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**Teufelsdröckh Is Alive and Doing Well in Nova Scotia: Carlylean Strains in *The Mountain and the Valley***

Despite the differences of geography and the different zones of time, Thomas Carlyle and Ernest Buckler were both fearful lest a materialistic view of life clog the spiritual. Not that Carlyle and Buckler share the same notion of the "spiritual". For Carlyle the meaning of the word narrows into the "moral"; for Buckler it extends to define the acute self-consciousness exacted by the artist. A careful re-reading of *Sartor Resartus* provides fresh insights into *The Mountain and the Valley* and throws new light on the enormous appeal Buckler has for young Canadians, paralleling as it does, Carlyle's appeal for young Victorians.

Is there any concrete support for the "imaginative continuum" connecting Victorian and Canadian literature, or is the link between the long dead Carlyle and the living Buckler merely theoretical and at best coincidental? If the distinguished Canadian scholar, Dr. Archibald MacMechan had not lectured on *Sartor Resartus* when Buckler was an undergraduate at Dalhousie (1927-1929), the connection between the two writers might easily be dismissed. But in a recent meeting with Buckler, I found him extremely interested in the possible relationship between Carlyle and himself, and he recalled with affectionate humour his studies of Carlyle under MacMechan.<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle's influence on Buckler is comparable to that of Swift on Carlyle. In no way did Ernest Buckler consciously pattern his novel on Carlyle's work, nor did he attempt to contemporize the philosophy of the Sage from Chelsea. However, in his 1897 Introduction to *Sartor Resartus*, MacMechan argues that the genesis of Carlyle's *Sartor* is Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*: "Here undoubtedly is the seed thought which lay chance-sown so long in Carlyle's mind that he had forgotten its existence and when it sprang up and bore fruit a hundredfold, imagined it to be some spontaneous, self-derived tilth."<sup>2</sup> The same might be said

with even greater truth of Buckler's "Seed" idea from Carlyle. For what else is *The Mountain and the Valley* but a contemporary delineation of David Canaan's youthful tension between his commitment to the "speculative philosophy" of the artist and his commitment to the "un-selfconscious work" of an Entremont farmer?<sup>3</sup>

MacMechan posits another interesting fact about Carlyle's little known career as a novelist which bears an important reference to a Carlyle-Buckler bond. He painstakingly proves that the first draft of *Sartor* was the novel "Wotton Reinfred", which Carlyle had to abandon after seven chapters.<sup>4</sup> The point that MacMechan makes is that the biographical section of Book II which is responsible for the total success of *Sartor* is Carlyle's "first and only entirely creative work" through which he felt "the joy of the artist".<sup>5</sup> And it is the final ecstasy of the artist as creator which likewise absorbs Buckler's imagination. His "Epilogue" to *The Mountain and the Valley*, wherein David is described on top of the mountain at last understanding the mystery of the creative process, is undoubtedly the most extraordinary section of the novel. It has few equals, if any, in contemporary literature.

It is not academic indulgence, then, to claim that David Canaan is a direct literary descendant of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. Both are extraordinary persons; their lives are, to a major extent, solitary; their experiences micrify the experiences of their ages; both climb from spiritual doubt and darkness to inner light and affirmation; both transcend the limitations of space and time to discover that no moment, no circumstance can yield any more than they already know.

But there are other obvious parallels. Joseph's son, David Canaan, extravagantly endowed with intelligence and acute sensitivity, lives in a "promised land" within the insignificant Nova Scotian village of Entremont. Diogenes, adopted son of old Andreas, also enjoys an idyllic childhood in Entephuhl. Both heroes are superior to their environments. David longs to break away from a confining temporality to seek the extra-temporal essence of time symbolized by the mountain, while Diogenes actually leaves the "dark puddle" village driven by *Weltschmerz*.

Even more unusual is the similar structural device found in both works. Carlyle constructs his biography of Teufelsdröckh from "Six considerable PAPER BAGS, carefully sealed, and marked successively,

in gilt China-ink, with the symbols of the Six southern Zodiacal Signs...; in the inside of which sealed Bags lie miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Snips..."<sup>6</sup> Carlyle does not want a rigid time structure for his work. He merely wants a frame for his patchwork enabling him to admit any scrap of an idea about life and his own experiences in it. Inventing an imaginary philosopher who is absent-minded and eccentric, Carlyle can thus forestall any charges of inconsistency and confusion.

Similarly, Buckler weaves his biography of David around Ellen's rag rug, each coloured snippet of which recalls an incident in the life of a family. The variety of the colours is analogous to the "colour" of the character. Gray reminded the old grandmother of her son Joseph — it was part of his shirt; the flowered gingham was Martha's dress; brown — Chris's stocking cap.<sup>7</sup> The story unfolds until only one tiny circle remains to be woven — white. David's snow-shroud is imaged in the transcendent circle of white, fusing all colours, all experience (Buckler, 301).

But the basic link between the two books lies in the motif of passage. Diogenes' wandering in Paris, his confrontation with the "Everlasting No", is a discovery of how to negate negation. In a similar way, David's accident when he is twenty, his journey through pain with its "bleaching ache" are the cathartic discoveries whereby he uncovers the secret link between his subjective and objective worlds:

Suddenly he (David) knew how to surmount everything. That loneliness he'd always had ... it got forgotten, maybe, weeded over ... but none of it had ever been conquered. (And all that time the key to freedom had been lying in these lines, this book). There was only one way to possess anything: to say it exactly. Then it would be outside you, captured and conquered.

(Buckler, 195)

Even though the book does not totally free David, it shows him where freedom lies. David's scar always remains to remind him that his estrangement, his remoteness from those he loves, will always be unresolved. The "saying of anything" is a symbol of the relationship between that which is seen and that which is unseen, just as the central symbol of *Sartor* is "clothing" which expresses the relationship between that which is clothed and that which clothes. The whole point for Carlyle and Buckler is that man cannot live and move either by himself or with his brothers unless he be arrayed in some investiture

woven for the soul. The emphasis for both writers is on the non-material elements of existence.

Before his rejection of despair, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh (God's light, devil's dung) knows that he is trapped in his own prison of self-pity. David's self-absorption, too, is a self-imprisonment. In the opening chapter of *The Mountain and the Valley*, David, the supreme isolate, gazes out over the wintry country-side. The very clarity of his perception has kept him a prisoner within:

Detail came clearly enough to David's sight; but it was as if another glass, beyond the glass of the window pane, covered everything, made touch between any two things impossible. He saw the children skating on the flooded marshes, but the sound of their voices fell in the thin air before it reached the house. Their movements were like line drawings of movements. His eyes followed the peopled cars as they passed down the long straight stretch of road; yet when they disappeared around the corner there was no impression of severance.

He stood absolutely still. He was not quiet with thought or interest. It was simply that any impulse to movement receded before the compulsion of the emptiness .... (Buckler, 14)

The "compulsion of the emptiness" made David in a sense invisible to others. The glass "made touch between any two things impossible", and within his invisibility David is tortured, not fulfilled. Only in his final acceptance of his inner world, does David shed his dependence on the externals of life – even of life itself. David loses corporality after he has scaled the mountain.

Diogenes' "Everlasting No" and David's "bleaching ache", then, restore both men to a degree of self-possession. Although both are further tormented by trials, they find a measure of safety in their inner freedom – Diogenes more so than David. From the moment in the Rue St. Enfer when despair taunted: "Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the universe is mine (the Devil's)", and Teufelsdröckh affirmed: "I am not thine, but Free and forever hate thee!" (Carlyle, 166-7) – from that moment Diogenes Teufelsdröckh is outside his own prison of fear and at last capable of extending himself to the "Not Me". Carlyle's "Centre of Indifference" is the imaginative representation of the soul freed from acute self-absorption and capable of accepting the shabbiness of the human condition: "Pshaw! what is this paltry little dog cage of an earth; what art thou that sittest whining there? Thou art still

Nothing, Nobody: true; but who, then is Something, Somebody?" (177). Diogenes found freedom in the written word, the book: "O thou who art able to write a Book, which once in the two centuries or oftener there is a man gifted to ... Thou too art a Conqueror and Victor ..." (170).

Diogenes' odyssey culminates in "The Everlasting Yea" wherein he loves no longer his own pleasure but God (185). At this point, Diogenes sees the divine in everything. "O, my Brother, my Brother, why cannot I shelter thee in my bosom, and wipe away all tears from thy eyes!" (182). But Carlyle's transcendental view leads Teufelsdröckh to emphasize action more than love. He is more actively conscious of preaching: "Do the Duty which lies nearest thee" (187) than he is in sheltering man in his bosom.

Here, then, is the crucial difference between Carlyle's and Buckler's vision of man. Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea" calcified in a narrow moralism. It emphasized doing good and avoiding evil. This is certainly, as Cazamian noted, "a decided movement towards the certitudes that action requires, but alas, it is also a movement towards the certitudes that develop into dogmas and prejudices."<sup>8</sup> Buckler, on the contrary, is little concerned with action. David Canaan, unlike Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, never publishes a book; neither does he teach nor travel. David, a twentieth-century replica of the shepherd-king-turned-penitent, is yoked with contrary tensions. It is the imprisoning effects of time and space and the crippling blows of human experiences with which Buckler commiserates. As an innocent, David "didn't know that adult speech was merely an instrument of disguise" (Buckler, 41). Thus, as a child, a word could and did transport him into a world of dreamy idealism wherein he was hero. But as he matured, the gamut of experience sucked him into a spiralling vortex of reality's contradictions. His bullying love-making with Effie is repeatedly imaged with feelings of betrayal and regret: "It made him feel big and spreading; and it made him feel lost.... It made him feel rich; and it made him feel destitute" (110). Even at the culmination, "he couldn't tell if everything had come inside him, or if everything had been lost" (111). The whole David-Effie relationship excels its tragic counterpart in Diogenes and Blumine, because David uses love as a means of self-embellishment. He makes love to Effie in the wet field merely to flaunt his sexual prowess before the indifferent Toby (146). In this

incident Buckler is more solicitous to explore the suffering that self-love heaps on man than he is in finding a solution for it. Unlike Carlyle, Buckler finds no salvation in action. Nor is there any advance to the affirming position of the "Everlasting Yea" in David's odyssey. Instead his whole life's journey is toward a "Centre of Indifference". The mountain top is that centre, the midpoint at which the attractive forces of the valley are balanced. When he committed himself to writing, David understood ideally that the creative act of the artist can clothe the subjective inner world with the garments of words. But even after Effie's death from leukemia, which scarred him emotionally, and his own fall from the rafters, which scarred him physically, David was never to experience equilibrium in life. Time and time again he is caught between opposing tensions — between the lure of the country and that of the city: "He sobbed because he could neither leave nor stay. He sobbed because he was neither one thing nor the other" (171). He is caught between the need for companionship and the demands of solitude. When his sister (and twin) returns to Entremont after her husband, Toby, goes to war, "even with Anna now ... he is outside" (279).

Only at the end does David find his "Centre of Indifference", and the incident has all the torpor which characterizes Teufelsdröckh's:

It was not the mood of defeat. Defeat pushes the inside back a little, but the inside and the outside remain distinct. Nor of despair, when the gap widens further still: there is still the bridge of conscious loneliness. Nor of apathy, when the inside is routed completely and the outside moves in to fill the vacuum.

Though the will remained unbroken, it was the mood *after* all these. The movement was reversed. Even the sensations of his own flesh had become outside. The inside was nothing but one great white naked eye of self-consciousness, with only its own looking to look at. The frozen landscape made no echo inside him. There was no tendril of interaction.

... as he looked at the frozen landscape it was as if the outline of the frozen landscape *became* his consciousness: that inside and outside were not two things, but one — the bare shape of what his eyes saw (281).

David is no longer inside looking out from behind a glass. Outside and inside are one. What is central to Buckler's view is the unity of all experience. Whatever happens in one's own consciousness, how man becomes sensitive to the unique, ultimately special way that time and space approach him — in this way only can man ascend to the "Centre of Indifference" and find unity in being. Time and space are obliterated

because in Buckler's view, as in Carlyle's, time and space usurp dominance. They divert attention from that mysterious awe-filled "white, naked eye of self-consciousness". Carlyle's conclusion to *Sartor Resartus* warns his readers to "Admit Space and Time to their due rank as Forms of Thought; nay, even, if thou wilt to their quite undue rank of Realities," but he insists further that "their thin disguises hide from us the brightest God-effulgences" (Carlyle, 240). Teufelsdröckh's perception lasted a lifetime; David's was only a momentary glimpse. His privileged moment of transcendence had passed as quickly as it had come, but it lasted long enough to let him grasp the mystery of unity in all of nature's myriad voices which:

... sounded and rushed in his head as if he must go out *into* these things. He must *be* a tree and a stone and a shadow and a crystal of snow and a thread of moss and the veining of a leaf. He must be exactly as each one of them was, everywhere and in all time; or the guilt, the exquisite parching for the taste of completion, would never be allayed at all.

(Buckler, 292)

And as with Teufelsdröckh, the exaltation of the moment led him outward to his fellow man: "I will ask her (Ellen) if she's warm enough .... I'll go over and tell her that's the prettiest rug yet .... I'll go over and help Steve unload his wood .... I will ask Chris to come live with us, and he'll know that I forgave him long long ago" (Buckler, 299-300). As with Teufelsdröckh, David discovered that "Man with his so mad Wants and so mean Endeavours, had become the dearer to me ..." (Carlyle, 182). But while Carlyle, at that point, mounts the pulpit to preach his active gospel of Renunciation (*Entsagen*), Conviction and Conduct, Buckler retreats into deeper reflection on the nature of evil. He discovers that all the hurts men give each other are caused "only by the misreading of what they couldn't express" (Buckler, 300). Buckler does not insist on each man improving his value as a person by removing the "black spot" in his "own sunshine" (Carlyle, 266). Rather he would have each man become more sensitive to his own inner consciousness. Because Buckler could never accept the Calvinistic austerity of Carlyle's "Entsagen", his David follows Diogenes in accepting the necessity of suffering in the quest to unfold the mystery of unity, but the journey from outside to inside consists more in a passive surrender than an active striving. The conclusion of both books shows the fundamental difference between the two writers. Teufelsdröckh is mysteriously

afoot in the universe waging war against Cant and Dilettantism. Even Carlyle admits that Herr Professor is a proselytizer in a dying world. But from this sick society a "new heavenborn young one will rise out of her ashes" (220). The phoenix is Carlyle's symbol of hope.

David, on the contrary, never practises his "Everlasting Yea". He is incapable of completing the hero's descent from the Mount of Apotheosis. His death in the snow represents Buckler's belief that the salvation of modern society lies not on the outside of man, but deep within – in the white heat of purifying self-awareness. In David's death all the blackness of his life's journey fades. It "turned to grey and then to white: an absolute white, made of all the other colours but of no colour itself at all" (Buckler, 300). David's "resurrection" is a triumph which Buckler images by the partridge:

[It] rose in the grey-laden air. 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, swooping, directly, intensely, exactly down over the far side of the mountain. (301-302)

The partridge becomes Buckler's embodiment of Carlyle's Infinite "made to blend itself with the Finite" (Carlyle, 206). David's death "is the last perfection of a Work of Art", and in his "divinely transfigured Sleep" there is "Victory resting over the beloved face" in which we read "the confluence of Time with Eternity" (209).

#### Footnotes

1. In this interview, June 29, 1974, in addition to receiving support for my study of the Carlyle-Buckler relationship, I was likewise impressed by the open-hearted simplicity and loving kindness of Buckler. In spite of failing health, he was already entertaining two young travellers from Newfoundland. Three more visitors were welcomed to his unpretentious home near Bridgetown, and to all five he was equally attentive.
2. Archibald MacMechan, "Introduction" to *Sartor Resartus* by Thomas Carlyle. (Boston and London: Atheneum Press Series, Ginn & Co., 1897) xxi.
3. These terms are used by George Levine in his essay, "Sartor Resartus and the Balance of Fiction", *The Boundaries of Fiction*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 29.
4. MacMechan, xxiii-xxvi.
5. MacMechan, xxvii.
6. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus and Selected Prose* with an Introduction by Herbert Sussman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 95. All subsequent references to "Carlyle" are from this edition.
7. Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* with an Introduction by Claude Bissell (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1961), 15-16. All subsequent references to "Buckler" are from this edition.
8. Louis Cazamian, *Carlyle*, translated by E.K. Brown, (New York: Archon Book, 1966), 118.