

**Ironie Technique in the Short Stories
and Novels of Ernest Buckler,**

by

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Abstract

Ernest Buckler frequently refers to the presence of irony and its effects in his writings. Since ironic literature has great potential for reader victimization, the question is an important one. The first chapter is a review of the basic dynamics of Buckler's fictional world embodied in his short stories, two novels, The Mountain and the Valley and The Cruellest Month, and in his fictive memoir, Ox Bells and Fireflies. The second chapter provides a synthesis of various theories of irony as a basis for discussion in the third chapter of Buckler's explicit understanding of irony and ironic technique as manifest in his notes and correspondence in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto. The fourth chapter is a further discussion of specific examples of irony and ironic technique in his fiction with the conclusion that Buckler must be seen within the tradition of classical and modern literary ironists if his efforts and achievements are to be truly evaluated and fully appreciated.

Les Techniques ironiques dans les contes et romans d'Ernest
Buckler par Susan Cleevely, C.N.D.

Résumé

Ernest Buckler parle fréquemment de la présence de l'ironie et des effets ironiques dans ses écrits. Cette question est importante car la littérature ironique a la pouvoir de duper le lecteur. Le premier chapitre est un court résumé des dynamiques fondamentales qu'on peut découvrir dans le monde littéraire de Buckler: ses contes, ses deux romans, The Mountain and the Valley et The Cruellest Month, et ses mémoires fictifs, Ox Bells and Fireflies. Le deuxième chapitre présente une synthèse de quelques théories d'ironie comme base de discussion pour le troisième chapitre sur la compréhension de Buckler lui-même à ce sujet. Ses idées sont manifestées dans ses documents personnels trouvés dans la Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library de l'université de Toronto. Le chapitre final présente une discussion plus élaborée au sujet des exemples d'ironie cités, et des techniques ironiques dans les écrits de Buckler. Comme conclusion, disons qu'on doit considérer Buckler comme appartenant à la tradition des écrivains ironiques des époques classique et moderne, si ses efforts et ses succès sont justement évalués et appréciés.

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Preface

In his notes, correspondence and in some of his fiction, Ernest Buckler makes explicit reference to the presence of irony and its effects in his writings. The question this raises is an important one since ironic literature is not what it appears to be on first reading and the potential for reader victimization is great. The question is also a comprehensive one since consideration of it calls for a knowledge of the writer's work as a whole, for some knowledge of the concept of irony and of ironic literature, and finally, for an evaluation of the author's work within that tradition. As a result, this study shall proceed in several stages. First, there will be a review of the basic dynamics of Buckler's fictional world as it is embodied in his short stories,¹ two novels, The Mountain and the Valley² and The Cruellest Month,³ and his "fictive memoir," Ox Bells and Fireflies.⁴ The second stage will be an attempt to synthesize various theories of irony with particular emphasis on common basic elements. The third will be an analysis of Buckler's explicit understanding of irony and ironic technique, especially as it is manifest in his notes and correspondence deposited in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto.⁵ Finally, there will be further discussion of specific examples of irony and ironic technique in Buckler's narrative fiction, and a tentative evaluation of his standing in the world of ironic literature.

I wish to thank Mr. Ernest Buckler for his gracious permission to quote from his writings and from the manuscript collection; the study has been a rewarding experience. I also wish to thank Mrs. Rachel Grover of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library for her interest and helpful assistance. I am grateful to Professor C. Abbott Conway of McGill University for directing the study and to all those who, in so many different ways, have helped in its realization.

Chapter I: The Fictional World of Ernest Buckler

The fictional world of Ernest Buckler is highly structured. Despite apparent differences, the basic dynamics of his themes and techniques are always the same. The core of his short stories, anecdotes, novels and fictive memoir is a probing analysis of human experience: a "searching for the answers to ourselves" (OB, p. 300). This quest is embodied in Buckler's almost exclusive focus on character and "revelatory moments of tension."¹ His work reveals a preoccupation with human limitations in the realm of consciousness and behaviour with particular emphasis on the relationships of mind, heart and will. It also reflects all the major literary themes: the creative and destructive potentials of love and freedom, the effect of time, place and other characters, the elusive nature of happiness, the question of free will and determinism, and the certainty, but incomprehensibility, of death. In addition, Buckler frequently uses the theme of the literary artist trying to capture reality as a frame within which to view these other themes. Buckler's longer works differ only in the number of these "moments" which he frames in patterns of repetition and/or contradiction. This accounts for the episodic and circular structures in much of his fiction, even in the more complex short stories. He shapes different

resolutions for essentially similar situations. Some are final within the context of the work while others are ambiguous. Some of the short stories or anecdotes which he incorporates into the longer works take on an entirely different character in the new context. His variations of similar situations underline the quest in the "searching for the answers to ourselves." In some stories, the very intensity, lyrical or hectic, of the search becomes a means of escape from the "answers"; and, to some questions, there are no answers.

The least of Buckler's interests is suspense with respect to action. A cryptic note alludes to this: "Re suspense in novel. Not much point when can turn . . . pages . . . what can't get by turning the pages are intuitions on each."² Frequently and pointedly, Buckler undermines the suspense of action through the dreams and premonitions of characters, his episodic and circular structures, and the direct intrusion of the narrator. He writes in the Forster style, which he describes in The Mountain and the Valley as having "more to do with the shadow of thought and feeling which actions cast than with the actions themselves" (MV, p. 244). In Buckler's fiction, even the suspense related to character reaction assumes a certain predictability; it is a theme that Buckler loves to explore. However, this pattern can be seen primarily in retrospect since the intensity of each moment can be blinding, another favorite theme.

Buckler speaks of two basic techniques: "multum in parvo" and a type of pointillism.³ Both are essential to an understanding of the themes and structures of his works. The first creates the potential for allegory. The truth of a moment becomes a part of a larger pattern of the truth of many moments which define a particular character; he becomes a symbolic figure with significance beyond Buckler's fictional world which is rooted primarily in rural Nova Scotia of the first half of this century. All his fiction, regardless of its tone, reflects man's attempt to come to terms with himself and others in a world of time and space. This technique reflects his strong sense of the universal in the particular that extends to the smallest details. When questioned about his expression " 'Bible' tripe" (OB, p. 284) to describe part of a steer's intestines, Buckler responded: "(I'd rather like to keep the expression, because it ties in with my obsession about inter-relatedness)"⁴ This technique also accounts for the episodic structure and the growing significance of particular symbols within a work, as well as Buckler's reminder to himself to "Emphasize anthropomorphism of mind in metaphor."⁵ In this way, Buckler, both within and beyond a work, sets up the "concentric reverberations,"⁶ characteristic of literature with depth and universal significance.

Buckler's literary adaptation of pointillism enables him to arrange and re-arrange insights, actions and details such that light and shade alternate, or one predominates, within a

context. As a result, within and between episodes, Buckler's patterns are kaleidoscopic. This technique, which he uses to "illuminate the core of person and place" through "juxtaposed clusters of carefully selected and particularly allusive detail . . . which will summon up their whole context,"⁷ frequently accounts for the different resolutions of similar situations. It should be noted, as well, that at the heart of both visions of reality and the techniques that embody them there can be a relationship of contradiction or opposition.

There are four distinct "worlds" in Buckler's fiction: the physical world of nature, time and space; the particular social context; the world within man; and the world of the literary artist. Moments of perfection, even ones of simple happiness, are characterized by the happy concurrence of all four, while moments of desperation are characterized by an awareness of the utter isolation of each world from the other. The most extreme human condition is characterized by "the mood after" defeat, despair and apathy when all four worlds cease to exist: "The inside was nothing but one great ~~white~~ naked eye of self-consciousness, with only its own looking to look at" (MV, p. 281). The countless permutations and combinations within and between these worlds are evident in Buckler's preoccupation, especially through his writer characters, with finding the "right" focus to capture reality. The problem of capturing reality in life becomes the problem of art.

The physical world has laws of its own over which man has no control. "He may learn the laws to his advantage or to avoid coming to grief, but he cannot defy them without consequence. Nature may appear to be a hostile or a benignant force but its essential nature is exemplified in the tree that kills Joseph in The Mountain and the Valley: "He didn't notice how the keel-piece was swaying in the breeze. The tree had no obedience in its heart, except to physics. It fell exactly when it must" (MV, p. 220). Also, time might seem to stand still for some of Buckler's characters, but generations stretch from the Old World through a pioneer society to a rural one which, itself, has ceased to exist. Both the passage of time and the significance of place are highlighted in a rural setting. Time may not bring progress but its procession cannot be halted by any human desire, and despite the "beauty of nature" one must be aware of "the death and the coldness and the indifference always inside it."⁸

Buckler tends to focus on characters in tightly-knit social contexts, especially that of the family, or on characters who are "outsiders" in a relatively cohesive community. A character's stamp of origin is never lost and only a few manage to move gracefully and unselfconsciously between country and town or city, between the simple and the sophisticated, and between a cultured civilization and a pioneer one. On a few occasions, characters who had known

each other in the past in a fairly close relationship are reunited. There are some, but very few, contrived social situations in which there has been no previous connection between characters. A variation of the last two situations is the social context for The Cruellest Month in which some of the characters had already met in a contrived situation five years earlier.

The physical world of time and space and that of the social context take on a new dimension as they are transformed and assimilated by human consciousness. The human perception of time, one of Buckler's preoccupations, is one of the most perplexing, frustrating and frightening questions facing man. There are significant similarities between his notions of time as reflected in his characters, events, settings, style, symbolism and points of view and those of T.S. Eliot as expressed in "Burnt Norton" and "Little Giddings" of his Four Quartets.⁹ The reluctance or refusal of many of Buckler's characters to accept time as a continuum is often manifest in their exclusive focus on the past or the present or the future. In contrast, a few, consciously or unconsciously, realize Eliot's notion: "Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past" ("BN" I.1-3). The very intensity characteristic of an individual's experience of "now" or the dulling effect of cultivated routine seems to stop time, perhaps to echo the

meaning of Eliot's words: "To be conscious is not to be in time" ("BN" II. 84). Buckler's characters who experience the shattering of an exclusive focus on the present that attempts to obscure an unhappy past or presumes an unlimited future also bear witness to Eliot: "What might have been is an abstraction / Remaining a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation" ("BN" I. 6-8). Eliot's belief that "Only through time time is conquered" ("BN" II. 89) becomes Buckler's theme.

Since, ultimately, man cannot escape this central problem of time, it is one of the most pervasive and threatening themes in literature. Paradoxically, it is through artistic creation, Eliot believes, that man within his own limited period of time can defeat time, his destroyer, since "Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness" ("BN" V. 140-42); and, "at the still point, there the dance is, / . . . where past and future are gathered" ("BN" II. 63, 65). Eliot also suggests that this same victory over time can be achieved through love which "is itself unmoving, / Only the cause and end of movement" ("BN" V. 163-64), and through memory, "For liberation - not less of love but expanding / Of love beyond desire, and so liberation / From the future as well as the past" ("LG" III. 159-61). Buckler frequently uses memory to undermine or pervert a character's resolve. The attempt to stifle memory becomes an attempt to stop time for memory is the evidence of the passage of time.

His most sympathetic characters are the rare ones, like the grandmother in The Mountain and the Valley, who consistently weave memory and love in creative patterns. His literary artists, who always fail, reinforce Eliot's reflection: "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" ("BN" IV. 149-50), and "Shrieking voices / Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering, / Always assail them" ("BN" IV. 153-55). In general, Buckler's characters reflect one or a number of these perceptions of time.

Place assumes an importance far beyond the physical world of weather, nature and specific areas or locales. Place and character become inextricably linked to the point that they can become interchangeable. Each can change or reflect the other. The only characters free from the bonds of place are those who attain a self-possession such that they become place and refuge for themselves and their loved ones. Thus, love can conquer both time and place.

Characters can see themselves and others in different ways as a result of changing circumstances or changes within themselves and others. The absence, presence or intrusion of others can alter a situation; and the convergence of time, place and character(s) becomes a regular pattern. In general, the complexity of these fusions becomes an index of the degree of development of character.

The fourth "world" in Buckler's fiction is that of the literary artist's perception of time, place and human consciousness. Buckler shapes the characters and situations to become his own commentary. In addition, he frequently uses point of view to comment directly on what is going on; this can range from simple explanation to the mocking of characters. Finally, through his characters, Buckler becomes the self-conscious literary artist as he comments on his own difficulties in trying to capture "the essence of time, place, and human equation."¹⁰

Buckler seeks maximum tension in his interweaving of these worlds. He creates conflict between the objective worlds of time, space and social context and the human experience of them. He exploits the range and variety of this human awareness within and between characters. With special interest, he focuses on the dizzying whirl of atoms of insight that collide, fuse or explode and create an aura of lunatic frenzy within the consciousness of a particular character. The variations are endless and the attempt to capture them becomes a literary voyage of hurtling through the space of human character. The impossible task of the literary artist increases the wire-tight tension. The effects can be tragic, comic, or melodramatic, frequently in combination.

In this context, it is important to understand Buckler's

notion of insight and human awareness. An insight is frequently prefaced by some variation of the verb "to know" but it is used to describe many kinds of knowing: practical, intellectual, intuitive and illusory. The greater an individual's capacity is for awareness, the greater is its potential for being a curse. The insight of each moment is charged by its immediacy. For the highly intelligent and sensitive person, insights and feelings become kaleidoscopic. With each twist, an entirely new pattern seems to emerge. What appears to be absolutely certain one moment can be upended by the next "certainty." Contrasting thoughts follow one upon another and yet remain separate with each being the "reality" for the moment. Contrasting feelings appear to be almost simultaneous. Buckler's notion of human awareness insures a certain degree of illusion since the thought or feeling of each moment takes on the aura of reality. In The Cruellest Month, there is reference to this: "But right there was the crowning trickery in thought. You never could believe that what you thought at any given moment could be wrong, for that was all that consciousness consisted of: what you presently believed; and thought was nothing but the sound of that belief" (CM, pp. 295-96). The greater the conviction that it is truth becomes the greater potential for illusion. Even past experience may not be strong enough to underline the absurdity; in a cryptic note, Buckler reflected: "Not see silliness of own ideas as you see silliness of previous ideas later in life."¹¹

Some characters are able to articulate their awareness while others cannot, although they may express it in other ways. The articulate ones tend to be condescending to others while those who are intuitively sensitive but inarticulate show a certain shuffling embarrassment in the presence of others. The level of "knowing" among characters can range from the fairly primitive to the highly complex but it has no necessary connection with the ability to articulate. Thus, within and between characters, Buckler sets up conflicts not only among the levels of knowing but also among the abilities to articulate.

While insight is important, it is not the only factor in human behaviour. It is only through choice, reflective or impulsive, that insight leads to action which may or may not embody the original insight. A character can avoid action by cultivating insights in a way that leads to paralysis or a hectic restlessness or he can stifle insight by cultivating habit. Sometimes, the intervention of some irrational force prevents action or results in a perverse reversal of the truth of the insight. An insight may be cultivated to the extent that it becomes synonymous with action or an illusory insight may gain ascendancy over a true one. Collecting "epiphanies" for safe-keeping and only occasional forced scrutiny can become a way of life. Some characters become so agile that they can simultaneously deceive themselves and know that they are deceiving themselves.

In his original version of The Cruellest Month, Buckler describes Paul: "Knowledgeable and intelligent as he was (enough even to be able truly to deceive himself and truly to see the deception and maintain both at exactly the same time). . . ." ¹² The variations depend upon human ingenuity which is especially fertile in this area. The scope of the longer works provides for greater complexity but the dynamics are the same. Further, the impossibility of containing all the insights can be the writer-character's excuse for his inability to capture reality. It is also the reason that it is so difficult for the reader to begin to have a comprehensive view of Buckler's fictional works.

His most sympathetic characters are those who, despite these almost insurmountable obstacles, reach out to others by choosing to make creative insight a living reality. Although they are few, they come to be seen as truly heroic, especially when such action has become the pattern of their lives. Those who do change the course of their lives by acting in this way are frequently inspired by "minor incidents" rather than by "the provocations with the trumpet note about them." ¹³ It is interesting, and perhaps pertinent, to note that Buckler did graduate work on Aristotle's notion of "akrasia" ¹⁴ which deals with exactly this problem: the actions of those who know what is right but for some reason, usually irrational, fail to act upon the good. For Aristotle, "Akrates" is "the man who lacks strength of will." ¹⁵ In Buckler's characters,

the irrational forces can be cruelly destructive when the impulse is protection of self. They can lie dormant and surface at the most inopportune times; they can also become a way of life that corrodes everything and everyone within reach. In addition, Buckler's notions of fate and habit as second nature bear striking resemblance to those of Aristotle.

These seeds of conflict grow as Buckler fashions another level of potential conflict with even more poignant effect. It would appear that conflict within character ends with death, the final resolution for the shape of a person's life in that his insight and pursuit of happiness can no longer be undermined. However, this is not so in one important social context; family members reach beyond the grave in succeeding generations. Not only is the potential for a particular conflict passed on but new and destructive combinations are generated. This may explain, in part, his preoccupation with family but the almost total absence of birth. In his story "The Dream and the Triumph" which ends on a happy note of birth, the reader is told explicitly that this is another story (RYD, p. 81). Other references to birth are in retrospect and triggered by an unhappy insight or shattered hopes of the present moment. On a few occasions, death accompanies birth: in The Mountain and the Valley, miscarriage follows the marriage prompted by the pregnancy (MV, p. 202) and in "The Rebellion of Young David," the mother had died giving birth (RYD, p. 8).

Buckler's earliest stories reflect his preoccupation with the potential for conflict within family. He sketches a genetic scenario that ensures binding ties and riving conflicts. Characters inherit physical, emotional and intellectual traits. In some, a simple trait is a dominant force while in others, a number of traits are combined in a complex of forces that can be explosive. Buckler's interest is evident in his first sketches for a novel, Excerpts From a Life: a young boy inherits the tendency toward loneliness from his mother who died at a young age.¹⁶ The inherited traits are not restricted to one generation, nor to one social setting, nor to one country. With each generation, the traits become more complex and stronger, or so diluted that they have lost their original strength. However, it would be incorrect to say that character development is dependent entirely upon genetic determinism. Different resolutions of similar situations in the family context show the importance of factors such as the particular complex of human awareness, circumstances and personal choice.

Across and within the generations of grandparents, parents and siblings, there are also the conflicts generated by the complex of human awareness, the ability to articulate and to act upon insight. In many cases, the intensity of the conflict is a function of the family or marital relationship; with reference to "the closely-knit country family" in "The Quarrel," Buckler speaks

of "The special havoc of a quarrel among them, which is really a function of their fierce affective bond."¹⁷ Since the family is the unit of "belonging," the pain and the happiness are intensified. Between grandparents and grandchildren, there is an almost intuitive understanding. More clearly than the parents, the grandparent sees in the grandchild the traits of different members of the family. A child often has an insight into parents that surpasses the understanding the parents have of themselves or of each other; this intensifies his experience of conflict within the family situation. At times, Buckler pursues the Biblical notions of children as a form of immortality or of their being made to bear the sins of their fathers; the rural community highlights both. Some of Buckler's children characters are precocious in a frightening, but credible, way. He explores the terror of the child who does not have a past to judge the "now" nor a realistic future to redeem it. He recreates the wonder of the child in the "now" of happy moments. In contrast, some of his adult children become parodies of themselves as they refuse to mature.

Buckler's preoccupation with "the enigma of Death, the one thing that is unfathomable" is an integral part of his view of life.¹⁸ In notes for The Cruellest Month, he reflected: "Death such a slow disease, born with it."¹⁹ A man may choose to ignore its omnipresence in every aspect of life but he cannot escape its final reality. Death's presence or imminence

may cast an eerie glow for the moment, but the intensity of a person's constantly facing it cannot be maintained. Buckler's frequent and detailed attempts to understand it reinforce the mystery. In a poem, "This Later Lycidas," he touches on the major elements that recur in his treatment of death: its occurrence, the immediate perception and ensuing ritual, and the quickly fading vision, "the gospel of forgetting/ That devours subtler than the worm."²⁰ His rural and family settings highlight death: the cycle of the seasons, the hazards of living on the land, the colonial past and the generations within a family. Death, although resolving the conflict of an individual, can create conflict for others as death frequently occurs at the best of times when " 'they'd just got where they could live! " (OB, p. 246), or at the worst of times when the survivors are left with heavy responsibility or a crushing sense of guilt.

Buckler's references to fate and the frequent occurrence of accidents seem to suggest some perverse external force that affects men's lives. In The Cruellest Month, he refers to the "r-e-i-g-n of accident" (CM, p. 248); and in his notes, he speaks of "the senselessness of planning: how all your life important turning points have been due to the purest of chance happenings."²¹ Upon analysis, however, it is clear that Buckler's "thesis of accidental determination"²² is always qualified in practice by some human factor. There may be innocent victims but accidents are caused by human weakness, carelessness,

ignorance, perversity or preoccupation that defies or clashes with the laws of physical nature. In the case of disease, "A traitor cell unlocks itself and death is inside" an individual (OB, p. 220). Accidental encounters always involve some personal decision to do something or to go somewhere. For everything that happens there is a reason. Some situations may be more plausible than others but even in coincidence, there is some factor of choice or weakness. -- The original impulse may have been of little consequence but the chance happening or encounter can become increasingly important as Buckler weaves it into more complex patterns.

His emphasis on accident tends to overshadow another human factor: a character's reaction. Individuals almost always act in a characteristic way in a crisis to reflect Buckler's belief: "the point is that in the emergency they don't suffer a change in personality; they are more like themselves than ever."²³ As a result of the situation, a character's attitude or behaviour may appear, at least for a time, to be different but once the crisis has passed, and even if circumstances have changed, he usually retreats to his earlier self. Buckler emphasizes that "each must inevitably be trapped by his own nature"²⁴ and he justified his use of even the most minute detail in The Mountain and the Valley "to show how the apparently blind and capricious turns of their fortune are the inevitable outcome of circumstance and inheritance."²⁵ What

might have been viewed as an inevitability borne of fate becomes in fact a concern with the psychological inevitability inherent within and between or among characters in a particular situation. Buckler's world is very much man-centered.

Buckler explores minutely the ways in which various types of people face the challenge of living in the physical universe, of living with other people and of living with themselves. These different aspects can become intertwined to the point of being inseparable. While his focus is not overtly religious, there is a strong sense of man as a creature whose spirit hungers for a close and meaningful relationship with others. His characters who are cut off from others experience a profound loneliness and sense of isolation. In a description of love in Ox Bells and Fireflies, he remarks: "Look at the lonely to know what it was: what it was, not to have it . . . Only in the lack of it there was the true wealth of it seen" (OB, p. 179). There is something of the sacred in the moments that characters experience a sense of complete unity of heart, mind and body. Although it cannot last, there is nevertheless a feeling of ecstasy in which one is literally taken out of oneself and freed in the most liberating way, by being "at home" with another.

The belief that man is trapped by his own nature and that

only death resolves this conflict would seem to invite despair. Buckler himself recognizes "the challenge of nihilism which, at times, seems to be the only logical creed."²⁶ However, his real, if at times muted, admiration is for loving individuals who take delight in the little things of everyday life and who face their sorrows and reversals with courage and dignity. Their sorrow becomes a way of learning about the human heart such that they reach out to others. With great spirit, they live their conviction that "you can bear more than you can bear" (OB, p. 227).

In all his longer fiction and in many of his shorter works, Buckler presents these basic and recurring themes within the context of the difficulty of the observer/writer to grasp them and to express them in a way that captures the reality of a particular situation and, by extension, of the human condition. Buckler sometimes refers to writing as a disease that is both congenital and not too respectable. The social position of one who is not seen to work is ambiguous at best; and in a rural community, which tends to measure manhood by physical strength, it is decidedly feminine. These reservations aside, but incorporated into the fiction, Buckler is always trying to fashion a style that not only renders the reality in summary form but also recreates the moments that together constitute human experience as well as the difficulties of capturing them "exactly." The creator may be handicapped by a consciousness that is too diffuse and lacking in

focus or he may be stymied by an inability to summon an adequate awareness of anything. In the bid to achieve some balance between the need for a unifying focus and the inundation of myriad details, there is a tension that ranges from delicate interplay to an overt and sometimes heavy-handed, ~~self-conscious~~ concern. For the creator, converting all the flashing insights into coherent and meaningful patterns in fiction is at least as difficult as converting them into creative human behaviour. His presence is a constant reminder that a writer is imposing limits on a potentially unlimited world of reality. In many instances, Buckler's achievement in capturing reality is highlighted by his making one aware of the perils which he at times indulges in but manages to tame in some larger focus. Not only does he take us on the journey between Scylla and Charybdis but he provides the commentary for the journey. Buckler uses every tool available to fiction in order to reflect and recreate his vision of life.

Chapter II: Buckler and Literary Irony

Any evaluation of Buckler's work must take into account his claims about the presence of irony in his work since ironic vision points to conclusions that may be directly opposite to those derived from a literal reading. Furthermore, a writer's ironic technique is determined by his particular understanding, conscious or unconscious, of the nature of irony. This relatively simple notion becomes complex when one tries to define irony. Historically, it is a term that has been used to cover everything from deceitful behaviour in a particular situation to a comprehensive philosophy or world view. In this context, it is important to analyse Buckler's use of the term "irony" as well as various theories of irony in already established philosophical and literary traditions to determine the sophistication of Buckler's use of the term. Without imposing a particular concept of irony on Buckler's work, it is possible through the synthesis and reconstruction of various theories of irony to isolate certain common basic elements that can provide a context within which to view Buckler's ideas.¹

In general, this concept of irony calls for an observer, stated or implied, who is aware within a specific context of

a clash between appearance and reality. At the same time, the observer is aware of a victim who is himself either unaware of the clash or aware but incapable of avoiding the consequences. The particular configurations of these elements invite varying "philosophical-emotional" responses.² Various qualifications are to be made with regard to each of these elements.

Theorists frequently divide irony into two broad categories: verbal and situational. The distinction is made that in verbal irony, one perceives the ironist's point of view, whereas, in situational irony, one perceives the ironic observer's point of view.³ However, it would seem that any ironist, consciously or unconsciously, must first be an ironic observer. The sharpness of his irony will depend upon the sharpness of his observation. The comprehensiveness of the irony will depend upon the specific context within which the ironic observer operates; this can range from a specific instance to a total world view characterized by "the perception of cross purposes, of absurdity, of tragic suffering, in the enigma of events that happen to us and in 'the crazy fabric of human nature' itself."⁴

The clash between appearance and reality can take many forms and it will be dependent, to a certain extent, on the ironic observer's notion of appearance and reality. The clash,

which is in the nature of the opposition of "contradiction, incongruity or incompatibility,"⁵ can be between appearance and reality, between appearance and appearance, or between reality and reality. It is not always as simple as saying one thing and meaning another; it can be a matter of saying two things and meaning neither⁶ or of saying many things and meaning only some or none of them. Terms associated with irony such as double vision, double layers or levels, and multi-layers or levels, suggest allegory as well. The distinction is that in irony there must always be some form of opposition between the layers.⁷ To reflect this necessary opposition, terms such as asserting and undermining, validating and invalidating, demolishing and reconstructing, creating and de-creating or meaning and countermeaning, are used. The clash results in two possibilities: resolution or endless dialectic. The resolution can come through the ascendancy of the real meaning over the apparent meaning or by the synthesis of the opposing forces at a higher level. In endless dialectic, there is no final resolution since any appearance or reality can be undermined or annihilated by another.

The ironic observer imposes his own limits upon the extent of his ironic vision. If he views reality as limited, knowable and defineable, his ironic vision will have definite limits beyond which some truth cannot be undermined or invalidated further. Plato's Socrates believed that ultimately

truth could be attained; the Christian believes that he finds life in death; Hegel believed that from the antithesis generated by some thesis, a higher synthesis emerged. Even the true sense of the irony of fate has such limitations: the decrees of a personified, if unknowable, fate. Despite obvious disparities, these visions have definite limits beyond which truth cannot be undermined.

For those who conceive of the universe as "uncontrolled flux," the response may be positive and creative or negative and fearful to the point of being nihilistic. In her book, English Romantic Irony, A.K. Mellor suggests that Friedrich Schlegel's positive and creative concept of romantic irony was shared by English writers such as Keats, Byron and Carlyle whose works "exhibit a structure that is deliberately open-ended and inconclusive."⁸ Schlegel believed that reality can be conceived of only as an infinite becoming. In contrast, man's nature is divided; he is attracted to and experiences the freedom of becoming but he also experiences a basic need for order and being. As a result of the latter, he is driven to try to capture a reality that constantly defies his efforts because of its infinite flux and his own finite, even if expanding, consciousness and language. He must capture and express reality; and he cannot. These opposing forces are never resolved but "stay in constant conflict; and the function of philosophical irony is to examine their intrinsic and

insuperable contradiction."⁹ In addition, the examination must be pursued with enthusiasm as a result of the infinite flux and with skepticism as a result of man's limitations. According to Mellor, the literary version of romantic irony includes, "a philosophical conception of the universe as becoming, as an infinitely abundant chaos; a literary structure that reflects both this chaos or process of becoming and the systems that men impose upon it; and a language that draws attention to its own limitations."¹⁰ The writer becomes creator of his fictional world and its de-creator by calling attention, in diverse ways, to it as fiction.

Since such a balancing of the creative and the de-creative can be difficult to maintain, it is more likely to characterize a particular phase of one's life or work. Enthusiasm can give way to skepticism and negative feelings of dread and despair borne of man's helplessness as he faces the absurdity of the universe, which is indifferent at best. This can lead either to nihilism or to the acceptance of traditional religious or philosophical systems or to the creation of some personal system as a means of coping with the vision of chaos.¹¹ In addition, between the extremes of enthusiasm and nihilism and in their interplay, there are countless variations of intellectual, emotional and moral responses. A literary ironist can reflect and recreate these convictions and attitudes with respect to reality in his work

in the same way the literary romantic ironist embodies romantic irony.

The most obvious victim in irony is the one who is "confidently unaware" of his situation.¹² However, there is also the possibility of the victim who becomes his own ironic observer. He is aware of his situation but for some reason he is unable to act upon his awareness and to resolve the conflict. Since the reasons might be physical, psychological or moral, numberless possibilities exist. Also, the notion of the ironist as himself a victim can become a protective stance; he may be a powerless victim but he is not a witless victim.

In summary, irony in literature reflects the ironic vision of the literary artist. All literature is a construct: it is both a reflection and creation of the writer; it is conscious and unconscious, and planned and inspired. The presence of irony may be consciously created or it may be an unconscious reflection. Frequently, it is both. In literature, the distinction between verbal and situational irony is irrelevant since the ironic literary artist is both ironist and ironic observer. There can be no such thing as the irony of fate, except in the secondary sense of the writer's depicting his own version of the irony of fate. All forms of verbal and situational irony become subsumed in the notion of a more comprehensive literary irony since the writer has created them.

The limitations of the ironic undermining of truth and reality will be determined by his ironic vision. He may say and show that fate is inexorable; however, he may also say or suggest that fate is inexorable while at the same time showing how a particular fate is the result of some human factor. The dynamics within and the limits of the world he creates will be the reader's guideline for understanding the limits of the potential irony within the literary work.

The narrative writer has almost unlimited possibilities for fashioning his work. In any short or long work, he chooses a fictive narrator or "implied author,"¹³ certain events and their sequence, diverse characters with varying degrees of development and possibilities for relationships, a particular setting in time and place, symbolic motifs, a particular style and tone, as well as a title and perhaps an epigraph. He can use all these elements to fashion irony in a limited sense or to construct and reflect a world of unlimited irony. He can do it in an overt manner that is fairly straightforward, or in a covert manner of deception that is meant to be seen through, or in a way that is meant to be ambiguous. The overall tone can be negative or positive, skeptical or enthusiastic with a particular emphasis or in balance.

All successful literary ironists, romantic or otherwise, prove the power of fiction to withstand their own ironic efforts

to undermine it. As they focus, explicitly or implicitly, on the impossibility of capturing and expressing even some small aspect of reality and on the pretension of anyone who thinks he can succeed, they are in fact creating. Some go further to include a focus on irony itself as a philosophic and literary vision. With reference to their own views or those of other ironic writers, they call attention to the presence, possibilities, limitations and negative or positive effects of an ironic view of life reflected in fiction. This can also be a self-protective stance to anticipate the objections of those who question the validity or morality of an ironic view of life. Thus, the self-conscious literary ironist affirms and undermines not only his own work but all literature as well. He becomes Muecke's figure of the ironist as a clown on a tight-rope who must be even more skilful than the ordinary tight-rope acrobat.¹⁴

Chapter III: Buckler's Understanding of Irony

Buckler's pointed use of the term "irony" in his notes, correspondence and fiction reveals that he is aware of its philosophical and literary implications. Attention will be directed to his understanding of irony and its effects; his status as ironic observer will be dependent on whether what he refers to as "irony" or as "ironic" is so in fact.

Buckler sometimes suggested alternate endings for his short pieces in order to increase his chances for publication since his longer works took years to complete "with time out to forage for food with short stories."¹ The chapter entitled "Another Man" in Ox Bells and Fireflies was first a story called "The Balance" that was rejected for publication. In a letter accompanying the story, he suggested: "There's the other possible ending, of course: the ironic one; that the coercion of habit in the lonely man would be stronger even than the revelation"² In another letter, with reference to this suggested ending, he noted that the "psychological twist is stronger."³ He uses the term "irony" in this context to describe the clash between the creative potential of the revelation and the negative influence of the character's habitual behaviour. Despite the character's insight, his desire

for a meaningful existence, and his clear vision of how to resolve the conflict, he chooses the security of his old habits. He is the prototype of Buckler's most compelling ironic victims: those who see their illusions shattered and resolve to break their bonds only to fall prey once more to the destructive power and security of habit. Buckler portrays the ironic victim who is, at least in part and for a time, his own ironic observer but the awareness is deliberately and quickly dulled by the retreat to habit which has become second nature. The intensity of the revelation and resolve accents the reversal. The irony of the resolution is more obvious when it is compared to that of a similar conflict in "Last Delivery Before Christmas": a similar character acts upon his insight in a positive and creative way (RYD, pp. 97-113). Much of Buckler's fiction consists of variations of this theme of the defeat or triumph of a character's resolve.

Correspondence concerning Buckler's short story "Glance in the Mirror" also reflects this understanding of irony; in addition, it introduces his recurring theme of the self-conscious artist, who, in this case, is married to an apparently superficial wife (RYD, pp. 133-38). In a span of almost ten years, Buckler suggested three possible endings and their effects. All the resolutions are ironic. One

letter proposed two variations:

If the ending should be too grim . . . the piece could be given an equally plausible happier one - by altering the woman a little and having her pretend to rewrite what he has written, to show him how he has always misunderstood her.

In the "grim" version, the wife is the ironic victim while in the "happier" one, the writer is the ironic victim. The emphasis on reversal is highlighted, if not appreciated, by an earlier critic who dismissed the story because of the "phony effect of a trick ending."⁵ In another letter, Buckler offered the following commentary:

This is a somewhat ironic and off-trail story, but I gathered . . . that you were aiming at rather a sophisticated (in the best sense of the word) audience and that you would not want the "formula" piece with the built-in slushy ending.

For the irony to be sharpest, of course, the story should end with the line, "Why don't you ever write one about you and me?" I added the final touch because I thought it was something which, under the circumstances, might very well happen; and I think it does give the reader a stimulating exercise of choice: Is what Jeff writes at the end indeed valid [sic] truth, or is it the climactic instance of Sheila's subtlest victory of all over his objective judgment? However, if you feel this part should be excised, to give the story more telling punch, I shouldn't object.

In each, there is a reversal of expectations in the clash between what is perceived and reality. In each, there is an ironic victim: the wife or the husband and in the last version, both are potentially ironic victims. As well, the reader who identifies with one or the other may be co-victim

in all the versions.

The three endings show Buckler's awareness of the different limits for undermining a truth. In the "sharpest" and in the "happy" versions, the ironic reversals are complete within the story. The truth of each resolution cannot be undermined further within the context established by the story. In contrast, the resolution is not complete within the context of the story in the version which offers "the reader a stimulating exercise of choice." There is, instead, the potential for further undermining of truth and for a situation of endless dialectic. Buckler himself suggested a more precise ending in notes for The Cruellest Month: "wife killed Morse's urge and talent ('Glance in the Mirror')." ⁷ However, this comment is beyond the context of the story and does not alter the essential ambiguity of the third version, the one finally published. Thus, it may be said that Buckler is aware of the difference between limited and unlimited ironic vision. In addition, he makes a distinction between the positive and negative effects of irony. One ending may be "happier" but it is still ironic and he clearly dissociates this kind of writing from "the 'formula' piece with the built-in slushy ending."

The comment in Buckler's notes can be helpful in understanding the element of the ironic self-conscious artist

in this story. In a number of his works, he intertwines the themes of whether a love relationship and commitment to art are compatible, of which of the two is reality and which is shadow, and of the fleeting passage of time. Despite rejections of the story because of the husband as writer, Buckler did not wish to change that aspect of the story. One magazine editor had commented that stories about writers did not interest its readers, "whereas the basic situation . . . a sensitive man married to rather superficial female . . . could be very good for us."⁸

Earlier, another editor had advised:

. . . the idea you present, a basic problem which any creative person always faces . . . is one worth developing. I think that you must do it implicitly rather than explicitly, through the characters themselves and not through you, the writer . . . you should begin the story . . . with the paragraph beginning "He was reading . . ." . . . letting the story tell itself in this interview between the writer and his wife.

Despite Buckler's desire to have the story published he did not make these changes; the version accepted for publication in 1956 retained the husband-writer writing prior to the wife's intrusion.

The editor who wanted the story to start at "'He was reading . . .'" to make it "a more integrated piece of work"¹⁰ confused the narrative voice, the husband-writer's consciousness, with Buckler's voice; also, he did not realize the

importance of the first part to the intricate interweaving of themes. Prior to this paragraph, Buckler establishes a seesaw rhythm of changing and clashing insights which tilt from the ideal to the real in the act of literary creation and in a love relationship. A short period of time is made to appear much longer by his anatomizing the situation. The tune of every mood is recreated in Buckler's style and his frequent use of words such as "And," "Then," "And then" and "But" underline a sense of piling on and counterpointing, which is reinforced by his shifting between "could," "should," and "would" verb forms and more active and immediate verbs.

In the husband-writer's initial musings, Buckler has him reflect on the wonders and loneliness of writing, and on its quality of "shadow" in contrast to the "real thing" of love and a life already half over. The character alternates between a frustration borne of the halting, painful, "crippling stillness" of writer's block and a lyricism borne of the sheer joy of when "time itself could be caught and said" (RYD, p. 133). He delights in his romantic vision of love: "... it meant a face . . . and the inimitable safety. The great sweet wonderful safety from the cry of things not understood . . . and the sound of time and the sound of time gone by . . ." The triumph of capturing this vision in words makes him feel "free like no one else," such that he "wouldn't exchange places with anyone" (RYD, p. 134). While he is reading it over, his

wife enters bringing what he later describes as "the love and the destruction both" (RYD, p. 136). In every way, Buckler sets up a contrast between the husband's romantic vision of a loved one and his wealthy, well-meaning but rather unreflective wife whose first act is to "glance at the mirror, instinctively" (RYD, p. 134). To excise this part of the story would destroy its rhythm and full impact.

Through the character of the husband-writer, Buckler becomes the self-conscious literary ironist who calls attention to the dilemma of the writer who, in order to capture reality, must be a participant in life and yet an observer. In addition, in this story the writer is also a participant in and observer of a love relationship. In both cases, the question that surfaces is whether "watching" diminishes or changes radically the reality of what is being watched. If one is totally immersed in it, can one "see" it? And if one can "see" it, is he really experiencing it? And, especially in the case of a writer, is "any kind of love" (RYD, p. 138) better than no love even if it brings destruction with it?

Important images are those of "shadow," "mirror" and "window." All are reflected images revealing only partial aspects of reality as the husband tries to catch "all the incommunicable shadows on the heart that the face hid-" (RYD, p. 133). Buckler seems to suggest that literature as

the mirror image of life is deficient. The wife sees only the reflection of her own perception of the reality and the husband's first "mirror" of what his life is like is a reflection of his perception of her. Perhaps Buckler is suggesting the possibility of the image of the mirror as that which yields an opposite reflection. The title itself provides a positive/negative twist which is so balanced as to reinforce the essential ambiguity of the resolution; the noun-verb value of "Glance" also emphasizes this. Nevertheless, it is one of his favorite images that triggers yet one more draft or mirror of reality; the husband is touched by "watching her through a window, walking away from him, so defencelessly back-to, so vulnerably small with distance" (RYD, p. 138).

Within the story, the writer's repeated efforts to capture and express reality and the suggestion of his failure become an ironic commentary as Buckler succeeds in capturing that struggle. On a lighter note, he also draws attention to writing as a less than honourable position with little remuneration and as a nasty habit when the wife is made to exclaim: ". . . you'd think it was something I'd caught you at" (RYD, p. 135). He also echoes a fairly frequent critical remark about his own stories: "grim" (RYD, p. 138).

Responding to the editor who accepted the story almost

ten years later and who praised it as "fragile and sophisticated,"¹¹ Buckler remarked that the magazine "will be one I can aim at with a blessed freedom from the cramps of all those Procrustean moulds which the 'commercial' magazines hew everything down to."¹² Within a relatively simple situation and narrow framework, Buckler has interwoven, in ironic fashion, at least three major literary themes: the nature of love and of literature and man's attempt to come to terms with time the destroyer. The ironic vision is evident not only in his suggested resolutions but it is embedded in every aspect of his work.

Buckler described himself as the "poor man's Henry James"¹³ and The Mountain and the Valley, his first novel, as "not the popular novel type, because its action is so largely that of psychological interaction of character."¹⁴ The ironic observer's sense of clash and opposition is evident in his comments on the main character, David: "self-contradictory nature," "divided sensitivities," "dichotomically fascinated," "divided allegiance";¹⁵ and "divided sensibilities," "tragic dichotomy," and "recurrent dichotomy."¹⁶

He clearly defined the nature and limits of this opposition. He refuted the notion "that David's death was an arbitrary device to end the story" and asserted that it was "the very first thing I wrote: the foundation of the whole thesis."¹⁷ Buckler did not intend the truth of the resolution to be

undermined further; it was not to be an ambiguous ending. David is not the only ironic victim but he is the most important one. At that last moment, David experiences "one final transport of self-deception: that he would be the greatest writer in the whole world" since "the writing business was just another instance of his fatal self-deluding blinding by transports of enthusiasm" ¹⁸ His final illusion was meant to be "an authentic and crowning dramatic irony" ¹⁹ and "the crowning point of the whole dramatic irony." ²⁰ Buckler noted that such an ironic resolution is tragic and that the victims are "all . . . finally trapped by their own nature." ²¹ His whole purpose was "to show how the apparently blind and capricious turns of their fortune are the inevitable outcome of circumstance and inheritance." ²² The distinction and opposition between appearance and reality are clear.

In response to a request to print excerpts, he recognized the negative effect of the tragic note: "One trouble is that the individual chapters are pretty much dependent for their force on context, and that, though I think the overall impression . . . is positive, a good many of them end on what is sort of a downward trajectory." ²³ An earlier comment reflects this also: ". . . their lives are all a sort of decrescendo (. . .) Yet if you consider the peaks of particularly vivid happiness, I figure their balance of satisfaction is actually positive." ²⁴

Buckler also commented on a number of techniques used, beyond the central one of David's death, to embody his ironic vision: "The most minor incidents and references were chosen as carefully as the major ones from the point of view of illumination or appositeness."²⁵ In his notes on the galley proofs, he remarked: "My point (or counterpoint) here was . . ."²⁶ In a letter he wondered if a quotation from Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of the Reading Gaol" might be a better title: " 'Some With a Sword' (from 'For each man kills the thing he loves, etc.,')." ²⁷ He wanted to retain in a certain passage the third person pronoun where it "left no ambiguity and, in fact, served to emphasize the fluctuation in degree of the immediacy of David's memories"²⁸ A few examples will show that many of his cryptic notes or "touches," as he refers to them, have a built-in opposition whether they are referring to what he labels "themes," "ideas and situations," or "devices": "the good-day fear," "comic and tragic genius combined," "the new house (symbolic moving from old to new)," or "scenes of what might have happened."²⁹

Buckler is also the self-conscious literary ironist in The Mountain and the Valley. He commented on David's failure to become a writer: "Well, for one thing, only one in a million, however potentially talented, in actual life ever does . . . And his attempts at writing are rather pointedly referred to no less than four or five times. In one case,

to the extent of a whole chapter."³⁰ In his notes, he referred to the "Pathetic contrast between things as they are and the way David writes them . . . love, war etc. . . ."³¹ David's final climb to the top of the mountain embodies every negative aspect of the writing process experienced by Buckler: the paralysis generated by the "one great white naked eye of self-consciousness" (MV, p. 281) and the "exquisite guilt" generated by "the swarming multitude of all the voices " (MV, p. 291). Buckler triumphs by completing his story that shapes "the swarming multitude" which David believes "would make him the greatest writer in the whole world" (MV, p. 299). The parallel has a certain self-protective ironic quality as Buckler calls attention, half-mockingly and half-seriously, to the difficulties, pretensions and dreams of all writers. The Mountain and the Valley is both a reversal and a realization of a writer's highest expectations.

With reference to The Cruellest Month, his second novel, Buskler commented: "I realize that it is largely a novel of ideas and that such are not especially marketable"³² In many ways, the novel is a compendium of most of his recurring thoughts, characters and situations with a strong emphasis on innate contradiction. Almost all of the hundreds of themes and techniques itemized in his notebooks for the novel are embodied in some way in the final version. They range from his desire to "Anatomize loneliness" and to have "A chapter

about 'Being' like the Grand Inquisitor," to the reminder that "Ellipsis may tell more than anatomizing." In this sense, the novel succeeds in fulfilling another note: "Work into dialogue, in a line or two, each of the philosophical thoughts listed in 'Ideas and Touches'." Although one must not confuse the intent with the actual result, it would be interesting to pursue the notion that it is a dialogue within himself for in an early note, he remarked: "one of my own personal traits projected as the predominant feature of each character."³³

The nature of the novel calls for characters who are able to carry on such dialogue. Soon after the first novel, he wrote that he was "half inclined to try a novel with a setting somewhere like Greenwich . . . with characters more articulate, if not more complicated" since "(It is sometimes rather limiting to have to avoid all observations in dialogue which wouldn't come naturally to a rural spokesman)"³⁴

In The Cruellest Month, the dynamics of contrast show Buckler at his most intense. His note, "Saw death in spring setting,"³⁵ applies not only to time and place but to character and situation as well. Beyond the fact that lilacs are present in Eliot's The Waste Land, Buckler is reported to have chosen them as a symbol because " 'their annual growth and rebirth mocks the inability of the characters to imitate the natural cycle.' "³⁶ His notes on devices show a repeated concern with "(something contrasted)"³⁷ within and between characters

and situations. He acknowledged that "The love bits . . . may be a bit gaga in spots; but again this was in large part to set up the later irony."³⁸ He thought of the whole novel as a view of "how contrastingly each character reacts to the big loss that has made his or her abdication 'retreat' instinctive"³⁹ However, at the end, these same characters "in the emergency . . . don't suffer a change in personality; they are more like themselves than ever."⁴⁰ All through the novel there is contrast not only between appearance and reality but also within each.

The notion that a victim is an essential element of irony is very explicit in his correspondence which deals with a reworking of the ending:

I tried first to keep the "irony" (rather reluctant to give up the mild "you can't win" twist) and protect Letty (. . .) at the same time. But it refused to come right. So finally I decided that I was probably trying to rework the unworkable and took another tack. I scrapped the irony (telling myself that maybe it was scrap-irony anyway) and simply wrote it straight.⁴¹

The ironic ending prevailed in the final version. He realized the need for a victim in irony and also acknowledged the related difficulty: the degree of severity with which a victim is dealt and the effect of this on the positive or negative ironic tone of the novel as a whole. He wanted to "protect" Letty; and, in an earlier letter he conceded that he might have "dealt a bit too harshly" with two other women characters

but that " . . . each paragraph makes some pertinent point about them and sets up the irony later on."⁴²

He intended the ending to be ironic in an unlimited way. Although the characters embark on what they think of as a new and different beginning in their lives, Buckler was not so sure: " . . . the original idea (vide 'this tricking morning' par . . .) was that the ending too should be, again for want of a better word, ironic."⁴³ This paragraph which appears on the second last page of the novel is echoed in the very last paragraph: "For a moment the April morning seemed to preen itself . . ." (CM, p. 298). The last two sentences of the novel are taken almost word for word from the high flown romantic vision of love in "Glance in the Mirror." The ambiguity is underlined by the final punctuation: ellipsis. Later, in a letter he reflected on an important theme in the novel: "The question of change; do people, ever, much? . . . (. . . the irony that Paul thinks he's found an answer in Letty - when, anyone should see . . . that this is maybe an ignis fatuus too,) The way people continue to fool themselves." In a postscript, he undermined an aspect of his original intention to include "the idea of the soundness of the 'natural' country person weighing more than the specious complexity & chatter . . . of the sophisticated" with the comment: "(. . . I'm not at all so sure about this now. Not at all.)"⁴⁴ In all Buckler's fiction, it is only death that limits the ironic

potential in individual characters; in The Cruellest Month, survival ensures no clear resolution but only a lingering and teasing ambiguity.

Buckler's preoccupation with the title highlights his concern that it not only mirror the ironic nature of the work as a whole but also indicate the tone. An early title, Cells of Love, was chosen "to cover (in a kind of double, somewhat ironic, application) both the cellular variegation of love and love's sometimes imprisoning aspects."⁴⁵ In some of his other suggestions for titles and epigraphs, he was more explicit about their relation to the ironic tone. His reservation about the final title, The Cruellest Month, with Eliot's epigraph was that perhaps "it put too sobersides a face on the book." He played with the title, "The Only Wear, (with epigraph 'Motley's the Only Wear' - from Jaques' speech in As You Like It . . .)" since "it "seems to represent Paul's philosophy (the dominant one in the book) very succinctly - and to convey the light, though not really frivolous, ironic touch which the book may need." He also suggested adding to the above the lines of John Gay: "Life is a jest . . . / . . . now I know it."⁴⁶ Buckler himself is calling attention to the tone of the irony which is one of the central problems in interpreting the novel. It is slashing, glib, mocking, and tender by turns such that there is ambiguity in the tone as well as in the resolution of the situation.

In The Cruellest Month, Buckler, the self-conscious literary ironist, writes a book about a book being written. He not only discourses on the joy and agony of writing but also, through his characters, offers different possibilities for the ending and then ends it himself with another. As well, in keeping with his own ending, he undercuts the writer figure all through the narrative; no one is so wrong, so often, about so much as Morse, the novelist, who alternates between being observer and participant, creator and destroyer, recorder and manipulator. In Buckler's notes, there is a terse but telling comment: "writers: Peeping Toms, voyeurs of suffering."⁴⁷ In a sense, Buckler "unwrites" the book that Morse is writing by exposing the latter's blindness. Towards the end, Kate comments: "No writer ever gets it right. How can they get it true to life when life's not true or faithful to itself? . . . or people to themselves? When there's no consistency in anything?" (CM, p. 284).⁴⁸ Buckler then shapes an ending that shows that apparent inconsistency is in fact consistency. The resolution may be ambiguous but it is nevertheless consistent when the novel is seen in retrospect. Much of Buckler's fiction has to be re-read in retrospect a number of times before the patterns are clear.

Another element of self-conscious literary irony is Buckler's conscious use of the "play motif" which "operated rather openly . . . because . . . life is so often like a play

of itself."⁴⁸ In answer to one query concerning the appropriateness of this motif in a particular situation, Buckler replied that he felt it was "particularly fitting here, because it is in just such moments of shocking reality that life is apt to take on for the participant the unreality of a play."⁴⁹ The distinctions and connections between life and art are interwoven throughout the novel. One of the contexts in which this occurs is in the awareness of and understanding not only of irony but of its effects both in life and in literature. In an early draft, Buckler was explicit about a character's understanding of irony as a mode of behaviour:

Knowledgeable and intelligent as he was (enough even to be able truly to deceive himself and truly to see the deception and maintain both at exactly the same time), whenever the moment for shucking concealment came, he just physically couldn't do it . . .

. . . he had "acted" for more than half his life. He had "acted" as if his condition were true, and yet somehow he had maintained to himself, by never allowing the name for it to be pronounced in his consciousness, that it was not.⁵⁰

Although this passage was deleted, primarily because Buckler had changed the problem to be concealed, it shows an awareness of the ironic interplay between knowing and acting and between living and acting. In another passage, discarded for the same reason, Buckler pushed this notion further:

Paul was fluent enough in the gibberish of irony. He could have written a book about the accident that had turned his life full circle . . . He wouldn't have pronounced the phrase "trick of fate" in a

bare-faced way . . . but he'd have implied it in the proper Hemingway fashion; and his hero would have had all the proper mixed-up attitudes toward it. This was so admittedly supreme among the Christer tricks fate had in its repertory that you half-saluted it. With the back of your hand: But commanding a like irony inside himself was a different matter.⁵¹

In a variation of the latter which served as a preface to the previous quotation, Buckler had intensified the "half-saluted" by adding, "Faced it down with a gritty slashing insolence. Brandished it openly, and then cut it to ribbons with knowledge-ability."⁵² In these passages and others, literature goes beyond being a reflection of life and becomes an agent that actually intensifies an individual's conflict.

Other characters also show an awareness of an ironic view and its effects in life and in literature; this is evident in their numerous references to well-known literary ironists: Swift, Ibsen, Proust, Tolstoy, O'Neill, Thomas Mann, Faulkner, Hemingway and Compton-Burnett. Shortly before publication of the novel, Buckler described it as "an investigation of the way in which various people of various temperaments meet personal loss and the challenge of nihilism which, at times, seems to be the only logical creed."⁵³ The only child in the novel puts it most starkly: "Bones make you feel funny, don't they . . .?" (CM, p. 37). At various times, the characters respond with anger, frustration, resignation, bitterness, cynicism, glibness, courage and love or seek escape in roles,

neurosis and alcohol. In each case, Buckler also focuses on the ironic effects of each stance. As a result, Buckler manages to be ironic with regard to nihilism on two levels. Through one of the characters, he calls attention to the ultimate irony of nihilism itself with its " ' nothing matters ' argument." The narrator pursues the point: " . . . it was one of those conjurer's tricks . . . You didn't stay convinced about it . . . The nagging command was to act^o against it. And who was to say that this command was not a sounder authority than logic?" (CM, p. 138). Buckler shows an awareness of the critics of an ironic view of life which can be negative and destructive. However, by noting the ironic effects of each stance, negative and positive, he also highlights the inevitable irony related to the impossibility of man's ever realizing his best hopes. The ironic view of life is upheld but the tone is an ambiguous blend of positive and negative.

An interesting aside in the context of irony in life and literature is speculation about the rueful feelings Buckler must have experienced in the final editing of the book. The first editor, Jack Rackliffe, who had been sympathetic and encouraging, was replaced because of illness. It is ironic that a novel so shaped by ironic vision should fall into the hands of another who appears to be exceptionally literal-minded and not especially conversant with literature, ancient or modern. The new editor didn't know "Robert Jordan" and

remarked that the "word 'cojones' doesn't mean anything to me"; he pointed out that Buckler must have meant "the hare and the tortoise" when he used "Achilles and the tortoise." With reference to "all the perfumes of Arcadia," he underlined the fact that "even school children know it's 'ARABIA' ";⁵⁴ Buckler answered with restraint: "I wanted the variation ('Arcadia') here - i.e., the rural idyll."⁵⁵ In all cases, Buckler responded patiently although, at one point, he did inquire: "(May I ask who the freelance editor presently working on the book is?)"⁵⁶

Of the three long pieces of Buckler's fiction, The Cruellest Month comes closest to a literary expression of romantic irony since there is constant hovering between the creative and the de-creative, the positive and the negative. There is the possibility for an almost endless dialectic. Buckler himself felt that, on the whole, the novel's "essential stance is positive . . . in the before-Peale sense of the word."⁵⁷ In an early note, he had remarked: "A sort of satire like The Sun Also Rises."⁵⁸ The tone of Buckler, the romantic literary ironist, is captured by the last words of Hemingway's novel: "Isn't it pretty to think so?"⁵⁹

Although Buckler's ironic vision is less evident at first, it is present in his fictive memoir, Ox Bells and Fireflies. Ostensibly, it is an attempt to capture the Nova Scotia

village of Buckler's youth; more profoundly, it is the attempt to capture one's youth. Echoes of Dylan Thomas' poem "Fern Hill"⁶⁰ recur as nature, youth and innocence are celebrated with exuberant, lyrical and religious overtones. Buckler's working title "Singing, As the Farm Was Home"⁶¹ was taken from the poem. Buckler's insertion of the comma after "Singing" reflects his dominant tone, his vantage point in present time and the poignant sense of loss of "home". Ox Bells and Fireflies is both a celebration of what was and a lamentation over the loss of that world.

What might have been only "a medley of fragments" (OB, p. 197) or a "clinical documentary" is integrated through his "approach . . . nearer the novelistic, using fact, incident and character as the prism of theme."⁶² The theme is the celebration of the past from the perspective of a clearly inferior present and with a sense of apprehension with regard to the future: "We no longer see the things we used to see . . . We see things we never used to see . . ." (OB, p. 300). It is the vision of one whose "flesh . . . has seen its own bone" (OB, p. 299) and who is looking back upon his youth when "everything was always and forever Now" (OB, p. 23).

In his attempt to defy the ravages of time by capturing a vanished way of life, Buckler uses what he calls the "short-hand" of "multum in parvo"⁶³ to embody "the macrocosms in the

minutiae; the exotic in the ordinary; the far in the near; the universal 'forms' (whether geometric, sensory or metaphysical) in the local particular"⁶⁴ The emphasis which is on the similarities within apparent contrasts extends from the title to the most minute detail, as has been noted with regard to his expression " 'Bible tripe' " (OB, p. 284). Buckler also celebrates the real contrasts in his characters since "it was just these opposites that made them real" (OB, p. 20). In general, the life depicted is a kaleidoscope of wonder in which "everything, animate or inanimate, cast a different shadow of itself as its context varied" (OB, p.20), since Buckler believed that "in the country especially, a single entity may . . . have the variety of thousands."⁶⁵ Contrast which is the source of conflict in most of Buckler's fiction becomes an object of celebration, "the spark of marvels" (OB, p. 57).

In the human experience of time, an individual's vision of the past and future is a function of his perception of the present: the past is what was as it now appears while the future is what is to come as it now appears. Thus, the present is prelude to memory. Buckler, the self-conscious literary ironist, explicitly calls attention to the deficiency of memory as the "blurred telescope of the mind" (OB, p. 21); he proposes that the past can be caught only through a

"sleight of heart" (OB, p. 22) which penetrates" the skin . . . the flesh . . . the bone -- straight back to the pulse of another time, and takes all of you with it . . . Not long enough to take it all down, but long enough to give memory a second chance" (OB, p. 21). The three dimensions of the present, the past of memory, and the past reached through "sleight of heart" are clearly reflected in Buckler's style. With the exception of the last chapter, the narrator begins each chapter from the vantage point of the present. His role, relayed in the present tense, is that of a commentator who introduces some aspect of the past and who may also intrude periodically in a chapter. Even in the chapters that are stories of the "third-person," this sense of the present summoning the past is caught in the cryptic note that prefaces the story: "Call the man . . ." (OB, p. 234). Simple memory is reflected usually in the use of the simple past or the use of the auxiliary "would" to create a sense of repeated past action. The "sleight of heart" memory is rendered in the present tense with the result that this past takes on the immediacy of the present. It is the presence of the reflective narrator that becomes the unifying force of Buckler's theme as the narrator indulges in "irony-assisted recall"⁶⁶ in which a sense of loss both summons and is emphasized by his celebration of what was once his heritage and hope.

One aspect of Buckler's vision that also serves as counterpoint to what might have been "just another wispily elegaic excursion into 'the happy valley' of childhood"⁶⁷ is the pervasive presence of death. The narrator begins his story of the past with a childhood dream that encompasses a day-night-day cycle in winter and from which he awakens to life and death in May. From then on, death becomes part of the fabric of life but inasmuch as not even a "sleight of heart" can penetrate the mystery of death, it remains a "conundrum" (OB, p. 131), "a secret never to be told" (OB, p. 18). Death can be known only in its occurrence and in the immediate human ritual surrounding it.

Buckler, the self-conscious literary ironist, also has the narrator comment on the impoverishment of a life lived through books, which were not much in evidence in Norstead: "But what was the lack? When everyone had read with his nerve ends the only great writers -- earth, sky, rock, and tree (not these the petticoated little penmen mooning about doubt and heartburn) - and been strengthened by them" (OB, p. 193). He ends that particular chapter on the note of "Who needed books, when he had memory?" (OB, p. 195). Again, Buckler, while seeming to downplay the role of literary artist actually highlights it, especially as the creator and guardian of collective memory. Only death makes patterns of the past clear whether it be in society or in the life of

a person. In his poem "This Later Lycidas," Buckler mourns not only the death of a particular man but more especially the death of his memory: "And now -- already -- he is 'yesterday.' / Soon he will be 'then.' / And, ah, so soon he will be faceless with 'ago.'" ⁶⁸ Individual memory dies with the death of a person but it is the artist who defies time by capturing it and, in one sense, making it "always and forever Now" (OB, p. 23).

Buckler's desire to avoid 'a dominant "iron-grey" tone (CM, p. 192) in Ox Bells and Fireflies is apparent in his choice and arrangement of chapters toward the end and in the exclusion of one chapter from the final printing. In one of his first drafts, Buckler had four stories or character sketches that he intended to use for four of the last six chapters. "A Man" had already been published as "The Bars and the Bridge" ⁶⁹ and "A Woman" as "A Little Flag for Mother." ⁷⁰ The other two stories had not been published: "The Balance" became "Another Man" and the second, "Children," which Buckler referred to as "(The David and Effie Piece)" ⁷¹ was to be included as well. "A Man" and "A Woman" clearly celebrate the lives of the characters; to counterpoint this, Buckler inserted "Another Man" which is in itself an ironic story. However, in Ox Bells and Fireflies its purpose is not so much to portray the poverty of one man as to highlight the riches of others who enjoy love and family. Perhaps for this same

reason, Buckler included in the last manuscript the chapter "Like Spaces, Other Cases," a sketch of very different characters: "To look at them and their like was to see better what Norsteads and their like were not" (OB, p. 265).

These chapters do not undermine the truth of the previous ones but serve to quieten disbelief that all could have been so idyllic in the past and to emphasize, by contrast, the riches of most Norstead characters.

The chapter that Buckler finally excluded would have gone beyond simple contrast and disturbed the tonal balance by undermining, at least suggestively, all that had come before. The David and Effie relationship of The Mountain and the Valley had three titles and two versions in its short story form: "Children," "The Day Before Never" and "Hares and Hounds."⁷² In an early draft and in the manuscript version of Ox Bells and Fireflies, Buckler had included one or other of the stories. Although he called both "Children," he used the two different versions. In one, he used the original "Hares and Hounds" variation in which a young boy tries to protect the girl from seeing her mother in a compromising position; later that night, he himself compromises the girl. The story does not belong in Norstead although it might have had its place in Claymore of "Like Spaces, Other Cases." The other version ends on the note of the young boy trying to comfort the girl by promising to marry her. This variation belongs in Claymore

for the incident, but in Norstead for the young boy's response. Neither version contributes to the theme of celebration of the past, and the sense of present loss would be seen as having its counterpart in the past. Either version would have undermined the total work; in a sense, the absence provides an example of how Buckler's ironic vision shapes most of his other works.

Ox Bells and Fireflies is a celebration of the past in which the patterns are given final shape by the perception of a very different present. In the last chapter, the narrator comes back to "an 'I' incident -- as in the beginning"⁷³ but he reverses his usual time pattern. He begins in the past that has the immediacy of the present but the time is August "before the season tips toward fall" (OB, p. 293). Soon the narrator, whose dreams as a child were full of life and wonder before waking to life and death, becomes an adult like the others: "Some nights we lie awake, searching for the answers to ourselves in the dark" while "all days we are asleep, sleepwalking among the things that now are all alike . . ." (OB, p. 300). This unhappy present triggers the last notes of celebration: "But then there were . . ." (OB, p. 300); the litany continues until the penultimate line of the memoir: "And fireflies and freedom . . ." (OB, p. 302). The final line is a repetition of this last phrase but without the ellipsis such that the finality of the past is underlined. The

destructive quality of the contrasts between the present and the past is heightened by the creative quality of the contrasts within the past, the "sparks of marvel" (OB, p. 57). Ox Bells and Fireflies, Buckler's last long work, ends where his first, The Mountain and the Valley, begins before he goes on to chronicle the ravages of time even in that part of the world. Buckler's three long works bear testimony to the difficulties of balancing the creative and the de-creative in romantic irony. In contrast to the essential ambiguity of The Cruellest Month, there is the tragedy of The Mountain and the Valley and the hymn of celebration of Ox Bells and Fireflies.

Chapter IV: Buckler's Ironic Techniques

At least two major difficulties present themselves as one tries to analyse the techniques that Buckler uses to embody his ironic vision in his work. One is the great number of the techniques, compounded by their variations, and the other is the difficulty of extricating specific ones since they are frequently part of a complex. As a result, the choice has been made to be arbitrary in the selection and at the same time to try, in summary form, to point toward implications that cannot be fully explored within the range of this study. Also, it is important to keep in mind that in his carefully structured, but deceptively simple, way Buckler repeats basic narrative patterns and the basic dynamics of his ironic techniques. In a number of ways, these points have already been alluded to in earlier parts of this study.

Buckler's obsession with time is evident in every aspect of his fiction. In general, he deals with four aspects of time: clock time, the human experience of time, the attitude toward time as an index of character and the personification of time as a character in its own right, usually as destroyer. The latter is evident in his preoccupation with change,

with the factor of "minutes" in accidents and the futile attempt to replay them as they might have been, and with death and its "crush of 'never'" (MV, p. 149). Buckler generates ironic tension by interweaving these aspects in a way that one undermines another in varying patterns of counterpoint.

Buckler's choice of language and fictive narrator reinforces the interweaving of these aspects of time. Separately and in combination, simple words such as "now," "then," "and then," "not yet," "ago," "moment" and the omnipresent "suddenly" and "exactly" become a form of punctuation. As has been pointed out with regard to Ox Bells and Fireflies, the past can be so vivid that Buckler conveys it in the present tense. With the self-conscious ironic flourish of trying to capture and prolong the reality of a moment, the narrator tries to convey all the nuances of a particular moment with immediacy and intensity: "In that instant suddenly, ecstatically, burstingly, buoyantly, enclosingly, sharply, safely, stingingly, watchfully, batedly, mountingly, softly, ever so softly, it was Christmas Eve" (MV, p. 65). In a similar way, but with a mocking overtone, the narrator portrays a character's attempt to prolong a moment of self-pity: "He caught himself close to the wisply elegaic plaintiveness that unconsciously poeticizes itself, frighteningly close to rehearsing his deprivation with that toxic 'lingering' regard of the

self-commiserative" (CM, p. 66). Buckler's repeated use of "would" can set up patterns of characteristic action not tied to any particular time or create a sense of tentativeness, especially visible in the use of the rhetorical technique correctio¹ to define something or someone: "If I say that . . . it would make him sound . . . you'd think that . . ." (RYD, p. 3). Sometimes the repeated pattern of "It got so . . ." (RYD, p. 63) is used to pile on details that increase the tempo and tension of time not passing quickly enough. Frequently, the word "breeze," or some variation of it, is used to foreshadow real or symbolic death, an echo of the Psalmist's reference to the insignificance of man's span of life: "as for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field . . . the wind passeth over it, and it is gone . . ." (Ps. 103: 15-16).² In The Mountain and the Valley, the narrator echoes this imagery: "Swiftly as a breeze, Peter and Spurge passed from fact to memory" (MV, p. 44). In addition, the frequent use of the omniscient narrator, aware of the past, present and future, enables Buckler to distort linear narrative time and also to comment on particular characters with respect to their understanding, or misunderstanding, of time.

Buckler uses all the variants of seasons, days and times of day as literal and symbolic frames for character and action. In The Mountain and the Valley, David is introduced just before he dies one late December afternoon, a contrast to the following scene of his happy childhood early one bright April morning. Buckler's use of April or spring is always conscious. In "By Any Other Name," spring is referred to as

a "catalyst";³ and in his notes for The Cruellest Month, Buckler reflected that "April hastens things," as well as "Saw death in a spring setting."⁴ Ox Bells and Fireflies begins with a young boy falling asleep one night in May to dream of winter and to waken to death. Using simple detail, Buckler frequently juxtaposes physical time and the human experience of it to intensify conflict. In "The Rebellion of Young David," the call of a young boy, frightened by the effect of the bright spring morning sun on the skeleton of a horse, is lost in the wind (RYD, p. 16). Later, the "eerie after-supper light" reactivates and intensifies his fear (RYD, p. 15). At other times, the sun mocks a character; David the "would-be" writer remarks that it "would come out brighter than usual the day your father died" (MV, p. 261).

Buckler's preoccupation with time is evident in the structure of his narratives. Through various techniques, he alternates between stressing the passage of time and not stressing it. Using an episodic structure, he alternates between summary to telescope time and anatomizing to expand it. In The Mountain and the Valley he creates the illusion of a tighter time span than is the reality. Technically, the time frame of the story is only a part of one afternoon. Reflecting Eliot's notion that "What we call the beginning is often the end" ("LG" V. 216), Buckler starts from the end and returns to it. Within that short span of time and through various

episodes amounting to no more than thirty days, Buckler covers approximately nineteen years of David's life, and many more of his family's. He fleshes out character and establishes repetitive patterns through the constant interweaving of memories, which also underline the passage of time. For most of Buckler's main characters, memory almost always undermines the resolve of a moment or provides a contrast to it. In his notes for Ox Bells and Fireflies, he referred to this technique: "I remember - parenthetical, apposite episodes."⁵ Buckler alternates between dwelling on the intensity of particular moments and having years elapse between chapters. In the last four chapters of Part Five, "The Scar," the all but complete disintegration of the family in one afternoon is achieved without melodrama since the episodic structure mutes the sense of the events having happened at the same time; even the careful reader will likely have to reconstruct in order to see this. Nevertheless, the reader's expectation is that this afternoon will have a profound effect on all the characters, especially David. On the next page, he is doing routine chores, five years later; the time detail is buried discreetly one page later (MV, p. 225). Thus, Buckler not only recreates David's illusions with respect to time but also underlines his unchanged, even if older, character. Related to this technique is the potential for reader victimization.

In The Cruellest Month, Buckler begins by telescoping

five years into episodes, and their attendant memories, covering four days. However, the more frequent technique is to expand time by anatomizing particular episodes and moments. The last thirteen chapters cover only part of two days and a morning. Thus, Buckler manages to create the illusion of a much longer span of time which also has potential for reader victimization; like the characters, one might believe that answers have been found.

In The Mountain and the Valley and Ox Bells and Fireflies which have closed time frames, the time pattern is circular. In The Cruellest Month, which is open-ended, the pattern appears to be linear but there is a strong suggestion of the circular within the episodes since the characters keep reverting to their unchanged selves. The Mountain and the Valley depicts the tragedy of a character who refuses to face the passage of time. However, in the The Cruellest Month, Buckler seems to question whether the recognition of time passing or even the threat of imminent death, the outer limit of personal time, really makes any difference for most characters: "You couldn't grasp the fact of death . . . The rushing current of the actual moment so persisted in its sentience of unlimited future . . . that you went on doing exactly as you'd always done . . ." (CM, p. 177-78).

Buckler uses a variety of time frames, separate and

combined, within which he explores place and character. Sometimes he uses that of the photograph to freeze, or "frieze" (CM, p. 248), the "now". At others, he uses that of the film in which something "seemed to have faded out and in again in the way that movies denote a lapse of time" (CM, p. 160), or he uses "fast-forward" and "flashback" to capture action and thought. At times, he alternates the rhythm of speeding up and slowing down to emphasize the intensity of the conflict and the ambivalence within it. Good examples of this may be seen in David's attempted running away from home (MV, pp. 166-71), Martha's searching for Joseph (MV, pp. 221-22) and Kate and Morse's journey through the fire (CM, pp. 279-82); it is used with great effectiveness in David's final walk up the mountain, which becomes a recreation of all the stages of his life and his particular attitudes to time in each (MV, pp. 289-300). The alternating perceptions of time standing still, opening up and racing ahead out of reach are all reflected in the sentence structure ranging from the prosaic to the hectic and lyrical. Buckler counterpoints the past and present, memory and desire, the "might-have-been" and the "was," and the "might-be" and the "won't-be".

Sometimes, the photograph technique of "now" becomes related to a more artistic approach as Buckler tries to capture and describe the elusive and changing qualities of time, character and landscape affected by light and weather

or some other circumstance. It becomes a combination of the artistic approach of the artist "G" (MV, p. 31), likely Constable, and the one apparent in the picture "Nude Descending a Staircase" (MV, p. 296) which Buckler referred to as a "shifting montage."⁶ Even in his actual descriptions, Buckler calls attention to these techniques:

A montage of all the things . . . flashed on the screen of his brain. Then they fragmented into pictures. Each one was realized completely and simultaneously in a single instant, as a whole day's happenings may pass in the elastic time of a moment's dream. (MV, p. 275)

The structure and time frame of the play is evident as well in the extensive dialogue, confined space and individual scenes in The Cruellest Month. The narrator calls attention to the hiatus of five years between encounters as a type of abridged intermission: "The whole thing was like one of those performances wherein the curtain has been momentarily lowered to mark the passage of time and the make-up man works fast" (CM, p. 117). It is a fair summary of the narrative structure and technique in the novel as well as a pointed reference to the question of whether people really change except in appearance.

Buckler uses the human experience of time as an index of character and as potential for conflict between and within characters. Implicit in the human experience of time is the

duality of the inevitable passage of physical time and a person's experience of it which may or may not be in harmony. The lack of harmony is normal in moments of stress or happiness but it is destructive as a way of life. For the very few of Buckler's characters who manage to achieve this harmony, it is a mark of their maturity. The most notable figures are the grandmothers in The Mountain and the Valley and "The Dream and the Triumph" and the "old-man" former suitors in "Last Delivery Before Christmas" and "Blame It on the Snow." In The Mountain and the Valley, Ellen, the grandmother, intimates that she had made a difficult decision as a young woman because of a new awareness of time: "Someday my youth would be gone. I wouldn't even notice when" (MV, p. 33). Buckler opens the novel with her thirty-year old grandson at a window, staring vacantly: ". . . any impulse to movement receded before the compulsion of the emptiness: to suspend the moment and prolong it, exactly as it was, in a kind of spell" (MV, p. 14). David's childhood tendency, understandable at that stage, to want to possess all his happy "now's" and to reject the unhappy moments as never having been, and all under the rosy hue of an always promised future, grows until he becomes the parody of an adult. The precocious child has become an adult "child"; even the physical description reflects this: "The longer you looked, the less you could be sure whether the face was young or old" (MV, p. 14). Buckler uses this same device in The Cruellest Month to describe

a similar figure, Paul, as "macabrely youthful" (CM, p. 10).

David has become like Herb Hennesy, an "old-man" figure:

"Not because he was really old, but because he lived to himself" (MV, p. 233). David's complexity is evident in that, while he has the potential to conquer time through love, memory and art, he embodies all the destructive attitudes toward time. In contrast, his grandmother through her rug is fashioning as best she can a pattern of the past to outlive the past. It is through her efforts to situate people in time and place that Buckler introduces all the major characters with fleeting references to the most important aspects of their family history. In this way, he rebukes David who could have been the literary interpreter of his grandmother's rugs; in fact, it is he who has drawn the simple circular patterns for the last one. Ellen's completion of the rug is a Pyrrhic victory; its meaning is hidden, never to be discovered. At the same time, Buckler underlines his own victory.

One affliction that a number of Buckler's characters share is that of "spells." David's mother, Martha, during one of her spells of thundering silence gathers up all the hurts of the past in increasingly destructive patterns. At such times, her husband, Joseph, who is like his mother, Ellen, in this regard, "borrowed ahead from times when somehow (somehow, as always) this thing now would be resolved and past" (MV, p. 219). In their last conflict, physical reality

intervenes with fatal effects. When Martha finally overcomes herself and calls him, "The wind was blowing away from him" (MV, p. 219); and later his preoccupation with a gift for her prevents him from seeing the tree sway. In The Cruellest Month, Bruce's and Peter's "spells" also have fatal effects. Buckler seems to suggest that in such conflicts, "once more" will ultimately have tragic consequences. For the most part, Buckler's characters die in a way that is characteristic of the way they live. David's sister Anna wins a victory over her "spells" through a childhood memory, an ironic twist of Buckler's usual pattern; however, one suspects that Buckler undermines the victory by suggesting that it was wasted on an "unworthy," even if he was her husband. In his notes, he frequently alluded to people who waste themselves on people or pursuits "unworthy" of them.⁷ In the case of most of the characters who do not achieve harmony in the human experience of time, some memory undermines the resolve of the moment; it is this basic pattern that is the core and the structure of The Cruellest Month.⁸ It is also the reason he suggested "Memory and Desire" as a title and finally included it as an epigraph.⁹

Buckler characterizes time as it is related to the perception of a character or the narrator in a particular situation and reflects this in his style. Objects can become clocks that "tick," often with ominous overtones (MV, pp. 13, 217);

in contrast, sometimes, "the clock-face of everything seems stopped forever . . ." (OB, p. 300). An object such as a suitcase can be a symbol of opposite perceptions of time: future adventure or past loss (CM, p. 217). In some contexts, time is viewed as impersonal like some type of arithmetic (CM, pp. 13, 42, 140) or like a "meter" (CM, p. 9). In others, it can be more sinister and destructive: a cage (OB, p. 299), "landslide" (OB, p. 179), "treacherous cliff" (MV, p. 90), "bacon slicer . . . tide . . . inexorable snow . . ." (CM, p. 153), "leeches" (CM, p. 257), "jaws open for the strike" (CM, p. 279), or the "rat's tooth of time."¹⁰ Time can parallel mood as in times of frustration or discontent it takes on "the pace of an ox" (MV, p. 158, 162), or as anger subsides, "time stopped running with him and settled back into its own pace" (MV, p. 166). At other times, a person tries to match the pace: "Time was moving again, faster than ever now. Each moment just escaped the reach of the moment before it. And David's legs began to move faster" (MV, p. 292). In The Cruellest Month, Rex's driving a car is described in the same way (CM, p. 81). Buckler also personifies time in ways that indicate a range of attitudes. Time came to Buckler's part of the world with Champlain when he "set the first discoverer's foot on this whole time-less land" (OB, p. 22). In one's youth, "Time is young" (OB, p. 3), while in death "Now and Never went their separate ways" (OB, p. 132). Time can intimidate as it "shoved its face right up against

yours" (CM, p. 153), or be a haunting void when "the robbing sunlight had taken the eye of Time away and put its empty socket there instead" (CM, p. 252).

Another ironic technique Buckler uses to couple character and perception of time is to make time the captive of a particular type of character: the one who fashions his space and life to contain it with apparent success. Time is something that a character like Rachel "wore away, bit by slow bit, with each movement of her rocker" (MV, p. 71), or that David and Buckler's "old-man" characters keep at bay through routine and meticulous tidiness while still believing, initially at least, in an unlimited future. Their victory is their own destruction; an infrequent and unsuccessful attempt to break out of their self-imposed restraints only reinforces the vice-like hold of the illusion because of all it protects them from. Another variation is the character of Paul in The Cruellest Month. Buckler in his notes pointedly referred to Paul's being like the character in Henry James' story, " 'The Beast in the Jungle' . . . nothing had happened to him."¹¹ Paul's desire to be inviolable and free for the big choices becomes its own form of enslavement.

Buckler sometimes fuses time and place such that one becomes the other. In some cases, it underlines the illusion as in the first part of David's walk up the mountain: "It was

as if time were not a movement now, but flat./ Like space . . . You could walk from room to room . . ." (MV, p. 287). After David's only attempt to leave home, it heightens his frustration as time becomes claustrophobic: "He felt as if time had turned into space, and was crushing against him. He felt as if he must leap somewhere out of the now, but everywhere it was now" (MV, p. 170); Buckler had first established this repetitive pattern for David in his childhood. In "Last Delivery Before Christmas," space becomes time: "It got so the only things of any reality in the whole house seemed to be Syd's unspoken name and the tick of the clock" (RYD, p. 110).

Even when time is not explicitly portrayed as a malignant and destructive force, it is always associated with loss. Time is not progress, in the sense of improvement, but a procession that brings gradual deterioration to people and place. In addition, in The Mountain and the Valley, Buckler suggests, through scattered detail, the loss of a civilized past in his references to the grandmother's family in England and to the present generations of the Goldsmith and Swift clans. Similarly, he suggests the loss of the adventurous past of early explorers and colonials. The changes in the country settings and in the quality of the people reinforce this sense of loss. In The Mountain and the Valley, Anna asks her grandmother for a story: "Well, tell me about somewhere . . . Not about here" (MV, p. 32). Instead, the grandmother weaves a simple story

about "here" that ties together the Old and New Worlds and that holds within it all the major themes of literature: youth and mortality, love and betrayal, kindness and harshness, insight into others and self, and travel that transcends time and place through story. In addition, there is the effort of the story teller to grasp and convey its significance and the presence of a critical audience. Buckler uses this very setting of rural Nova Scotia for the same themes.

Buckler's rural setting reinforces the relationship between time and place since "the day itself is an extra character in every situation, these people living as they do, in the very house of the weather" ¹² The seasons, light, shade, darkness, cloud and storm continually change the aspect and atmosphere of the day and the place. Although it is not always with reference to a rural setting, Buckler establishes the context of illusion whenever he speaks of place as an escape from time; the references are countless, especially in The Cruellest Month. Natural forces which are tamed or all but invisible or inconsequential in the city can be a matter of life and death in the country. Buckler uses this reality to affect and reflect human behaviour. Buckler ranges between and interweaves the terror and the beauty of these forces. He also uses to effect their basic indifference, a topic that interests David, the "would-be" writer: "How you could love the land's face and the day's face, but

how they never loved you back; the sun would come out brighter than usual the day your father died, and the wind would cut, as blind and relentless as ever, the night your brother was lost in the woods . . ." (MV, p. 261).

Buckler uses time and place to affect behaviour. Their fusion can provoke memory. In The Cruellest Month, Bruce thinks that he can escape this by telling his story in a moving car: "His words would not fall all in one spot, a cache for memory to return to later and regret" (CM, p. 107). In keeping with the pattern of that novel, he is proved wrong (CM, p. 111) but such a fear is well founded in Buckler's fictional world. Buckler purposely chose April with its "temperamental . . . weather"¹³ as well as the country, the "worst place for . . . people who don't get along,"¹⁴ to hasten and intensify conflict, especially that of "memory and desire." The convergence of a particular time and place, some natural force and human behaviour also accounts for signals missed, as in the case of the wind blowing voices away, and for tragic accidents.

Buckler consistently changes descriptions of time and place to reflect human perception of a particular situation. He uses the hills in "The Echoing Hills" in this way and the happy ending of "Last Delivery Before Christmas" is intensified by the very forces that only recently mocked and thwarted:

"the tree had suddenly become an intimate again - and now the wind and the cold and the dark were not enemies anymore . . . their violence merely heightening the sense of . . . containment" (RYD, p. 111). In "The First Born Son," Buckler uses the same images of sun, sky, stone and wagon wheels in different contexts and combinations to project and reinforce the opposite reactions of the father and the son.

He frequently uses place as an index or symbol of character. As a child, David likes to sit "on the top beam of the haymow" to watch what is going on beneath him so that he can be "in it, but above it and outside it at the same time" (MV, p. 59). Progressively, Buckler uses this early image to ironic advantage with respect to David's part in the play, his relationships with others, his choice of the attic in the new house, his fall from the beam and his final appearance on the mountain. The title of the novel reinforces this aspect of his character. At the beginning of the novel, Buckler associates Joseph with his land and he introduces the story of the sailor, continued through the symbol of the locket which is given to several characters in turn, to set up David's growing conflict between the power of the land over him and the lure of adventure, symbolized by the sea. In Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea, Buckler extends this basic dichotomy to reflect the people of his province as a whole; as well, universal implications are sounded. In a similar

way, Buckler, in The Cruellest Month, associates Paul with the timber lines around his property which "he kept . . . as distinct as the lines round himself" (CM, p. 111). All the characters in that novel choose Endlaw as an escape from some aspect of time and from some place associated with that time. The hopeless nature of this quest is underlined in the quip that "all the perfumes of Arcadia could never . . ." (CM, p. 238), in effect, change a character. It might cleanse the vision but it will not change fundamental behaviour patterns.

Much more explicit is Buckler's use of city, town and country to define character and to set up conflict within and between characters. Whenever "town" is given more than casual reference, the attitude is clearly negative. The town is a neutered version of city and country. With two exceptions, Buckler's country people are uncomfortable among town people. David's attitude is typical, even if more intense and articulate: "He despised them, but he hated them too: they could make him feel so self-conscious" (MV, p. 200). In "The Quarrel," the happy ironic reversal is triggered by the country family's sense of displacement among the town people.

The city has a dual and contradictory role: it tempts and it repels. It promises bright lights and women to a young boy frustrated by the rigours and monotony of farm work;

it promises a man escape from the stigma attached to learning in the country. On the other hand, it can be a heartless expanse of stone that destroys; or it can be a superficial, chattering world that intensifies nostalgia for the lost country of one's youth. In effect, city and country become symbols. Buckler interweaves these attitudes to generate ironic tension. It is important to see that in any comparison of the two, Buckler uses each in a restrictive context. He compares the worst of one with the best of the other such that there is only an apparent contrast. As he tries to "flesh out" his country people to reveal their psychological complexities, he almost always stereotypes his city characters. In a sense, he juxtaposes two worlds at points at which they do not meet such that both characters and readers can be victimized.

The characters who do go to live in the city experience an insecurity and a sense of betrayal with respect to their origins. None of Buckler's male country characters are shown to achieve harmony in this conflict. There is always the sense of the "less-than-male" character of learning and professional work for those who stay in the city and that of not being one's own "boss" in manual labour for those who return to the land. The dichotomy in the comparison is once again evident. Buckler focuses on the professional who cannot compete in the country and on the farmer who, as a labourer,

cannot compete in the city.

Only one of Buckler's characters is able to move freely and unselfconsciously across country, town and city boundaries: the grandmother figure of "quiet authority" (MV, p. 200) in The Mountain and the Valley and her counterparts in "The Dream and the Triumph" and in "A Woman" of Ox Bells and Fireflies. Buckler uses a younger version of this female figure to bring about the only happy ironic reversal of the city-country conflict. The irony is intensified in "You Could Go Anywhere Now" because it is the city woman who has better character than an earlier country rival and it is she who becomes "home" for her country husband.

This latter theme is the core of another of Buckler's perceptions: the loved one as place and refuge. A simple variation of this can be seen in "The Echoing Hills." The basic dynamics of "Cleft Rock, With Spring" consist of a point by point parallel between the deterioration of a couple's marriage and the countryside of their youth. The unexpected discovery of the spring, the one thing that has not changed, suggests a happy ironic reversal in their own relationship. In "The First Born Son," the son's rejection of his father's gift of land is not only a rejection of the father but also a refusal to give him immortality in his sons and grandsons. The apparent happy resolution of "The Rebellion of Young David" is one in which love becomes a form of omnipresence: "He hadn't

the slightest doubt that no matter what he did, wherever I was I would know it, and that wherever I was I would come" (RYD, p. 17).

Buckler reverses this technique to reflect unfavorably on the character for whom place becomes person. "Paul's place" is a phrase that introduces The Cruellest Month (CM, p. 8) and anticipates the final irony of Paul's risking his life not for the one he loves but to save his place. In his notes, Buckler commented: "Paul pathetic, 'to have nothing but a place to love.'" ¹⁵ The description of Paul's body, his sense of self, and his fear of illness and others, reinforces the sense of his being a captive within himself, within his own place. Although the novel ends on the note of his apparently having found love and a place of safety, his test for himself is still "That inviolacy business" (CM, p. 297). That he does not feel "invaded" does not mean necessarily that he has given himself without reserve. The opposite is suggested and reinforced by the phrase "this tricking morning" (CM, p. 297), and by the very last words to describe that "safety" as a refuge from "the sound of time and the sound of time gone by . . ." (CM, p. 298). The words are almost a direct quotation from the romantic vision of love in "Glance in the Mirror"; the ellipsis as final punctuation contradicts any sense of finality in time and insight. Buckler also fuses time, space and person in this way to underline David's emptiness and to foreshadow

his end in The Mountain and the Valley. Prior to his final ascent, time becomes "not a movement, but a feature of the frozen fields," and "as he looked at the frozen landscape it was as if the outline of the frozen landscape became his consciousness . . ." (MV, p. 281). The "as if" becomes reality as David lies dead under the snow which, with its natural indifference, "grew smoothly and exactly over him and over the fallen log that lay beside him until the two outlines were as one" (MV, p. 301).

Buckler's characters range from those who exhibit a dominant single trait, either in stereotype or in depth, to those who embody a complex of traits, very often with destructive effects. The family situation, reaching across generations, is especially fertile for complex combinations. It also provides an opportunity for seeing differences and similarities in a way that can intensify conflict; but it can also hide a growing divergence between characters who, initially, appear to be similar. Buckler translates these same dynamics into situations in which the social context goes beyond that of the family. With reference to The Cruellest Month, he noted: "one of my own personal traits projected as the predominant feature of each character."¹⁶ The depth of his stories and his characters in terms of their potential for "concentric reverberations" is largely dependent on the complexity of the characterization and their conflicts. If one uses this

as a scale, the least complex stories feature single traits and primarily one theme while the more complex ones exhibit an interweaving of various traits, within and between characters, in conflicts that shift dependent on different contexts.

Buckler, especially in The Cruellest Month, focuses explicitly on the various forces that have been considered as influences on human behaviour and the outcome of events. Reference has been made already to his consideration of accident, fate and heredity, which Morse summarizes in a flippant question: "Which do you think is more important, heredity or environment? Are most people's megrims due to circumstance? Or is it just their blue genes?" (CM, p. 250). Very early in the novel, he and Kate are divided on "what identifies people": For Morse, "it is the kind of thing that happens to them . . . The kind of thing they attract"; while for Kate, it is "simply the thing that troubles them" (CM, p. 14). Also, Paul, in his notebooks, reflects: "His Achilles heel the first keel laid in everyone" (CM, p. 273); and with respect to Kate's decision to go to Endlaw, the narrator comments that "She had become her own pawn" (CM, p. 78). All of these stances are highlighted and, within various contexts, given a certain immediacy that can victimize both the characters and the readers. There is constant need, in fact, to revise one's estimation of any one of them and its effect on character in light of the total structure of

Buckler's fictional world which would seem to suggest that reality is to be found in a composite of them, with particular emphasis on being one's "own pawn." Accident may alter the course of events but it alone does not produce substantial change in character.

In addition to the interweaving of time, place and character, Buckler uses many other techniques to develop character with ironic effect. His ironic vision is embodied even in the physical description of his more important characters: the young in the old, the old in the young, the dark in the light, the light in the dark, the gentle touch in the physically strong, the dogged strain in the physically weak, and the transparency and mystery of features. To underline the delicate shading and balance, he frequently uses the rhetorical technique of correctio which enables him alternately to assert and to qualify or to undermine. He uses it to achieve negative effects with respect to David in The Mountain and the Valley and Paul in The Cruellest Month; their neither old nor young faces highlight their refusal to grow. He also uses it for positive effects: in The Mountain and the Valley, Ellen's eyes, in her old age, "disclosed an original brightness" (MV, p. 15), and Joseph's physical strength is matched with a kindness and tenderness that should not be confused with a "softness" (MV, p. 25).

In the extremes, Buckler's characters tend to articulate

either through words or their hands. A few, like Ellen in The Mountain and the Valley, oscillate between the two modes without conflict; for others, there is conflict, as in the case of Bruce in The Cruellest Month: "He seems to have a clot in his speech stream. One minute smooth as anything, and the next minute it blocks the whole main artery" (CM, p. 120). An extension of this technique is the association of a character with a particular activity, manual or mental, and a particular space where it is exercised: the land, the kitchen, the sea, a car, or the world of school, accounting or literary books.

A simple ironic technique that Buckler uses is the mistaken impression as well as the unwitting remark that is actually prophetic. In most instances, the impression is a function of the person's own character. In The Mountain and the Valley, David, as a child, wrongly assumes that the trip to the mountain would mean as much to his sister as it does to him; their separate trips to it as adults underline the divergence and ironic reversal in their development. When his grandmother sees his mother and father kneeling as they gather potatoes, she thinks of them as praying; in fact, the scene is a prelude to one of their few, but searing, conflicts. In "The Rock" episode, the alternating views of David's and his father's perceptions underline the chasm between them. The inability of a poor country woman to grasp and remember a word like " 'leukemia' " (MV, p. 152) intensifies David's

sense of guilt with respect to Effie's death. In some cases, the mistaken impression is due to the tendency of a group to stereotype those, like bachelors and spinsters, who are outside it. In The Cruellest Month, Buckler uses Morse consistently to pronounce in jest what is actually going to happen or to pronounce definitively upon things about which he will be shown to be mistaken, especially with regard to character, an important failing in a novelist. He is right in his jest about their fleeing "the first puff of smoke . . . like lemmings" (CM, p. 247) and so wrong in his understanding of Rex and Paul. The prophetic note can also be chilling as in David's, " 'I've got you' " (MV, p. 223), when he helps his grandmother down from the wagon just before finding out about his father's death and his mother's hysteria. The chapter ends on that note; on the next page, they have only each other and it is five years later.

Buckler also fashions ironic reversals as a function of a trait within a character or a relationship. The focus is on the contrasting impulse such as when a keen sense of betrayal triggers a fierce loyalty; a going forward prompts a sense of betraying the past; or a character's exuberance becomes a dark, sinister and compulsive intensity. The ability to use words to heal, soothe or create is more likely to be used to destroy or obscure. Likewise, in all Buckler's family situations, the intensity of the conflict is a function of

their degree of closeness. In other cases, the degree to which the "mystery" of someone or something is stressed is in inverse proportion to either the "nothingness" or to one's inability to comprehend. Paul, in The Cruellest Month, is such a character; in his notes, Buckler commented that the "mystery about Paul was that there was none" and compared him to Henry James' character in "The Beast in The Jungle" and to Tolstoy's character Vronsky in Anna Karenina.¹⁷ Also, Paul, like a number of Buckler's characters, pursues the mystery of death in a way that promises enlightenment but always ends on the note of one's inability to comprehend it.

In character development, Buckler generates ironic tension by setting up a dichotomy between extremes such that there is no middle ground. The core is a refusal to accept human limitations; for characters like Paul in The Cruellest Month and David in The Mountain and the Valley, freedom becomes synonymous with not choosing so as to be free when the great opportunity presents itself. The "non-choice" becomes a choice making the character his own victim as a slave to his "freedom." Love is seen as both a creative and destructive force; in The Cruellest Month, the love relationship in marriage is described as either a "bell-jar" (CM, p. 222) or "the one inimitable safety" (CM, p. 298), a highly idealized romantic vision. Some characters like David in The Mountain and the Valley, Bruce in The Cruellest Month and some of Buckler's writer-characters perversely try to destroy what is not perfect or

they refuse to attempt something that by its very nature cannot be perfect, once and forever. The very intensity of the focus on the extremes of the conflict obscures the reality of the shade of most human behaviour and sets the reader up as a potential victim as well.

Another ironic technique that Buckler uses is mismatching; he sets up contrasts and equations that appear to have validity. Thus, he pits the articulate against the inarticulate, an obvious and real contrast; however, being articulate becomes synonymous with being sensitive in a way that suggests being inarticulate is synonymous with being insensitive. In addition, being articulate is associated with physical weakness and being inarticulate, with physical strength. Up and down the scale and across the parallels, Buckler compares elements that have nothing to do with each other in any necessary or meaningful way. It becomes another instance of the technique of no middle ground but it intensifies the effect by a cross-breeding of incompatibles. A character may compete in the area of physical strength with no hope of winning or even of being an equal; a character's "knowledge" may be undermined by another's intuitions; and sensitivity may be exposed as selfishness. The ironic tension in all the father-son and brother conflicts is generated by this technique. The victim is a loser on all counts because of his own false associations or analogies. In these conflicts, the resolution shows clearly

that articulate means sensitive in the sense of self-conscious and selfish, while inarticulate means sensitive in the sense of selfless. Also, if there is a happy resolution, it is brought about by the inarticulate character of the father or brother or the young son in "The Rebellion of Young David."

In his comparisons of apparently similar things which in essence belong to different levels of reality, Buckler's favorites include the intellect versus intuition, reason versus emotion, and knowing versus action. In this context, he exploits the notion that the greater the range for insight, the greater the potential for irony and for characters to become their own ironic victims with varying degrees of awareness.

In the conflict between intellect and intuition Buckler uses to full advantage the semantic similarity of the word "knowing," or one of its variations. The character who prides himself on his ability to know bases it on his knowledge of mathematics or the world of books and he looks upon the less "knowing" with condescension who, in turn, are shown to possess an instinctively correct, if inarticulate, insight into the nature of a character or event. In The Mountain and the Valley, David is shown to be consistently wrong or belittling in his estimation of his brother who shows real insight into and concern for David; in fact, David is wrong about everybody.

The greater the character's confidence in intellectual knowing as an index of his knowing human character or the significance of events, the greater is his victimization. Even when he is forced to admit his own deficiency, the emphasis is on the amazement over the other's insight rather than on his own deficiency. Such a character always "knows" but never learns, another distinction that Buckler blurs with ironic effect. A good example of this technique can be found in "The Clumsy One."

Buckler's fictional characters defy in every way the notion that to know good is to do good. On the surface, the differences between the intellectual and the emotional and the behavioural levels of reality may be obscured but beneath that surface, Buckler establishes an order of priorities among the conflicts. The imminent "resolution" of one conflict can be undermined by a change in context that triggers a stronger impulse: for example, in The Mountain and the Valley, just after David's discovery that he can "surmount everything" (MV, p. 195) through writing, an unwelcome intruder triggers his impulse to collect his hurts and to retreat. This victory of some irrational force over what ought to be is usually obscured by a character's reflection that he "can't" or "couldn't" when, in fact, the truth is he "won't" or "wouldn't." In David's case, Buckler begins this pattern very early in childhood. At the conclusion of Part One, when his "anger began to settle" (MV, p. 85), David is repentant but unyielding: "He wished the door could blow open, but it wouldn't."

He wished he could make out he wanted a drink and go downstairs and leave the door open when he came up again, but he couldn't. He wished . . . but he couldn't. He wished . . . but he couldn't" (MV, p. 86). The tie between impulse and behaviour is underlined by the description of him the next day: "The anger was no longer there to instruct him" (MV, p. 86). In his anger, he "knows" what he is doing. In contrast, Buckler's good characters choose "will" over "can't"; it isn't without struggle, but the choice is always clear.

There are a number of ways in which Buckler's characters avoid real insight. Some collect and list individual insights so as to avoid seeing patterns and a possible larger significance. In fact, the pursuit of insights can become an avoidance of real insight. In The Cruellest Month, this dynamic operates in the group as they indulge in a dialogue of the deaf and try to outdo each other in the collecting of insights. Buckler uses words like "barrage," "detonations" (CM, p. 252), or "ambushes" (OB, p. 300) to describe the war-like assault of a constantly changing consciousness. A succession of contradictory insights can have the same effect with the possibility, as well, of creating a keen sense of ambivalence frequently described as being in "no-man's-land" or in some emotional state prefaced by the word "half-." Another way of avoiding real insight is to gloss over, misread or disregard facts that contradict the mind's scenario before, during or

after the fact. The impulse behind it is usually self-protection that ranges from the desire to preserve some harmless fantasy to the desire to be perverse and cruel. In The Mountain and the Valley, Anna discovers as a child that reality rarely measures up to the fantasy: "But something in the circumstance's being actual robbed it of the excitement she'd expected" (MV, p. 29). However, her twin David and the character Daniel in "The Clumsy One" become masters of the full range of this pattern.

Buckler fashions the moments of a character's knowing "the answer" with such intensity that he deflects attention from the character's not acting upon it. This illusion can have the same blinding effect on the readers as it does upon the characters since it appears to provide a final context. In most cases of soaring insight, "The pendulum arc-ed back" (CM, p. 174) almost immediately or very soon after; in other situations, it is described as being like a "boomerang" (CM, pp. 148, 249). One of the most frequent reasons for losing the momentum of the resolve is memory. Buckler uses memory not only to reflect patterns of behaviour for a character in general but also as an excuse for putting aside a resolve in a particular situation. It may be the memory of a past failure, or some hurt, or a false sense of loyalty, especially to one's origins, that overpowers. After the disastrous play scene (MV, p. 85), and after David's

unsuccessful attempt to run away from home (MV, p. 170), whole paragraphs of sentences beginning with "He thought of . . ." emphasize the undermining effect of memory. This ironic technique is at the very heart of much of Buckler's fiction as he indicates in his choice of Eliot's words for title and epigraph in The Cruellest Month. For most characters, the hand of the past controls the future. Memory becomes especially destructive when it not only recaptures incidents or hurts of the past but also fuses them in new oppressive and destructive patterns. In addition, the attempt to avoid memory or to change it underlines its power: in David's adolescent dreams of making love to a girl, he tries to see her "(. . . shorn of features, in the secrecy and in the photography-without-depth of memory)" (MV, p. 107); and after Effie's death, "He tried to pretend that, by sheer will, he could reach back through the transparent (but so maddeningly impenetrable) partition of time, to switch the course of their actions at some place or other" (MV, p. 148).

In contrast, the absence of memory or the refusal to accept it breeds a hectic restlessness. Buckler's sailor figures are constantly drawn by the promise of the next moment since "every place you come to, as soon as it is here and now the faces are not quite real, like the ones ahead"¹⁸; they are restless without end. This same restlessness is evident in the pursuit of happiness when it is imagined as

"a static goal, something you could achieve . . . there waiting for you, still and certain"19 In this unpublished piece, "Would You Know It If You Fell Over It," the character Karl pursues happiness in education, health, business, writing, the country village of his youth and in heavy labour until there is only the desire for "isolation from appetite"; finally, the pursuit ends in physical blindness. Frenzied activity impelled by constantly changing insights is as futile as no activity.

It is in this context that Buckler's preoccupation with characters of habit and routine should be viewed. Habit and routine can be both self-protective and self-destructive. In their extreme form, they become a way of keeping the demons at bay but the cure is as bad as the disease since the victims become imprisoned by their own methods. Through attention to trivial details, a character is able to stifle meaningful insights. When reminded by his grandmother of significant memories, David responds with a laconic and spiritless, "I remember" (MV, pp. 203, 223). He sees all the details and misses important things in a way that is truly tragic; even the minor reference to his crossing the road on his way to the mountain at the end underlines this: he noticed that the mailbox needed to be straightened but he didn't hear the car bearing down on him. (MV, p. 281). Habit and routine also create a false sense of accomplishment that obscures its

worthlessness and strengthens the illusion of one's being able to stop time. In the rare moments that such characters see into the truth of what they are doing, they destroy their labour or some symbol of it in a way that puts the accent on the object and not on their own self-betrayal. In "Another Man," Syd threw his account scribbler into the fire for "That's what had betrayed him!" (OB, p. 261); and in The Mountain and the Valley, David "Quickly, almost running, . . . rushed up the row with a wild comical stagger . . . slashed at the pulpy flesh of the parsnips blindly, wherever the hack fell, the whole length of the long even row" (MV, p. 278). Predictably, Syd bought a new scribbler and David, almost immediately, "was on his knees, patting the torn flesh of the parsnips back into shape as best he could" (MV, p. 278).

Extreme caution or fear of testing can also prevent the conversion of insight into action. The man who won't marry until he has a certain amount of money ends up without his girl who marries, usually unhappily and in straitened circumstances, the dashing outsider, but only after she has tried to suggest to the first that he is her choice. The fear of testing also becomes a way of postponing action and facing failure. In The Mountain and the Valley, David's fantasies about being the best in everything are secure as long as they are not tested in reality. His few attempts at writing are either aborted or destroyed because they could never match

his fantasy of being "the greatest writer in the whole world" (MV, p. 299). In The Cruellest Month, Paul's fear of involvement is a variation of caution and fear.

In summary, it might be said that the variations of insight and ensuing action or the lack of it are numerous. Buckler's most sympathetic characters are the few who act upon good insight in a creative way. In a few cases, a character overcomes some overriding impulse that has been preventing creative action only to discover that it is too late, usually with tragic consequences. For the most part, characters do not act upon a good insight or they act in a way that is a perverse reversal of the original insight. Frequently, characters act upon the wrong insights they have about themselves, about the significance of events in their lives, and about other characters or time or place. In The Cruellest Month especially, some characters are so right about some things and so wrong about others that initially it is as difficult for the reader as it is for the characters to ascertain which is which; needless to say, most of the time they act upon the wrong ones. A true victory for characters depends on the fusion of good insight and selfless action.

Particularly in his stories that deal with families, Buckler achieves ironic effects by pairing characters in terms of apparent similarity and contrast. Within this context, he

highlights distinctive traits in certain characters and blends them in potentially tragic complexes in others. The emotional intensity of "The Quarrel" is heightened by the child's understanding of and being torn between his parents. His shifting loyalties give rise to feelings that are painfully ambivalent. This same technique is used in "Last Delivery Before Christmas" in which the child's preoccupation with how his traits are a blend of those of his now dead father and his mother obscures his stepfather's selflessness; the happy outcome becomes a vindication of his lovable but feckless father's attitude that, "Everything always turns out right" (RYD, p. 113).

Frequently Buckler starts with an explicit statement with respect to similarity or contrast, but then he proceeds to blur or undermine and perhaps to reverse the original similarity or contrast. In terms of contrast, a variation of this has already been noted with respect to the father-son and brother stories. The technique is an important one in The Mountain and the Valley in which he has greater scope to explore these parallels. The grandmother sees most vividly the particular traits of individual characters of several generations and the blend of them in the younger generation particularly: "It was queer . . . how each of them carried hidden in his face the look of all the others. It flashed out suddenly sometimes though none of the physical features altered" (MV, p. 122). She underlines the potential conflict

within David when she notes that, compared to his sister and brother, "David seemed to have no face of his own" (MV, p. 123). David's assurance that he and his twin Anna are exactly alike is slowly undermined by their growing divergence that is evident even early in childhood in their different attitudes to the trip to the mountain and their reactions to death; the gap widens with Anna's leaving home and her marriage. The contrasting development is completed by her victory over the impulse, shared with David and their mother, to hurt a loved one in order to protect self and to try to prolong a happy moment forever. Ironically, in the context of Buckler's fiction, her victory is achieved through interspersed fragments of memory of her and David in childhood; ironically, in keeping with Buckler's vision, the victory seems to be for an unworthy. In contrast, David who, with attitudes ranging from awe to condescension, sees himself as being so different from his father becomes a parody of his father. While Joseph is not able to articulate his satisfaction, David chooses not to articulate his dissatisfaction. It is David, and not his father, who bears his lot with as little complaint and rebellion as the oxen he so despises. As Joseph admirably pits himself against the physical forces of nature, David destructively pits himself against the creative forces of his own nature. He becomes a travesty of all that is good in Joseph. In a similar reversal in The Cruellest Month, Sheila exits in the very spirit of resignation that she has helped Bruce to

overcome. In a lighter vein, when Morse chooses for his story an ending that reflects Kate's vision, she laments the reversal: "Her Pyrrhic victory . . . Morse on the side of the angels! It would sound absolutely false" (CM, p. 284). Buckler specializes in ironic reversals within and between his characters.

For the most part, Buckler's plot structures mirror the particular patterns and rhythms of insight; even the most minute details must be seen in this context. The architectural order of Buckler's fiction can be seen only in retrospect; frequently, it takes a number of readings before the symmetry of all the patterns can be grasped. Even in many of his shorter works, Buckler uses the episodic structure which is the basic pattern of his longer works. He uses a particular incident or insight, which initially may appear to be trite, to establish a basic motif for each character and pattern of action. By repeating the basic dynamics, Buckler intensifies the significance of earlier incidents and qualifies one's understanding of a character and events. The careful reader must be aware constantly of the need to re-evaluate a particular insight or incident in light of a growing sense of the whole; the potential for reader victimization is great.

In The Mountain and the Valley, each part repeats the

basic patterns but emphasizes some particular aspect to widen the context. Every detail of David's childhood increases in ironic significance. It is indicative of the power of the episodic structure that Buckler dares to begin at the end when David has become a parody of himself. However, the very intensity of the description of his childhood which follows tends to dispel the reader's first image of him. Buckler uses the episodic structure both to set up the promise of character development and creative change and to destroy it. After repeating the basic pattern which features some new insight or dramatic happening, he then shows explicitly the character's defeat or he ends on a note of promise that is undermined by the long passage of time before the next episode or by a shift of context in which some other conflict takes priority. He tends to emphasize the first pattern of undermining in The Mountain and the Valley and the second in The Cruellest Month, but they are frequently interwoven.

In The Mountain and the Valley, the details of the Prologue increase in symbolic significance; the use of a simple word like "child" can be attributed to the old lady's age but in the Epilogue, in which the first scene is repeated exactly, the word becomes a symbol of supreme irony. The precocious child, more adult than child, has become the adult child who has refused to mature. In The Cruellest Month, Buckler uses the understandable fear of a child in the Bruce

and Peter episode as the core of the theme of trying to come to terms with one's mortality: "Bones make you feel funny, don't they . . . ?" (CM, p. 37).

Within the episodic structure, Buckler presents scenes in which a single individual can be viewed in different contexts. He may set up contrasts between the fantasies of a person's mind with respect to a particular situation, either in prospect or retrospect, and the actual experience of it. At other times, a character is made to act in different ways dependent upon factors such as his perception of time, place and other characters. Sometimes, in one scene, the particular view of one character about another can be given prominence such that the reader can be misled. In The Mountain and the Valley, both David and Anna initially create Toby in their own images. The Toby that Buckler portrays hardly seems worth their efforts although Toby does not in any way actively provoke or support their efforts. In The Cruellest Month, Morse puts such emphasis on the mystery behind Paul that it deflects attention from the lack of mystery. In fact, in this novel, almost everything that is said in one context is refuted in another, while what is said in jest frequently turns out to be true. The reader must be aware that a character may have to be reconstructed if he is to be understood properly; however, the intensity of the scenes or views works against this awareness.

Buckler sometimes uses a single scene to show the contrasts among characters to a particular situation; what appears to be a common experience becomes instead an occasion to highlight different and often clashing perceptions of it. The annual visit to the graveyard in The Mountain and the Valley evokes not only memories of local and family history but also different reactions to death. The reactions reflect not only age and experience but also particular aspects of personality; also, Buckler often uses these reactions to foreshadow either explicitly or implicitly. This structural technique is clearly seen in "The First Born Son" and is frequently used in The Cruellest Month to register everything from different attitudes toward the place to the final wildly different individual insights triggered by the deer and the fire.

Buckler juxtaposes scenes and elements within scenes to achieve various effects. Frequently, he uses the juxtaposition to set up and highlight contrast between and within characters with respect to perception and action. At times, he recreates the rhythm of intensity or mindless frenzy and the ensuing lull. In some cases, he shifts emphasis from a moment or situation of intensity to another that has no immediate or necessary connection. Often, he uses it to distort the passage of time or to highlight the interweaving of past, present and future, in fact and in fantasy. Sometimes, even within a scene, an

apparently meaningless and minute detail is repeated in juxtaposition with some other detail such that it assumes ironic significance. In The Cruellest Month, there is a seemingly needless reference to Rex and Sheila's not having seen "the snail with the perfect Spiral of Archimedes, $r = \Theta$, marked on the back of the house it was inching across their path" (CM, p. 87). Three pages later, immediately after Rex says to Sheila, "I wish you and I could live forever," their car "crushed the snail" (CM, p. 90). The significance might have been more obvious, but less in keeping with the spirit of the novel, if Buckler had used his description of the snail in Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea: "The spiral marking on the snail's snug house infinity" ²⁰ The Spiral of Archimedes is also a symbol of perfect relationships.

In his plotting of scenes, Buckler actually intensifies the poignancy of a particular situation by dispelling the suspense normally related to development of action. In The Mountain and the Valley, the shifting of scenes between and within the minds of Martha and Joseph in their last quarrel intensifies the ominous note; and yet at one point the narrator intrudes to say "(She didn't know that Joseph was dead . . .)" (MV, p. 220). Instead of defusing the situation or making the rest of the action anticlimactic, this knowledge actually takes the reader immediately into the mind and heart of Martha in her tragic journey. Buckler matches the pace of his prose

to the rhythm of her alternating moods within the context of a growing anxiety. At this stage, it is Joseph's death that is anticlimactic and the reader becomes co-victim with Martha. The technique of dealing with Peter and Molly's deaths in The Cruellest Month is the same. Also, in both, the tragedies occur at a time that will insure the most intense guilt for the survivor. Buckler portrays the prelude to tragedy with such intensity that by breaking the suspense, he actually draws the reader more deeply into the tragedy itself. In a sense, he is showing that to "know" is not really to know until one has fully experienced a reality at many levels.

Another technique that Buckler uses is to shape symmetrical scenes whose superficial similarity underlines the ironic contrast. In this way, in The Mountain and the Valley, Buckler emphasizes the basic differences between Chris and David in their first sexual experiences. The two scenes, in adjoining chapters but separated by a year, are plotted in a similar fashion; however, the emphasis in one is on the physical enjoyment of it while in David's case, the emphasis is on his trying to experience it while being divorced from it. Buckler also sketches the contrasts in character between the two girls. In both episodes, there is an ominous tone reinforced by earlier dreams and premonitions, all confirmed by later experiences. Towards the end of the novel, Buckler uses this technique to show the final divergence and ironic reversals in the

relationships of David and Toby and of David and Anna. He uses Toby and Anna's walk up the mountain as prologue to David's Epilogue. He separates the scenes by only one chapter but, in fact, three years have lapsed. Using explicit parallels of physical signposts,²¹ thoughts and words, Buckler clearly shows the difference between David and Toby, and Anna's coming to terms with herself with regard to the nature of love and time; it is in marked contrast to David's final journey through all the illusions of his life. Anna, with both courage and fear, returns to the valley while David, balancing "exquisite guilt" (MV, p. 291) and condescension with regard to the life and people of the valley, dies at the top of the mountain. Just prior to his death, David, from his great height, looks down upon the tiny figure of his grandmother and laments, ironically, her growing blindness; she is actually calling him to say she has completed her rug. The last two circles are a scarlet piece from David's cloak from the play, his life in emblem, and a scrap of fine white lace, the last remnant from her early and privileged past in the Old World. Buckler chooses to end David's life, and the novel, with the image of a partridge:

Its heavy body moved straight upward for a minute, exactly . . . And then its grey body fell swiftly in one straight movement, as if burdened with the weight of its own flight: down, between the trees, down, swooping, directly, intensely, exactly down over the far side of the mountain. (MV, pp. 301-2)

It is a final ironic parody of David: the partridge is returning to the "fairy-tale" orchards which "Nothing visited. . . but the timid partridges, to bud in the apple trees, at dusk; and the soft-eyed deer" (MV, p. 254).

Buckler uses this same setting of a walk to the top of the hardwood hill bathed in the wash of happy childhood memories to conclude Ox Bells and Fireflies. The details used to contrast in this case are taken from the unhappy present of an adult whose "flesh . . . has seen its own bone" (OB, p. 299). In each of his three longer pieces of fiction, Buckler casts the final scene in some form of journey. Even the two characters, Letty and Paul, who appear to remain behind in The Cruellest Month go on a journey. It is suggested in Buckler's imagery to describe their sexual union which he explicitly refers to as a journey in Ox Bells and Fireflies: "Couples, finding sex in bed with them, took each other to the one place where the two of them could become one -- and brought each other back from the journey farthest west from Death" (OB, p. 171). In each, the final scene becomes a summary of the conflicts faced by the different characters and the contrasting attitudes as well as an undermining of each attitude to a greater or lesser degree.

Buckler shapes the endings of his stories so that the ironic reversals are either complete within the stories themselves or ambiguous with the possibility of further undermining

beyond the story. The tones range from the profoundly tragic in The Mountain and the Valley to the facile and slapstick comic in stories like "The Eruption of Albert Wingate" or "Choose Your Partners." An essential difference between his short stories and longer fiction is that some of the former which seem to end on a happy note of ironic reversal may be part of a pattern of illusion in the longer ones. Two of his short stories are especially interesting in this regard. In The Mountain and the Valley, Buckler incorporates much of "The First Born Son" in "The Rock" episode. In its original short story form, the ending is ambiguous with the suggestion that the father has indeed lost his son and all that he symbolizes. However, in the novel Buckler changes the ending of this episode to make it conform to the pattern of David's dependence on others, much less articulate than himself, to heal or restore a relationship, and to the pattern of his repeated illusions. In contrast, "The Rebellion of Young David" is a sequence of insights that appears to end on a happy note. Buckler changes it significantly in The Cruellest Month to make it a chilling part of Bruce Mansfield's character pattern. In this case, Buckler extends the story such that, despite Bruce's previous insights and resolve that "He would see to it that enough understanding took that smashing, unreachable look from his [Peter's] face forever" (CM, p. 38), his inability to triumph over some selfish, irrational impulse that Peter's actions trigger in him leads to the terrible accident in which his wife

and son are killed. Buckler even intensifies the guilt with the death of the wife who, in the short story, is already dead. It is at least open to question whether Bruce can function as a child psychiatrist. He seems to be better at patching bodies as he is shown tending to Rex's superficial wound. He shows himself to be just as closed to the inner turmoil of Rex, the very person who, from the beginning, has reminded him of Peter. The irony would only be intensified if he were able to function as a psychiatrist. Thus, the extended story now conforms to and reinforces the patterns of illusion in The Cruellest Month: the characters are only more like themselves in crisis despite the illusion of change before or after the crisis.

In The Cruellest Month all the characters seem to change as a result of their experience at Endlaw. However, as in the case of Bruce, Buckler undermines each "victory" in some way. Sheila, who is so wrong about her husband, diagnoses correctly the destructive effects of Bruce's spirit of resignation but it is that very spirit she embraces as she leaves. As well, it has always been her pattern to have a protective feeling toward Rex when others snub him; she herself projects the pattern into the future as she contemplates the attitude of their barely conceived child toward Rex. Rex's desperate need to belong is satisfied after his fashion, and his carelessly thrown cigarette ignites the fire that the others must face. Morse's books are

still more important than any woman, and Kate's "sudden wild centaur of decision" (CM, p. 279) proves that her desire to get married is stronger than her fear that she will be of no use to Morse after she is no longer of any story value. In the narrator's comment, "As if the fire had tempered her" (CM, p. 281), ambiguity is certainly suggested. Paul rationalizes that he can't possibly marry the woman he loves because he would "probably die smack in the middle of the honeymoon act" (CM, p. 258); but he almost dies of a heart attack saving his house which has become "something, someone almost that, giving him back his will to live, he'd risk his life to save" (CM, p. 286). At the end, he proposes to marry another woman who could not possibly "invade" him in any other way than the physical and partly because he does not "die smack in the middle of the . . . act." Even the early bee incident witnessed by Letty (CM, p. 15) reappears in the fire scene (CM, p. 287) although Letty takes a more active part this time. Only Letty is as unselfish as she has always been; but in her bid to please Paul she becomes self-conscious about her grammar, a fitting note on which to end a book that specializes in talk which alternates between the vacuous and profound truth, but truth that is never really understood or pursued by the characters.

The illusion of change in Buckler's characters is directly related to the intensity and certainty they experience in their moments of illumination. Since some readers and critics question David's final visions as his last grand illusions in

The Mountain and the Valley and some lament that he dies just when he is ready to act,²² it is even more comprehensible that some fail to see the ironic possibilities in The Cruellest Month, especially since the characters survive.²³ In The Mountain and the Valley the central irony resides in the contrast between what David thinks and what the reader knows, if he has not been victimized as well. In The Cruellest Month what the characters know keeps changing such that it becomes a problem as to how much the reader can know with any certainty. Hopes are presented and undermined but there is no final synthesis, other than that Buckler writes the book that Morse missed the significance of in terms of a human dimension; but Buckler does it without being "on the side of the angels" (CM, p. 284). In much of his fiction, Buckler only appears to provide the final context; when he does provide it as in The Mountain and the Valley, it is not always accepted. Perhaps this is ironic evidence of his power to create and sustain illusion.

Buckler also uses point of view to effect different ironic overtones. In his short stories, he sometimes uses the first person narrator for two contradictory purposes: creation and victimization. The creative narrator belongs in the realm of literary irony since Buckler uses him to illustrate the intense desire and the struggling, halting and elaborate attempt to piece together the details of the story, to grasp their significance and to find exactly the right words to convey that understanding. The narrator's struggle becomes

a conscious reflection on the difficulties of literary creation; in addition, the reader becomes co-creator as he enters into that world which goes beyond the mere "knowing" about human character. The narrator is often forced to contemplate emotions that he himself does not completely understand but which he senses are significant. To underline the inadequacy of words to catch the essence of anything or anybody, Buckler has the narrator use repeatedly the rhetorical technique of correctio. The emphasis is on qualifying, weighing and shading: ". . . in no way . . . and yet . . ."; "if I say . . . if I say . . . none of that would be true . . ."; and "sort of" and "kind of." The technique provides for greater subtlety in rendering all the twists and turns of characters and situations. In "Would You Know It If You Fell Over It?", concern is expressed about the too clever character:

He had lost the antennae of sympathy that informs every serious novelist. He had a way with words but no feeling for material . . . He turned to facts. But there, . . . he found that facts too are fiction. The same tincture of imagination, warm and near to things, is necessary to tell the real truth.

In "The Wild Goose," expressions such as "I don't know . . ." and "Do you know . . ." become antiphons as the narrator asks questions of his listener/reader; he creates a conversational, digressive structure marked by an always tentative and groping expression which results in a sense of real immediacy and growing clarity in the emerging portrait. With respect to this particular narrator, Buckler noted that "the repetitive phrases

were intentional, to emphasize the groping nature of the narrator's effort. His desperate urge to communicate, though he's not exactly sure how to go about it best, is meant to be part of the point."²⁴ His effort is also related to his vague intuition that his brother's death will be reversed in the immortality that art implies. Buckler makes effective use of this type of narrator in "Penny in the Dust," "The Bars and the Bridge" and especially in the complex of themes in "The Quarrel" and "The Wild Goose."

The creative narrator of "The Wild Goose" becomes the victimized narrator of "The Clumsy One." The narrator, Danny, destroys himself as he sings, unwittingly, a hymn in praise of the blindness of the mind, especially a "quick" one, in geometry (RYD, p. 54). Like the narrator of "The Rebellion of Young David," he understands nothing of the significance of what he has no trouble remembering. His lack of insight into himself is not only powerfully revealing but also chilling at times as he consistently trots out all the significant details about his own character and his brother's only to dismiss their significance. After betraying his brother, wallowing in his own shame is more important than seeking forgiveness. For his own consolation, he recreates the scene with himself as hero and each point of the betrayal reversed. He considers himself so successful that, without realizing the irony of the imagery, he rhapsodizes, "The sharp sword of my mind shone

and sang doing it, and I was really proud of its quickness" (RYD, p. 60). His unwitting exposé of the kind of person he really is becomes the strongest possible evidence of the good character of his brother. Buckler reinforces the irony by having him exit as obtuse as ever, still scratching his "quick" mind as he asks incredulously, "Did I say it was David who was the clumsy one with anything that couldn't be held in his hands?" (RYD, p. 64). The emphasis is still on David and his "clumsiness." Danny is Buckler's most odious type of character: confidently "knowing" but blind to himself and others and selfish to the point of being perverse. Despite this, there is the real possibility of reader victimization as one tends to be swept along by the narrator's abundance of detail and commentary such that the patterns are missed or dismissed.

In a somewhat similar, but not as extreme, way, the adult narrator, reflecting upon a period of his youth, in "Last Delivery Before Christmas" is the reverse of the creative narrator in "The Quarrel." The former's tone, conversational and tentative, is marked by parenthetical asides and frequent use of expressions such as "I think," "I believe," "I suppose," as well as "Come to think of it" (RYD, p. 105) or "Maybe I only seem to remember" (RYD, p. 113), in a way that qualifies his apparent assurance and reflects his growing awareness in retrospect of the significance of a particular memory. He

acknowledges that he was the deliberate agent of tension in the relationship between his mother and stepfather; however, his numerous allusions to the "ne'er-do-well" character of his father, without consideration of the destructive effects which he himself suggests, reveal that he also has been deceived by his father who "(. . . could do tricks that no one could see through)" (RYD, p. 99). He is won over not by his stepfather's reliability but by his apparent "unpredictability" which, in retrospect, should be seen as part of a consistent pattern of unselfish action. The real triumph of the stepfather can be seen more clearly by looking at "The Balance" or "Another Man" in which the point of view is centered in the lonely bachelor figure. Perhaps it is for this reason that Buckler revised an earlier version called "The Christmas Order" in which the youthful narrator was much more explicit in his attempt to describe the lonely bachelor who became his stepfather.²⁵

When Buckler uses a third person narrator, he incorporates many of the aspects of the first person narrator by his use of dialogue, especially by the almost constant inner dialogue of a character. In The Cruellest Month, the narrator reflects that "Each person is a twosome. Himself and the overriding concern with which he's in such constant dialogue that it becomes personified inside him" (CM, p. 110). In the dramatic presentation of the quarrel between father and son in "The First Born Son," Buckler alternates their points of view

to highlight the ironic conflict within and between them. The few words that are spoken summon, for each, a myriad of images that not only embody and intensify the contrast between them but also touch on so many of Buckler's themes. At the very moment the son vows to himself never to be like his father, "with that stupid look on his face, like one of the oxen" (RYD, p. 23), the father tells him that the land will be his gift to his son. The father who mistrusts words because of all they cannot convey provides repeated openings for the son who refuses to speak except in vicious retorts, each one more wounding than the last. The father, recognizing the destructiveness of such a quarrel, tries to understand as the son deliberately misunderstands and misconstrues in his total preoccupation with self. The inconclusive ending makes it an even more chilling tale.

Buckler's use of third person narrator enlarges the potential for irony and reader victimization since the fictive narrator may provide commentary at a number of levels. He may be used to give factual description, to explain or reflect upon the thoughts and actions of characters, to correct misconceptions, to give advance information, to criticize and even to mock characters. Buckler also uses him, at times, to inundate the reader with detail in a way that may highlight one focus at the expense of another or he may have him adopt a style of high burlesque to obscure the basic triviality of the subject. It is fairly simple to isolate some of these

techniques but Buckler frequently combines them for maximum ironic advantage. The reader can be lulled into a sense of partnership only to become another victim of illusion. The mocking tone in parenthetical asides becomes more dominant as David grows in age and illusion in The Mountain and the Valley. Infrequent insight into himself only intensifies his need for and the power of his illusions: "(But intenser' still, then: tomorrow, tomorrow . . .)" (MV, p. 231); the ironic effect is intensified as the narrator only points to the substance of a well-known Shakespearean quotation. His mocking tone continues to the end; with reference to David's final illusion about finding "A single beam of light . . . enough to light all the shadows" which "would make him the greatest writer in the whole world," the narrator comments:

He didn't consider how he would find it. (The words he'd put in the scribbler before now had never fallen smooth over the shape of the remembrance, or enclosed it all. But the minute he put the scribbler away the perfect ones seemed surely possible to be found the next time.) Nor how long it might take. (If you took a hundred years, then -- though neither this thought was explicit nor reason's denial of it, for the swelling moment to transcend -- he would live a hundred years.) He knew only that he would do it . . . " (MV, p. 299).

For the most part, the narrator of The Cruellest Month is not quite so heavy-handed, which is perhaps more in keeping with a novel that puts more emphasis on fostering illusion than on overtly deriding it. There are occasions when he is explicit as in his remark about Kate: "If she had stopped to think it

through, she'd have seen that Endlaw had more the features of a cul-de-sac than of a launching site" (CM, p. 76). The language and tone of the narrator in the love scene between Bruce and Sheila combine most of the techniques in tones that range and alternate between high and low burlesque. Even the careful reader can be a long time reconstructing the scene which ends with ellipsis, Buckler's frequent signal for illusion, ambiguity and interruption; in this case, it probably means all three. To intensify the irony, it is the cuckold's cough that interrupts the "lovers" and their discussion about the future; the narrator observes that, "They sprang to their feet; and as if at a signal, the woods struck their sets. This play was over" (CM, p. 215). In this particular novel, the tone and the tune of the narrator change repeatedly to reflect and reinforce the ambivalent attitudes toward the individual tragic situations, and life in general: glibness, self-torture, escape through illusion, sex or alcoholism, resignation or nihilism. In the supposed "domicile of peace" (CM, p. 11), the point is confusion; Buckler uses the narrator to intensify the confusion.

Buckler's preoccupation with the "multum in parvo" and "concentric reverberations" is obvious in his themes and their emblematic patterns. His style embodies and reflects his enthusiasm and skepticism dependent upon the joy of creation and the recognition of human limitations in this regard. His style which is an extension of his themes and techniques has

already been considered implicitly; to do it full justice would require a full length study of its own. In general, his patterns of language alternate between passages of summary and commentary and passages in which Buckler strives for an immediacy and intensity with different tonal effects. The style may be lyrical, frenetic, halting, burlesque or abstract. As has been noted, the lyrical may be used in an attempt to capture, in all its shades, a child's delight in Christmas (MV, p. 65), while a burlesque version of the style can reflect a certain self-mockery in a character taking himself too seriously (CM, p. 66). His patterns that recreate a sense of groping may be used to describe as accurately as possible a genuine attempt to come to terms with some aspect of reality. At times, he recreates the problem of focus by calling attention either to the lack of it, such as in David's vision, or to the other extreme of a narrow focus or "squint" (CM, p. 274), or to the absence of focus in face of the great white emptiness "because that master page inside you stays white . . . white . . . white" (CM, p. 153). Buckler incorporates all these into his own style such that nothing becomes something and that which has no focus becomes part of his focus. At times, he creates from the inability to create. There is no doubt that his efforts cannot always succeed but any judgment on his style must be made on the basis of the context of the passage.

One aspect of Buckler's style that should be stressed is

his concern with meaningful detail, especially in the realm of symbols. Almost every detail has its echo either in parallels or reversals and frequently in their combination; also within the context of his entire body of fiction, some symbols signify different things and must be evaluated in context. In "Penny in the Dust," the penny is not only an eloquent symbol of enduring, if inarticulate, love but also a symbol of golden hopes once again being buried but this time willingly and in the "dust" of mortal man. There are also Biblical reverberations in "The First Born Son": there is the Christmas birth of a long awaited son who in time rejects his father and denies him immortality; also, the ploughshare "shone underneath . . . like a sword" (RYD, p. 26), and the rejected father "scraped the dirt from his heels" (RYD, p. 27). In addition, in this story Buckler uses the symbol of place as person, contrasts the symbols of city and country, and reverses the symbol of April as a time of creation and hope. The son's view of the father as being like the oxen is reversed as the son, in a number of telling details, is shown to be ox-like; he is finally reduced by his own perversity to a token gesture of rebellion as he "jerked the yoke-straps" (RYD, p. 27).

However, in Ox Bells and Fireflies, to reflect the creative contrasts and tone, Buckler uses the image of the oxen and their bells in a positive way: "The slow, measured pace of the oxen and the silencing sound of the bells set your thoughts lapping like windless waves against a peaceful shore" (OB, p. 93).

In The Mountain and the Valley, Buckler uses a simple thing like a wristwatch to link ironically the characters of Toby, David, Chris and Old Herb Hennessey (MV, pp. 140, 233, 294); whether a watch is working or has stopped, it cannot affect the passage of time. In a similar way, he uses the locket which symbolizes adventure and the recognition of passing time; the grandmother gives it to David who at first sees himself in it and who, in turn, gives it to Anna who sees Toby's likeness in it. The reader becomes aware that the grandmother's hopes for David have been dimmed when Toby reminds her of someone (MV, p. 264); in all likelihood, it is her early sailor friend who had given her the locket. The symbol of train as adventure becomes the symbol of pain for a character like Rex in The Cruellest Month and David, in The Mountain and the Valley, for whom pain has become the one adventure not to be missed. In the latter novel, the keel kills Joseph in a physical and psychological sense since he is distracted by his unselfish and forgiving concern for another; it also becomes symbolic in the light of Paul's aphorism in The Cruellest Month: "His Achilles heel the first keel laid in everyone" (CM, p. 273). Mathematical terms are frequently used as analogies for characters in particular situations or for the development of characters in fiction; they promise a certain stability and predictability but they are always found wanting in the end since "There are no equations for feeling" as Paul finds out in "The Dream and the Triumph" (RYD, p. 68).

Many symbols take on a number of meanings. "Breeze" can symbolize the shortness of man's life; at other times, it assumes a literal or metaphorical association with the triggering of an illumination, genuine or illusory. "Window" can evoke a sense of physical or psychological protection or obscurity; it may reinforce the sense of being spectator; or it may create a sense of distance that triggers in a character an intense feeling of loyalty after betrayal, especially if the other character is seen "back-to". As it has already been noted, "mirror" evokes an ambiguity of whether it gives an accurate reflection of reality, or a reflection of one's perception of reality, or an opposite reflection. The notion of the "play" is likewise ambiguous; in The Mountain and the Valley, the fictional play becomes reality while in The Cruellest Month, the two are so closely intertwined that one becomes the other and both become intertwined with the narrative structure. "Water" is protean in its associations. As the sea, it symbolizes both adventure and separation or death in some form; as the "Baptizing Pool" (MV, p. 103), it is associated with youth and has sexual overtones which are also evident in the water in the dreams and premonitions of Chris and Anna. Ice evokes memories of both carefree and careless youth as well as the self-assurance engendered by mastering figure eights, while at other times it accentuates the emptiness of a frozen landscape. Snow and rain enhance a sense of security or vulnerability, both of which come together in David's final appearance as a

snow-covered log, Buckler's variations are countless.

Especially in his longer works, an interesting variation of symbols and style informs Buckler's fiction; he adapts and sometimes reverses the central symbols of other ironic writers. The most obvious adaptation is his title The Cruellest Month. He takes not only the title and other lines for an epigraph from T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land but also incorporates the imagery of April, lilacs, bones, wind, fire and water, "horns and motors";²⁶ there are also echoes of "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"²⁷ in Paul's apparently finding peace in saving his place which, in the smoke, seemed "like a Gothic castle emerging from some Arthurian lake" (CM, p. 285). However, the adaptation and tone are distinctly Buckler's as lilacs are uprooted and the bones of a horse have been exposed by dogs and the true significance of the bones is apparent to the child but lost on the father. The fire of sex and passion is stoked by a real fire which Morse and Kate flee like "lemmings" while engaging in a wild exchange of "horns and motors"; the fire ranger who has already coupled them as man and wife is right out of the "music-hall" form. Letty and Paul engage in a similarly ironic battle with both kinds of fire. Within a few paragraphs, Buckler weaves the serious and the farcical: Wryly, Paul thinks of himself as looking "like some crackpot native in a fertility dance" (CM, p. 289), but almost immediately he is barely breathing with the pain, his life-saving pills have been

dealt a "Death by Water" and he is revived by a rather comical looking "fairy princess." Buckler translates T. S. Eliot's symbols into facts in a way that can easily victimize the reader who has certain expectations because of his knowledge of Eliot. In a sense, Buckler strips all these images of their weighty literary significance.

He also undercuts the belief of those characters who feel that they have found the answer in sexual union, within and without marriage, through his previous development of Rex, Sheila and Bruce, and through his scattered references to Bruce's family life, and to Letty's marriage; even with reference to Paul, it is noted that "Casual, therapeutic sex . . . (and it was abundant hereabouts) had never threatened control of his own boundaries in the least" (CM, p. 59).

Another explicit allusion to a major ironic writer is Morse's vision of Paul as being like that great literary pursuer of illusions created by Ibsen: "If he had to, he could load himself and Letty on that deer and take off like Peer Gynt" (CM, p. 278). As usual, Morse speaks the truth in jest. Buckler uses the deer to trigger a characteristic "illumination" in each character and like the deer, as Morse also correctly notes, at "The least scent of smoke, they take to their heels" (CM, p. 276). Buckler has all the characters "get some kind of seat . . . on some kind of deer going the other way" (CM, p. 278).

Also, in retrospect, much of Paul's characterization is a reflection of Peer's: the world-wide search for self, the keeping of self free in order to choose with the result that one is not even a great sinner since he is "Betwixt and between . . . half and half."²⁸ Ibsen has Peer refer to himself as "an empty house / where no one within might be warmed and gladdened- / the owner, they say, was never at home" (PG, 219); Peer is also told to "Set your house in order" (PG, 220). When Peer is taken in by the woman who has never ceased to love him despite his wanderings, his plea to her, as wife and mother, is "hide me, oh hide me, within your love" (PG, 222), but the Button Molder suggests that the final verdict is not yet in. In The Cruellest Month, Letty has always felt excluded from Paul's "country of those people who seemed to know exactly what the world was saying" and she knows that she belongs only "in the kitchen of his mind" and not in "its living rooms" (CM; p.24). It is she that Paul envisions as wife and "safety." Buckler's final ellipsis, without a period, strongly suggests the absence of a final verdict.

Peer and Paul are also failed recorders, lovers and doers; David, in The Mountain and the Valley, is like them. While Peer is quickly running out of cross-roads, David has convinced himself that "all the crossroad junctions had been left irretrievably far behind" (MV p. 274). When the Broken Straws tell Peer that "On Judgement Day / we shall flock to voice our

accusation" (PG, 195), Peer responds: "An empty threat; you daren't accuse a man of what he hasn't done!" (PG, 195).

This echoes Eliot's "shrieking voices" ("BN", V. 153-55) and the voices that pursue David on his last journey. In a variation of the Particular Judgment scene, Buckler does accuse David of having failed as a doer, lover and recorder-writer. In the Prologue, David Canaan's name and age have Biblical overtones that are highlighted by his failure in the Epilogue. He has rejected the gift of words, even of music (MV, p. 251), characteristic of his prototype, the Psalmist. Moses-like, he dies on the mountain looking into the Promised Land because he too has doubted his gifts; David tapped the rock not twice but seventy times seven times. Buckler uses the same setting of the walk up the mountain to underline the narrator's triumph in Ox Bells and Fireflies. David is made to fulfil Peer's cry before the nearly blind Solveig takes him in:

I will climb up high to the steepest peak
and watch the sun rise once again;
I will stare till I tire, at the promised land,
then let the snow drift over me . . .
And there they may write: 'Here lies-No One.'
(PG, 219-20)

Once again, Buckler fashions literal renditions of major literary ironic symbols.

It is David's grandmother, towards whom he has been so condescending because "she sees everything-so dimly," who, through her rags, finishes the story that David has never

attempted (MV, p. 299). Her hopes had always rested upon him; as a child he had delighted in her stories and it was to him that she had given the locket. At the time of David's fall, she had "put her hand not to her head or her heart . . . but to her mouth, as if it were her breath that was threatened" (MV, p. 193). Ellen's rags have no meaning because they have no voice. The physical scar that resulted from David's fall becomes a mocking emblem of his life: " . . . the scar . . . sickled, like a smile-scar, from the corner of his mouth to his left temple" (MV, p. 14). As a Fates figure, Ellen completes the simple and circular patterns but it is David who drew them for her in keeping with Buckler's belief that "the apparently blind and capricious turns of their fortune are the inevitable outcome of circumstance and inheritance."²⁹

Buckler is always conscious of the wonder and the curse of being a writer who feels that he has something to say only to be frustrated by the thought of all the literary giants who have said it so much better; and yet, he is compelled by the conviction that no one can say it all forever. He mocks all writers for their "scavengery" (CM, p. 158); he mocks those who refuse to try as well as those who think they can write with ease. Despite the limitations and the vulnerability, Buckler chooses to create, believing that "In the way that termites are not architects though they both have to do with the same medium, critics are not writers."³⁰ A critical study such as this one can obscure the essential unity and cohesive

power of the best of Buckler's fiction. Buckler described himself as an "omnivorous" reader of "Anything that's well-written, with that unfakeable spark of conviction, sixth sense of how things are, and vital pulse."³¹ His favorite authors range from "(. . . Shakespeare and Dante and the great Russians like Tolstoi)" to modern Canadian writers. He admired Hemingway as "he was the first to write so deceptively simply yet give the meaning between the lines such tremendous impact"; he remarked that James Joyce had "first established the infinite variety and complexities of even the most ordinary man," and that T.S. Eliot had "first established the frequent deserts in a man's soul."³² Using a distinctly Canadian setting which, like all settings, no longer exists in its particulars, Buckler "mirrors," in every one of his senses of the word, the universal concerns and the various styles of major world writers. Literally and metaphorically he begins and ends where Yeats said, probably ironically, that he had ended: "Now that my ladder's gone, / I must lie down where all the ladders start, / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."³³ The deceptively simple appearance of Buckler's fiction should not be allowed to obscure the intellectual, psychological and aesthetic complexity that is characteristic of his best fiction. Ernest Buckler must be seen within the tradition of the classical and modern literary ironists if his efforts and achievements are to be truly evaluated and fully appreciated.

Notes

Preface

¹ Ernest Buckler, The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories, sel. and arr. Robert Chambers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975); hereafter cited as RYD and incorporated into text. Quotations from published stories not in this collection will be noted separately. For a comprehensive bibliography of all Buckler's writings, see John Orange, Ernest Buckler: An Annotated Bibliography (Downsview: ECW Press, 1981).

² Ernest Buckler, The Mountain and the Valley, introd. Claude Bissell, NCL, No. 23 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961); hereafter cited as MV and incorporated into text.

³ Ernest Buckler, The Cruellest Month, introd. Alan R. Young, NCL, No. 139 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); hereafter cited as CM and incorporated into text.

⁴ Ernest Buckler, Ox Bells and Fireflies: A Memoir, introd. Alan R. Young, NCL, No. 99 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); hereafter cited as OB and incorporated into text. Buckler himself refers to it as a "fictive memoir" in Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists - I (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 9.

⁵ Ernest Buckler Manuscript Collection (MS Collection 99), Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto; hereafter cited as BMC. Originally, the citations from the collection in this study were based on the present arrangement of the collection as outlined in John Orange, Ernest Buckler: An Annotated Bibliography; however, the citations in this final form have been given in terms of their context since the arrangement has not yet been finalized.

Chapter I: The Fictional World of Ernest Buckler

¹ Letter to John Rackliffe, 14 Oct. 1961, BMC.

² Notes on CM, BMC.

³ Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.

⁴ Notes on OB, BMC.

⁵ "Leftover Notes" on CM, BMC.

Chapter I:

- ⁶ Ernest Buckler, "Alden Nowlan: An Appreciation," The Fiddlehead, No. 81 (Aug.- Sept.- Oct. 1969), p. 46.
- ⁷ Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.
- ⁸ Notes on MV, BMC.
- ⁹ T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, 1971); "Burnt Norton" hereafter is cited and incorporated into the text as "BN" and "Little Giddings," as "LG." All quotations from the works of T.S. Eliot are taken from this edition.
- ¹⁰ Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.
- ¹¹ Notes on CM, BMC.
- ¹² Early typed version of CM, BMC.
- ¹³ Letter to Robert Marjoribanks, 28 Sept. 1957, BMC.
- ¹⁴ Letter to Francis Brown, 16 Dec. 1963, BMC.
- ¹⁵ The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, rev. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 195, fn.
- ¹⁶ Early sketches, BMC.
- ¹⁷ Letter to Almeda Glassey, 28 March 1959, in response to request for introduction to "The Quarrel" for special Chatelaine fiction issue, July 1959, BMC.
- ¹⁸ Letter to Keith Bagnell, 30 August 1977, BMC.
- ¹⁹ Notes on CM, BMC.
- ²⁰ "This Later Lycidas," The Atlantic Advocate, Nov. 1963, p. 84.
- ²¹ Notes on CM, BMC.
- ²² Letter to John Rackliffe, 14 Oct. 1961, BMC.
- ²³ Notes on CM, BMC.
- ²⁴ Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- ²⁵ Letters to Dudley H. Cloud, 24 March 1951, and to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.

Chapter I:

- ²⁶ Letter to Vance Henry, 17 March 1962, BMC.

Chapter II: Buckler and Literary Irony

¹ The summary that follows is derived primarily from Douglas C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969) and Irony (London: Methuen, 1970); Norman Knox, "On the Classification of Ironies," Modern Philology, 70 (Aug. 1972), pp. 53-62; Susan Suleiman, "Interpreting Ironies," Diacritics, 6 (Summer 1976), pp. 15-21; Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); A.E. Dyson, The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony (London: MacMillan, 1966); Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975); Eleanor N. Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1965); John B. McKee, Literary Irony and the Literary Audience: Studies in the Victimization of the Reader in Augustan Fiction (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1974); and Anne K. Mellor, English Romantic Irony (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980).

- ² Knox, p. 53

- ³ Muecke, Irony, p. 51

- ⁴ Dyson, p. 223.

- ⁵ Muecke, Compass, p. 20.

- ⁶ Muecke, Compass, p. 53.

- ⁷ Muecke, Compass, p. 22.

- ⁸ Mellor, p. 6; Knox, p. 59, also makes this point but the ideas presented in this part of the study are based on Mellor.

- ⁹ Mellor, p. 12.

- ¹⁰ Mellor, pp. 24-25.

- ¹¹ Mellor expands this idea in Ch. 6, "Fear and Trembling: From Lewis Carroll to Existentialism," pp. 165-184.

- ¹² Muecke, Compass, p. 20.

- ¹³ Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 67-77.

- ¹⁴ Muecke, Compass, p. 198.

Chapter III: Buckler's Understanding of Irony

- 1 Letter to Harry J. Boyle, 7 April 1958, BMC.
- 2 Letter to McKenzie Porter, 15 Sept. 1951, BMC.
- 3 Letter to John Clare, not dated, BMC.
- 4 Letter to W.O. Mitchell, 16 Dec. 1950, BMC.
- 5 Letter to Ernest Buckler from Robert Weaver, 1 Sept. 1950, BMC.
- 6 Letter to Michael Wardell, 9 June 1956, BMC.
- 7 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 8 Letter to Ernest Buckler from Eileen Herbert Jordan, 29 Oct. 1947, BMC.
- 9 Letter to Ernest Buckler from John Schaffner, 13 Dec. 1946, BMC.
- 10 Letter from Schaffner, 13 Dec. 1946, BMC.
- 11 Letter to Ernest Buckler from Michael Wardell, 21 June 1956, BMC.
- 12 Letter to Michael Wardell, 3 July 1956, BMC.
- 13 Letter to Naomi Burton, 25 Feb. 1950, BMC.
- 14 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 15 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 16 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 17 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 18 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 19 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 20 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 21 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 22 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 24 March 1951, BMC.
- 23 Letter to John Clare, 25 April 1952, BMC.

Chapter III:

- 24 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 25 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 26 Notes on galley proofs of MV, BMC.
- 27 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 28 Letter to Betty Jane Martin, 2 June 1952, BMC.
- 29 Notes on MV, BMC.
- 30 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 15 May 1951, BMC.
- 31 Notes on MV, BMC.
- 32 Letter to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 20 March 1961, BMC.
- 33 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 34 Letter to Bill Raney, 3 Sept. 1952, BMC.
- 35 "General Notes" on CM, BMC.
- 36 Alan R. Young, Ernest Buckler, NCL, Canadian Writers, No. 15 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 43; Young quotes Bernita H. Harris, "A Comparison of the Symbolism and Imagery of Ernest Buckler's The Cruellest Month with T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land,' " Diss. University of New Brunswick 1969, p. 6.
- 37 "Leftover Notes" on CM, BMC.
- 38 Letter to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 20 March 1961, BMC.
- 39 One of two versions of Synopsis of CM: the word "contrastingly" is omitted in the other version. BMC.
- 40 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 41 Letter to John Rackliffe, 31 Jan. 1962, BMC.
- 42 Letter to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 20 March 1961, BMC.
- 43 Revisions of CM, BMC.
- 44 Letter to Gregory M. Cook, 30 January 1967, quoted in Gregory M. Cook, ed. and introd. Ernest Buckler, Critical views on Canadian Writers, No. 7 (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), pp. 80-81.

Chapter III:

- 45 Letter to John Rackliffe, 14 Oct. 1961, BMC.
- 46 Notes on CM, BMC. This perhaps accounts for the change in Paul's name from "Lachance" in the notebooks to "Creed" in the novel.
- 47 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 48 Letter to John Rackliffe, 27 Nov. 1961, BMC.
- 49 Revisions of CM, BMC.
- 50 Typed version of an early draft of CM, BMC.
- 51 Pencilled version of an early draft of CM, BMC.
- 52 Typed version of CM, as in note 50, BMC.
- 53 Letter to Vance Henry, 17 March 1962, BMC.
- 54 Work on galley proofs of CM, BMC.
- 55 Work on galley proofs of CM, BMC.
- 56 Letter to Jack McClelland, 7 March 1963, BMC.
- 57 Letter to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 24 Sept. 1959, BMC.
- 58 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 59 Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (New York: Scribner's, 1926), p. 247.
- 60 Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill," The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), pp. 910-911.
- 61 Interim Report to Canada Council, 17 June 1966, BMC.
- 62 Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.
- 63 Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.
- 64 General Observations on text of OB, BMC.
- 65 General Observations on text of OB, BMC.
- 66 Fussell, p. 30.
- 67 Request to Canada Council, 20 Oct. 1965, BMC.

Chapter III:

- 68 "This Later Lycidas," The Atlantic Advocate, Nov. 1963, p. 84.
- 69 Family Herald, 24 April 1958, p. 17.
- 70 Farm Journal (Philadelphia), May 1963, pp. 69-70.
- 71 Notes on OB, BMC.
- 72 Short Stories, BMC.
- 73 Notes on OB, BMC.

Chapter IV: Buckler's Ironic Techniques

- 1 Mellor, p. 120.
- 2 The Holy Bible, King James Version (New York: American Bible Society, n.d.).
- 3 The Atlantic Advocate, June 1957, p. 80.
- 4 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 5 Notes on OB, BMC.
- 6 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 7 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 8 Letter to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 12 Jan. 1959, BMC; given the sequence of letters, there is a possibility that the year may be 1960.
- 9 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 10 "This Side of Paradise, Nova Scotia (Home is Where You Hang Your Heart)", MacLean's, Sept. 1973, p. 41.
- 11 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 12 Letter to Harold Ober, 23 May 1951, BMC.
- 13 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 14 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 15 Notes on CM, BMC.

Chapter IV:

- 16 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 17 Notes on CM, BMC.
- 18 Early Sketches, BMC.
- 19 Early Sketches, BMC.
- 20 Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 110.
- 21 As a result of the time span, the "cigarette butts" (MV, pp. 270, 286) seem an implausible detail; however, rather than detracting from Buckler's skill, this minor and apparent "slip" highlights his mastery if one considers the myriad of details in his fiction.
- 22 Varying degrees of acceptance or rejection of irony in MV may be seen in Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 187; Douglas Barbour, "The Critic Criticized: A Reply to Bruce MacDonald," Studies in Canadian Literature, 2 (Winter 1977), pp. 127-28 and "David Canaan: The Failing Heart," Studies in Canadian Literature, 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 64-75; Claude Bissell, Introd., The Mountain and the Valley, pp. vii - xii; Robert D. Chambers, Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975); Marilyn Chapman, "The Progress of David's Imagination," Studies in Canadian Literature, 3 (Summer 1978) pp. 186-98; Gregory M. Cook, ed. and introd. Ernest Buckler; D.J. Dooley, "Style and Communication in The Mountain and The Valley," The Dalhousie Review, 57 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 671-83; J.M. Kertzer, "The Past Recaptured," Canadian Literature, No. 65 (Summer 1975), pp. 74-85; Bruce MacDonald, "Word-Shapes, Time and the Theme of Isolation in The Mountain and the Valley," Studies in Canadian Literature, 1 (Summer 1976), pp. 194-209; John Orange, "Irony and the Idyll: Recent Ross and Buckler Criticism," Journal of Canadian Fiction, No. 22 (1978), pp. 118-23; Laurence Ricou, "David Canaan and Buckler's Style in The Mountain and the Valley," The Dalhousie Review, 57 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 684-96; Eilen Sarkar, "Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley: 'The Infinite Language of Human Relations,'" Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 44 (July-Sept. 1974), pp. 354-61; Clara Thomas, "New England Romanticism and Canadian Fiction," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 2, No. 4 (Fall 1973), pp. 80-86; A.M. Westwater, "Teufelsdröckh Is Alive and Doing Well in Nova Scotia: Carlylean Strains in The Mountain and the Valley," The Dalhousie Review, 56 (Summer 1976), pp. 291-98; and Alan R. Young's critical writings: Ernest Buckler; "The Genesis of Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the

Chapter IV:

Valley," Journal of Canadian Fiction, No. 16 (1976), pp. 89-96; "A Note on Douglas Barbour's 'David Canaan: The Failing Heart' (SCL, Winter 1976)," Studies in Canadian Literature, 1 (Summer 1976), pp. 244-46; and "The Pastoral Vision of Ernest Buckler in The Mountain and the Valley," The Dalhousie Review, 53 (Summer 1973), pp. 219-26.

23 Varying degrees of acceptance and rejection of irony in CM may be seen in Robert D. Chambers, Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler; Gregory M. Cook, ed. and introd. Ernest Buckler; Dave Godfrey, "Buckler and Allen," The Tamarack Review, No. 36 (Summer 1965), pp. 82-86; Bernita H. Harris, "A Comparison of the Symbolism and Imagery of Ernest Buckler's The Cruellest Month with T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land,'" Diss. University of New Brunswick, 1969; John Orange, "Irony and the Idyll: Recent Ross and Buckler Criticism," Journal of Canadian Fiction, No. 22 (1978), pp. 118-23; and Alan R. Young, Introd., The Cruellest Month, pp. vii - xiii, and Ernest Buckler.

24 Letter to Harold Ober, 22 Nov. 1951, BMC.

25 Short Stories, BMC.

26 The Waste Land, III. 7.

27 The Waste Land, V. 426.

28 Henrik Ibsen, Peer Gynt: A Dramatic Poem, trans. and introd., Peter Watts (Middlesex: Penguin, 1966), p. 198; Peer Gynt hereafter is cited and incorporated into the text as PG.

29 Letter to Dudley H. Cloud, 24 March 1951, BMC.

30 "Observations" in Notes, BMC.

31 Biographical Material for McClelland and Stewart, BMC.

32 Letter to Judy Holton, 4 Aug. 1973, BMC.

33 W.B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, pp. 158-159.

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----- . introd. Ox Bells and Fireflies. By Ernest Buckler. New Canadian Library, No. 99. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974, pp. xi-xvi.

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