew Graham to take tea with her one Sunday. This is the same Andrew whom we hear about in The Channel Shore, the seventy-year old father of Bill Graham. In the short story, Andrew is a young lecturer at the university; it is six years since he has left the Shore. Yet Naomi keeps asking about people and events as if all time were jumbled together. For Andrew, "it was as though the walls of time were down. As if, distant but still around them, men and women who until now had been nothing but names to Andrew, were living flesh and bone".<sup>32</sup> At the end, she gives Andrew a silver paper-

weight in the shape of a running stag. This creates another link with The Channel Shore. When Grant comes to Toronto to marry Hazel, he visits the Grahams. Bill, remembering this event in 1946, recalls the scene. "He could see the black leather of his father's chair, the golden oak desk, the paperweight in the shape of a silver stag".<sup>33</sup>

By devices such as these, memories, family names, incidents, stories, objects, Bruce makes his linkages between one period of time and another. Characters appear as youngsters in one tale, to reappear as adults in a later one. In this way one may trace a personal history through a long period of time. Thus Colin Forrester, the great-grandson of the original settler of that name, appears as a boy so eager to go fishing that he accepts a job with Long George Graham, with whom nobody wished to go because he was so cranky. In "The Fiddlers of Point M'sieu 1873" he learns a lot about handling boats and fishing. The author returns to the story of Colin Forrester in "Voyage Home 1910". Here Forrester, a well-known seaman on the trade routes of the world, is seen idling on the docks of Wilmot Town, while waiting for his sailing companion to turn up and is accosted by a stranger who tells him of death and sickness in his kin folk long left behind him. His cousin had run away leaving a wife dying of diphtheria and a young son, with only the child's widowed grandmother to look after everything. At once

Forrester abandons his own career and returns home to run the ancestral farm and to bring up young John.

We learn much of his character from young John's story, as related in two tales, "The Bad Day 1921" and later, "The Wind in the Juniper 1945" which tells of Colin's death at the time of John's graduation. John Forrester's story is that of a brilliant nuclear physicist, given his chance of education by the self-sacrifice of his great-uncle. So much of that life and sacrifice becomes clear to John as he lies dying of accidental irradiation. Here the linking objects include the juniper tree planted originally by the first Colin Forrester, and the fiddle which the Captain once played at Point M'sieu.

A similar story of a self-sacrificial return is related in "People from Away 1917" in which an aunt comes back to share her brother's life and to look after his motherless son. What is made clear is that the ties of family are strong enough to reach out and bring back people who have left the Shore to make lives for themselves elsewhere.

Nostalgia and a sense of home-coming bring others back by less direct means, as in the case of Bart Somers, "The Sloop 1939". Bart is a newspaper man in New York who has married a heartless woman. After their divorce he comes back to Morgan's Harbour, in a search for something of his



boyhood's past which will help him. He finds the answers to his unhappiness, not by land or by meeting boyhood friends with whom he now has little in common, but by taking to the sea in an old sloop. One evening at anchor he is hailed by a young woman called Prim Sinclair, and she recalls their meeting as children years ago. Through her Bart believes that he will once more find his way back into the close family kinship of the Shore.

Unlike Ox Bells and Fireflies in which Buckler limits himself to a particular period of time, Bruce in his second work, as has been shown, covers nearly two hundred years, to create, in his own phrase, "the weave of relationship, experience, memory, custom".<sup>34</sup> Since he is passionately and primarily interested in people, he has turned his raw historical material into fictional form. Some of these short stories are much better shaped and polished than others. The earlier ones are far more interesting than those of contemporary time, which seem more mediocre in idea and form. Probably the best is "Cadence 1834"; but even at his best Bruce has not the mastery of the short story that Raddall has so amply displayed.

In a review of this book, Marión B. Smith remarks:

This might have been a more satisfying book had its characters been less insistently presented as a succession of ships passing downstream in the tide of Heraclitus' ever-changing river. Where nothing is fixed there can be no completeness, and, for the reader, no point of rest or satisfactory resolution.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed the connecting links which the author is so careful to construct do in a sense diminish the independent, self-contained unity which is a necessary characteristic of the short story. The reader's mind is forced to wander backwards and forwards in time, to the possible detriment of the story form.

The Township of Time cannot be considered a successful book, and reviewers and critics are quick to point out its flaws. Yet it is possible to appreciate it, and even like it, when thought of in connection with and as an extension of The Channel Shore. What seems clear is that Bruce needs space and long stretches of time to develop a theme, to create a world and to people it largely with a multitude of characters in all their complexity.

For these reasons, he remains, basically, a one-novel man, but that novel is one in which any writer might well take pride. It is a curious, ironic and unfortunate fact that such a distinguished and comprehensive publication as The Literary History of Canada (1967 edition) lists Charles Bruce only as a poet, gives him credit for all his volumes in that genre, but does not even mention his works of fiction. He received national recognition as a poet, when he was given the Governor General's Award for his book of poetry, The Mulgrave Road (1951).

Bruce's poetry is written in an old-fashioned mode, far-removed from the fashionable styles of angular, abstract and symbolic verse. His poetry is curiously "Georgian", simple, direct, melodic and descriptive. But to read it in juxtaposition with The Channel Shore is to understand how closely related the two volumes are. "Biography", for example, is a perfect study of James Marshall. The sonnet, "Tidewater Morning", expresses completely the inner conflict between sea and shore which is so evident a quality in the lives of men like Richard McKee and Stewart Gordon. It is clear throughout the book that for Bruce himself, the major love is of the sea rather than the land. And on the land, although it has its own special texture and form, it is the moving figures of men and women who are closest to the author's heart. All is best expressed, perhaps, in a poem entitled "Planes of Space and Time":<sup>36</sup>

As when, through plated folds of finite space  
 We peered at distance, and the subtle glass  
 Brought up the stick and stone of place and place,  
 Far hillsides, forests, cattle deep in grass,  
 And drew their fabric -- leaf and root and limb,  
 The rock, the road, the falling stream, the blown  
 White fringe of vapor on the mountain's rim --  
 In, to the dooryard's earth and stick and stone.

So now, in the tired textures of the brain --  
 Deeper than glass, and moving -- curling sea  
 Comes up, and frosty pastures, and dim rain,  
 And faces and known gestures.

Silently

The moving moments come: and all, all, all,  
 Drawn to this breath, this now, this something said  
 Of space and time . . . and lamplight on the wall,  
 And someone slowly going up to bed.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Charles Bruce, The Channel Shore (Toronto: Macmillan Macmillan, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Buckler, The Cruellest Month, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce, The Channel Shore, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 345-346.

- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 87-88.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 88.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 243.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 352.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 353.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 353.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 208.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 208.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 208.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 395.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 159-160.
- <sup>31</sup>Charles Bruce, The Township of Time (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 66-67.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 122.
- <sup>33</sup>The Channel Shore, p. 179.
- <sup>34</sup>Bruce, The Township of Time, p. 197.
- <sup>35</sup>Marion B. Smith, "Novel as Myth"; Canadian Literature, No. 2 (Autumn 1959), 80.
- <sup>36</sup>Charles Bruce, The Mulgrave Road (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), p. 30.

## CONCLUSION

When the work of these three writers, Raddall, Buckler and Bruce is considered together, it becomes readily apparent how closely related they are, in spite of great dissimilarities in style. What they have in common is their basic material. One could make an analogy with three sculptors, who all draw their marble from the same quarry, and then each takes his load to a separate workshop, to create something after his own individual fashion.

What is common ground here is literally the common ground -- the Nova Scotian landscape, its woodlands, farms, shore and the surrounding sea. Buckler and Bruce especially share a deep involvement in the rural way of life, a pastoral world with its sharply defined limitations. Raddall explores the life of small towns, and the strange exotic world of Marina, as well as the sea itself, and its harbours, ships, and powerful tides. But most of all they share an instinctive, intuitive yet fundamental understanding of the people of the region, their turn of thought, their basic reticence, their idioms, or, in simple terms, they know what makes these people what they are.

All three authors agree that, for the most part, the people who live in this world are deeply committed to it, in

spite of the strong pull of the cities, and the steady drifting away of the young and adventurous. Carney and Isabel opt for Marina; David Canaan never leaves home; his brother Chris returns; Anna is unhappy in the city. Grant and Alan find their life's work on the Channel Shore; Hugh Neill and Stan Currie come back to it. Of the major characters in these novels, Neil Jamieson alone leaves his native place, and in his case there are very real psychological problems that drive him away. It is worth noting that Neil does not choose a city life, but will work in the forests of Northern Ontario.

What these authors establish is the strong magnetic force of the world they describe, however remote, antiquated and backward it may appear to the urban dweller. If there is an element of nostalgia, apparent most strongly in Buckler and Bruce, it is perhaps because such a world as they describe seems to offer escape from the social, economic and political pressures operating on the city dweller. The beauty and peace of this life becomes for Buckler almost holy, for Bruce an emotional homeland to which he may return in fact or fancy as he chooses. Raddall in this sense is less romantic, more realistic, but it is clear that he is in love with the physical aspects of this territory, and neither of the others can surpass his magnificent descriptive passages, be they of the ceaseless change of the seas, the depth of

the forest, or, especially, the ever fascinating variation of the season and its effect on people and mood alike. He is far less pastoral, more adventurous than the other two, transporting his characters out to sea, up through the great Gulf, or inland up remote rivers in the neglected backwoods. For all, however, there is a passionate attachment to place.

The heritage of the past is also something all three writers are keenly aware of, though Buckler makes less of it than the other two. This sense of the past seems to be particularly strong in Nova Scotians. Alden Nowlan in a recent article in Macleans (June 1971) expresses many of the same ideas as presented by the novelists. He too had a grandmother, whom he describes as "an old peasant woman who played the Autoharp and believed in witches".<sup>1</sup> In her childhood, everything the family consumed, except tea and sugar, was produced on their own land. This grandmother is akin to Buckler's Ellen, and her family to Raddall's Back Roads family of Tally Prendergrass. Nowlan remarks:

That fascinated me when I first heard about it as a child of eight; it fascinates me even more now that I'm a grown man and a writer who produces nothing except the words he puts down on paper. It's the kind of fascination that has kept Robinson Crusoe alive for 250 years: man's repressed desire to be utterly self-sufficient, and therefore wholly free.<sup>2</sup>

The "living memory" of Nowlan, through his grandmother, also connects him with the woodsmen, the ship builders and the sailors who made Nova Scotia famous in the days of sail. This



is his proud heritage from the past; it is his by birth as a Nova Scotian.

With this splendid inheritance of place and time readily available in their consciousness, and indeed almost crying out to be utilized, it is hardly surprising that these three authors have attempted to recreate it, each in his own fashion.

Raddall has been by far the most prolific, with many novels, books of historical interest, short stories and articles to his credit. He is a thoroughly professional writer, far more concerned than either of the others with a carefully developed plot, and a dramatic use of action and suspense. In this sense he is an old-fashioned writer, but there is a competence and craftsmanship about his work at its best which gives it durability. The world of Marina is gone forever, but it remains alive for us through Raddall's art. It is worth noting, perhaps, that Raddall alone introduces Indians into his stories, not merely as painted props for an eighteenth century war scene, but as real people with an important role to play in the drama of Neil Jamieson, and in clever and amusing situations in a number of the short stories. Raddall's novels are solidly constructed and at least as interesting in character and theme as those of Hugh MacLennan's, but because their scenes are not urban, or their action full of political implications,

he has not had such a wide readership or general acclaim.

For his part, Bruce suffers from the limitations of being a "one-novel" man, since The Township of Time is a collection of interlocked short stories, not a novel. What we have in The Channel Shore is a full rich panoramic view of a world, a way of life which, though linked closely to the past, is in fact a continuum. It is still there in the present, and one hopes, in the future. If the regional writer must be an "interpreter" of his own particular corner to the rest of the world" as suggested by Patricia Barclay<sup>3</sup> then Bruce truly fulfils this role.

Buckler, especially, seems not only to embrace the pastoral community but to become positively opposed to all forms of city life. The city is for him a symbol of human estrangement, of loneliness, and meanness of spirit. But Buckler alone seems to be concerned with the struggles of the artist to create his own world, and for him solitude, even within a well-loved area, is a vital necessity.

Raddall also formulated some principles and theories of writing but he never included them as a major element in his novels. He did, however, discuss his ideas in articles dealing exclusively with that topic, and completely divorced from the writer as an individual with visions and emotions of his own, as for example "The Literary Art"<sup>4</sup> and "To a Young

Writer".<sup>5</sup> There are, nevertheless, cursory remarks about the difficulty of the writer's trade and the importance of solitude made by Rena in Tidefall when she advises Pascoe. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, it is not Raddall but Buckler who seems to create, intentionally or not, an impression of anti-intellectualism, extolling the virtues of the Rousseau-esque life, and a kind of homespun philosophy.

Though all three writers reject the meaningless, hypocritical and artificial existence of the city dweller, their differences lie primarily in the degree of their condemnation. Bruce makes indirect comments by having his characters return to their spiritual and physical homeland, like the Atlantic salmon to the innumerable streams of the region; Raddall is more specific in his statement, especially in The Nymph and the Lamp; but Buckler is most emphatic in his expression of his relative position on the issue of the quality of life, in these diametrically opposed locations -- city and country. Assuming the deep attachment of the writer to his region, and to the people and their way of life, we are made constantly aware of the irreconcilable dichotomy, as in statements like these, taken from Ox Bells and Fireflies:

In the city . . . soulless light strikes daylight in the mouth . . . Each face has its window to itself walled up, each with the small world behind it running like clockwork wound up and forgotten . . . There is a bleaching yawn of distance between the closest things.<sup>6</sup>

There are fashions in the city faces. Each looks as if it had been bought off the racks in a shop that stocked only the prevalent masks.<sup>7</sup>

The picture arising out of those lines is unmistakable, and leaves us with only one positive impression -- Buckler's philosophical and emotional closeness to whatever is basic and serves as the common denominator in the equation of values.

Regionalists they all are, but what none of them seems able to do is to transcend the purely regional to enter the high world of the truly tragic. The regional world has very definite limitations -- an identical point of view about life, and its purposes and meanings, an intellectual boundary from which the truly enquiring mind must escape, a certain sameness and monotony. All three writers attempt to describe the bad as well as the good, but the range of evil thus portrayed is also limited. Anse Gordon and the Katens are base but not truly wicked, in the more absolute sense in which one might call Goneril and Regan "wicked". Sax Nolan is a greedy rascal who is hardly satanic. The Mountain and the Valley contains no truly destructive characters. In these novels, there are tragic people, like Josie Gordon but she remains a passive rather than an active person. David Canaan may certainly be thought of as tragic in his downfall, but David is defeated by himself, not by evil outside himself. If there are no Iagos, no Macbeths, equally there are no Snopses, no Alec D'Urbervilles, and no doom-filled fate. In

effect, there is no tragic vision.

Perhaps this is too much to expect from a world where there are heart-aches and sorrows aplenty, but where the spirit of people and place is against a tragic view, a world where a certain dogged optimism is part of the air, and the principle of mutual help prevails. David's solitariness is self-induced; Sax Nolan's greed brings about his own destruction with little harm to anyone other than his unfortunate shipmates. Neil Jamieson alone finds the stars against him, but manages to escape in the end, by means of a good friend who is also a clever lawyer. Even in his final moment of rejection of his heritage, he departs supported by the hope of Tally, who is the symbol of all that is good in his land.

Buckler comes closest to the high tragic vision, since his artist, David, is trying to evolve a total view that will sum up everything, good or evil, that exists or has existed in the world. Such an all-encompassing ambition necessitates a totality which must embrace the tragic. In a sense David is the true Romantic hero, who dies while reaching out for the ineffable.

If these writers do not possess the artistic stature, as regional writers, of Hardy or Faulkner, nevertheless to read and to study them is a rewarding experience. Those who care at all for Canadian letters must be aware of how much

we owe to these three writers, who have made us more fully conscious of our own historic past, and of the kind of life fought for by the early settlers, and continued in some parts of the land as still a viable way of life. Or even if it is pure social mythology, as Frye suggests, it is gratifying to know that we have our own myth-makers.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alden Nowlan, "Alden Nowlan's Canada", Macleans (June 1971), 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Patricia Barclay, op. cit., above, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Raddall, "The Literary Art", Dalhousie Review, XXXIV, No. 2 (1954-5).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Raddall, "To a Young Writer", Atlantic Advocate, II, No. 12 (August 1965).

<sup>6</sup>Ernest Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

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