A WRITER'S CRUCIBLE:
THE SHORT STORIES OF ERNEST BUCKLER

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A THESIS

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at
Sir George Williams University
Montreal, Canada

February, 1974

Abstract

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Ernest Redmond Buckler is the author of three complex works of fiction, the best known being The Mountain and the Valley. The complexity is both structural and imagistic. He is also the author of sixty-seven short stories, thirty-eight of which have been published in Canadian and American magazines in the last three decades. The remainder, in manuscript form, may be found in the Buckler Collection in the University of Toronto Library.

In this study I examine the published short stories in order to determine what were the artistic beginnings of Ernest Buckler the novelist and what were the motivations that led to three major works of fiction. I trace the development and maturing process of style, imagery and dominant themes in the short stories and point out how these developments have affected the novels that followed.

The short stories are the testing ground for new ideas and imagistic patterns which, when successful, found their place in the two novels and the fictive memoir. Although my emphasis is primarily on the short stories, I refer to the novels and the memoir to show how the short stories and their thematic structure have been used as part of the larger works-- to show, in short, their interdependence.

Critics of Buckler's novels have noted the skillfulness and beauty of his style, the richness of anecdote, the sensitivity of images and impressions. I intend to demonstrate

that his ability as a novelist is due largely to his literary apprenticeship in the short story form, for it was in this medium that he had the opportunity to develop the anecdotal method and imagistic complexes that characterize his style.

PREFACE

Although Ernest Buckler's writing is held in high regard by several eminent critics, few comprehensive studies of his work have been undertaken. What criticism there is deals with the novels; the short stories are mentioned only casually. In Gregory Cook's book of collected criticism, entitled Ernest Buckler, only Douglas Spettigue makes direct reference to several of the short stories. The only other critical sources dealing directly with the short stories are two unpublished Master's theses: Ernest Buckler: His Creed and His Craft by Gregory Cook, and The Masks of the Artist by John Orange.

My references to the critics are, consequently, few. For the most part, I have had to rely on the stories themselves, on my own judgement, and on letters from Ernest Buckler to answer specific questions that I have had. In some cases, I have referred to criticism of the longer works and have applied it to the short stories. If certain observations which I have made, and conclusions that I have reached, seem to be unsupported by reference to critical sources, it is simply because no such critical sources exist. It is my hope that this thesis will help to fill some of the gaps existing in the body of Buckler criticism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my thanks to Professor Patricia Morley for the great interest she showed in my thesis, and for all of her valuable suggestions for improvements.

I also thank Ernest Buckler for his kindness in meeting with me and corresponding during the year this study was in progress.

I owe a special thanks to my husband, Duncan Willmott, for his patience, interest and encouragement.

Throughout this study, all references to the four major works will be made in the text rather than in footnotes. The following abbreviations will be used:

The Mountain and the Valley	MV
The Cruelest Month	CM
Ox Bells and Fireflies	OBF
Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea	WS

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Introduction

> A man's consciousness is shaped (consciously or not) by the trowel and drawknife of all that he has ever heard or seen or smelled or touched or tasted. More than that, by all that these sensations .... stand representatives of, all the nation of correlatives each brings (subconsciously) to mind. (WS, 100).

When Ernest Buckler wrote these words, he had been a writer for more than thirty years. As a man, he realized that he was the sum total of his life's experiences; as a writer, he must have realized that his work was a cumulative experience, built slowly on what had gone before. From the first short story of 1940 to Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (1973), Buckler's art as a writer has been progressively fashioned and developed, with one experience acting as a building block for another. Before each of his first two novels there is a group of short stories which contain the seeds of his developing art. In these short stories, Buckler has experimented with theme, character development, plot and setting. Only a few of these short stories are unrelated thematically to the longer fiction. Most of the stories belong to the total context of the Buckler canon, and clearly show how Buckler's consciousness as a writer was shaped by all that had gone before.

Ernest Buckler is the author of four major works, the best known of which is The Mountain and the Valley which was published in 1952. Ten years later, The Cruelest Month was published. His third major work, Ox Bells and

Fireflies, is not a novel, but rather a fictive memoir and classified by Buckler simply as a book. Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, published in 1973, is a collection of photographs by Hans Weber with text by Buckler. The text consists of several essays and a short story.

Although he is primarily known for these four works, Ernest Buckler is also the author of sixty-seven short stories, thirty-eight of which have been published in Canadian and American magazines since 1940. Several of these short stories have also been republished in short story anthologies. Before the publication of The Mountain and the Valley, Buckler had written sixteen short stories, and in the decade between this novel and The Cruelest Month, twenty-two stories were published.

It is possible, through an examination of the short stories, to trace the artistic beginnings and subsequent development of Buckler the novelist, and to determine the motivations that led to the longer fictive works. The short stories prove to be the testing ground for ideas, themes, characters, incidents and imagistic patterns that will be found in the novels which followed each group of short stories. In many instances, the short stories are the raw material from which his two novels and the fictive memoir were fashioned.

Ernest Buckler sees his short stories as quite separate from his accomplished, longer works, and does

not regard the genre as his forte. He has spoken of this as follows: "The short story was never my (considering my verbosity) forte. They're far harder to write than novels."[1] In a later letter Buckler explained his comment:

> Short stories are harder than novels because every single word must be made to count. There's simply no space to digress in. In a novel you can have different styles of architecture even: in a short story there can be only one. The short story has to be a 'multum in parvo.' You can't even explain in a short story, as you often can in a novel. Only suggest. Every sentence must hew to one cumulative point: a single irrelevant sentence may wreck it. I suppose the short story is to the novel as a small statue is to the large amorphous block of nearly shapeless granite it was hewn from.[2]

Buckler has spoken disparagingly of his short stories, and to date has refused to have them collected. He has said that he nearly abhors his short stories, but admitted that some of them are perhaps of value, if only for archaeological purposes.[3] I hope to show in the course of this study that Buckler's opinion of his short fiction is unjustified and that the short stories hold an important position in his canon.

I intend to examine Buckler's short stories from two major points of view: first, to see how Buckler handles the genre and to see, by studying them in chronological sequence, whether there is a development and maturation of style and theme; and second, to investigate the short stories in the light of the longer prose works which followed. In the latter investigation, we shall see the use to which the author put material first employed in the short stories, the

quantity of material that was transmuted and integrated into the longer works, and what, if any, improvement or maturation came about with the subsequent use of this material. We shall also observe that the short stories and the longer works are interdependent, with material from the novels being used in later short stories.

In the short stories, just as in the longer works, certain themes may be traced throughout the entire body of work. In Buckler's fiction, family relationships are very important, especially the unspoken type of relationship that is best conveyed by looks and expressions rather than by words. Time, memory and the recalled moment are basic to Buckler's fiction, especially the moments of wholeness that often come in youth and which may only be recollected in adulthood--moments where the writer struggles to tell exactly "the way it was." Because the writer is looking back from the vantage point of adulthood, he can recognize the imperfections at the centre of what he felt was a perfect moment in his childhood.

Tension is produced in the story as the writer seems to be frustrated in trying to convey all the nuances of the recalled moment. Coupled with this is the irony of memory, the double pull of longing for youth when the moment of completeness was actually experienced, and an ironical treatment of vision by the narrator-writer who now possesses heightened understanding of those moments in retrospect. Indeed, a type of double vision is produced, as in "The Quarrel," where the story is being told by the narrator as he remembers

both his excited anticipation of a day at the fair, and the exploding of those expectations one by one. As a result there is an ironical view of innocence, which can be understood only from the narrator's new position of experience.

This tension between the two views runs through every phase of "The Quarrel," as well as a number of other stories also told from the vantage point of recollection. Buckler is well aware that perfection is ephemeral and that time perversely refuses to hold onto perfection. As a result, many of Buckler's stories have a haunting, frustrated, almost sad overtone. It is at such times that Buckler tries to reach out to his reader, asking him to participate in trying to recall the lost perfection of that fleeting childhood moment. It is thus no accident that in many of the stories the narrator is "I" looking back on some incident of childhood with a sense of increased clarity, but at the same time with a sense of longing for the simplicity and wholeness of the child's reaction.

Death and its effects on child, man and woman is also a theme frequently explored by Buckler, often in connection with time and memory and the perfect moment. Since time refuses to hold on to the perfection of the moment, it is only through death that the moment may be crystallized and kept perfect, thus preserving "the way it was" for all time. In The Mountain and the Valley David's moment of wholeness and clarity comes just before his death, so that death may then seal the perfection in timelessness.

Step-mothers and especially step-fathers appear in some of the short stories, and they usually have the problem of winning over a child who sees them as interlopers, trying to become an effective substitute for the lost father or mother. Occasionally one parent, usually the mother, is dead, leaving the child with only memories of a happier, more complete family relationship.

Several of the short stories are centred around an adolescent or near-adolescent character who is the budding artist figure already experiencing isolation. This has its most complete treatment in The Mountain and the Valley, in the person of David Canaan. Such a character is torn between his desire to be the same as those around him, and his pride in his special sensitivities that seem to set him apart from his friends and family. This sensitive artist-figure is usually highly articulate in a society whose thoughts are not word-shaped. Here too tension results as this figure struggles with a separation of art and life, idealization and reality. He must try to work through to a distinction between a fragmented or word-shaped perception of reality and a unified or intuitive one.

Buckler sees his most important theme as "the sense of isolation and desolation that besieges man and woman alike." This theme is certainly felt strongly in most of the stories, as characters struggle, often unsuccessfully, to move from isolation into some kind of close contact

with another person. Isolation in its many forms-- of the artist figure, of boy from father, husband from wife--is frequently of the inarticulate kind, when one person feels the need to explain his feelings to another, but cannot find the words to do so satisfactorily. It is frequently the isolation of the hypersensitive person who reacts to the nuances of expression: sifting, sorting, trying to find the right words or gestures that will make it "the way it was." It is also the loneliness of the artist seeking to give articulation not only to the people he has hurt, as David Canaan did, but also to the people, the places, the times, the feelings which were special to him. In short, it is the isolation of the sensitive, aware person trying to find the single core of meaning in life.

In the thematic development of the city life versus the country life, Buckler frequently shows ambivalence. He usually prefers things of the country since he considers that they are the simplest and most genuine. It is often ironic that the thing most distrusted by Buckler about city people is their articulateness and their word-shaped thoughts. This quality of word-shaping, however, is the very device that David, in The Mountain and the Valley, and Morse Halliday, in The Cruelest Month, must use to give meaning to their surroundings and to find that single core of meaning.

A large number of Buckler's short stories centre

around Christmas and the specialness of that time of year. It is for him a time of magic, a time when scarcely-thought-possible dreams may come true, a time for a person to break out of his shell of isolation and bring meaning and happiness to his life. When asked about his frequent use of Christmas as a time setting for his stories, Buckler replied that it had always been a special time for him as a child, and the excitement of the season still had meaning for him.[6]

The impulse toward autobiography is very strong for Buckler, especially in describing the health of his characters. Frequently the narrator or hero of the story suffers from headaches, is physically not as strong as his neighbours, or has suffered a fall or some other accident. This comes directly from Ernest Buckler's own experience: he has described himself as "a physical crock."[7] His penchant for mathematics figures strongly in his stories and mathematical terminology is often used for descriptive or symbolic value. His love for the theatre, his admiration for the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett and Albert Camus and for the rural countryside-- all find their way into his short and long fiction. The focal character of his fiction is often a boy who has been brilliant in school and has graduated several years earlier than his fellows, or is a writer or a farmer. All of these things come directly from Buckler's own biography. What is more important about these autobiographical details is how they are used, transmuted and integrated into the work of fiction.

to become a believable part of the character to which they are ascribed.

It is worthwhile also in an overview of the short stories to note the handling of symbol and image. In some of the earlier stories symbolism is handled awkwardly, as in "On the Third Day" and "A Sort of Sign." In these stories the feeling is conveyed that the plot has been made to fit the symbolism instead of the symbolism being used as a 'grace note' for the story to add a further dimension of vividness. By the time that The Mountain and the Valley was written in 1952, Buckler's use of symbolism, conscious or unconscious, had become polished. His symbols are unified with the thematic development of the story. Ellen's rug hooking is employed throughout the novel to unify the memory associations and interrelationships of characters. It is wordless, but provides a pattern for the development of the novel and is symbolic of the timelessness and ability of human relationships to withstand time's eroding. This successful use of symbolism came about only after many attempts in the earlier short stories, and was most successful when Buckler used it as a unifying device rather than as an end in itself.

It is tempting with Buckler's work to try to read some significance into the names he uses for his characters: to see, for example, the Canaan family as living in a "Canaan" or Promised Land, with David as the Moses figure who lives

to glimpse the Promised Land, but not to enter it. Names used by Buckler with some frequency are Martha, Joseph, Martin, Ellen, David, Chris, Toby, Anna, Peter, Daniel, Redmond (as a surname), Arthur and Mark. Of these names, David and Ellen occur most often. Place names are Granfort, Entremont, Norstead, Dondale, Newbridge and Greatbridge. All of these may be closely identified with Dalhousie West where Buckler used to live or Centrelea where he now lives. The nearby towns of Annapolis Royal, Port Royal and Bridgetown are identifiable. Entremont is literally between the North and South Mountains which cradle the Annapolis Valley.

Buckler stated in conversation that he made no conscious use of symbolism in the names he chose for his characters and settings. Rather he relied on the common Valley names with which he was familiar. Many of the names have a Biblical origin, but this is common to the largely Baptist religious heritage of the Annapolis Valley. The surname "Redmond" is Buckler's middle name. He said that "Canaan" was derived from the name "Kane." Andrews, Marchant, Holman and Fairfield are all fairly common names throughout Nova Scotia. The only uncommon surname that Buckler uses is "Creed," the surname of Paul in The Cruelest Month, and of Kevin in the short story "By Any Other Name." As Spettigue suggests, the surname "Creed" may indicate "a rooted faith or certainty by contrast with the creedless visitors to Endlaw." Spettigue sees the name as almost too apostolic.[8] In spite of Buckler's assert-

ion that he did not consciously use symbolism, it is easy and quite logical to see in "Norstead" the "no more place" of Ox Bells and Fireflies, in "Entremont" the valley that imprisoned David, and in such names as "Joseph" their Biblical context and significance. Buckler refutes his own assertion by admitting that the writer "never knows what he's said, really, until someone else points it out to him."[9]

Undoubtedly the most striking feature of Buckler's fiction is his use of language. From the earliest story to his latest book, Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, the reader is struck by the richness and variety of language. His prose is often poetic in its impact. His words and images are carefully chosen to communicate an impression or feeling that is as close as possible to the actuality of the object or event being described. Often the symbolism and allegory employed will hold the whole significance of the story, as in "Yes, Joseph..." or "Penny in the Dust." Sometimes one feels that it is overdone, as is the case in the former story. More often, it is apt, as in the latter story. Claude Bissell, in the introduction to The Mountain and the Valley, comments on the pitfalls Buckler sometimes has encountered in deliberately trying to derive the full meaning or import from a situation:

> It is this 'fronding', the reaching out of the mind and the sensitivities in many directions in order to encompass the full impact of an idea or situation, that gives to Buckler's prose its complexity, and, often, its vexatious obscurity. There are times when one feels that the search for the word has become an

> end in itself: the novelist has lost touch with the event, which must, after all, be the essential unit of the work of fiction. [10]

One of the most important features of Buckler's prose style is his use of coupled words to convey with the greatest possible economy either the most precise meaning or a whole cluster of meanings. This device is closely comparable to Anglo-Saxon kennings. Some examples are "friendfaced" to describe a house, "soft, handkerchief-crying" to describe a woman's sobs, "blue-shivering lips," "bare-free body." Buckler's characters, like himself, are frequently fascinated by anagrams and relationships between words. In "By Any Other Name," Buckler suggests that it is no accident that 'walk' and 'talk' rhyme.[11] Paul Creed named his home Endlaw, an anagram of Walden. (CM, 8) One of Buckler's favourite anagrams is 'heart' and 'earth', which have the same letters.

Buckler's own search for the right words to convey "the way it was" is often put into the mouth of his narrator. This device is used in several of the short stories, most notably in "Glance in the Mirror," as the artist narrator thinks about his own writing: "You would have words for the touch of flesh, and words for the way of two people who were really together and words for the wordlessness in the mouths of people who never had anyone, and words for all the incommunicable shadows of the heart the face hid.... And time itself could be caught and said."[12]

Ernest Buckler's thirty-eight published short stories

have appeared since 1940 in Esquire, Saturday Night, Macleans, Collier's, Chatelaine, Weekend, Better Farming, Atlantic Advocate, Ladies' Home Journal and Canadian Home Journal. Another thirty short stories and fragments, along with stories that were reworked for later publication, may be found in the Buckler Collection in the University of Toronto Library.

If we hold with Claude Bissell and Alden Nowlan that Buckler should be considered as one of Canada's foremost novelists, then the short stories should provide valuable insights into the artist at work. It is the purpose of this study to demonstrate that Buckler's short stories are the crucible in which The Mountain and the Valley, The Cruelest Month, and Ox Bells and Fireflies were fired.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY STORIES (1940-1951)

Part 1 The Beginnings

Ernest Redmond Buckler was born July 19, 1908, at Dalhousie West, a village about ten miles south of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia. He was the third of five children, and the only son. His childhood was spent on the family farm, and provided much of the inspiration and setting for the novels and short stories that followed later. The Baptising Pool, for example, which figured prominently in The Mountain and the Valley and the first published short story, may still be seen there.

He was twelve when he completed senior matriculation at the one-room school in Dalhousie West. He had been a brilliant student, especially in mathematics. His last years of pre-university schooling were spent at the High School in Bridgetown, and at home with a correspondence course.

To earn money to attend university, Buckler worked summers at Kent House, a Connecticut lodge, during the five years 1920-1925. Some of the experiences at Kent House found their way into his fiction, but in a much more peripheral fashion than the earlier years at Dalhousie West. For instance, Kent House may have served as the inspiration for "Paul's Place," Endlaw, in The Cruelest Month, and some of the city people staying at Kent House may have been used

as models for characters in the same novel. The only short story that can be directly traced to these years is "By Any Other Name."

In 1925, at the age of seventeen, Buckler entered Dalhousie University in Halifax, and graduated with a B.A. degree in 1929, with distinction in mathematics. His undergraduate career was interrupted for one year, 1927-28, owing to ill health. During these years he did not participate to any extent in the literary life of the university except for the writing of a few poems and an item contributed to The Dalhousie Gazette arguing in favour of compulsory physical education at university.

After graduation, Buckler accepted a scholarship to study philosophy at the University of Toronto and graduated from there in 1930 with an M.A. degree. His thesis was entitled "Aristotle's Theory of Conduct." He was offered a scholarship to begin doctoral studies, but declined. The next five years from 1930-1935 were spent in Toronto at actuarial work with the Manufacturer's Life Insurance Company. References to these years of actuarial work may be found in several short stories including "Guilt on the Lily," "In Case of Emergency" and "Cleft Rock, With Spring."

During these years in Toronto Buckler lived alone in a small rented room and each year, for his summer vacation, packed all his belongings and headed for Nova Scotia. His ties with Toronto were not of a permanent nature. In 1932 Buckler's father died suddenly, but it was not until the

summer of 1936 that Buckler severed his ties with the business world in Toronto and headed home for good. This homecoming closely parallels Paul's homecoming in the short story "The Dream and the Triumph," and is further referred to in other "home-coming" stories, such as "Penny in the Dust" and "Cleft Rock, With Spring." Once again ill health accounted in large measure for his decision to stay in Nova Scotia away from the more frenetic life in Toronto.

On the farm in Dalhousie West Buckler lived with his mother, his sister and her husband. He was twenty-eight then. He had found many changes in his home, changes that were later to be portrayed in The Mountain and the Valley. Settling in at home, he began to help with the farm. Within a year of his return home, he was to begin his professional writing career. The American magazine Coronet sponsored a writing contest, with the subject being "What is Coronet?" The author of the best entry would win a prize of one hundred dollars. Coronet's first choice for the prize was Ernest Buckler's entry. As a result of this prize, several of Buckler's later stories deal with prizes won and not won. In "The Quarrel," the mother does not win the sewing prize at the local agricultural exhibition. Ironically, this story won the one thousand dollar prize in Macleans' short story contest for 1949. In The Mountain and the Valley, David also sends off a magazine article and wins money with which to buy his first pair of long pants. In the short story "The Dream and the Triumph," there are references to two

prize winnings.

In February, 1938, Buckler wrote a letter to Esquire to express his views of that magazine. This letter was the beginning of a long association with Esquire, and a friendship with its editor Arnold Gingrich. The letter was published by Esquire, and his prose style evoked praise. Two more letters to Esquire followed, and the editor was sufficiently inspired by the letter to devote an editorial to the letter-writer's criticism.

It was at this same time, when Buckler was thirty years old, that he and his mother moved to Centrelea, just outside of Bridgetown, to look after a farm belonging to his aunt and uncle. The aunt and uncle died soon after. Buckler, a farmer first and a writer second (in the time that remained after the farm chores were completed), had his first two short stories published in Esquire in 1940 and 1941. From 1941 to 1947, a number of short stories were published in Saturday Night, Macleans, Collier's, and Ladies' Home Journal. He also wrote several CBC radio plays during this same period. In 1952, The Mountain and the Valley was released for publication in the United States and Canada. It was a critical success, and a modest financial success as well. With its publication Ernest Buckler was established as one of Canada's important writers.

Between 1940 and 1952, sixteen short stories were published. Ten of these stories contain material that fits directly into The Mountain and the Valley context, three

stories contain material that will ten years later be part of The Cruelest Month context, one story fits into the much later Ox Bells and Fireflies context, one story comes from the historical context of the Second World War, and one story is an incidental, humorous one.

I propose in the following pages to examine these stories as they fit into the several contexts outlined above, and to show just how much the longer fiction depended on ideas which had their inception many years earlier.

Part 2 Stories in the Context of The Mountain and the Valley

Ernest Buckler's first published story, "One Quiet Afternoon," contains many of the thematic and stylistic ingredients that would twelve years later characterize The Mountain and the Valley. The two main characters of the story are David, a young boy, and the woman Martha Legros, who had always been David's friend, in spite of the questionable reputation she had among the village men.

As the story begins, David is sitting in the August sun, looking over the hill at his mother's grave and realizing that she will never return. Martha appears, sobbing:

> Not soft, handkerchief-crying like the women when they tiptoed in to look at his mother, or the way you cried when you scraped your knee, to help the pain. It made him think of the way his father's face looked that first night, or how you felt when you broke something you'd always had and the crying itself hurt. He stood up to speak to her. Martha's eyes looked at him as she ran by, but she didn't seem to notice him, really. She didn't speak. [1]

David is puzzled: why did Martha not speak to him? She had always been friendly, helpful and attentive. David then reviews in his mind some of the slights that had been given to Martha by his aunt, and how the men used to wink at each other when she went by. He doesn't understand their treatment of her, and concludes "it must have something to do with how you grew up." [2]

The story then shifts its focus from David to Martha, in order to explain the reason for her agitation and crying. Michael Legros, Martha's husband, had accused her of being a whore, and Martha, heart-broken and desperate that he had

believed the lies of the men, is running towards the Baptising Pool to commit suicide. Even nature seems to be conspiring against her. As she runs to the pool, all is hushed, waiting for what is to happen. "Even the leaves of the poplers were still. The squirrels did not scold.... She heard only the beating of her own heart in the hot-still afternoon. She ran across the meadow, green-shining in the breathless sun. The still tree-shadows lay on the edge of it, like silhouettes."[3] Foreshadowing is strong, as the water-grass in the pool moves "like a drowned woman's hair." Martha hesitates at the edge, thinking of what her death would do to her husband, leaving him alone with his guilt. Martha throws herself on the ground and prays to the earth to lend her something of its eternal quiet and strength.

The focus of the story shifts back to David, who is feeling at odds with the day, even taking no pleasure in swimming. As he thinks impatiently that he will never grow up, he recalls seeing Martha earlier in the afternoon: "Then he remembered Martha crying, and the dim-sad flavour of the day was suddenly sharp and clear."[4] His reverie is interrupted by some other boys who begin to tease the smaller David. They hold him down and one of the boys threatens to sew up David's mouth with a devil's darning needle. David, in rage and panic, screams for Martha. The boys taunt him by saying, "David loves Mar-tha. Ha-ha-ha-ha." In an impotent rage, David throws handfuls of wet moss at the boys.

but to no effect. Gathering up his clothes, David runs off, not realizing that Martha had overheard.

After David's scene of rage and despair, the story shifts once again to Martha. Dusk is coming on, and Martha has reached the realization that even the earth to which she had prayed earlier has denied her its comfort.

> "The children too..." Martha shuddered. "Even my little David." Slowly the place began to change. It was dead-still now with the dusk loneliness beginning of places where there had been day-laughter but no one has ever stayed at night. The day-friendliness left the river and the trees, and the cold night-strangeness and river loneliness crept into them until the river and the trees seemed to Martha like dead things about her. Her eyes were like the eyes of an animal that has been beaten before. 5

Since no one cared nor had come to look for her, since even nature had turned away from her, Martha realizes that she must go ahead with her plan. "'I got to do it,' she whimpered."

For the final time the story shifts, this time back to David with whom it had begun. Only minutes have passed since David had left the pool sobbing. As David walks along the road, he dreams about how he will show everyone when he grows up and has a million dollars. Then he can pass right by in his car, stopping only to pick up Martha who has always been kind to him. This dream is interrupted by the appearance of a car on the road, containing a strange, cool-looking woman who waves and smiles at him as she passes by. David, full of admiration, watches the car disappear, once again dreaming about the million dollars, but having forgotten all about Martha. He thinks that when he grows up he will marry

a woman like the sleek city woman he has just seen. Oblivious to the tragedy that has just occurred at the Baptising Pool, David hears his aunt calling him for supper.

As noted above, this story contains the basic ingredients of The Mountain and the Valley. The story shifts in focus just as does the novel in the use of Ellen's rug hooking to provide the memory associations that make the shift smooth. In the short story, the shift is triggered naturally by thought and word associations. The descriptive language is rich, and conveys the dead-stillness of a hot August afternoon. David is essentially the same in both story and novel, and his incident with the other boys at the Baptising Pool is similarly rendered in the novel. Martha Legros, in the story, becomes Bess Delahunt in the novel; the precipitating incident that causes Bess's suicide is the same, and occurs at the same place, although much later in David's life.

In the story David dreams hazy dreams of future riches and glory, just as does the David Canaan of the novel. David's unconscious rejection of Martha in his dreams is symbolic of Martha's rejection by her husband and the land. Such symbolism is also used in the novel. David's thoughts about the death of his mother have a close parallel in the novel, as do his feelings of apartness and isolation from the other boys. Buckler also begins in this first short story to portray human emotions by the face, rather than by words.

This will prove to be a recurring technique. Words can hurt, and do irreparable damage, as do the words of Michael Legros to Martha.

The characters of David and Martha are economically delineated, and the atmosphere pervading the story is vividly established. "One Quiet Afternoon" contains a 'preoccupative kernal'[6] that was later to form the basis for one of the important incidents of The Mountain and the Valley.

"The First Born Son" contains material used in Part Four of The Mountain and the Valley, and also alludes to an event which formed the core of the short story, "Yes, Joseph. ..." The two chief characters are the father Martin, and his older son David, to whom Martin will leave the farm. The mother, Ellen, appears in Martin's thoughts throughout the story and she also appears near the end. The essence of the story lies in a quarrel between father and son, and the father's acute disappointment that his first born son does not feel the same love for the farm as Martin feels. The atmosphere throughout is one of sadness and futility as Martin comes to realize that David's feelings for the land are ones of hatred. Martin feels that if David does indeed hate the farm, then he, Martin, has no son.

David is impatient with his father, with the slow, steady oxen and the life of the farm. He longs for the city where "their bodies are not dead-tired now. They have not walked all day in their own tracks... back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, in their own damn tracks.

There is movement and lights and laughing. Every day there is something new... something to keep alive for."[7] David feels imprisoned by the farm, the drudgery, even the encircling trees.

Contrasted with David's thoughts of the city are those of Martin. Ironically, he sees in the city the same hateful round of sameness that David sees in the farm. To Martin, the stone buildings of the city are impersonal, and even the sun there is strange. For Martin the houses have the same imprisoning aspect as the trees have for his son. Martin thinks also of the people who inhabit cities: for him, their faces were stony too, like the buildings. "They looked as if they never awoke from their tired dreams of the night.... When they talked, it was empty, because their eyes saw nothing but the stone things that their hands had not built... and none of them had anything to say that could not be said with words."[8] Martin felt the loneliness of the city people, whose laughter was only of the mouth and not of the eyes. In counterpoint with Martin's thoughts of city people are those of David:

> So many different women's bodies! What if they didn't speak? The bright metallic faces of always-rich women seemed to shine in the shop-window light, and you knew you would feel clumsy and ashamed with them, but it was good to think of having their soft flesh alone somewhere in the dark. There was so much light there, then... and life.[9]

The tragedy of the story builds as the reader sees the thoughts of father and son. There can be no reconciliation of the two, and herein the closeness of the father-

son relationship breaks down. The values of the two generations are different, and no amount of thought can bring them together. Martin senses this, but cannot find the words to speak to David. In contrast, the only words that David can use with his father are stinging, condemning words, culminating in the most hurtful accusation of all, "All right, but what did you ever amount to?"

Martin, sick, confused and bitterly disappointed, can take refuge only in his thoughts of the younger son Peter, who had loved and understood the land. Peter, however, is dead, killed in a farm accident. Even nature has turned its face away from Martin: "The sky looked away from its own darkening face in the mud-bottomed puddles of the road."[10] Martin trudges slowly back to the house where his wife Ellen is waiting for him. It reminds him of the night they buried Peter: "He felt lost in the long dead day."[11]

Contrasted with the bleakness of Martin's thoughts of his two lost sons is the warmth awaiting him in the kitchen. "'What in the world have you two been doing?' Ellen said, moving across the scrubbed softwood floor from the stove to the table. The warm breath of food rose sweet in the oil-lamplight."[12] The richness of the kitchen, its peace and abundance is ironically contrasted with the emptiness of Martin's thoughts. He cannot tell Ellen what has happened today in the fields. The realization that David also is lost to them is something that he must keep from his wife. His final laughter is bitterly ironic,

"heavy and grey, like a hawk rising."

One of Martin's earlier thoughts during the afternoon had been of David's birth on Christmas Eve, and his fear that Ellen might die. When the child was born and Ellen was safe, a whole world of possibility had opened for Martin:

> Suddenly the whole night was a great, neighbourly, tear-starting friend. He had a son now. He knew it would be a son. ...A son...A son... Martin couldn't believe how good it was. He would never die now. He had a son now... when he was too old to break up this land he loved, any more, this son would come in at night, and they would plan together, just the same. This son's sons... [13]

It is this dream that is blasted forever by David's words, leaving Martin sad, broken and bitterly disappointed.

These first two published stories are significant with respect to the rest of the Buckler canon. Both have as a main character the child or young man who will be the hero of The Mountain and the Valley, one whose special sensitivities will set him apart from family, friends and neighbours. Both stories deal with "the sense of isolation and desolation that besieges man and woman alike." [14] Martha, in "One Quiet Afternoon," and Martin, in "The First Born Son," find themselves at odds with someone they love, and both have suffered the stings of words that once said cannot be changed. In both stories Buckler makes good use of the interweaving of past happy memories and present sadness and frustration. In both stories David is the cause (directly in the latter and indirectly in the former) of the futility and bitterness felt by Martin and Martha.

Buckler's use of words to describe the land and the feelings of his characters is surprisingly mature and well-developed in these two early stories, although in the later novel, there is a greater economy of language. Also, in The Mountain and the Valley, the language flows with less awkwardness.

A comparison of two passages, the first from The Mountain and the Valley, the second from "The First Born Son," shows the subsequent ease with language:

> Dave is tired, he thought, and he's fighting it. You can't do that. You have to let it come and go, quietly, and remembering it after supper, it's sort of like a nice soft tune in your muscles. (MV, 155)

> He knew David was tired. And David could not learn to handle his weariness. He fought it. It was no use to do that. If you let it come and go, quietly, after supper it made a lazy song in your muscles and was good to think about. 15

The first passage has an economy of language, a subtly tighter style, and is consequently more effective.

In the novel, the father's difficulties in communicating with his son are summed up. The father could not give shape with words to his feelings, as David could. The feelings were still there, making "a tune in him just the same. He couldn't write the notes that made it up, if he tried." (MV, 156) One looks for such a statement in "The First Born Son," but it is not there. Instead, a plethora of Martin's thoughts, recollections and feelings is present, and the reader must infer that his thoughts lack the word-shaping that comes so easily to David.

The characteristic Buckler attitude to city life is described in both stories from the point of view of Martin, who has actually experienced the city and its superficialities, and David, who can only dream about its attractions. In both stories, however, the feeling is conveyed that David, once he has had actual experience with the city and its people, will arrive at the same conclusion as his father.

Buckler, in these two stories, shows an eye for careful structuring as he moves from the mind of one character to another. Abrupt shifts of mood are carefully anticipated and clearly handled by triggering thoughts and words. If the descriptive language is at times over-rich and somewhat effusive in these first two stories, it is nevertheless vivid and well-suited to conveying nuances of feeling and atmosphere.

Buckler's main preoccupation with character rather than action has its beginnings in these two stories as well. In an unpublished text prepared and read by Buckler for the CBC in 1953, he comments:

> I didn't fret too much about action. For myself, as soon as complications in a book start popping, I always feel like muttering to the characters: "Oh, for heaven's sake, stop scurrying around advancing the plot! Sit still a minute till we get a squint at your insides." For I think that insides are far more important... and interesting--than outsides. That action... is far less important than its motivation. [16]

This statement is borne out in these two stories under consideration. In each, action serves only as a framework for the delineation of character. In "The First Born Son," for example, the activity of plowing is the motivating

circumstance for the bitterness and misunderstanding between father and son. It is the feeling between the two that assumes primary importance and is the focus for the reader's attention. In short, what the head is doing inside is of more importance than what the hands are doing. With Martha, in "One Quiet Afternoon," the act of suicide itself is not described: Buckler considers important only the words that have been spoken and her reaction to them, and her tortured thoughts.

"Another Christmas," although not dealing with David and the rural setting in the present, is important in Buckler's evolution as a writer. Steve, a writer, is attending a Christmas Eve party given by his wife, but he is not as delighted as he should be. Through a flashback initiated by a comment about how wonderful it must be to be a successful writer, a swarming of memories, sensory impressions and recollections of a childhood Christmas overwhelm Steve. In a scene similar to one which later appears in The Mountain and the Valley, Steve remembers an earlier Christmas when he had received a new pair of skates from his parents. He recalls the triumph he felt when he learned how to turn a corner by crossing one skate over the other. Once he had learned this skill, he never forgot it, but could repeat it time and time again with the same delight. This scene recurs in Part One of The Mountain and the Valley where David experiences the same feeling of exhilaration that Steve did.

In the course of Steve's recollections, the preoccupation of the artist figure with writing and the necessity of saying it 'exactly right' occurs for the first time in Buckler's fiction. Steve thinks to himself: "So it's wonderful to write. So it's such an easy job...." [17] His thoughts continue, and their echoes will later be found in both The Mountain and the Valley and The Cruelest Month:

> And the first day you tried to tell a thing that had happened, truly, and the right-feeling words would not come, the ones that had a move and a speaking in them, the ones that brought the thing outside you, clearer and shaplier than you had ever thought you knew it.... And the other times when you did get something truly, then your mind was feverish and swarming with everything there was, to tell. If you walked in the woods, then, there was an untold story in the way every single fir tree was.... And you tried desperately to find a single light that would come suddenly so that everything would fall into place as if you were looking at a picture that was only broken lines at first but as you looked at it, steadily, suddenly all the broken lines flowed into a single image and the separate lines were gone and everything was part of the same thing. But you never found that single light... that single plan. No one ever did. So how could the little separate part you had told matter at all? [18]

Steve's problem is exactly the same problem that David Canaan faces in the Epilogue of The Mountain and the Valley, and that confronts Morse Halliday and Paul Creed in The Cruelest Month. It is a theme that will preoccupy Buckler in several other stories as well.

In "Another Christmas" Buckler expresses what must have been his own concern as a writer: how does one really tell, in all its multiplicity, "the way it was?" This is the first time, incidentally, that the characteristic phrase, "The way

it was" occurs, and it is coincident with Buckler's first portrayal of the artist figure. The question may occur to one who has read The Mountain and the Valley and taken note of David's solution: does Steve succeed? He seems to be overwhelmed by the multiplicity of things and cannot select one thing as being more important than any other. The answer to Steve's problem lies in the last three lines of the paragraph quoted: no one ever finds "the single light" or that "single plan" that unifies all things. That is not the writer's job, necessarily. By electing to tell the "little separate parts" of things rather than by searching for "the single core of meaning" that David thought he found only seconds before his death, Steve is much closer to Buckler himself. Buckler, through telling the scores of small details, is able to fuse them together into an approximation of that "single core of meaning"-- but he begins with the multitude of detail that swarms up to meet him.

I think that in all of Buckler's fiction, the best examples of successful handling of "the single core of meaning" occur in his two most recent books, Ox Bells and Fireflies and Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea. Buckler's reconciliation with the swarming multitude of things has taken a lifetime of writing to achieve.

Buckler's use of memory and the perfection of a past moment is apparent in this story as well. The pivotal experience for Steve the writer was the childhood experience of the new skates, "that time he had done it and he didn't know,

in his head, just how, but he knew it was right, that now his legs knew it, to repeat it whenever they liked."[19] For Steve, this childhood experience is whole, intuitive and complete in itself: it somehow contains the perfection that he has been looking for as a writer. The two Christmases are, as a result, different for Steve. The success of childhood (the country experience) was complete and involved happiness and freedom; by comparison, his city success (as a writer) is incomplete. Thus, the writer can only try to capture the <u>quality</u> of those remembered feelings of completeness through dealing with the fragments of experience and memory, and seems to be doomed to frustration if he tries to find "the single core of meaning." Paralysis can set in for the writer who allows the memories and sensations to swarm about him, unless he learns to be selective in the detail and memory with which he is concerned.

In "Another Christmas" Buckler, through his fictional artist Steve, for the first time expresses his views about art and its relationship to life. The artist intuitively senses perfection in the things of the world around him, and in certain memorable experiences he has had. Perfection might lie in a fir tree or in learning to turn corners when skating by crossing one foot over the other. Steve, like other artist-figures in Buckler's later fiction, is overwhelmed by the multiplicity of things. He is not able to select one thing as being more significant than any other, and is thus frustrated by his inability to capture the

quality of remembered feelings of wholeness. Art, he feels, can only deal with fragments of experience and is therefore inadequate; art is imperfect, while nature contains a perfection to which one can intuitively and joyfully respond. Buckler has expressed his own views about life and art, saying that writing, at best, "is only a shadow."[20]

For Buckler then, perfection (wholeness) is achieved in life, not art, in moments of genuine human communication and/or heightened awareness. This distinction between art and life seems to imply that no work of art, no matter how perfectly rendered, can capture life truly. At best, art will be only an imitation of the perfect whole. In this respect, Buckler's approach to art is the reverse of writers who see the artist's function as one of ordering language so that it will reveal whatever harmony or wholeness the world has-- in short, as a superior kind of truth. Buckler's moments of epiphany do not reveal the meaning and harmony of reality, but in fact suggest the most agonizing frustration at not being able to do so.

The artist may search for the single core of meaning underlying all of the memory impressions he receives, but he will never satisfactorily find it through his art. The attempt confuses and frustrates Steve, for he cannot see how his telling of a few details can really matter. In later stories, Buckler indicates one way that the important memories may be caught and held, and this is in the stasis of death, when the movement of life's swarming experiences stops, and

they are then frozen in timelessness. Consequently, we find in much of Buckler's fiction the experience of death and burial -- of people, of objects that related to people, and of memories.

"Another Christmas" is an extremely good story stylistically. It uses metaphor effectively and words vividly ("ghost-world of words," "the springless bones-of-words," "gossamer-drifting mists of thought"). Dialogue is handled with considerable ease and fluidity, and the interior monologues as Steve tries to articulate within himself his feelings of frustration at his inability to capture the perfectness of nature, are as good as any found in The Mountain and the Valley.

"David Comes Home" is a good example of a story built around a symbol, one that holds the entire significance of the thought and action being depicted. David has been killed in the war, and his father Joseph laments his past inarticulateness with his son:

> ... he hoped that the silence between them might not have been strangeness at all; had hoped that David was quiet because he knew his father's thoughts were not word-shaped and bright like his own but of one flesh just the same. In that way the silence became a bond. But Joseph could not be sure that this was so. [21]

As Joseph is thinking this, he unearths with his plow a fishing spinner that David had lost long ago, and in reading David's notes later, he finds a joyful description of the day that the spinner was lost. This double discovery symbolically seals the bond between father and son. To try to preserve

this moment of happy illumination for all time, Joseph buries the spinner where he found it. This is also a metaphor of the son's burial.

Although this story has the same poignant quality of "The First Born Son," it has none of the overt futility and desperation. In the latter story the father came to the conclusion that he had no son, but in "David Comes Home" (an ironic title), Joseph is happy that he has rediscovered his son, although it is now too late to say all the things he wishes had been said before David left for the war. The story also foreshadows The Mountain and the Valley, and the happy, tranquil times that David spent with his father. It is significant too that Joseph buries the spinner, just as we shall see a penny being buried in the dust in a subsequent story. Only by burying something precious, something that contains rich memory associations of a past joy or experience, can it be preserved in a timelessness. "David Comes Home" is the first of Buckler's stories to rely so heavily upon symbolism. Nevertheless, the symbolic spinner is used unobtrusively. This story anticipates even more closely The Mountain and the Valley as Joseph sensed that his own thoughts were not word-shaped as were those of his son. As a result David was set apart not only from his father, but also from other members of his family.

The plot of "A Sort of Sign" closely parallels the Anna-Toby relationship of Buckler's first novel, except that in this story Anna's sailor husband is David. The story

hinges on two symbols: the small globe filled with seawater, and the 1922 dime. Anna, a young wife who must face her husband's departure for sea duty the following day, is beset with doubts and cannot sleep. She doubts that her sailor husband loves her as much as he loves the sea. He carries always with him, as a bond between him and the sea, a globe filled with seawater. Thinking the sea to be her rival for David's love, she decides to smash the globe, but along with the globe she finds the 1922 dime which David had jokingly used when he proposed marriage to her. The two symbols then become emotional links connecting together people across time and space, and symbolic of emotional communications that cannot be articulated in any other way.

This problem of articulate communication is one that Buckler will be increasingly concerned with in his short fiction and his novels. Of David, Buckler says: "He never made any pretty speeches at all."[22] David's face is, however, another matter. Several times throughout the story it is referred to as revealing a secret hurt. For David, and many other of Buckler's characters, facial expressions are the only means of articulating feeling. It then becomes the responsibility of the more sensitive, aware characters like Anna to interpret this expression and, if necessary, find the right words to reply. Significantly, it is frequently the female characters who possess this wisdom.

The short story "Yes, Joseph, There Was a Woman; She Said Her Name Was Mary" was adapted for stage under the title

"The Stars Were Bright" and presented by the CBC. This story is an extension of material first used as a recollected incident in an earlier story, "The First Born Son." The setting is Christmas Eve, the time of magic for Buckler. Ellen is about to have a baby and her husband goes off in the winter night to get a neighbour woman to help with the birth. Joseph is gone a long time, and during this interval Ellen feels that the baby is coming. Suddenly a strange woman, who says her name is Mary, is there with her, giving comfort and assisting with the birth. When Joseph returns without the neighbour woman who is not at home, he finds Ellen well, holding the new-born baby in her arms. She tells him about the strange woman, but there are no tracks in the snow.

Symbolism permeates this story. The miraculous birth of the child is identified with the birth of Christ, and in the earlier "The First Born Son," Ellen referred to her new-born son as "My little Jesus." The characters of "Yes, Joseph..." are closely akin to Martha and Joseph of The Mountain and the Valley. In this short story Joseph is referred to as " a sober and slow-feeling man."[23] He stands at Ellen's bed, full of feeling which he desperately wants to express, if not in words, at least in some tender gesture. His strength is powerless in the face of Ellen's pain, and he can feel only fear. In the novel Joseph feels the same way, but then too cannot articulately express his feelings. He feels only impotent rage and confusion.

As Joseph trudges along in the night and the snow, a

train goes by. There occur then some thoughts about the city and city people that have been encountered before in other stories, and will occur often again.

> There were people in that train, Joseph thought, laughing and talking in their easy city-way in the light... the easy-fitting clothes and the easy-talking way of the city people in the train that Eilen did not have.... [24]

The language used, the vivid description of the snow and Joseph's thoughts, are strongly reminiscent of The Mountain and the Valley. Phrases such as "Christmas-kindled moonlight" and "white-burdened shoulders of the spruces" are found in the early chapter of the novel. In atmosphere, language, character and theme the story strongly prefigures the first novel.

"You Wouldn't Believe Me" is a slender little story based on a subtle idea that is handled in a rather heavy-handed way. Buckler has confessed that some of his short stories "were written with an eye on the market." [25] While this story may have some merit, I feel that it fits the category Buckler refers to in his letter. The names of the characters have not changed. Ann and David are a married couple. Ann is planning to leave David because she is frustrated and upset by his habit of never taking anything seriously. He laughs at everything, even his wife's preparations for leaving him. Ann, however, sees David's face in a mirror. David is not aware that he is being observed, and Ann thinks that she has never seen a sadder, more desolate face than his. He cannot show this sadness to her

face, but must hide behind a joke or a laugh. Ann, understanding, decides to stay. Buckler's heavy-handedness occurs near the end when he feels compelled to explain further about Ann's decision -- an explanation that is not really necessary and indeed spoils the subtlety of the story:

> And then she knew they couldn't talk it over any more than that. Not now. Because now she understood at last how it was with people who couldn't let anything be. How it was with people who every single time they got close to something wonderful had to laugh. [26]

This story fits into the context of Buckler's first novel not only because of the names of the characters, but because of the preoccupation with inarticulateness that can lead to the isolation of a person. Although the isolation felt in this story is not that of the artist figure, it is nevertheless a sense of isolation brought about by the inability to communicate feelings verbally. In this respect, David of "You Wouldn't Believe Me" and Joseph of The Mountain and the Valley are similar. In this story also, it is the wisdom and sensitivity of the woman that bridges this chasm.

"Penny in the Dust" is one of Buckler's best stories, and the one most frequently anthologized. Narration is retrospective, and is provided in the first person by Danny. As in The Mountain and the Valley, there is a prologue and an epilogue to frame the story. The characteristic Buckler language, tone and atmosphere is provided by the opening paragraph of the story:

> My sister and I were walking through the old sun-still fields the evening before the funeral, recalling this or that thing which had happened in this or that place, turning our memories after the fashion of families who gather again in the place where they were born -- trying to disclose and identify themselves with the strange children they must have been. [27]

This paragraph serves as the prologue for the story which is triggered by Danny's sister asking, "Do you remember the day that Dad gave you the penny?"

The character of the father is very close to that of Joseph in previous stories and in The Mountain and the Valley, and Danny is much like young David. The narrator Danny cannot quite find the right combination of words to describe exactly how his father was. Danny's impatience with his own inadequacy may be sensed when he says: "There's no way you can tell it to make it sound like anything more than an inarticulate man a little at sea with an imaginative child." [28] After making this statement Danny begins to find the words to tell how his father was:

> It was as if his sure-footed way in the fields forsook him the instant he came near the door of my child's world and that he must wipe off his feet before he stood inside, awkward and conscious of trespass; and I, sensing that but not understanding it, felt at the sound of his solid step outside my world's foolish fragility. [29]

From this point the delicate, subtle relationship between father and son is developed. The father gives Danny a shiny, new penny, and the imaginative Danny sets off that August afternoon to weave dreams around it. The magic of the new penny has its corollary in the lush descriptive language

that Buckler uses in speaking of the afternoon: "It was that time of magic suspension in an August afternoon.... The sound of the cowbells came sharp and hollow from the cool swamp."[30] But Danny, playing that the penny is a pirate's treasure, loses the penny in the dust-- the penny that had been a precious token of his father's love for him. It is significant also that it is during this moment of 'wholeness' amid the lush description of nature that Danny's dreams are blasted by the penny's loss. Danny, tearful, runs to his room and hides from his family. The narrator tries to explain to the reader that he was not hiding from his family, but was hiding because the whole day has been spoiled by the penny's loss.

The next morning his father offers to help Danny find the lost penny. They walk down the road, "stiff with awareness" of each other. Danny's father, a competent man able to fix broken things, to unsnarl tangled fishing lines and to make alder whistles, finds the penny almost immediately, and is compelled to speak to Danny about the incident. The father thinks that Danny hid the previous day out of fear of a beating. Danny feels sick to think that his father would believe such a thing, and no matter how foolish he felt, he has to tell his father about his pirate games, "because only the truth ... would have the unmistakable sound of truth, to scatter that awful idea out of his father's head."[31] Danny's father, his eyes tear-filled, puts the penny in his pocket.

In the epilogue Danny finds the penny, still shiny and new, in the vest pocket of his father's good suit -- the suit that his father was buried in. Tersely, yet poignantly, Danny closes with the simple remark: "I left it there." The penny is thus like the spinner in "David Comes Home:" only by leaving the penny in his father's pocket to be buried with him, like the spinner being reburied in the ground, may the moment of 'wholeness' be captured and held timeless. Danny, in searching for the right words to describe his father, indeed searching for that core of meaning, must finally resort to telling the parts of things, the details about his father, as Steve did in "Another Christmas." Buckler's idea of the dichotomy between art and life, and the impossibility of holding on to perfection except through death or burial, is explicit in this story.

Buckler's next story, "The Quarrel," won the thousand dollar prize in the Macleans fiction contest for 1949. The characters are unnamed: they are a small boy (the narrator) and his mother and father. "The Quarrel" is a subtle probing into the interrelationships of family members, recalled after an interval of time. The particular quarrel referred to in the title happened on the weekend before the family was going to a country fair at Annapolis. The narrator's mother decides to enter a tablecloth which she has made in the sewing competition. The narrator comments: "the moment was so perfect that even the consciousness of its perfection sprang into my mind."[32] This moment of perfection is spoiled by a

quarrel that erupts between the father and the mother; it is not a serious quarrel, but is started by a series of small comments, and its inevitability becomes apparent. By Monday, the day of the fair, the impetus of the quarrel has gone, but neither the father nor the mother can find the words to end it. All the expectation and excitement of the day at the fair are spoiled when the mother does not win a prize for her tablecloth. To the child narrator, what had appeared so glorious at home now appears shabby and ordinary when compared with the prize-winning entrants. The child's father is also diminished at the fair: when he tries to ring the bell on the weight machine, his efforts are not sufficient. Even the narrator's excitement and dreams are shattered when he learns that the fortune-teller is just an ordinary person, bored with the 'country-hicks' at the fair. The quarrel ends on the drive home when the father tries to comfort his wife in her disappointment about the tablecloth: "It's the prettiest thing I ever seen. I don't care--".

Throughout the story the narrator feels the need to appeal to the reader to understand:

> Now here is where I wish for the subtlety to show you, by the light of some single penetrating phrase, how it was driving home. But I can only hope that you will know how it was, from some experience of your own that was something a little like it. [33]

The story expresses what Buckler has called "the extraordinary intricacy of feeling and loyalty in the members of a close-knit country family... their fierce affective bond, and the swell of induplicable happiness

they experience when they are brought to recognize this constitutive loyalty full face."[34] The narrator of the story refers to this feeling when he points out that a child intuitively grasps this closeness of the family bond, but in retrospect, realizes what a "crying thing" it was "to hurt each other." It is this same regret for past hurts given to loved ones that David laments in the epilogue of The Mountain and the Valley. Once again, the reality of the experience is not as wonderful as its expectation, and the perfection of small moments is transitory at best. In this story and the one following we may best see Buckler's masterful handling of atmosphere, language, structure, and the subtlety of human relationships.

Of the stories in The Mountain and the Valley context, "The Clumsy One," despite some awkwardnesses at the end, is one of the most interesting and significant. It contains most of the themes that have served singly as the focus of other stories, and it strongly foreshadows the complex and intricate relationships, style and structure of the first novel that was to follow two years later.

The first person narrator of the story is Daniel Redmond, "the one who had only the thin muscles of the mind."[35] The older brother David, "the strong one of the flesh," initially seems to be the clumsy one of the story's title. The story begins arrestingly with the question "Did you ever strike your brother?" From that first question a sequence of memory associations begins and suspense is created by Daniel's

statement that he did not do it "with a blow that day." The recalled incident occurred during Daniel's first summer home from college. Although David was the older he had not gone to college, since there was only enough money to provide for one son. Daniel tells the reader that there had never been any question about which of the two very different brothers would go:

> Because even as children it was I who was clumsy with anything outside the shadow world of books, and it was David who had the magic sleight for anything that could be manoeuvred with his hands. I don't know why the quick nervous way of my mind seemed to make me the special one of the family. I could see instantly the whole route of thought that led to the proof of a geometry theorem, without having to feel it step by step. But surely that was a poorer talent than to have the sure touch of David's fingers on the plow handles, that could turn the long shaving of greensward from one end of the field to the other without a single break. 36

This exerpt also seems to indicate that for Daniel, (and for Buckler himself, possibly) intellectual ability was something about which to be vaguely ashamed-- that it was not as worthy as the practical, mechanical ability which David possessed.

Early in the story the harmony of the family relationship is established. Daniel is shielded because he was the one in the family "who was weak in the flesh, but had the quick way with learning." Daniel, like the narrator of "The Quarrel," comments on the ability of the more articulate member of the family to hurt the close family relationship. It is this "hurting of the one who understands you best" that is the gist of this story.

When two of Daniel's college friends drop by the farm

unexpectedly, Daniel shuts David out of the conversation deliberately, and only later does he realize the awful thing that he has done to his kindly, understanding older brother. Daniel's deliberately making David feel that he was awkward and stupid in front of the city boys is closely paralleled in The Mountain and the Valley when David Canaan, to impress his city friend, uses unfamiliar words to shut out his country friends from the conversation. David's comment after doing so indicates that his relationship with the country boys was never the same again, for they now fully realized how different he was from them. Buckler clearly shows in both "The Clumsy One" and the novel how damaging a word or words can be in the mouth of an articulate person. Daniel, like David Canaan, also tries to fantasize the incident. But Daniel has to realize that words once said cannot be unspoken. Martha, in "One Quiet Afternoon" wished the same thing, but it was too late once the words had actually been uttered. Like David Canaan, Daniel realizes that the relationship between him and his older brother would never be the same again.

A few days later, an incident occurs while the two brothers are busy sawing logs. David previously had always made allowances for Daniel's slighter strength, and had always managed the work so that Daniel could have a rest without embarrassment in front of the other workers. This time David does not show the same sensitivity for Daniel's weakness, and mercilessly pushes Daniel until he has to ask for a rest. Buckler makes a comment here in the story: "If

you weren't brought up in the country, you can't understand what a peculiar sort of shame there is in not being able to take as heavy a hoist as the next one."[37] As David and Daniel are walking home, David calls his brother by a pet name used in happier times. Suddenly Daniel realizes that David was showing a deep understanding of the whole situation:

> I understood then what had happened this afternoon. How else could he square it between him and me, between me and my conscience, than by doing something as mean to me as I had done to him? How else, since it couldn't be mentioned with words, could he show me that he'd known all the time the falseness of what I'd done, the burden of afterward-- how else, than by doing something as unmentionable to me today and letting me see, by his face now, the falseness and burden of that?[38]

For the two brothers, the incident and its paralleling situation at the saw mill have a happy ending. Not so, however, for David Canaan and his brother Chris. When they reach an impasse such as this, a misunderstanding that is beyond words, there is no redeeming incident at the saw mill to bring the brothers back into a close relationship again. This reconciliation of characters does frequently take place in the short stories, but not in the novels, which have the more sombre atmosphere of the earlier story "The First Born Son." It would seem that Buckler rejects the happy ending as being unrealistic in the isolated artist situation of the novels, but feels that it is more satisfying for the short stories. The reconciliation can act as a unifying force for the short story which does not admit to the fuller development possible in the larger scope of the novel.

In "The Clumsy One," dialogue and the interplay of Daniel's thoughts and regrets are extremely well handled. Time shifts clearly and fluidly from the further past to the nearer past. The first person narrator provides for this shift. The relationship between the brothers is portrayed subtly and sensitively. The chief defect of the story lies in its ending. For some reason Buckler felt compelled to add on to the story, almost as an afterthought, the statement: "Did I say it was David who was the clumsy one with anything that couldn't be held in his hands?"[39] Such an obvious statement, coming as it does after a story that is full of delicacy and underplayed nuances of feeling, strikes a jarring note.

"The Clumsy One" is the last of the early stories in the context of The Mountain and the Valley. By the late months of 1950, when this story was published, many of the themes, patternings, images and stylistic devices of the first novel had been used in the stories. The theme of family relationships had been worked and reworked in a variety of combinations: husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother. With increasing skill and subtlety Buckler had shown his ability to articulate the often unspoken interplay of character. It is a long jump from the "I have no son" of "The First Born Son" to the delicate and haunting counterpoint of father and son in "Penny in the Dust." The lush, at times over-rich, description of "One Quiet Afternoon" has been subdued and controlled until description of setting acts

as a quiet undertone in "The Clumsy One."

Buckler has experimented with several types of narration, using first of all third person narration, then first person narration. The narrative formula for The Mountain and the Valley will be a combination of the two, leaving the writer the greater authority of objective, omniscient comment, as well as the freedom to enter the minds of his characters through the first person.

The most successful device of the early stories is the use of a triggering memory to recall past incidents, usually happenings that are either happier and containing the moment of perfection that can be recalled but not relived, or incidents that have relevance for the present. A combination of these are in the first novel, structured by the device of Ellen's rug hooking, which serves as a controlling pattern for the uprush of memory and recollection.

With The Mountain and the Valley Buckler does not belabour a single symbol as he has done in several of the short stories such as "A Sort of Sign" and "Yes, Joseph...." Symbolism will, for the novel, be an integral part of its theme, and not the controlling end in itself of these stories.

Death and burial have been employed in several of the stories and will occur in the novel in various ways, chiefly in the burial of David on the farm, thus trapping him in his past and in isolation. Later, burial will be used literally when David is buried in the snow on the mountain-top to freeze for all time his moment of perfection and illumination.

The thematic treatment of the artist trying to find the "single core of meaning" will have much fuller development in the first novel than it has had in the short stories. Buckler's approach, however, will remain the same as it was in "Another Christmas."

These first short stories show a writer already mature in his language, characterization, dialogue, imagery and approach. All the ingredients are present for The Mountain and the Valley.

Part 3 Stories in the Context of The Cruelest Month

Only three of the stories written between 1940 and 1952 have any discernable threads that would much later be woven into The Cruelest Month. In the first two of these three stories, the threads are tenuous at best, and contain only vague hints that thought had already been given to a second novel. The first of these two stories is "On the Third Day." The story is set at Easter, but Buckler cannot resist comparing the excitement of an Easter egg hunt with the excitement surrounding Christmas. The mother, who is the narrator, contrasts the death of her husband, a flyer, with the death of Christ. Three days after hearing that his plane has been lost, peace comes to her as she realizes that her husband is no longer shut behind a wall of silence. This realization comes about through the questions asked by her young son Peter, about Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection. When she tells her young son about the joyfullness of Easter and the hope it contains, she suddenly realizes that the same hope is present for her husband, since he lives on through their son.

The story is clearly an experiment with the techniques of symbolism and allegory. The one main symbol holds all of the story's significance. The awkward and obvious allegory is used in a heavy-handed fashion. Too much must be made of the toy airplane that young Peter finds hidden among the Easter eggs-- it indeed must stand for resurrection and the ascension, and it is too fragile and incidental a

symbol to hold such a weight of significance. "On the Third Day" also has the same sort of plot contrivance as The Cruelest Month and the same preponderance of symbolism.

The second of these two early stories, "You Could Go Anywhere Now," has a slightly closer link with The Cruelest Month. The plot involves a triangle of characters. David, who is returning to the country where he grew up, is bringing his new wife with him. The wife is identified only as "this one" until the end of the story. It might be Anna, a country girl with whom he grew up and who has been living in the city for some time, or it might be Katherine, a city girl by birth. This same type of triangular relationship of characters will be an important part of The Cruelest Month, with the Morse-Paul-Kate, the Rex-Bruce-Sheila, and the Paul-Letty-Kate relationships. The reader is led to believe, from the comments made by Mrs. Andrews, as she awaits David's arrival with some excitement and anxiety, and from David's own comments, that he has married Anna. The story's twist occurs when David explains that he has married Katherine who, although city-born, has the deep understanding which Anna has either lost or never had. It is Anna who now personifies the hollowness and artificiality of the city, and Katherine who has the understanding and sensitivity that Buckler so often associates with the country. Clearly, Katherine is the prototype for Sheila Giorno of The Cruelest Month. Although Sheila is a New York society girl, she nevertheless

receives the most sympathetic treatment by Buckler of any character in the novel. Sheila's admirable qualities are the same ones attributed to Katherine in "You Could Go Anywhere Now."

David is Buckler's persona and is also a prototype for the novel's Paul Creed. Both are echoed in David's thoughts:

> Because he could never leave this place. Because it would always be home for him. No matter what he did or where, the good slowness of earth and the little loneliness of it that was a man's best company, things like that would always be in him as they were in the people who still lived there. [40]

This is the attitude expressed by Paul about Endlaw, and it certainly seems to be Buckler's attitude about the Annapolis Valley. The chief defect of the story occurs in the necessity of referring to David's new wife as "this one" in order to conceal her identity and to build up suspense. One wishes that Buckler could have found a less awkward method. Buckler's treatment in this story of the city versus the country is interesting. In the stories of The Mountain and the Valley context, the most worthwhile virtues are found always in rural characters. One must only remember "The First Born Son" and Martin's thoughts of the city and the facelessness of its people. In The Cruelest Month, however, which deals with a combination of city characters, those of the city do have redeeming features. Such features are well portrayed in this early story in Katherine.

"The Rebellion of Young David", the third of these

early stories fitting into The Cruelest Month context, has the clearest links with the novel. This story has also been included in anthologies under the title "The Harness." In its entirety it is used as Chapter Three of The Cruelest Month. The incident is recalled in the first person by Art, the father of seven year old David. This recall is from the near past, not from a distant vantage point as in other stories.

The narrator, by the use of several isolated incidents, establishes the subtle relationship existing between him and his son. Buckler, in using the retrospective narrator, once again makes use of a short prologue and epilogue set in the fictive present as a framework for the recalled event. The prologue relates the type of relationship that Art and David have: a close, almost adult one occasioned by the death of David's mother when he was born. Art stresses that he and the boy were pals, that David called him "Art" and not "Dad," that they tried to reason things out when disputes arose. Art admits: "I had never whipped him.... We were supposed to reason things out. Sometimes that worked. Sometimes it didn't."[41] The recalled conversations between son and father show David as eager to please, "vibrating with obedience," trying to hold up his end of the adult conversation in which the two engaged. There were times, however, when David would balk, growing impatient and sullen. As Art recalls such times, he also remembers the harness that he had made David wear in the yard as a protection

from nearby traffic and a blind corner. He remembers that David rebelled at any kind of bond. Recollection of the harness triggers the memory of the particular day containing the main incident of the story.

Art has gone to the back pasture with David, where the two work together harmoniously for some time. A fine simile is used by Buckler to convey the tranquillity of their effort: "The obbligato of manual labour was like a quiet stitching together of our presences."[42] The harmony is broken when David, scared by his first sight of a skeleton and his first thoughts of death, leaves the pasture without explanation. Later in the day after the two have returned to the pasture to finish the fencing, David breaks the package of staples and scatters them on the ground. Art, acting impulsively, grabs David and spanks him. It is only later, after a sleepy remark of David's, that Art suddenly realizes that David had been afraid of the skeleton. When Art apologizes to David for the spanking, David shows himself to be the truly wise one of the two: "'No, no,' he said, 'You spank me every time I do that, won't you, Dad?... spank me, Dad.'"[43] Suddenly the realization comes to Art that he has wronged David in more than one way: "He had called me 'Dad.' Could it be that a child would rather have a father than a pal?... By spanking him I had abrogated the adult partnership between us and set him free. He could cry. His guilt could be paid for all at once and absolved."[44] Art realizes also that the spanking had not been as cruel as all the times that he

had snubbed David as one might snub an adult, that David was 'in harness' to his father's adult expectations of him.

A short epilogue, set in the fictive present, shows that David's new relationship is a much happier one for both. They are no longer 'pals,' but are father and son.

In The Cruelest Month this story is used as a recollected incident from the past of Bruce Mansfield. "Art" is Bruce Mansfield, "David" is Peter. In the novel, Peter's mother is not dead and Peter's use of his father's first name remains unchanged. The realization that comes to Art almost immediately will come to Bruce only years later after Peter has been killed in a car accident. The incident as related in the short story is more satisfying than as related in the novel: there is a greater compactness, a greater unity and logical outcome of the incident as related in the story.[45]

"The Rebellion of Young David" is a fine example of the subtle use of symbolism. The horse's skeleton serves well as a symbol of the child's fear of death and provides an effective contrast with the adult's calm acceptance and lack of sensitivity to the child's reaction. The story unquestionably ranks among the finest in Buckler's treatments of human relationships and the nuance that must be brought to bear in the effective delineation of such interrelationships.

Part 4. Stories in the Context of Ox Bells and Fireflies

Only one of the early short stories contains material used directly in Ox Bells and Fireflies. This story, "School and Me," is written in an episodic fashion, largely unplotted. It is more of the author's personal reminiscence of his childhood than a conventional short story. It was published as fiction, however, in Macleans. In this story Buckler gives the flavour of school and school life as it was in the past when he was a child. It is vaguely nostalgic and contains a wistful longing for a way of life that has since disappeared, and may now be captured only through memory. As Buckler describes "the way it was" for him as a youth, the reader senses that the memory of the experience is more enjoyable than the actual experience was.

His portrait of the one-room school, its pupils, its teacher, the dreaded yearly visit of the inspector, lunches heating on the pot-bellied stove, things learned and not learned, games of ball, 'moose,' and 'oxen' -- all these single incidents made up for Buckler the fabric of his school-boy years. He attempts to disprove certain myths about country schools and the children who attended them: "What kind of children were we? For the most part we were strangely adult. Tom Sawyer gave us a pain. We weren't cut-ups or bullies."[46]

Buckler involves the reader in his memories as he gives an account of an experience that was special to him:

> How can you tell such things as how it was the morning the mote-thickened spring sunshine slanted through the open window, over the map and over the globe, and touched your morning-cool slate with the first real touch of warmth, and you saw that the figure you were dividing with was the same as the figure in the denominator of the answer, and you thought in the same moment about the lady-slippers in the cool green shadow, waiting to be picked at noon...? [47]

But the idyllic picture of the country school, its children and teachers, was one that would not last. It too would give way to change, and that change could leave only a vague nostalgia for the past happy moments of perfection. Buckler clearly indicates this in the last paragraph of the story when he recounts the changes that did come about in the years after he left. He concludes: "I guess I just got out in time!" Nostalgia hides behind humour: this feeling will be closely copied in the chapter of <u>Ox Bells and Fireflies</u> entitled "Slate Rags, Tudors, and Popocatepetl."

Part 5 Incidental Stories

In the group of early stories under consideration in this chapter, only two do not fit into the contexts of the three novels.

The first of these, "The Finest Tree," has been strongly influenced by the Second World War. The setting is Christmas time, which serves as the controlling symbolic framework for the story. The narrator and his wife, dispirited because their son Nick is overseas and perhaps will not survive the war, decide that this Christmas they will not have a Christmas tree. In the course of an afternoon drive, they meet an old man, who, in spite of the fact that his son David has been killed in the war, is still going to have a tree. After giving the old man a lift in their car, they drive on, each lost in thought. On their return, they encounter the same old man. He has cut a tree not only for himself, but also for them. As they drive off with their tree, the old man stands facing in a south-east direction--the direction of Italy where his son David died. The fortitude and indomitable spirits of the old man help the narrator and his wife and make them feel ashamed of themselves. For them, this moment of clarity and spiritual strength is clearly associated with Christmas, as it is for many of Buckler's characters.

This story, which has much of the same quality as "On the Third Day," is well written. It has effective dialogue and great poignance. Little of the characteristic

Buckler language is associated with it, but the thematic treatment is handled in a fashion similar to other stories of the same period. It is clearly one of the 'experimental' short stories that was discarded because of its topical material. Only the importance of the Christmas season and the subtle interplay of character would survive in the later novels. The old man is, however, vaguely reminiscent of the father in "David Comes Home."

The second example of the incidental material is a brief, domestic and quite comic account of a wife's advice regarding what Ernest, the narrator, should do with his spare time. It is entitled "Hands Off My Spare Time." The prose is whimsical, and is more similar to material found in Buckler's essays and articles than in his fiction. Macleans, however, published this occasional piece as fiction. It would seem to be similar in content to Buckler's present work-in-progress, a collection of humorous essays and nonsensical poetry, the working title of which is "Hamlet," or "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, I'm Hung Up in Ma's Closet, and I'm Feeling So Sad...".

Part 6 The Early Stories -- Summary

The sixteen published stories of this early period (1940-1952) provide an excellent insight into the writer-in-the-making. From the first stories published in Esquire to the most recent "The Rebellion of Young David," one finds a writer already mature in his handling of theme, dialogue, structure and language. It is not a case of the early stories being weak and awkward with a gradual improvement through the years. Strength is already present in the earliest stories of the 1940's. Buckler's handling of language in all its richness and evocative power is well established in "One Quiet Afternoon," which was written more or less on a dare proposed to Buckler by Esquire after his letters analysing and criticizing the prose content of that magazine. One may note, however, that the 'scatter-gun' effect of the prose is gradually brought under control so that the lush descriptive language is used with better economy and effect. The handling of characters is subtle and powerful in all stories. Buckler's use of facial expressions rather than words to convey emotion begins with the first story and is masterfully handled.

The most arresting quality of Buckler's prose style is its closeness to poetry. Details are carefully chosen to evoke the exact feeling of an incident. The images and symbols employed frequently suggest much more than is said, thus making the sentences rich and intense. Sometimes, however, as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter,

Buckler makes a symbol carry too much weight. Consequently, the symbol breaks down or becomes ineffective.

Even the description of a lazy afternoon in August captures the feeling of the day rather than its look: "The sky was a dead-still August blue, and in the fields around him now and then a wave of hay would float for a minute in the breeze and then be quiet again. Only the nervous leaves of the poplars in the graveyard kept up a steady murmur."[48] All three of Buckler's novels are full of such descriptions, especially Ox Bells and Fireflies.

The result is a poetic prose which Claude Bissell has called "the high metaphysical style" in which "the reader must be constantly in search of a whole cluster of meanings."[49] So successful is Buckler in the blending and infusing of meaning into symbols and descriptive language that one at times senses that the feeling conveyed is indeed the meaning. Since many of his best writings are memories, many of the symbols used act as the carriers of past emotions brought to intense awareness in the present by these signs. This is the case in stories such as "David Comes Home" where the fishing spinner recalls the memory and gives the father a fresh awareness and intensity of the moment being recalled. A Christmas tree is put to the same use in "The Finest Tree." The symbol thus carries emotional communications that cannot be articulated in any other fashion.

Certainly with these stories all the ingredients are present for The Mountain and the Valley, which followed in

1952. It is noteworthy also that this first novel, which took six years to write,[50] was in progress at the same time as several of Buckler's finest short stories -- "The Clumsy One," "The Quarrel," "Penny in the Dust," and "The Rebellion of Young David." In many respects, these early years were Buckler's most creative period.

CHAPTER II

THE LATER STORIES (1952-1963)

Part 1 The Established Writer

Ernest Buckler remained a farmer first and a writer second until 1958. The Mountain and the Valley was well received by critics and reviewers and established Buckler as a novelist of some renown in Canada. Many favourable reviews for this novel came from the United States as well. Several film companies were interested in making The Mountain and the Valley into a film, CBC radio staged a ninety-minute adaptation in 1956, and CBC television prepared a "Festival" production of the novel.

In both 1957 and 1958, Buckler won the Governor General's Award for the best short story published in Canada during the preceding year. It was at this time that Buckler gave up farming as his chief occupation and devoted his full efforts to writing.

By the late 1950's Buckler was at work on his second novel and with the help of his first Canada Council grant, completed The Cruelest Month in 1963. It did not, however, enjoy the same success as The Mountain and the Valley. Claude Bissell pointed out some of the reasons for its lack of general appeal: "They do not spring naturally to life, as did the characters in The Mountain and the Valley.... Moreover, the prose ... has become far more complex, intense, and involved ... often bringing the flow of the narrative to

a halt."[1] Robert Harlow had even stronger criticism: "It is not a good book; in fact, it is so bad that it is difficult, if not impossible, to take seriously."[2] Several of the problems encountered with The Cruelest Month show up in the short stories which belong to its context, and will be dealt with in Part 2 of this chapter.

During this same period, Buckler continued to work on his short prose: radio talks for the CBC, stories sold to Atlantic Advocate, Chatelaine, Canadian Home Journal, Weekend, and several other Canadian and American magazines. During this period, twenty-two short stories were published, most of which fit into the context of The Cruelest Month.

Part 2 Stories in the Context of The Cruelest Month

Stella Marchant, in "The Educated Couple," is one of Buckler's best examples of a totally integrated character. Although illiterate, Stella possesses the wisdom of the simple country woman, and when she learns to write, she is fascinated by the power of words but instinctively resists being confused, overawed or deluded by them. She and Letty, of The Cruelest Month, have much in common.

The story is narrated in the first person by Professor Peters, who lives in the country because of his ailing wife. Peters becomes involved in the life of Glen and Stella Marchant when Glen suffers an accident that keeps him hospitalized for some time. It is Peters who must bring the news of her husband's accident to Stella. Aware of the disparity in education between Glen and Stella, people of the community tend to look down on Stella. They wonder what Glen Marchant, a "knowin' man" and a school teacher, had ever seen in her. People had concluded that since Glen and Stella kept very much to themselves, he must be ashamed of her. The narrator leaps ahead at this moment to remark ironically: "Just how ignorant Stella was, I'd discovered myself."[3] He had found that Stella was a gracious hostess, possessed of poise and tact in sparing her guest embarrassment. When Peters tells her of Glen's accident, she became pale, but did not scream or cry. "I knew she was holding herself in until she was alone."[4]

Stella's problem of illiteracy becomes critical when

she receives the first compensation cheque. Hesitantly, she asks Peters if he will teach her to sign her name. Two days later, Peters was astonished by her quickness and by the fact that her writing already showed the stamp of her personality.

Peters is then inspired to ask Stella if she would like lessons in reading and writing, so that she could write to her husband while he is in hospital. Stella, with dignity, yet with rising excitement, says that she has never thought much about it: "No more'n I'd think about not being able to sing or anything."[5]

Three weeks of lessons pass, and then Stella shyly shows Peters a letter for her husband. It is simple, straightforward and loving. Stella, with only her few weeks of lessons, is able to convey feeling and concern with honesty. On reading the letter Peters feels something of the discoverer's excitement. Stella has shown herself to be an apt pupil, and to have a genuine feeling for words: "'Ain't it funny,' she said, ' 'furniture' is such a long word and 'love' is such a short one. You'd think it'd be the other way around.'"[6]

Woven through the story is Peters' suspicions that Glen was buying presents for another woman, since in his pocket on the day of the accident an expensive bottle of perfume and a large gold bracelet had been found. Not knowing Peters' suspicions (suspicions prove to be totally unfounded), Stella explains the significance of the initials on the bracelet which Glen had remade for her because the bracelet was too gaudy for her taste. Peters pauses to reflect about his

unworthy suspicions:

> What did Glen ever see in her? I was thinking. He just saw Stella, that's all. A woman of taste, taste of the kind so subtle and natural it can only be envied, not imitated.... He was an educated man not because he could read books, but because he knew Stella wasn't uneducated because she couldn't.[7]

Stella is educated in the values of humanity such as kindness and generosity -- something that no amount of formal education can ever instill. Stella is thus in the same mold as Martha of The Mountain and the Valley or Letty of The Cruelest Month. For those who might have wondered what kind of marriage Paul Creed and Letty might have in the latter novel, this story might well provide the answer. It is strange that Buckler himself did not see the appropriateness of the relationship. He remarks on "the irony that Paul thinks he's found an answer with Letty -- when, anyone can see, particularly with Letty changing herself ("proper" speech, etc.), that this is maybe an ignis fatuus too."[8]

"The Educated Couple," like Stella herself, is a relatively simple story told partially in the fictive present and partially as recollection. It holds only slim traces of the complex relationships and interrelationships of characters that will form so important a part of The Cruelest Month. This story is a good example of what Spettigue notes in his essay "The Way It Was," concerning Buckler's view of the word-shaped character:

> ... one detects in David -- perhaps in Buckler himself -- that sense of guilt on the part of the

> very articulate person that an anti-intellectual society fosters, as though too great a facility with words implied a lightness of character; a kind of black magic clings to the rituals of words even yet.[9]

One could only hope that Stella's new skills of writing would not change her, though her innate dignity and wisdom would probably guard against that.

"The Dream and the Triumph" was the 1957 winner of the President's Medal for Fiction, as the best short story published in Canada in the previous year. It is a story that contains the best elements of the novels, and also several of the themes that Buckler worked out successfully in earlier short stories.

One of the main characters of the story is Paul Redmond, who could serve as the prototype for Paul Creed of The Cruelest Month. The other main character is Mary Redmond, Paul's grandmother. According to John Orange, she is closely modeled after Buckler's mother.[10] She is also similar to Martha of The Mountain and the Valley, and in her wisdom and dignity she is very reminiscent of Stella of "The Educated Couple," and Letty of The Cruelest Month. Her husband, Chris Redmond, is cast in the same mold as Martin of "The First Born Son" and Joseph of The Mountain and the Valley. Paul, who has been raised by his grandparents ever since he was orphaned at the age of ten, is in the city taking a degree in engineering. As with so many of Buckler's characters, Paul has great ability in mathematics: "Even as a child he'd taken the mathematician's almost sensuous delight in

surprising from a thing the equations that ran like hidden bones through it."[11]

Paul returns to the farm just a few days before his grandfather's death, feeling guilty about the accident that caused the fatal blood-poisoning, and thinking that if he had been on the farm helping his grandfather, the accident would not have occurred. As Buckler describes Chris, his prose becomes poetry; Chris's face wavers, "like puffs of breeze on a lamp flame when the door blows open.... There was that final moment in the bedroom when three people became two people there, unalterably, and nothing moved but the curtain, in and out a little, suddenly, like a sigh."[12]

Paul reluctantly decides to stay with his grandmother and run the farm. He almost resents the decision that he feels has been forced on him. Paul and his grandmother exchange sharp words as his resentment shows through his tiredness.

Later, Paul discovers that his grandmother's eyesight is failing and the only hope for her vision lies in a difficult, expensive and dangerous operation. Determined that his grandmother will have the operation, and knowing that she will not accept the money from him, Paul persuades her to enter a writing contest which will pay five hundred dollars for the best entry entitled "My Favourite Memory." Paul never sends her entry, but instead pretends that she has won the prize. Paul accompanies her to the city, concealing a terrible misgiving. He is afraid that once back in the city where he had been studying, he would find it

difficult, if not impossible, to return to the farm.

On the plane and later in the surgeon's office Mary conducted herself with great dignity. In the hospital after the successful operation, the nurses treated her as their favourite and most extraordinary patient, confiding in her and paying court to her. But the greatest gift or triumph for Mary is not the restoration of her sight, but rather the doctor's announcement that her case, owing to its uniqueness, would be reported in an international medical journal. Touchingly, this is for Mary Redmond her immortality. Her name will appear in print, circulating all over the world. Her reaction is both pathetic and comic, as Buckler clearly shows the magic of the printed word for a simple country woman.

Paul also is changed by the visit to the city. It is a triumph for him as well, as a bloodless operation is performed on his vision:

> ... he was unbearably homesick. It was as simple as that. Here where you left no track, where almost everyone was servant to something, where the memory of you stopped with your breath, he longed to be back where you could see the paths your feet had made on the yielding earth. Where your only masters were sun and storm. Where in your neighbours' registry of deeds any little individuality you'd ever achieved was perpetually recorded. And where your little kingdom would always be known as "the Paul Redmond place" as long as the windows looked out on the spot where you lay. It struck him that intensely. [13]

What Paul observes is a familiar thread in Buckler's fiction. It is the feeling that possessed Martin in "The First Born Son," Joseph in The Mountain and the Valley, and Paul Creed in The Cruelest Month. The city is transitory at

best; only in the country can a person come face to face with himself and feel himself a part of the timelessness of his natural surroundings. The promise of Paul's happiness and acceptance of the country life is given not only in the above quotation but also in the letter he receives from Molly. He thinks of her: "she could never fit into the mold that seems to pattern most of these sure-faced wives here!" Yet Paul discovers that Molly has the same quality that Glen Marchant must have discovered in Stella, "the kind of understanding that's a passport anywhere that matters."

At the end of the story Mary Redmond hints to Paul that she really saw through his ruse of the contest, but her innate delicacy and tact forbids her to make direct mention of it. And it is just this tact and consideration for others that Buckler seems to be saying may be found most often in country people.

"The Dream and the Triumph" is a widely rambling story, moving from the death of Chris, through Mary's and Paul's life together on the farm, through the writing contest, to the operation. It is, however, tightly held together by the characters themselves and the developing closeness of Paul and Mary. The title itself suggests the duality of the story -- that it is a dream and an actual triumph for both Mary and Paul.

Material from this story also appears in the context of Ox Bells and Fireflies. Mary's failing eyesight and the operation are retold in the chapter entitled "A Woman." Kate

of that chapter is essentially the same person as Mary. In the chapter "A To Z" of the same book, the story about the lost wedding ring (Mary's favourite memory for the writing contest) appears with "Mary" replaced by "Stella." One begins to see, with increasing frequency, the tight interweaving of the fictive material, as Buckler works through the medium of the short story and the novel to tell "the way it was" for people with whom he was familiar.

"Glance in the Mirror" is an extension of Buckler's thesis that art is merely an imitation of life, and that living is more worthwhile than art. The main characters are Jeff, a writer, and his wealthy wife. Sheila cannot understand why Jeff feels the need to write when there is no financial necessity for him to do so. As Sheila enters the room, Jeff "was right on the verge of capturing it exactly."[14] "It" is the same thing that Steve of "Another Christmas" is trying to capture also, and in this respect this story is a reworking of the earlier one. The reader shares Jeff's thoughts as he thinks about the job of the writer and the difficulties involved:

> They thought that writing was always wonderful, but most of the time it was the loneliest job in the world.... You would think of all the times you'd sat here alone, while the rest were building something tangible. Together. Really together with the real thing, not this shadow of it.[15]

This then is the agony of writing, not only for Jeff or Steve, but for Buckler himself as well. Although art ideally has the power to transcend time and hold onto perfection, it is

only an imitation of life, the "shadow of it." This realization seems to hold some guilt as if the writer were only half living, while others "were building something tangible." This remark also points up the ironic tension existing in this story and in much of Buckler's fiction: that art is at the same time both more real and less real than life itself. Buckler realizes art's greater reality as he searches for the 'single core of meaning,' but also he realizes its limitations, as thoughts have to be word-shaped instead of merely felt.

Writing, however, does have its compensations when the words and thoughts begin to come in great rushes, and "time itself could be caught and said." This is David's realization on the mountain top, moments before he dies. This is also Morse Halliday's thesis of writing and life. But after the exultation of the words rushing, another realization sets in: the realization that the writer has done "only bits of the thing that it was meant for him to do wholly."

Such a realization often produces guilt feelings in Buckler's artist-characters. The artist feels he should be able to succeed in capturing those remembered feelings of wholeness. Art, however, can only deal with fragments, never the whole or the essence of a thing. This, then, is the writer's greatest failure. Steve, David and later Morse, all try to find the 'single core of meaning' that will illuminate a feeling or experience, but it cannot be

expressed through art. Only in the actual experience of the feeling or of the moment may its essential meaning be grasped. Art may be only recollective: an attempt to find the 'single core of meaning' through relating 'bits of the thing.' For Buckler, achieved art is always imperfect and inadequate.

This time, Jeff feels, in what he has written about Anna, he has almost succeeded in "telling it exactly right." Sheila enters the room, pausing a moment to glance in the mirror and smooth her hair. She voices the thought that Jeff is wasting his time, "puttering around with a few old words." In reaction to Sheila's words, Jeff rips up what he has just written. As Sheila begins to leave the room, she glances in the mirror once again. Jeff suddenly gets an idea and begins to write about their relationship: "But they were not together at all. She could destroy his voice, without knowing it, because she couldn't enter into any of the things that were his."[16] When Sheila asks to read what Jeff has written, he decides almost defiantly to let her look in his mirror for a change. Sheila does not understand what Jeff has written, and with exquisite irony says: "I think it's wonderful. But why do you always have to make them so grim?... Why don't you ever write about you and me?"[17] Jeff is initially deflated, but on reflection, realizes that Sheila loves him for himself, and not for what he has written. She had tried to understand him, but had he ever tried to understand her? He suddenly sees himself as selfish and egocentric, a writer to whom words were more important than love.

Buckler's conclusion in this story is significant. Up to this point, words have assumed the utmost importance, not only for Buckler, but also for his artist-characters. There have been only vague hints, and these found in the thoughts of the inarticulate characters, that words were not as important as human relationships: indeed, that human relationships transcend words. Jeff's insistence on the importance of love is treated fully in The Cruelest Month as Buckler there explores the complexities and kinds of love that may exist between people. In this novel Buckler comes to the same conclusion about the all-importance of love as the final solution to the "isolation and desolation that besieges man and woman alike."[18]

We see then, that "Glance in the Mirror" recalls ideas touched upon in earlier stories such as "Another Christmas" and material used in The Mountain and the Valley where David first experiences the joys and frustrations of writing. It also anticipates the main thematic considerations of The Cruelest Month.

"By Any Other Name" is a slender little story, subtitled "A holiday romance." It is based on the rather improbable coincidence of a scientist, Kevin Creed, having the same name as a best-selling novelist. Kevin decides to impersonate this writer during a short vacation at Briar Lodge in order to really experience life outside the prison of his laboratory. The disguise is successful and leads to a romance with a waitress. When Kevin becomes guilty and starts to confess

his true identity to her, he finds that she knew he was an imposter from the beginning. The fact that he is not the famous writer Kevin Creed had nothing to do with her love for him.

Doubtless Briar Lodge comes from Buckler's own experience and is closely identified with Kent House, where he worked summers before he went to university. Also it may be identified with Endlaw, Paul Creed's small hotel in The Cruelest Month. Briar Lodge had a rule about leaving guests strictly alone if they wished it, and that is Paul Creed's behaviour towards his guests at Endlaw. The scientist-waitress relationship developed in the story is similar to that of Paul and Letty in the novel.

The entire story is somewhat contrived, based as it is on the improbable coincidence of such uncommon names. There is a facileness about the story that is quite different from the honesty of emotion and character of the country stories. Indeed, this story suffers from the same kind of contrivance and falsity as The Cruelest Month. Even the symbolic linking of oboe and orchestra throughout the story seems heavy. As Kevin sits alone in his laboratory his isolation is rendered in orchestral terms: "the only orchestration of personality he could hear inside himself was a single note for unaccompanied oboe."[19] Buckler continues the orchestra metaphor: the pit lights come on inside Kevin, the oboe has accompaniments. As he sits down in the dining-room, conscious that he has been pointed out as that Kevin Creed, this symbolism

intrudes again: "He heard the whole orchestra -- strings, brasses, percussion and all strike up inside him."[20] This symbolism is used once again before it is finally dropped, as if the author had become aware of its overuse. In Buckler's best stories symbolism and imagery always grow naturally from the context. It is only when they are artificially imposed on the character or incident that they do not ring true. Such is very much the case in this story. It would be more effective if the entire last paragraph had been omitted. The introduction of facts about the author Kevin Creed and the subsequent marriage of the scientist Kevin Creed and his waitress is quite irrelevant and destroys the light banter and romance of their developing relationship. And unfortunately, the worst aspects of this story in many respects were to be incorporated into The Cruelest Month.

"Cleft Rock, With Spring" contains echoes of The Mountain and the Valley and also fits into the context of The Cruelest Month. The three characters of the story are Jeff Kendall, his city wife Madge and Dave Woodworth. The latter is an incidental character but is important to the story's development. There is an interesting autobiographical note in Jeff's actuarial career: he had been a country boy with a genius for mathematics and his stubborn drive had brought him from office clerk to chief actuary in just a few years. His success has, however, left him feeling dissatisfied.

Madge and Jeff, suffering from a restlessness and lack

of communication in their marriage -- they can not even discuss the last party they attended -- go back to Jeff's home town to try to recapture what has been lost between them. The town of Dondale is disappointing to both, but especially to Jeff. It has a faded appearance and is not as he had remembered it from his youth. Both find that the past cannot be recaptured. As they drive along the road they pass Dave Woodworth, a childhood friend of both. Although they do not stop to speak with Dave, seeing him triggers a memory for each. They recall a spring on the old logging road where they had played as children. In spite of the bushes which choke the path, they find the spring, and it has not changed since their childhood summers. Although he has spent years in the city, Jeff still feels himself to be essentially a country boy, while Madge, only a summer visitor to Dondale, has the sureness and polish of the city person. As they see the spring, Jeff thinks to himself that Madge seems to be 'automatically' ahead of him: "You knew you were city-grained and I was homemade..."[21]

Suddenly, in a cleft of rock, Madge spots a ring made from an ox-shoe nail that Jeff had fashioned for her long ago when she was his childhood sweetheart. She recalls that she had thrown it away because Jeff had turned the occasion of its presentation into a wisecrack for Dave's benefit. Madge now asks Jeff to get the ring out of the cleft. Somehow her action pleases Jeff, and it would seem that a new communication between them will be possible in the future.

When Jeff suggests that they stop on their way back and see Dave, Madge agrees. She knows that what she says will be very important at this very delicate point in their relationship. She recalls the moment long ago when Jeff made the ring for her, and thanks him for giving "a city mouse" such a terrific build-up to his friend Dave.

This story contains several recurring themes in Buckler's fiction: the country boy returning home, the attitude of mockery to cover up feelings of inferiority, and the inferiority itself which is engendered by its country origin. The lack of communication between Jeff and Madge is handled in a convincing, subtle manner, with the tentativeness of their new relationship delicately hinted at. Although the story is related largely from Madge's point of view, through memory and recall the reader is also able to see Jeff's thoughts. Madge is the city girl, like Sheila Giorno of The Cruelest Month, or Katherine of "You Could Go Anywhere Now," who must bring sympathetic understanding to the country boy. Jeff remains just that, in spite of his city success. In her own way, Madge feels a guilt at being "city-grained", as if she is an intruder into Dave Woodworth's "homemade" world. In this respect, this story closely prefigures the Sheila-Bruce relationship in The Cruelest Month.

The symbolic use of the cleft rock, the spring and the ring is effectively handled, with the cleft rock indicating the division and lack of communication between Jeff and Madge, the spring the unchanging quality of the past and the

new possibilities in their relationship, and the ring, in its circularity, the return not only to the sources, but also the new harmony in the marriage. It is significant too that the ring is retrieved and kept. In previous stories, the symbol of a past perfection, be it spinner or penny, must be buried again in order to preserve the perfection in an amber of timelessness. As a result, the ring is the more dynamic symbol, since it hints at new moments of perfection and awareness to come.

"The Concerto" introduces a type of character already present in The Mountain and the Valley, and one that will have increased importance in The Cruelest Month. Dave Carter, like Rex Giorno of the latter novel, is an amputee, handicapped by the loss of a finger. Unlike Rex, he is not emotionally handicapped as well. The plot centres on the meeting of Dave Carter and Mona Graham at a party. David is listening to Mona play a concerto that he too had once tried to play before the loss of his finger. As David listens to Mona's playing, he remembers the fun he had had in his life before the accident which ended his own piano playing. When Mona finishes Dave speaks with her, and finds an easy kinship with her through music. When she asks Dave if he plays, he replies by holding up his hand. "It was funny, he'd never been able to do that with anyone else, without a wisecrack."[22] This attitude of Dave's, of making a joke to cover the seriousness of the moment, is reminiscent of both "Cleft Rock, With Spring" and "You Wouldn't Believe

Me." Mona, with the same type of understanding that Madge Kendall showed, asks Dave if he would like to play, with her supplying the missing hand. Dave and Mona play the concerto perfectly and Dave realizes that once it was completed, it would not be necessary for him to play it ever again. The moment of perfection has been reached and held, and by burying it, no repetition will be necessary. What is now important for Dave is the new feeling of being together (in concert) with Mona. His feelings for Mona on first meeting her are reminiscent of David's in "You Could Go Anywhere Now;" that he and Mona had an instinctive understanding between them for which words were not necessary. Many of Buckler's characters search for this kind of relationship that transcends words. Once again, Buckler's attitude of suspicion towards one who is highly articulate seems to be hinted at. But then many stories have already been examined in which words were not sufficient for explaining 'the way it was' with a recollected incident that had instinctive, but not articulated, feeling.

One of the most interesting stories in The Cruelest Month context is "The Darkest Time." It is a third person narrative involving an engaged farm couple named Carl Devers and Anna Cleaves. Thirteen days before their wedding, they go to Truro for the day, and the incidents of that day form the substance of the story. Carl, who has a limp resulting from childhood polio (the 'amputee' figure again), has never seen a circus. While Anna shops Carl goes to the circus and

is greatly impressed by the trapeze artist performing on the high wire. Carl is momentarily taken from his own ordinary world of the farm, and forgetting his limp, visualizes himself on the trapeze. After the performance he meets the star of the trapeze act and finds him to be just an ordinary person, in his own way no different from Carl. The trapeze artist looks on his own job as being ordinary and sometimes repetitive and boring, despite the danger.

When Carl later joins Anna, she is staring with envy in her eyes into a department store window at an expensive wedding dress. "Once or twice in a lifetime a woman's face unconsciously leaves its key in the lock.... He knew that she was seeing herself in this dress exactly as he had seen himself on the trapeze. Only there was no protest in her vision."[23] Anna is able to accept calmly that the expensive wedding dress could not be hers and offers no overt protest. Carl learns from her the futility of protesting against what he cannot have. Once again, it is the woman's practical wisdom that teaches the visionary male a lesson -- the same kind of lesson that Peters, in "The Educated Couple," found he could learn from Stella. Nevertheless, Carl feels the assault on Anna's modest country appearance when she is "snubbed" by the rich surroundings of the store.

The situation with Carl is also closely paralleled by Kevin Creed in "By Any Other Name." "The Darkest Time" is a more successful handling of the theme of wishing to be someone other than what one is. Symbolism is subtle, and

the story in general possesses a greater honesty and naturalness. The only jarring note that struck me in this story was the name "Anna Cleaves." Buckler usually shows greater discernment and sensitivity in the naming of his characters. The most successful device in the story is the handling of characterization and feeling through facial expression, a device which often results in some of Buckler's finest descriptive language.

Still another story having this theme (of wishing to be what one is not) is "The Doctor and the Patient." Walter Moore, the patient of the title, is a writer who consults a psychiatrist. Moore is bothered by the fact that he is dissatisfied as a writer and would like to be a doctor instead, but he is worried that it is too late in his life to change. In conversation with Dr. Austen, the latter explains:

> ...It's as if you'd been blind, isn't it, and then got your vision back... but just too late to catch the things you really wanted to see. It's as if the past were a sort of wall your eyes could see through but your hands couldn't smash down, to grasp the life that should have been yours all along. And it almost kills you to stand there helpless and stare at that life being lived by someone else doing the very things you were cut out for.[24]

Dr. Austen tried to explain to Moore that his talents lie in writing, that to be a doctor requires certain talents and long study as well. Through his questioning it soon becomes apparent that Moore would not have been a good doctor for he hates to see blood. To convince Moore further, Dr. Austen brings from his desk a piece of writing and asks Moore as a writer to evaluate it critically. Moore does so, saying

that the person who wrote it could never be a writer because the piece lacks skill and technique. After Moore leaves the office, the doctor sighs and reluctantly puts away his piece of writing. Like his patient, the doctor is also longing for an unrealizable dream. This incident is used in The Cruelest Month. In the novel, Paul Creed is envied by his doctor because of the life in Nova Scotia involving hunting and fishing. Paul's doctor shows the same wistfullness as Dr. Austen with his longing to be a writer. Buckler carries the theme one step further in the novel. Paul adopts the name Bruce Halliday from Bruce Mansfield and Morse Halliday. Bruce will someday be a doctor; Morse is a writer. Paul, in feeling that his pseudonym suits him, is another of Buckler's characters who would like to be both doctor and writer.

It is interesting to speculate just how much of this story is autobiographical. At the time of writing it, Buckler himself was already in his early fifties. His life in Toronto as an actuary had been over for two decades, and his life as a farmer had been over for nearly four years. By this point in his life, he was totally, and, one might say irrevocably, committed to writing. If we see Walter Moore as Buckler's persona, then Buckler is voicing through Moore a feeling of distrust for those who place great faith in art as something that can actually show things as they truly are. Art is simply an attempt to appreciate the myriad fragments of all things around us, but at times Buckler seems to be

saying that this act of appreciation and awareness is an unworthy commitment. His writer-characters all, at one time or another, come to grips with this problem of a vague guilt for their occupation.

As early as 1941, with the publishing of "Another Christmas," the fictional writer is struggling with the problem of saying 'the way it was.' The writer-narrator of "The Quarrel" has the same struggle to tell exactly the quality of the misunderstanding between his parents, and the excitement he felt about going to the fair. It is certainly no accident that Daniel Redmond, the narrator of "The Clumsy One," is the more articulate of the two brothers, and is, in his own eyes, the more clumsy of the two. David Canaan, in Buckler's first novel, is isolated because of the very fact of his greater articulateness. He feels himself estranged in a world where thoughts are not 'word-shaped.' Jeff, in "Glance in the Mirror," comes to the conclusion that "his few stuffy old words were less important than any kind of love."[25] It is also evident in The Cruelest Month that the one character who is the most solid and appealing is Letty, who never becomes involved in the word-games and intellectual sparring of the other characters. She triumphs through her artistry in the kitchen and her ability to give simple, unquestioning love and understanding. Paul thinks to himself, after the night spent with Letty:

> And to think of Letty was to turn from the tattered complications -- or no, the complicatifying-- of the others and to touch a safety warm as the stinging

> reallegiance to some tie you'd come within a fool's breath of denying. He felt beautifully simple, and she was the beautiful monosyllable of home. (CM, 296)

It would seem then that the people who are often most suspect in Buckler's eyes are those whose thoughts are 'word-shaped.' That includes Buckler himself.

The remaining three stories that fit into The Cruelest Month context do so owing to their triangles of character involvement.

"Nettles Into Orchids" is a rather disappointing story with an unrealistic situation, strained and unnatural dialogue, and a resolution that is difficult to account for. The story is basically an affirmation of the country woman and the virtues she represents when compared with a city woman. Margot Faith, although country born, is now an actress of some renown in the city. She returns to Greatbridge after many years and visits Kate Elwood, the widow of Peter Elwood. The contrast of the two women is established from the beginning by the use of a small detail: "Margot Faith's fantastic hat seemed to be snickering at this small-town parlour of Kate's."[26] Kate pounces on Margot, accusing her of jealousy because Peter married Kate and not her. Kate says that Margot has returned only to gloat over Kate because Peter is now dead. Kate sees herself as the real winner because she had had Peter for these years and now has his two children for comfort. Even as she says this, she wonders if perhaps Peter didn't always love Margot more. If she had remained in Greatbridge, instead of going to the city for a career as an actress, perhaps he

would have married her instead of Kate. These nagging doubts have beset Kate all her married life. Margot is able to quiet Kate's doubts, and the contrite Kate invites Margot to stay with her and the children for an extended period.

There is also Margot's wish that she had stayed in Greatbridge, and Kate's vague longing for the type of excitement that Margot has had as an actress. The shallowness of characterization comes about because the characters are treated by Buckler as caricatures of their respective lives, and not as real people. Margot is the archetypal city woman; Kate, the country woman who is nonplussed by the city woman. Beyond this, the two have no real substance or believability. The 'about-face' and prompt resolution at the story's end is abrupt and inadequately prepared for. One feels like adding, "And they all lived happily ever after." This is one of the least successful and convincing of Buckler's short stories.

"One Sweet Day" is also a rather contrived story. For Barney Morgan it is indeed one sweet day in the ironical sense. The morning of the story he had had a quarrel with his wife Ann about an old girl friend of whom Ann is still jealous. His car is making a suspicious ticking sound. He stops at the garage to have the car repaired. There is a small irritant in the transmission which sets Barney to thinking. When he gets home he tells Ann about the problems with the car, and compares the irritant that has given the trouble with the car to his old girl friend whom he sees as abrasive and trouble-making, like the grit in the transmission.

All is then well between Barney and Ann. The plot of this story, like that of "Nettles Into Orchids," is a bit too contrived. There is almost no character development, although Barney does arrive at some measure of self knowledge and shows a greater sensitivity towards Ann.

"Choose Your Partners" has the same type of character involvement and complexity as The Cruelest Month, and a similar character triangle. Four characters, in several varieties of triangles, are present in the story. The story focuses on one couple, John and Mindy Peters, who have left the city and now live in the country so that John can pursue his writing career. They are visited by another couple from Toronto. Since John and Mindy want to appear as the successful writer and his wife, 'playing' at living on the farm, the conversation among the four is stilted and artificial. The characters are moved about by Buckler, and the whispered 'asides' they manage to sneak to each other, about each other are silly and contrived. The Toronto visitors come across as shallow creatures; Mindy and John, who, up to this point have been quite dissatisfied with country life, opt for the solid values of the country. The most appealing character of the story is the country mailman, who is the personification of the country values that John and Mindy come to admire. He provides the story with a wry humour. After the Toronto visitors leave, the mailman returns to the house, and where he had earlier left a rejection slip for one of John's stories, he now brings a letter containing a cheque for five hundred

dollars. With the receipt of the cheque, John's decision to reject city life in favour of country life is vindicated. The story thus serves as a vehicle for reaffirming country values.

It becomes evident that the stories in The Cruelest Month context (with three possible exceptions) are not as successful as the earlier stories, those set in the context of The Mountain and the Valley. (The three more successful are "The Educated Couple," "The Dream and the Triumph," and "Cleft Rock, With Spring.") In many of these stories the plot seems to be too contrived, the symbolism too forced, and the characters moved about on a stage to suit the convenience of the plot. Few of the characters have the strength and believability of much earlier characters such as Martha of "One Quiet Afternoon," or Martin of "The First Born Son." None of these stories have the poignancy and haunting descriptive powers of "Penny in the Dust." If these stories were a preparation, as it were, for The Cruelest Month, it then becomes apparent why that novel was not as fine a work as the first novel.

Like the short stories that preceded it, The Cruelest Month attempts to grapple with complex interrelationships, with the mental actions and reactions of the seven principal characters whose lives make up the fabric of the novel. One comes to feel that Buckler is trying to 'order' his characters as they assemble and reassemble at Endlaw and indulge in their complex, and at times, facile, word games and soul

exploration.

Claude Bissell speaks of the problems involved in The Cruelest Month:

> The Cruelest Month represents an inevitable stage in the development of an artist. The first novel had the fluidity and lyric grace of autobiography. The structure was determined by the simple flow of events, and a strong emotional appeal was gained by a deep immersion in the consciousness of a central figure. The new novel is carefully, elaborately and a bit stiffly constructed. The centre of interest shifts rapidly from one character to another, and there is no strong centre. Something of the spirit of the novel is perhaps unconsciously revealed by the frequent use of mathematical metaphors to record the movement of emotions.... One feels that the poetry and the vision so beautifully captured in the first novel have not been completely captured in the second. [27]

The same shortcomings that Bissell speaks of in connection with The Cruelest Month are present in the later short stories in that novel's context.

It is evident that Buckler must have felt that novel's shortcomings, for Ox Bells and Fireflies is a return to the same confessional and recollective mood as The Mountain and the Valley. With his third book, Buckler perceptively returns to the same type of people that made the early short stories and the first novel so memorable.

Part 3 Stories in the Context of The Mountain and the Valley

Only two of the later stories recall material of The Mountain and the Valley context. The first of these stories, "The Line Fence," is set on the farm with routine farm chores and farm people. The relationships of these farm people, however, are complex, subtle and inarticulate. The quasi-narrator of the story is Gil Roach, an inquisitive farmer, who serves to relate character details and to comment on the action. The two chief characters of the story are Steve Elliot and Ed Lawson, good friends and neighbours for many years. The relationship between them is very similar to that of Joseph and his neighbours in The Mountain and the Valley. Gil comes upon Steve and Ed, who are busy putting up a line fence between their property. Gil ponders on the strained atmosphere that he senses between the two men. Because of what Gil knew about Ed and his temperament, he concludes that the trouble must have been started by Steve.

Gil finds himself taking Steve's part because Ed is just too perfect. His cows never got into the fields of his neighbours and he always borrowed tools and returned them in better condition than he had found them. Gil tries to pump Ed about the cause of the disagreement but Ed will say nothing. Steve finally explains to Gil what had happened. Steve is bewildered because Ed had taken his words in the wrong way. "I didn't mean it in that way," is all that Steve can say. Significantly, it is words which cause the problem between Ed and Steve. "It was only meant to be a

casual remark. But perhaps it was his sudden awareness that it must be made to sound casual that made its casualness sound false."[28] Spoken words are frequently the cause of bitterness and estrangement in The Mountain and the Valley, as they are in this story.

In a flashback Steve gives an account of the events that had led up to the decision to erect the fence. Like most quarrels or misunderstandings in Buckler's fiction, this one began innocently. Ed, however, took Steve's words in the wrong way, and after the first damaging words, nothing can repair the close feeling between the two men. The fence is put up, and the estrangement continues. Steve thinks: "A neighbour you were bad friends with was like a sore thumb. You'd never realized -- until you were reminded now, each time you struck it -- how much it figured in all your actions."[29]

When Steve suffers a fall and breaks his arm, all his neighbours except Ed come to help with the chores. After a few days, however, the neighbours lose interest in helping Steve; they have their own chores to do and the drama of Steve's accident has palled. Steve decides that he must sell his cattle since he cannot look after them. After an advertisement appears in the local paper, Ed's cattle get through the fence and stray onto Steve's property. Elated because he can finally get revenge on the perfect Ed, Steve pounces with bitter words:

> "There's no damage, I guess," he said very deliberately. "You jist drive 'em home and -- and then you stay on your side of the fence and I'll stay on mine." Ah! Those were the words he'd been waiting to get out.... He felt lightened, delivered. 30

But Ed is not hurt or insulted. Awkwardly, in the way of an inarticulate person, Ed offers to help Steve with his chores. The quarrel has been patched up. Gil later finds out that Ed cut the wire on the fence himself to provide an excuse for 'patching things up' with Steve. This time, despite his gossipy nature, Gil "knew enough to keep his mouth shut."

The outstanding feature of this story is the brisk natural dialogue between characters, and the vividness of portrayal of a simple incident that assumes importance in the lives of the two men. Both Ed and Steve are handled in a masterful way, with the same subtlety that characterizes the best of the early short stories and The Mountain and the Valley.

The second story, "Wild Goose," is a direct extension of material from The Mountain and the Valley. The relationship of the two brothers Jeff and Kenny is almost identical to that of Chris and David in the earlier novel. The story is narrated in the first person by Kenny, the younger brother, and involves a recalled incident with his now dead older brother Jeff. The relationship of the brothers is also similar to that of "The Clumsy One." Kenny describes this relationship:

> But I always seemed the older, somehow. He always seemed to -- well, look up to me or something. It didn't matter how often I was mean to him. I could draw the sprawling back field on a piece of paper and

> figure out the quickest way to mow it, by algebra; but when I took the machine out on the field itself I wouldn't know where to begin.[31]

Jeff, the inarticulate one, did not need algebra to mow the field. His was the sure touch of the farmer, in tune with the land. Kenny is set apart from his surroundings; he cannot be a part of the rhythm of his environment because of his word-shaping mind. Buckler is saying here quite clearly that an artist, to be an artist, must lose out in human relationships.

The story is a series of recalled incidents from the past: small happenings that serve to point out Jeff's fine but inarticulate sensitivities, as in the following reminiscence:

> Once Jeff picked up about fifty bags of cider apples nights after school. The day he took them into town and sold them he bought every single one of us a present.... He'd lost a five dollar bill out of the money the man at the cider mill had given him. But he'd kept the loss to himself, not to spoil our presents. That's what he was like.[32]

Such a reminiscence provides background for the main incident of the story, the day that Kenny and Jeff went hunting for geese. To shoot a wild goose was a special thing, and would evoke admiration from neighbours. Kenny had said unkind things to Jeff the day before, and Jeff, uncharacteristically, had replied with angry words. The more articulate Kenny had refused to say the words that might have cleared things between the two brothers, and afterward felt guilt for his silence.

On the day of the hunt, Jeff, the more capable hunter

of the two, pretends that the simultaneous shooting of the one wild goose is his fault, and that the bird has been felled by Kenny's shot. Jeff's motives for allowing Kenny to take credit for the shot are guessed by Kenny: "I knew what he was thinking. This would wipe out what I'd done yesterday. And the men wouldn't look at me now the way they looked at a bookworm but the way they looked at a hunter."[33] In recalling this incident, Kenny is trying to expiate the guilt he feels for not having been a better brother to Jeff while he was alive. Kenny felt the only way to do this was to explain how wonderful Jeff was, through writing a book about him. In a way the book has already been written about Jeff. For Kenny, writing can have a therapeutic effect in connection with his loss of Jeff. Similarly, for David Canaan, writing is the one means at his command to 'square accounts' for all the hurts he has given, and all the hurts members of his family had given to each other. The last sentence of the story, "Do you know how it is?" is an appeal to the reader to understand, to sympathize, to appreciate how "it" really "is."

The style of "Wild Goose" shows Buckler at his best as he captures the feeling of the special day rather than its look: "The day was so still and the sun was so bright, the leaves seemed to be breathing out a kind of yellow light before they fell to the ground."[34]

The recall of incidents that illuminate character, the moments of perfection and intuitive understanding, Kenny's

attempts to tell how it was in Jeff's life -- all of these are indicative of Buckler at his best. Nothing is contrived or forced and the characters, although complex and subtle, are natural and believable. The symbolism of the wild geese, like that of the fir tree in "Another Christmas," provides a haunting, poignant counterpoint to the harmony of the story. "Wild Geese" ranks among the best of the stories which are closely related to The Mountain and the Valley.

Part 4 Stories in the Context of Ox Bells and Fireflies

Only one of the later stories has material foreshadowing Ox Bells and Fireflies and that is "Last Delivery Before Christmas." The first-person narrator looks back on the Christmas of his tenth year, a special Christmas for him. As background for the Christmas Eve incident, Ronnie Matthews reminisces about the events which led up to his mother's marriage to Syd Weston. Laura Matthews had gone with Syd when they were younger, but she had been courted and married in swift succession by Jess Matthews, a laughing man totally different from the more serious and reliable Syd Weston. It is this particular event that is recounted in Ox Bells and Fireflies.

Although Ronnie likes Syd as a neighbour, he stubbornly resists full acceptance of him as step-father, feeling that such acceptance would be disloyalty to his dead father. Ronnie steadfastly refuses to call Syd "Dad," and in small ways rejects Syd's overtures: "But I had the child's talent for that most punishing rebuke: of withdrawing a little, as if behind an invisible boundary, just when the other had begun to think your estrangement must have been something he imagined."[35]

In a series of incidents Ronnie keeps on rejecting Syd. All the time he has to admit to himself that things around the farm seem to be going more smoothly under Syd's guidance, yet, "how could a child love anyone for that kind of thing? How could that kind of thoughtfulness take the place of the

knack Father had of immediately winning you over to his way of seeing that serious concern over anything belonged way down below fun?"[36] Ronnie even resents the fact that his mother seems happier with Syd than she had been with his father Jess. Ronnie, caught in the trap of his own stubbornness, refuses to get excited about the approach of Christmas or take part in ordering presents from the catalogue. The Christmas parcel, however, is delayed, and on the day before Christmas a severe snowstorm makes the mail delivery impossible. Ostensibly going hunting, Syd sets off in the storm with his gun. As the afternoon passes, and Syd does not return, Ronnie and his mother grow apprehensive, then fearful. Just as they are about to set out to get help, Syd returns. He has just completed a six mile walk to town and back to get the Christmas parcel; he has even remembered to buy Christmas wrapping and seals. As Ronnie says, "Everyone knows one miracle in his life, and this was mine. For in his hand he held the Christmas order!"[37] This action of Syd's, "almost childish", caused Ronnie to be speechless to the point of crying. Not only has Syd brought the parcel home, but he has also brought presents for Laura and Ronnie. After Ronnie helps Syd wrap the present for Laura, he refers to Syd as "Dad." Syd's crazy, dangerous action in walking all the way to town in a blizzard and his thoughtfulness in buying presents for Laura and Ronnie, make Ronnie realize how wrong he has been in his treatment of Syd. For Ronnie, this is the most miraculous Christmas of all because they have become a family. This realization is the present that Ronnie can give

to his mother and step-father.

This story is told in the same form of episodic snatches as Ox Bells and Fireflies. It has the same reminiscent, memory-recalling atmosphere. The retrospective narrator recalls a moment special for him. This recalled moment resists the erosion of time and is thus frozen in perfection. Buckler's description of feeling and reaction of characters is both subtle and sensitive, using his favourite device of remarking on the facial expressions of his characters. The description of the storm is vivid: "I kept my lamp lit a little while to watch the great flakes float and eddy down past the window pane, like an infinite fragmentation of some beautiful white healing silence... the whole world seemed buried in a great sea of snow: huge, billowing, porpoise-backed waves of it...."[38]

The entire story has a great affinity with the joy of a memory recalled from childhood, a special memory that must be preserved somehow in order to keep its perfection.

Part 5 Incidental Stories

Several of the eight stories included here are, in places, vaguely reminiscent of either The Mountain and the Valley or Ox Bells and Fireflies, but not strongly so. Two of the stories deal with Christmas and the miracles that the season often brings; one story pursues the theme of family relationships when there is a step-father present; one story is a recalled event that has special meaning for the character recalling it; one story is comical and quite humorous; one uses the events of the Hungarian Revolution as background for the plot; two are Buckler's attempts at writing suspense stories.

The number of incidental stories, it may be noted, is much greater in this chapter than in the last. This may be because Buckler was casting about for new themes and ideas to pursue in a longer work, or it may be as a result of trying to experiment with different situations, types of characters and plot motivations. These stories are varied in content and quality, but do contain a certain amount of interest in tracing Buckler's development as a writer.

The earliest of these stories is "A Present for Miss Merriam." The three main characters of the story are a spinster schoolteacher Helen Merriam, her pupil Bobby Fairfield, and Chris Fairfield, Bobby's widower father. For Helen Merriam, Christmas was a time to be alone in Halifax: it held no magic for her because she had no one with whom to share it. As the story begins, she is standing alone in

her classroom on the last day of school before the holiday. She is thinking of nine year old Bobby and of the fact that he was the only child who had not brought her a Christmas present. Bobby comes in just then, bringing a gift for her. He said that he had forgotten to give it to her earlier. Sensitive to children and their ways, Helen Merriam realizes that Bobby has not forgotten, but had deliberately waited until the other children had left. Helen is overwhelmed by the gift, a pair of beaten copper earrings. Bobby shyly accepts her surprised thanks and dashes out of the room.

Later that afternoon, when Helen drops by Bobby's home to leave some school papers, his father invites her in and the three of them participate in decorating the tree. Everywhere around Helen is the scent and feeling of the Christmas season: "The incarnate smell of the oranges and the fir were like the true breath of the gentle mystery."[39]

Because of self-consciousness and awkwardness, Helen cuts her visit short. On an impulse, she asks if Bobby may accompany her to the city the next day. While travelling on the train to Halifax, Helen pretends that Bobby is her son. By doing this, Helen saw herself as an ordinary woman and hoped that she would be thought like the others, if only for a few hours. Such an action shows the loneliness that Helen suffered always, but especially at Christmas.

Bobby is enchanted with the city, and is excited when Helen wears the new earrings to go shopping. As Christmas Eve approaches, however, Bobby grows restless: he misses

his father, and wants to share Christmas Eve with him. To Helen's surprise, Chris meets the train on their return. The three of them go to the Fairfield house. As they are driving there, Helen experiences a special feeling about that Christmas Eve:

> It was exactly the kind of Christmas Eve you saw on all the cards. Calm unhurried moonlight fell on the white road, polishing the sled-runner tracks like isinglass, except where the dark shadows of the spruces latticed them. The cold star-fire seemed softened, and the flakes of snow drifted down dreamily against the headlights, like leaves from a twig.[40]

Then Chris shyly gives her his present: a statuette of herself which he had carved. It was the loveliest thing that Helen had ever seen. Chris later proposes to her, but Helen is afraid he may be proposing so that Bobby can have a mother, and not because he wants her for a wife. But then Chris says that Bobby might be jealous for awhile, and Helen suddenly realizes that Chris is proposing for himself. Christmas has now become a time of magic and miracle for Helen, and not the lonely time that it had been in the past.

This story too might be entitled "a holiday romance" as was "By Any Other Name," but it is not diminished by such a subtitle. This story has all the naturalness, simplicity and lack of coincidence that the other does not. The simple characters are subtly and sympathetically presented. The feeling of Christmas is effectively presented by Buckler, not by precisely delineating detail, but by capturing the essence through facial expression and evocation of mood. In many respects, Helen's special Christmas is reminiscent of the

joyful one that is described in The Mountain and the Valley and shows Buckler's own feeling about the uniqueness of that season.

The other Christmas story, "Anything Can Happen at Christmas," is told in retrospect in the first person by a young boy named Peter. It too is a story of how Christmas can bring about a special magic and leave a strong impression on a child's memory. The greatest longing of his mother Annie is to have electricity installed in their farm house, yet her husband does not have the money to pay cash for such an undertaking. Peter, upset with his father because he knows of his mother's dream, sharply tells his father that his mother is tired out. Arthur is a kindly but inarticulate man. To try to make up to his wife for her tiredness, Arthur suggests that she take a trip to the city to visit her sister and brother-in-law.

At first Peter is overjoyed at the idea of staying home with his father and helping him manage the farm. In trying to be helpful Peter causes an accident to happen to his father's prize steer. Fearful of his father discovering the broken horn, Peter begs to be allowed to go to the city with his mother. Peter is disappointed with the city and the apartment in which his aunt and uncle live:

> The apartment was like a rich plush pocket you stepped into out of the teeming day. But it was like a pocket in other ways too.... The radio I'd looked ahead to so eagerly was broken.... The whole city struck me like that. Aunt Ella took us to see the Christmas displays

> in the big stores. They were captivating, but there seemed to be something iron grey striking through the glitter of everyone's and everything's face.... And all the snow looked soiled. [41]

Peter is apprehensive about facing his father again, after the accident to the steer, until Arthur wordlessly shows his son that he forgives him. It is dark when they reach the house, and the house is in complete darkness. Arthur goes in ahead of the family, and to their surprise, plugs in the lights for the Christmas tree. "The sudden illumination made us blink after the pitch darkness outside. But it wasn't harsh or blinding. It was the soft magic glow of I couldn't count how many little coloured bulbs strung over the Christmas tree." [42]

Added to the surprise of the electricity, there is a new radio. And that was the best surprise of all, for it meant to Peter that his father really understood about their longings. The surprise binds the family together as one--and that is the true magic of Christmas for Buckler. A short epilogue, the only indication that the story is told in retrospect by Peter, somewhat weakens the impact of the story as a whole. It recalls a play by Eugene O'Neill with which Arthur felt some affinity: it was the story of a man whose wife lost her mind because of her husband's disregard for her womanly fancies. The wife's name in the play was also Annie, a coincidence that Buckler's story does not require.

"The Accident" is a complex, episodic story of family relationships. Fourteen year old Peter is filled with guilt

over his father's death; Jane feels herself caught between her son and his step-father Mark. Peter stubbornly resists Mark's overtures of friendship. It seems that her marriage to Mark is a mistake: "Even a show of affection between any two of them had to be watched lest it seem like an alignment against the third. Somehow they could never be an equilateral triangle. It hadn't worked out at all."[43]

As Jane lies awake, concerned over Peter's recurring nightmare, she reviews past memories: Tony's death, the time she told Peter that she was going to marry Mark, the time Peter was not promoted at school, the first quarrel that she and Mark had. As a result of the quarrel they had over Peter, Mark decides that he will not interfere in any way. Mark tells Jane of Peter's behaviour when the two of them were returning from a hunting trip. Peter had pulled the ignition key from the car, as if to throw it away. Mark feels that Peter's behaviour, especially his withdrawal and insolance, is getting worse.

For Peter's birthday there is a party and a gift of fourteen dollars. He seems happy until his mother and step-father playfully start to spank him. Peter resists violently and runs from the room. Later Jane finds that Peter has run away from home and has tried to join the army. When Peter is brought home, Mark suggests that Peter should see a psychiatrist. This suggestion precipitates a confrontation between Peter and Mark, and Peter reveals that his guilt comes from a feeling that he had been responsible for the accident

that killed his father. Peter had been playing with the ignition keys and distracted his father's attention from the road. He feels too that Mark and his mother blame him for his father's death. It is only when this guilt is brought out into the open and talked about that Jane and Mark can assure Peter that the accident was not his fault; his father's car had been hit by a drunken driver.

To get closer to Peter, Mark confesses that he once ran away from home because he thought that his father did not love him. It has been Mark's helplessness in dealing with Peter that has made him realize that his father did indeed love him, but could not find the words to express that love. The decision is made for both Peter and Mark to see the psychiatrist, but their joint decision suggests that a psychiatrist is not really necessary. Harmony is established once the family is honest with each other about their feelings and can talk about them openly.

This story, composed as it is of many incidents which give insight into the family relationship, recalls many of the earlier stories where misunderstanding had led to isolation and alienation of characters. It is Buckler's attempt to explore more fully the father-son relationship which has been so important, not only in the other stories, but in The Mountain and the Valley as well. The father-figure almost invariably is a man who cannot express himself articulately, especially to the son. He tries by his actions to give expression to his love and concern but frequently these

actions are misinterpreted by the son. When the mother is present, she feels herself torn between the two opposing forces of husband and son, but cannot resolve the conflict until some precipitating incident causes the three to find words and honestly express their feelings. Guilt feelings are often present as well. Sometimes it is the guilt felt by the more articulate person who withholds the necessary words and causes suffering which he later regrets; sometimes it is the guilt felt by one who attaches too much importance to the significance of his own actions, as does Peter in "The Accident." This theme recurs in Buckler's fiction.

"Long, Long After School" is a haunting, poignant story about another kind of isolation, one produced by prejudice and rejection. Wes Holman, the Negro caretaker in the village cemetery, has experienced prejudice as a child at the hands of his school mates. When the pupils played games involving holding each other's hands, no one wanted to hold Wes's hand. The teacher, Miss Tretheway, had always tried to understand, and would step in and hold Wes's hand. She had once helped him when some laundry he was delivering slipped off his sled. When Wes had a badly cut arm and needed a transfusion, only Miss Tretheway had volunteered blood for Wes. Miss Tretheway had died as the story opens, and memories of her flood back to Wes as he puts flowers on her grave. Toby Wenford, who is talking with Wes in the graveyard about Miss Tretheway, does not understand Wes when he says that, to him, Miss Tretheway was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Only a lonely little Negro boy, befriended by a kind and understanding teacher, could realize that beauty is not of the face, but is of the heart and the actions prompted by it. This is a story told with delicacy and restraint from the point of view of a man who had experienced the joy that a loving concern brought to his loneliness. This story might be labeled sentimental by some, but it is the kind of sentimentality -- natural, honest, direct, but not maudlin-- that shows Buckler at his finest.

Buckler's sublety of character presentation is evident here. Buckler never once says directly that Wes is Negro, but instead this fact is revealed by a seemingly casual comment: "'Miss Tretheway, you're making me blush.' And do you know, that was the first time I'd ever been able to say that, and laugh, myself."[44] Miss Tretheway's lack of physical beauty is revealed with a similar indirection. Such subtleties give the story its delicate touch, but they in no way detract from the deep feeling revealed between the lonely little boy and his understanding teacher.

"The Eruption of Albert Wingate" is a rather whimsical short story, chronicling one day in the life of Albert Wingate. With his forty-fifth birthday, Albert feels that he has reached the point of 'erupting' into a new, adventurous type of existence. He begins with the writing of new resolutions which he hides in his tobacco cannister, and follows them up the next day by going to a party without his wife Emma. Albert lets himself go at the party, leading

a conga line and calling Miss Beulah Winchester "Cuddles." When he tries to phone his wife and gets no answer, he rushes home to find Emma calmly knitting. Emma confesses that all along she has known that Albert had a reckless streak, and she has been waiting for it finally to master him. The next day Albert comes down with the 'flu. Emma waits on him and brings him his can of tobacco, passing him a folded slip of paper at the same time. She says that she found the paper while putting a piece of apple in the cannister to keep the tobacco moist. Albert pretends ignorance about the paper, and as Emma turns away, Albert thinks that he sees a flicker of a smile on her face.

The story, while slight, is an attempt by Buckler to look at the husband-wife relationship from a lighter point of view. As frequently happens in Buckler's fiction, the wife is the one who shows forbearance and understanding in the relationship. The mock-seriousness of the story is reminiscent of "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

"The Echoing Hills" is one of Buckler's few 'topical' stories. It relates an incident that has taken place during the Hungarian Revolution. The story is initially weakened by an authorial intrusion in the first sentence: "In Hungary (remember Hungary?) they still speak of Mariya's miracle." 45 The story closely parallels Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Its main characters are Mariya (Mary) and Joska (Jesus) her son. He is a fighter in the Hungarian resistance. Joska is shot by a firing squad led by the Russian officer Marshall

Borgev (Pilate). After the execution Borgev is filled with guilt and is haunted by bad dreams. When Mariya returns on the third day for Joska's body, it was as if Joska had risen from the dead because of the smile on his face and his peaceful appearance. Mariya, through her tears, realizes that Joska will serve as an inspiring example to other resistance fighters. The Easter analogy throughout the story is too transparent; "The Echoing Hills" is not one of Buckler's memorable short stories.

The final two stories to be considered in this chapter are Buckler's two attempts at writing suspense stories. Both draw on Buckler's actuarial experience, and deal with embezzlement. Both touch on themes discussed previously in connection with other stories.

The first of these two is "In Case of Emergency." Vance Corbett, an outsider, tries to take advantage of what he considers to be gullible, innocent Maritimers. He embezzles a large sum of money from the Scotian Loan Company and attempts to leave town disguised as a naval officer. A quick-thinking woman, Helen Neilson, the widow of a sailor, after offering Vance a ride to Quebec, spots his disguise and phones the police. She had become suspicious when Vance tipped his hat instead of saluting, and when he did not know about the white hat covers that naval officers use in the summer. The arresting officer praises Helen's quick thinking with an unconsciously comic eulogy: "You done noble, lady.... He should have known better than to tangle with a Maritime woman's insight."

Suspense is maintained throughout the story and the pace is brisk. Buckler's stance regarding city people's inferiority in comparison with people in the country is explicit. Once again, it is the woman's capability and sensitivity to small details that save the day.

The second of the two suspense stories, "Guilt on the Lily," is thematically linked with Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. The guilty person is eventually relieved to have his chance to confess. Max Carver, the night watchman for a loan company, finds Fairfield dead in his office, his wallet on the table. Unable to resist the temptation of the money so close at hand, Max buries Fairfield's body and hides his car in an abandoned garage. He feels that the burial of Fairfield will remain undetected for some time, since Fairfield was scheduled to leave on a motor trip the night of his death. The police sergeant, however, gathers his evidence bit by bit, and an incriminating lily petal is found on Max's boot. The story maintains suspense and the dialogue is fast-paced and convincing.

Part 6 The Later Stories -- Summary

With the exception of a few of the stories considered in this chapter, the quality is not as high as in the earlier stories. The exceptions are, significantly, those stories that either come from The Mountain and the Valley context or deal with country characters similar to those found in the earlier novel. Even those stories which I have placed in the context of The Cruelest Month have the focus of attention on characters whose appeal is that of the simple, straightforward, honest country person. In "The Educated Couple" it is the illiterate Stella who has the courage and generosity to face her lack of formal education and learn to read and write. "The Dream and the Triumph" deals primarily with the stoutness and courage of Mary Redmond to face life without her husband and to go ahead with a difficult operation. The Christmas stories, with their rich evocative language about the special time that Christmas was for some people, are among the more successful stories. Here again, however, Buckler's success with these stories derives from the masterful way he has of summoning the sights, sounds, smells, and consequently, the essence of this very special season.

If one looks at the stories of the later period in chronological order, one must come to the conclusion that Buckler was searching for a way round what Claude Bissell calls his "terrible fluidity of confession."[47] The stories of this period are undoubtedly more varied in theme,

presentation and content than the stories of the earlier period, and many do try to escape from the confessional mode, but the most convincing, artistic and unified of the stories are those that do depend on recalling 'the way it was' and deal with the ofttimes complex, subtle relationships within a family. I think it is no accident that the finest of the stories of this later period, in my opinion, is "Wild Goose," which was published in 1959 but is closely related to The Mountain and the Valley.

Writing of The Cruelest Month, Claude Bissell says: "Buckler could not make his sophisticated, urban characters live, and the style often had a desperate, intense quality, as if the author despaired of ever seizing his material."[48] this statement is applicable to many of the stories that come from the period of The Cruelest Month.

For the purposes of this study, however, these later stories are of considerable value. They may not be the artistic successes that the earlier stories were, but they show a writer attempting, through experimentation with theme, character and mode, to diversify his talent. It is obvious that Buckler himself did not consider these stories successes. For proof of this statement, all the reader must do is consider the book published five years after The Cruelest Month. In Ox Bells and Fireflies Buckler returns to the world of The Mountain and the Valley, and by doing so, as Claude Bissell says, he shows a "sure intuition" for the directions in which his talents lie.

CHAPTER III

THE SINGLE CORE OF MEANING

In the last ten years Ernest Buckler's writing has been prolific and varied, but only one short story has been published. It forms a chapter of Buckler's latest book, Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (1973). This is curious, since the two previous decades saw the publication of thirty-eight short stories. From 1963 to 1968 Buckler wrote a number of book reviews, chiefly for the New York Times, wrote and delivered a number of CBC radio talks, and wrote several plays including one commissioned by The Centennial Commission of Prince Edward Island and called "Christmas in Canada." During this time, he also published several articles.

Buckler was occupied during this period by his third long work of fiction, Ox Bells and Fireflies. In many respects, this book is the culmination of Buckler's writing career, using as it does the best aspects not only of the two previous novels, but also of the short stories. John Orange points out that Ox Bells and Fireflies in some ways is the book that David Canaan would have written if he had lived.[1] It is significant that the weaker aspects of The Cruelest Month become the strengths of Ox Bells and Fireflies. The shifting point of view and the lack of a strong centre which were two of the chief criticisms expressed in connection with the second novel, give Ox Bells and Fireflies its variety and wide range of experience. Bissell speaks of Buckler's

"terrible fluidity of confession" in connection with The Mountain and the Valley. The same expression might be applied to the best of the short stories as well. Spettigue sees as one of the weaknesses of Buckler's fiction the fact that characters tend to melt into one another.[2] Alden Nowlan also speaks of Buckler's tendency to let his similes "slip out of his hands."[3] With Ox Bells and Fireflies, all of these weaknesses become strengths as Buckler uses them to his advantage.

In an essay entitled "My Third Book" Buckler speaks of his aim in Ox Bells and Fireflies. He aspires to give a comprehensive picture of "this way of life, with all its distinctive customs, institutions, values, tasks, recreations, idioms of speech and behaviour, atmospheres and textual variety."[4] It is a way of life that has vanished forever. He goes on to say: "I should like to triangulate it, so to speak, within the mingling stream of heritage, material change and social mutation."[5] Buckler recognized also that what he was attempting required neither the documentary nor the strictly conventional novel form, but some slightly different form blending the two. He chose to subtitle Ox Bells and Fireflies "a fictive memoir."

Instead of concentrating on one particular family as he did in The Mountain and the Valley and in many of the short stories in that context, he chose rather to show a whole range of people as he remembered them from those vanished days. They would not be quaint or stereotyped.

"However inchoate their expression sometimes was, they were as charged with depths and intricacies of thought and feeling as the more sophisticated. Even in the small cross-section of life they represented, every conceivable psychological mode and sublety had its embodiment."[6] As Buckler himself admitted, "such a book ... must stand or fall on the author's ability to catch the essence of time, place and the human equation."[7]

Ox Bells and Fireflies as a result has no discernible plot or narrative development and no interacting of characters. The stresses of trying to move the characters around as he did in The Cruelest Month are gone; so too is the isolated, tortured and at times over-sensitive narrator of The Mountain and the Valley. All of the themes that have been tried in the short stories and the two novels are present, but without the more restricting form of the conventional novel or short story. One might look on the earlier works, with experiments attempted and rejected, themes worked and reworked, as preparation for this work, the end towards which all previous work tended.

Many of the Buckler themes that have been dealt with in the short stories with varying success are present here. The redeeming, healing aspect of country life as opposed to the separating and alienating aspect of city life is found throughout Ox Bells and Fireflies, just as in "The Dream and the Triumph," "The First Born Son" and "Another Christmas," yet somehow without the despair and intensity of these short

stories. This is not to say that Ox Bells and Fireflies lacks intensity. It is there, but it is to be found in the lyrical descriptions of nature and people.

As noted earlier, this is the book that David Canaan might have written to give "an absolving voice" to the people of his world. As he rests on the mountain top, David thinks:

> I will tell it, he thought rushingly: that is the answer... As he thought of telling these things exactly, all the voices came close about him. They weren't swarming now. He went out into them until there was no inside left. He saw at last how you could become the thing you told.
>
> 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. That would be enough. A single beam of light is enough to light all the shadows, by turning it from one to another. ...I will tell them just as they are, but people will see that there is more to them than the side that shows....
>
> He caught his breath. He felt like the warm crying of acquittal again. Even my mother and my father and all the others who are gone will know somehow, somewhere, that I have given an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves or each other -- hurts that were caused only by the misreading of what they couldn't express. (MV, 298-300)

David's thoughts have also been encountered in a number of the short stories, but nowhere articulated as clearly as in the above passages. In each of the short stories, Buckler has tried to find either that "single core of meaning" or the light "to light all the shadows" of his characters. This had, however, been a fragmented, groping experience. Steve, in "Another Christmas," came to the conclusion that with his writing he had "never found that single light...that single plan." He felt frustrated because he wondered, that

being the case, how the separate parts he told could acquire any real meaning. With Ox Bells and Fireflies, Buckler answers the question Steve had asked twenty-five years earlier. Ox Bells and Fireflies is indeed the telling of the little separate parts. What Steve was trying to find in his question, however, was the answer given here: that the little separate parts, when brought together, do give the whole, "that single light ... that single plan." The "single core of meaning" is to be found, ironically, only in the telling of the fragments. This was the vital point missed not only by Steve, but also by David Canaan. Since, for Buckler, art is fragmentary, all the artist can ever hope to find are the separate shafts of light. His job, then, is to synthesize the separate parts, and to bring about the greatest possible unity. It would seem that in the earlier works, and particularly in the short stories, Buckler himself had not discovered the truth in this observation. There are times in Ox Bells and Fireflies when one may be convinced that Buckler still is not sure that the fragments can make up the whole, as he persists in being dissatisfied with his ability to capture and translate experiences accurately 'the way it was.' Many of these clarifications appear as authorial remarks in parentheses. Chapter Two, entitled "Memory" is filled with such parenthetical comments.

In spite of the fragmentary telling of experiences, there is a great deal of structuring or ordering in Ox Bells and Fireflies. The book begins with "The time is youth,

when Time is young." (OBF, 3) The occasional narrator, Mark, is ten years old as we share with him the first encounter with death. Generally, Ox Bells and Fireflies follows a chronological development through the cycles of the seasons, amusing childhood experiences, school, work, courtship, marriage, parenthood, and back to childhood, although at one remove from the opening chapter. By the final chapter the narrator himself is old and is musing about the good times of youth and the friends of youth, many of whom are far off, dead or alone. The bitter-sweet recollection of "The Quarrel" is all that is left to the narrator of the multiplicity of the happy childhood memories. Only through writing about these memories and through the process of recollection, may the perfection of those lost moments be captured, and then only as shadows. The real substance fled with the moment. As the narrator says, "we are caged within age." (OBF, 299)

In many respects Ox Bells and Fireflies represents the distillation of Buckler's artistic ability and thought, combining as it does the best, not only of The Mountain and the Valley and The Cruelest Month, but also of the short stories. Indeed, the short stories provided the best possible preparation for the type of fiction that Ox Bells and Fireflies is.

Ernest Buckler's most recently published book is Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, a collaboration with photographer Hans Weber. While speaking of his native

province, Buckler attempts to catch the essence, that elusive single core of meaning, of what the land and its people mean to him. Here too he reiterates his attitudes towards city life. "In its cities or near-cities (other than Halifax, where the myth-softened mask of a history which has been unique as nowhere else pervades even the impervious) pavements, as in cities everywhere, beat the faces blind." (WS, 12) "In the great cities, man is forever lonely because he never sees his thoughts and feelings corporified outside him, so that the crush of their edgelessness is lessened." (WS, 13) These two passages clearly show the characteristic Buckler stance regarding cities and the spiritual erosion they effect on their people. It is a theme frequently found in the short stories, from "The First Born Son" (1941) to the present.

The book is concerned primarily with Nova Scotia's people, and throughout the book thoughts of the land are intimately associated with the people who inhabit it. This too has been noted about Buckler throughout the stories: his concern for his people is all-encompassing, sensitive, perceptive, sympathetic. It is the face of the people that he sees in the face of the land: "Nova Scotia is the face from Genesis and the face from Ruth. The face from Greco and the face from Rubens." (WS, 16)

In speaking of his people, Buckler once again deals with his frequently expressed theme of words and their true worth: "They don't weigh their words, for words weigh less

than smoke on the scales they count the solid pounds of the day's catch with. Not poets (except as there may be poetry in the hands of men who take their lives in their hands daily), for them only the real is real." (WS, 26). In spite of the fact that words are the coin by which Buckler himself lives, he has always looked upon his own articulateness with a certain amount of suspicion. The isolate is the one whose thoughts are 'word-shaped' and consequently he is isolated from his fellows whose thoughts are felt but not articulately expressed. He whose dealings are with words is frequently unhappy, dissatisfied, and often handicapped in some way: Steve of "Another Christmas," Jeff of "A Glance in the Mirror," Kenny of "Wild Goose," David of The Mountain and the Valley, Morse Halliday of The Cruelest Month -- all of them suffer because their thoughts are shaped by words. Several of them are physically weaker and are made to feel, or feel themselves, inadequate when compared to an inarticulate but manually skilled person. Of all of Buckler's characters, the only one for whom words are kept in a proper perspective is Stella of "The Educated Couple." Although she is fascinated by words and their power, she has the wisdom to resist being confused or deluded by them.

For the purposes of this study, the two most significant chapters of Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea are "Man and Snowman" and "Faces and Universes."

"Man and Snowman" is a reworking of an earlier unpublished story, "The Snowman," found in the Buckler

Collection in the University of Toronto Library. It is the story of Paul, an old man now helpless from a stroke. In his helplessness, he is bed-ridden and is cared for by his son and daughter-in-law. His bed faces the window, and through it he can see life and the cycles of the seasons and his grandchildren at play. A game played by his grandchildren provides the device for the old man to return to memories of his youth. As the children count 5...10...15...20 in their game of "Blind Man's Bluff," Paul follows their counting and his thoughts parallel their numbers. His first memory is of the sights and sounds and smells of his young world. It is a simple memory of riding on the horse, but he had learned then to conquer fear. The next memory is of the discovery of and joy in his young manhood and friendships. The "25" of the game recalls his twenty-fifth year and working in the city. At first there was excitement and adventure, but this soon changed to suffocation and shabby dreams. "Tram cars, bound to their tracks, climbing the hilly streets, with all their occupants so glazed with monotony that none of them notices how the streets can choke the life-reach out of hills even." (WS, 56)

The city is the place of people with "clock-stopped faces," with faces "that look like an article of clothing bought uncertainly and never worn thereafter with satisfaction." (WS, 57) The distasteful images of the city pile up in Paul's mind until he remembers the day he could take no more and returned home. The years from twenty-five to fifty

pass in Paul's thoughts in a blur. They were the years with Ellen his wife; the years of home-building, loving Ellen and the son she bore him, full and happy years, cut off when he was fifty and Ellen died. With this recollection the memories crowd in of the years following, discovering that "whatever life might rob you of, you were always left with something worth its cost." (WS, 62)

Paul desperately tries to reach seventy, but each time his mind approaches it, the thought slips back into the past. It is at this point, a few days before his seventieth birthday, that the old man dies, leaving his slate by his bedside with one word written on it: peace.

Woven throughout Paul's recollections are the simple, concerned, day-to-day type of comments of his son and daughter-in-law downstairs: they wonder if Paul needs anything; they are concerned over the death of Leo, an old friend of Paul's; they wonder if they should tell Paul about Leo's death; they remember that Paul, even without much formal schooling, was always reading; they worry that a window might have been left open in Paul's room. The day that they discover Paul's death and the slate, his son Mark provides an epitaph for his father: "He had his good times and his bad times... but if anyone ever had the stuff in him... or got the most out of life... he did. (WS, 63)

Paul the old man is the archetypal Buckler character with his memories of good times past, and with his attempts to reach out to hold these reminiscences of the past. He

is the child playing in the swimming pool with his friends, helping his father on the farm, trying to live the sterile life of the city only to discover before it is too late that life on the farm is infinitely better. He is the man living a fulfilled life with his wife and son, losing his wife, but still having his immortality through his son and grandson. He is the old man trying to recapture these happy but lost moments of perfection in his last hours. He is the sum total of David, Kenny, Joseph, Paul Redmond, Chris, Jeff, Steve -- he is the one that, for Buckler, stands for the many. "Man and Snowman" holds an important place in the Buckler canon, serving as it does as the point towards which all of the earlier stories have been aiming. With this story Buckler comes very close to achieving the single core of meaning that has been his quest for thirty-three years.

"Faces and Universes," the chapter that follows "Man and Snowman," contains a number of vignettes that have either appeared in the earlier short stories, or stand close to them. Although they tell of simple people engaged in ordinary tasks, each illuminates an important or significant moment in the life of that person. There is the man pruning his orchard who finds a horseshoe that his son David, now dead, had hung in the tree. He remembers his talented son who "could multiply 22 by 1,987 in his head -- and he could draw horses realer than horses." (WS, 99) This incident recalls the short story "David Comes Home."

A man and his wife, as they walk home from a friend's

funeral, recall the dead man's generosity and kindness to them and in so doing, parallel the story, "The Line Fence." The closeness of two friends and their simple conversation about a new house being built also contains echoes of that story.

The scene of Christmas Eve with its friendly snow, the perfect tree, the table "splendid with the steam of Christmas food that is touched this night as if with miracle" (WS, 103) recalls the miracle of "Yes, Joseph...," "The Finest Tree," "A Present for Miss Merriam," and "Last Delivery Before Christmas." It recalls too the hauntingly beautiful and vivid description of Christmas in The Mountain and the Valley. With one small incident in this vignette Buckler is able to sum up all that the city means to him: "...she picks up a strip of imitation velvet (from a shawl a cousin in the city had once sent her) and hooks it in. She sees it is wrong. She ravels it back." (WS, 107) The city has no place in the fabric of country life: like the imitation velvet, it is an imitation of life only, and does not fit into or harmonize with the design.

The closing conversation of Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea sums up the harmonies of people together, their trust in each other, their love, their concern, and most of all, their humanity:

> "Dad, did you lift that great big rock up onto the stone wall?"
> "No, my father did."
> "Could you lift it up?"
> "No."

"Were you scared of him?"
"No. Never." (WS, 127)

And the best of human relationships, as Buckler has been saying throughout his work, are built on such love, admiration and concern. For Buckler, as for his characters, life is people, people infinitely complex in their simplicity, as they try with varying success to find their single core of meaning.

AFTERWORD

Ernest Buckler's short stories fall generally into two categories: the retrospective stories that envision an idealized past, a perfect moment that may not be adequately recaptured with words, and the incidental stories that are indicative of the variety of life's experiences. Of the two groups, the retrospective stories are both structurally and imagistically better. They are also the ones that fall into the context of at least one of the longer works of fiction. One may thus conclude that the incidental stories were experimental in nature and were Buckler's attempts to break away from the more confessional type of fiction. That none of them pointed to a new direction for Buckler in longer works of fiction indicates that he realized in what direction his talent lay. He wisely discarded this experimental material for the more familiar 'country' type of story involving characters and activities with which he was familiar. By sticking to the more familiar, Buckler was able to explore the often complex feelings and relationships of people to each other and to nature. He deals with themes that he has explored over and over again, but each time he gives a fresh approach and a new insight into the complexity of 'simple' people. In this respect, Buckler's artistic development has been a circular journey.

For Buckler himself, undoubtedly the most provocative theme explored in many of the short stories and novels has been that of the artist figure trying to bring order and

meaning to past experiences. Buckler's artist, overwhelmed by the multiplicity of experience, cannot select one thing as being more significant than any other thing. He tends to see life as containing perfection, and art merely as an imitation, an attempt to capture the wholeness contained in the specific experience. For Buckler, however, art can only deal with the fragments of the remembered experience, and thus is inadequate for the task. Art is an attempt to appreciate the many fragments of all things around us. It cannot capture the perfect whole of any experience, and thus art becomes merely an imitation of life. Buckler as a result stands in direct opposition to those writers who see art as the unifying principle of life. Buckler sees life itself as containing the unity; art can only approximate that unity, and he is never satisfied with the approximation. His thesis is most clearly shown in his often almost frenzied search for the right word, the right nuance of feeling that he wishes to convey. It leads to his coining of words, phrases and compound words to compensate for what he feels is the inadequacy of language to convey just exactly the way it was.

Buckler's stance on art being inadequate to convey the perfection of life's experiences puts him very much in the puritan tradition. The puritan tends to distrust art and to consider the actual experience, with its moral context, as more complete than any artistic expression or approximation of it. Mimesis, whether on stage or in fiction, becomes suspect because it only approximates real life. Reality is

closer to perfection than any imitation of reality -- or so Buckler seems to be implying. Buckler carries his thesis one step further since he seems to distrust those who do place inordinate faith in art as something that can actually show things as they really are. All one has to do is recall the feelings of personal inadequacy and guilt that Buckler's artist-figures feel when confronted with a physical task for which they are incapable. All of Buckler's artist-figures are crippled either physically or emotionally because of their greater articulateness. One of the best examples of this may be found in the short story "Wild Goose." Kenny is the more articulate, but Jeff, with his greater physical strength and mechanical ability, is, in Kenny's eyes (and in Buckler's as well), the more admirable of the two. Kenny, like David Canaan, is set apart from his surroundings. He cannot be part of the rhythm of his environment because of his mind that shapes words for him. The writer Jeff, in "Glance in the Mirror," sees himself as an egocentric writer for whom words are more important than the realities of life and love. He comes to the conclusion that human relationships transcend words, and that words lose their importance in the face of love. Buckler's artist-figures turn to art to find that feeling of completeness; they search for a vision of unity in art. Buckler treats these inflated expectations of art ironically. When Jeff attempts to hold up a mirror to his wife, it is himself that he finally sees. It is not his wife's inadequacy that has caused problems, but instead it is his own. Although Buckler believes that the actuality

of living is more important than art, there is an irony contained here also. Buckler, like his artist-figures, denegrates words for being inadequate to explain the realities of life and love, yet he and the artist-figures must use words to explain their very inadequacy. Such a use of words provides another level of ironic tension in Buckler's fiction.

Buckler's earliest stories, the two that were published in Esquire in 1940 and 1941, show an already mature writer, although they are excessively wordy. Through the years that followed, Buckler's development as a writer was marked by his attempts at longer fiction. As long as he was content to develop the rural world of the valley and its simple though complex people, whether in the short story or the novel, his work showed great skill and feeling. When he tried to step out of this world into the more sophisticated world of The Cruelest Month and such short stories as "The Doctor and the Patient," "By Any Other Name," or "The Darkest Time," Buckler's fluid prose tended to become abstruse and overly symbolic and his themes were left unresolved.

Robert Harlow spoke of The Cruelest Month as a "still-life with sound track."[1] This applies to the stories in that novel's context and to the incidental, experimental short stories. One feels that Buckler did not follow his own injunction in "My First Novel" where he wrote:

> I didn't fret too much about action. For myself, as soon as complications in a book start popping, I always feel like muttering to the characters:

> "Oh, for heaven's sake, stop scurrying around advancing the plot! Sit still a minute till we get a squint of your insides." For I think that insides are far more important -- and interesting -- than outsides. [2]

It would seem too that in the less artistic and less realistic of his short stories, Buckler lost sight of his credo regarding the short story: "You can't even explain in a short story, as you often can in a novel. Only suggest. Every sentence must hew to one cumulative point; a single irrelevant sentence may wreck it." [3] Frequently a jarring note creeps in when Buckler has attempted to explain through overly suggestive symbolism, or when he has permitted irrelevant details and sentences to creep in. Examples of this latter point have been observed throughout this study.

Despite these weaker stories, there are many that could stand with the best short stories written by any Canadian. Stories such as "Penny in the Dust," "Wild Goose," "David Comes Home," "The Quarrel" or "The Clumsy One" show a writer possessing great sensitivity for both character and language, a sure control over theme, structure, imagery and the play of memory. In Buckler's best short stories there is often great economy of language and deliberate understatement in the impressions which he conveys. This, however, has not been a steady story-by-story type of development. The best of Buckler is to be found in his earliest work, and in his later work.

Fortunately for his admirers, Buckler realized where his true ability lay and returned to the world of The

Mountain and the Valley in his last two books. Sometimes the single core of meaning lies right on one's own doorstep. True wisdom lies in recognizing the familiar for the unique thing it is, and using one's talents to effect a rebirth of wonder. Through his multiple attempts to relate 'the way it was', Buckler gives meaning to the past's multiplicity of memories. To Paul, of "Man and Snowman," comes the full intuition of all that Buckler the artist has been trying to accomplish: "Another moment and the dimness vanished in the light of memory's sheer chiseling force." (WS, 55) It is this force of memory that has served as Buckler's chief tool in coming to some understanding of life and people and their single core of meaning.

Buckler's achievements as a writer are considerable; the short stories add another dimension to his craft as artist. Through them the reader is able to observe Buckler's literary apprenticeship and mastery of his craft. The short stories thus are the crucible in which the longer works of fiction were fashioned.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1 Letter, July 5, 1973. (All references to letters in this thesis refer to letters from Buckler to myself.)

2 Letter, August 24, 1973.

3 Letter, July 5, 1973.

4 A more complete analysis of this "ironical treatment of vision" may be found in an unpublished Master of Philosophy thesis: Ernest Buckler: The Masks of the Artist by John C. Orange, (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1970), pp. 6-29.

5 Letter, July 5, 1973.

6 In conversation with Ernest Buckler, August 13, 1973.

7 Letter, February 12, 1973.

8 D.O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was," Ernest Buckler, ed. Gregory Cook (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 109.

9 Letter, February 12, 1973.

10 Ernest Buckler, The Mountain and the Valley, Introduction by Claude Bissell (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. xi.

11 Ernest Buckler, "By Any Other Name," Atlantic Advocate, 47 (June, 1957), p. 80.

12 Ernest Buckler, "Glance in the Mirror," Atlantic Advocate, 47 (January, 1957), p. 53.

Chapter One

1 Ernest Buckler, "One Quiet Afternoon," Esquire (April, 1940), p. 70.

2 Ibid., p. 70.

3 Ibid., p. 199.

4 Ibid., p. 200.

5 Ibid., p. 200.

6 Phrase used by Ernest Buckler in a letter, July 5, 1973.

7 Ernest Buckler, "The [redacted] Born Son," Esquire (July, 1941), p. 54.

8 Ibid., p. 55.

9 Ibid., p. 55.

10 Ibid., p. 114.

11 Ibid., p. 114.

12 Ibid., p. 114.

13 Ibid., p. 54.

14 Letter, July 5, 1973

15 Buckler, "The First Born Son," p. 54.

16 Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel," in Gregory Cook, ed., Ernest Buckler, p. 23. A similar statement may also be found in Claude's Bissell's introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of The Mountain and the Valley, p. ix.

17 Ernest Buckler, "Another Christmas," Saturday Night, 57 (Dec. 20, 1941), p. 25.

18 Ibid., p. 25.

19 Ibid., p. 25.

20 Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel," in Ernest Buckler, p. 25.

21 Ernest Buckler, "David Comes Home," Collier's, 114 (Nov. 4, 1944), p. 24.

22 Ernest Buckler, "A Sort of Sign," Ladies' Home Journal, 62 (May, 1945), p. 36.

23 Ernest Buckler, "Yes, Joseph, There Was A Woman; She Said Her Name Was Mary," Saturday Night, 61 (Dec. 8, 1945), p. 48.

24 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

25 Letter, July 5, 1973.

26 Ernest Buckler, "You Wouldn't Believe Me," Saturday Night, 63 (Dec. 6, 1947), p. 49.

27 Ernest Buckler, "Penny in the Dust," Macleans, 61 December, 1948), p. 18.

28 Ibid., p. 19.

29 Ibid., p. 19.

[30] Ibid., p. 19.

[31] Ibid., p. 19.

[32] Ernest Buckler, "The Quarrel," Macleans, 62 (January, 1949), p. 6.

[33] Ibid., p. 26.

[34] From a short introductory commentary to "The Quarrel" when reprinted in Chatelaine (July, 1959), p. 67.

[35] Ernest Buckler, "The Clumsy One," Macleans, 63 (August 1, 1950), p. 29.

[36] Ibid., p. 8.

[37] Ibid., p. 30.

[38] Ibid., p. 30.

[39] Ibid., p. 30.

[40] Ernest Buckler, "You Could Go Anywhere Now," Saturday Night, 62 (Nov. 2, 1946), p. 28.

[41] Ernest Buckler, "The Rebellion of Young David," Macleans, 64 (Nov. 15, 1951), p. 19.

[42] Ibid., p. 28.

[43] Ibid., p. 37.

[44] Ibid., p. 38.

45 When asked to comment about the changes made from "The Rebellion of Young David" to The Cruelest Month, Buckler replied: "About the Peter-Dad bit. I honestly don't remember exactly what my thinking was there. But I guess it was that retention of 'Bruce' in the first case was partly to work in the thing about naming the new child and of Peter's identification with his father by this device. So that it is not until Bruce's flash of understanding in his dream toward the end of the book (a more delayed reaction than in the short story) wherein Peter does call him 'Dad' that Bruce recognizes the situation fully." (Letter, August 24, 1973.)

46 Ernest Buckler, "School and Me," Macleans, 62 (Sept. 1, 1949), p. 48.

47 Ibid., p. 48.

48 Ernest Buckler, "One Quiet Afternoon," p. 70.

49 Claude Bissell, Introduction to The Mountain and the Valley, p. x.

50 Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel," p. 24.

Chapter Two

1 Claude Bissell, "Various Kinds of Love," in Ernest Buckler, pp. 83-85.

2 Robert Harlow, "Sound and Fury," in Ernest Buckler, p. 86.

3 Ernest Buckler, "The Educated Couple," Weekend (June 7, 1952), p. 18.

4 Ibid., p. 18.

5 Ibid., p. 19.

6 Ibid., p. 37.

7 Ibid., p. 37.

8 Ernest Buckler, "My Second Book," in Ernest Buckler, pp. 80-81.

9 D.O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was," in Ernest Buckler, p. 108.

10 John C. Orange, Ernest Buckler: The Masks of the Artist, an unpublished Master of Philosophy thesis (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1970), p. 6.

11 Ernest Buckler, "The Dream and the Triumph," Chatelaine, 28 (November, 1956), p. 13.

12 Ibid., p. 33.

13 Ibid., p. 44.

14 Ernest Buckler, "Glance in the Mirror," p. 53.

15 Ibid., p. 55.

16 Ibid., p. 55.

17 Ibid., p. 55.

18 Letter, July 5, 1973.

19 Ernest Buckler, "By Any Other Name," p. 48.

20 Ibid., p. 48.

21 Ernest Buckler, "Cleft Rock, With Spring," Atlantic Advocate, 48 (October, 1957), p. 90.

22 Ernest Buckler, "The Concerto," Atlantic Advocate, 48 (February, 1958), p. 66.

23 Ernest Buckler, "The Darkest Time," Canadian Home Journal, (May, 1958), p. 66.

24 Ernest Buckler, "The Doctor and the Patient," Atlantic Advocate, 51 (July, 1961), p. 65.

25 Ernest Buckler, "Glance in the Mirror," p. 55.

26 Ernest Buckler, "Nettles into Orchids," Atlantic Advocate, 51 (August, 1961), p. 70.

27 Claude Bissell, "Various Kinds of Love," p. 86.

28 Ernest Buckler, "The Line Fence," Better Farming, 125 (February, 1955), p. 80.

29 Ibid., p. 81.

30 Ibid., p. 87.

[31] Ernest Buckler, "Wild Goose," Atlantic Advocate, 50 (October, 1959), p. 91.

[32] Ibid., p. 92.

[33] Ibid., p. 94.

[34] Ibid., p. 91.

[35] Ernest Buckler, "Last Delivery Before Christmas," Chatelaine, 26 (December, 1953), p. 34.

[36] Ibid., p. 35.

[37] Ibid., p. 40.

[38] Ibid., p. 38.

[39] Ernest Buckler, "A Present for Miss Merriam," Chatelaine, 25 (December, 1952), p. 37.

[40] Ibid., p. 42.

[41] Ernest Buckler, "Anything Can Happen at Christmas," Chatelaine, 29 (December, 1957), p. 68.

[42] Ibid., p. 68.

[43] Ernest Buckler, "The Accident," Chatelaine, 33 (May, 1960), p. 39.

[44] Ernest Buckler, "Long, Long After School," Atlantic Advocate, 50 (November, 1959), p. 44.

[45] Ernest Buckler, "The Echoing Hills," Atlantic Advocate, 48 (May, 1958), p. 75.

[46] Ernest Buckler, "In Case of Emergency," Atlantic Advocate, 47 (August, 1957), p. 72.

[47] Claude Bissell, "Various Kinds of Love," in Ernest Buckler, p. 86.

[48] Claude Bissell, "Return to Innocence and Wonder," in Ernest Buckler, p. 119.

Chapter Three

[1] John C. Orange, "On Ox Bells and Fireflies," in Ernest Buckler, p. 137.

[2] D.O. Spettigue, "The Way It Was," in Ernest Buckler, p. 112.

[3] Alden Nowlan, "All the Layers of Meaning," in Ernest Buckler, p. 116.

[4] Ernest Buckler, "My Third Book," in Ernest Buckler, p. 117.

[5] Ibid., p. 117.

[6] Ibid., p. 117.

[7] Ibid., p. 118.

Afterword

[1] Robert Harlow, "Sound and Fury," in Ernest Buckler, p. 88.

[2] Ernest Buckler, "My First Novel," in Ernest Buckler, p. 22.

[3] Letter, August 24, 1973.

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