Notes on Language and Learning in *Who Has Seen the Wind*

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In *Ox Bells and Fireflies* Ernest Buckler pauses to ask himself about the results of his public-school education: "What kind of children did all this make of us?" And he answers: "Well, for the most part we were strangely adult. No Tom Sawyers."[1] Buckler is thinking particularly of the exclusion of pap or fantasy from his youthful reading. But his question raises a more fundamental consideration for his reader: it reiterates the problem, implicit at the beginning of the memoir, of the relationship between the narrator and the generalized boy "I" who is the book's subject, of the relationship between the author's deliberate remembering in a book and the time when "I did not think about any of it with these words".[2]

Recalling the time when the words weren't there emphasizes the apparent contradiction of trying to convey the child's simple, sensory, spontaneous encounter with the world through a deliberate and carefully worked language. In the broadest sense, of course, the contradiction is the universal one which comes of trying to match language and experience, but it is especially intriguing and challenging when the writer, the most skillful of men in his use of language, must use words to express the perspective of those who have a very primitive language (or, at the extreme of infants, no intelligible language at all). Not surprisingly his attempt often results in literary children who are "strangely adult," not in their actions, but in their feelings and thinking.

Some critics have hinted that Canadian writers show an unusual willingness to take up the challenge. Eli Mandel says that "in Canadian writing the figure of the child assumes exceptional importance,"[3] and Elizabeth Waterston offers the intriguing, but undeveloped, suggestion that there is a relationship between the many children in Canadian literature and our image of a country still young and struggling to develop.[4] But the surprise may not be so much the prevalence of children in Canadian literature as that—given the impact of Freud, the mass of psychological literature on child development, and a society which many would call child-centred—so few writers have tried to express the point of view of the child. Some of this surprise seems to be shared by Ronald Sutherland when, in comparing Rejean Ducharme's *L'avalée des avalés* and W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen*

the Wind, he wonders "why Canadian literature should have the possibly unique distinction of two such books successfully exploiting the point of view of a child".[5]

Sutherland senses the uniqueness which lies first in the difficulty of having the child as a subject, in contrast to having the adolescent whose growth to adulthood is the theme of an immense amount of fiction. He feels, too, the uniqueness in having the pre-adolescent child[6] as focus of a book for adults (however difficult and arbitrary it may be to distinguish these from children's books). Although the natural simplicity of childhood has been an important focus for writers since the beginning of the nineteenth century (since Rousseau and Wordsworth and the rise of Romanticism),[7] the sustained presentation of the young child's perception is still very rare. Joyce gives a memorable suggestion of the child Stephen's sensibility at the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:*

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was
> there was a moocow coming down the road and
> this moocow that was coming down along the
> road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo.[8]

But Joyce's presentation of the child's perspective is a very small portion of the novel. Thomas Wolfe plunges more ambitiously into the infant Eugene's mind in *Look Homeward, Angel,* but a short passage is enough to show that the crib contains an adult:

> He was in agony because he was poverty-stricken in symbols: his mind was caught in a net because he had no words to work with. He had not even names for the objects around him: he probably defined them for himself by some jargon, reinforced by some mangling of the speech that roared about him, to which he listened day after day, realizing that his first escape must come through language.[9]

"*Huckleberry Finn* as a whole, in its unique directness," notes Alfred Kazin, "makes us realize how little, elsewhere in America literature, children as themselves ever speak to us".[10] Where are the children who are not merely cute, on the one hand, or strangely adult on the other? Where are the children who are not primarily metaphors or figures from an adult character's memory but unique characters in their own right?

Modern psychology provokes such questions by showing us that children are not miniature adults, differing only in quantitative ways from their elders, but that children have unique ways of perceiving, thinking, socializing and judging. My own interest in the style and language through which a writer gives form to the child's intelligence

and imagination led me to, and was in turn sharpened by, Jean Piaget's observations about child language. Piaget, for example, has shown us what a large proportion of a child's language is egocentric, "partly because the child speaks only about himself, but chiefly because he does not attempt to place himself at the point of view of his hearer . . . nor to tell him anything".[11] This fact obvious to any parent indicates the special sensitivity required of the creator of child characters, and of the reader listening to children in literature. Often that sensitivity is particulary evident in books for children—in *Alligator Pie,* for example, or in Dr. Seuss books or even in *Charlotte's Web.* These books suggest that the writer attentive to the child's point of view will, like the child himself, be less concerned with communication than with exploring his language for its sheer pleasure of rhythm and sound, with making the exploration itself serve to liberate him, to liberate his imaginative processes. Yet even in saying this I am caught in the contradiction I mentioned at the beginning, for a psychologist would see what I would call imaginative exploration or natural poetry as an adult's sentimental misconception of a natural process of assimilation and of building cognitive structures.

Nonetheless, the writer would likely side with those who find that children's language is not simply a somewhat blurred and distorted tape-recording of what they hear adults saying. As a lay psychologist describes the language of the child: "Their articulation differs from that of adults, they combine words in unique ways, and they make up words. They ask questions that have never been asked before ('What does blue look like from in back?') and make statements that have never been stated before ('I buyed a fire dog for a grillion dollars.')"[12] We also know that "adults sometimes take metaphors literally, but young children never take metaphors metaphorically".[13] The discriminating writer or reader must ask not only what does this or that speech mean (still a legitimate enough question, of course, where we are thinking of literature for adult readers), but also what does the speech mean to, or do for, the child, what differing perception does it reflect? Perhaps this is only to say that we must be attentive to both our understanding, and a character's understanding, in any literature we read. But because the adult has such a slight memory of his own childhood, it is especially difficult to remain sensitive to the differences.

How does the writer present the wonderfully child-like child and avoid creating, against his will, the strangely adult child? What language does he use to create a convincing sense of the understanding of a child whose language is relatively undeveloped, whose writing, particularly, is primitive, and whose language, in any event, is a markedly different thing? Although many answers are provided by many different writers,

the author who writes a novel that begins with, and remains with, the life of a child is very rare, and among these the number who have made a success of sensing and conveying the child's unique perception is fewer still. So, any writer who approaches the task with a startling straightforwardness and humility—"This is the story of a boy and the wind."—must make a very special claim on our attention and on our hearts.

The story, of course, is W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947), a novel unusual in its concentration on a boy's growing up during the pre-teenage years. If we think of *Huckleberry Finn,* a novel to which *Who Has Seen the Wind* is often compared, we recognize some other ways in which Mitchell's novel is uniquely focussed. Because *Huckleberry Finn* is in the first person it is more a story *by* a boy than *of* a boy; Huck is mainly an observer of the world and his comments on adult society and morality are essential to the novel's appeal to adult readers, while Brian O'Connal is an active participant in his world, engaging himself with it in a familiar pattern of responding, accommodating, learning and growing. Unlike Huck, a solitary refugee from society, Brian belongs to a normal family and class structure in an ordinary small town and attends an ordinary school every day. But, perhaps most significantly, whereas Twain follows Huck on a journey down the Mississippi, Mitchell carefully marks out the phases of Brian's development in formal and thematic stages. The structure of *Who Has Seen the Wind,* in four distinct parts based on Brian at four different ages, is a way of focussing attention on Brian's development and of understanding its nature. In using this definite pattern Mitchell shows a kinship to the psychologist who, although he knows that a child's growth is an uninterrupted continuum, invents "stages" to make comprehension easier.

A short preface directs the reader to Mitchell's intent, the "struggle of a boy to understand...the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life". Then, following the deservedly famous opening description of essential prairie, we first see Brian or, more correctly, we see his tricycle, wheel askew, in the middle of the sidewalk. "The tricycle belonged to Brian Sean MacMurray O'Connal, the four-year-old son of Gerald O'Connal, druggist, and Maggie O'Connal."[14] Appropriately we meet Brian through one of his playthings. Also, we meet him at an age when the problem posed by language is particularly prominent:

> By age three, the child deals very well symbolically with his familiar pragmatic world. By about age four, he begins once more to find his language inadequate to his experience....The older preschool child learns to try answering his own questions. Not that he gives up asking his parents—but his questions come

increasingly after an attempt at a formulation of his own, in the form of hypotheses. [15]

Certainly Brian finds his experience constantly running ahead of his language, and his speech is full of questions. Indeed Brian's first spoken words in the novel are questions:

> "Can I have a tent like the baby has?"
> "Ye cannot. 'Tis bad enough having the baby ill without—"
> "Is he ill bad?" (5)

The first of these shows Brian trying to relate his brother's sickness to his own play-world. His second question shows more perplexity than concern, and more jealous desire to keep his grandmother's attention than either.

At once we note Mitchell's adeptness at suggesting child language. On the one hand his psychology is sound: Brian picks up two words, "bad" and "ill," which his grandmother has just used, and tries to fit them into his own understanding. On the other hand his poetry is sure: Brian's question carries a Calvinistic hint of the inherent evil in sickness, which would not be there in the grammatically correct, "Is he very ill?" The child's diction is deftly evoked, without seeming cloying or merely cute. Elsewhere Brian says "belshes" for "belches" and "crissmus for "Christening". Mitchell slips a child's coinage into his description here and there—"sunshiny," "clicketing"—to reinforce Brian's point-of-view. Brian, in short, is following the natural patterns of adapting the sounds, prosody and grammatical forms of the language. Again Mitchell is at his best when he discovers within this process a special sensory vividness beyond Brian's understanding; a startling and funny example is Brian's comment on his grandmother's illness: "She's got room-a-ticks in a leg". (10)

We hear Brian trying to answer his own questions in passages where Mitchell nicely catches the humorous non-communicating nature of child dialogue:

> "Do you know anything more?" asked Brian.
> "I'm hungry. Maybe if you was to ask, your maw'd give us a piece."
> "The baby's going to heaven," explained Brian.
> "My Dad's a conductor," Forbsie said, "on the C.P.R. He has got silver buttons".
> "It's where God stays," said Brian,"heaven".
> "No it ain't," said Forbsie. (6)

Brian and, to a lesser extent, Forbsie speak egocentrically without intending to communicate, as if they were thinking out loud. Brian's speech here is an accompaniment and reinforcement of his mental

activity, a way of channeling his thoughts and, therefore, of exploring himself. In distinguishing such characteristics from adult language Piaget gives us one framework within which to consider Brian's development:

> We may safely admit that children think and act more egocentrically than adults, that they share each other's intellectual life less than we do. True, when they are together they seem to talk to each other a great deal more than we do about what they are doing, but for the most part they are only talking to themselves. We, on the contrary, keep silent for longer about our action, but our talk is almost always socialized.[16]

Brian is a contemplative and reflective child, more so than most of his companions, apparently, though we hardly know the others well enough to say. At any rate, Brian seems to have less and less to say as the novel proceeds. It is as if (to use Piaget's pattern) as Brian grows to an age where speech becomes more and more socialized, less a tool for exploring the self, it becomes less essential to him. Yet Brian does become more committed to his family and to his community; he needs language for discovery, but he doesn't need talk to produce deep feelings for others.

Discovery involves trying to articulate his sense of the significance of the "boy on the prairie" (24), or asking Digby the meaning of "engagement" (7-8), or, although he has been touched by the hand of the wind, asking Mrs. Hislop what a "spirit" is (9).In these and many other ways Brian is reaching for the language which will define his experience, which will change his experience, by giving him new channels through which experience may act upon him. So, with the at first imagined, and then several times repeated, personalization of God as "R.W.", Brian finds an equivalent in language which allows him to hold onto a notion of God both as personally familiar and yet as slightly anonymous and deserving of great deference.

God is also the subject of the most fascinating example of child language in Part One, Brian's "song-one," a monologue in which he defines and explores his world while totally absorbed in a game:

> "Now God is on a leaf—and the leaf is on a lawn—on a lawn—on a lawn—and He's got cuff links—He's got them on—on the lawn—and they are gold—they are gold cuff links—and they're yellow—so are the dandelions—and that's how God is—with gas on His stomach—with gas on His stomach—so He can belch if He wants to." (37)

Piaget describes how essential the monologue is to the child:

> If the child talks even when he is alone as an accompaniment to his action, he can reverse the process and use words to bring about what the action of itself is powerless to do. Hence the habit of romancing or inventing, which consists in creating reality by words and magical language, in working on things by means of words alone, apart from any contact either with them or with persons.[17]

Song-one seems to be Brian's word for psalm, perhaps with a distant echo of solemn. Brian, then, is making poetry, that thing that "lies beyond seriousness, on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy, laughter".[18] But again Mitchell's poetry contains a fine intuitive sense of child development, nicely expressing the connecting of single attributes of objects which characterizes the pre-school child's reasoning.[19] Brian is thinking from particular to particular, as a four-year-old must; the adult, overhearing Brian, recognizes the inherent concept of God: a playmate and friend, closely connected to natural things, yet set apart by the grown-up magnificence of gold cufflinks. Brian creates by words and magical language a God who is humanly fallible (suffering from a bit of gas), yet free to follow his own instincts. The serious side of Brian's song-one is emphasized by Mitchell's epigraph from Psalm 103, which also depends on images of grass, flowers and wind to express the relationship of man to God. Yet Brian's other model, "There's a frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea," adds a sprightly sense of the interconnectedness of all things, expressing an enchanted wisdom beyond most adults in the novel.

Brian's experience may be running ahead of his language, yet language is enabling him, on a few occasions like this, to create and greet a reality which transcends concrete facts. At the end of Part One, when Brian first experiences that exquisite "feeling...of completion and culmination," it is an emotion, an instinct within him, which will only take on its full significance when he finds the language to fit it and explain it.

Part Two begins on the first of September, 1931, Brian's first day of school. Brian is six years old; at the end of Part Two he is eight. In Piaget's terms this is a period when a child's ways of thinking become less reliant on perception and intuition as he begins to think logically, at least about the world of real, concrete objects.[20] Mitchell, however, sees this stage of Brian's development dominated by a rather different factor:

> ...like all children after the first blush of individuality at three, he was malleable and would remain so until perhaps the age of

eight, when he would again try to impress his personality upon the world he had come to dissociate from himself. (89)

The passage reminds us that Mitchell is as interested in Brian's moral development as in his intellectual development. In his first years at school Brian's morality is determined largely by authority and by the approval of others. He is ruled, that is, by conventional morality; he is at a stage which a student of moral development, such as Lawrence Kohlberg, would describe as characteristic of middle childhood. Yet Mitchell's mention of an impending assertiveness suggests that in this, as in other areas, Brian is emerging as extraordinarily precocious.

Brian's questioning becomes more insistent at this age:

"Why do people sleep, Dad?"
Gerald O'Connal pursed his lips. "Habit".
"What's that?"
"Doing something over and over."
"Well—why do you sleep over and over?"
"You just do—while you sleep, you rest."
"Can't a person rest without sleeping?"
"Not as well," his father said. "When you sleep you rest better." (99)

These are questions more demanding of answers than the egocentric queries we noted at the beginning of the novel. Piaget would call them "whys" of *motivation.*[22] Brian is looking not for the physiological cause of sleep but for the purpose or motive for sleep. His father intuits the direction of the question immediately: Brian is asking what makes people do the things they do.

Moments later Brian links his wondering about sleep to his continuing speculation about God: "Does God sleep?" Brian is once again considering the nature of spirit. But this time, instead of asking Mrs. Hislop for a definition, he is trying to formulate his own sense of spirit by looking for the link between God and his everyday experience. But hasn't this been Brian's direction from the beginning? Not quite. He is now specifically interested in a connection which will help him comprehend; he is approaching an awareness, therefore, that the two things are different in kind. This is a different approach from: "When God ate his porridge He had a dish as big as the prairie"(21). Whatever this view may be to the adult reader, it is literal realism for Brian. But now, in Part Two, he is increasingly, however tentatively, attracted to metaphor to bring understanding: "God could be like a flame, Brian was thinking, not a real flame, but like a flame "(99). The language here is covert and therefore not so firmly planted as to represent a conviction, but it certainly belongs to Brian. And in looking for the metaphor, then reminding himself that the flame would not be a real

flame, Brian is logically seeking connections within his immediate, concrete world. He is using separate levels of reality, though he is not yet aware of it.

The trickiness of expressing the child's point-of-view is still clearer in another of Brian's metaphors:[23]

> The Catholic church bell began slowly and majestically to tongue the silence. Like on a lawn, he thought, with the inarticulate yearning in him deepening, a kid turning slow somersaults over a lawn—looking up with his head, then ducking it to take another slow turn completely over on the lawn. (107)

Here Mitchell is describing Brian's experience moments before that "turning point in Brian's spiritual life" brought on by his contemplating the dew drop on the spirea. The trick comes in slipping so easily from the narrator's slightly archaic rhetoric—"majestically to tongue the silence"—and its sense of the ancient grandeur of the established church, to Brian's vividly pictorial playground analogy. Not only is this second sentence a marvellous example of prose rhythm echoing sense, but it shows Brian again making something intangible (the bell's sound, but perhaps spirit and God are implied as well) available through tangible experience. This use of metaphor depends on his increasing ability to handle language: his comparison of the sacred tolling of the bell with the spirit of a child's game re-establishes that ancient link between ritual and play through their common elements—"order, tension, movement, change, solemnity, rhythm, rapture".[24] "Over a lawn, over a lawn, and over a lawn," (110) is Brian's personal version of "holy, holy, holy". This time the link is established not through chanting aloud to himself but through internalized language. Mitchell has pointed the development neatly by moving from the "song-one"—" 'God is on a leaf' "—to the "twinkling of light" on each leaf of the spirea. Brian is grasping the different levels of reality and reaching for their connection in the very midst of "an inarticulate yearning" for he knows not what.

We know that Brian has the Bible and the Book of Knowledge close at hand, but there is little evidence that he spends much time reading. Of course, book learning is presumably more important to Brian than its actual appearance in the novel indicates. Brian seems more impressed by the language which resembles his own "song-one". As a language to learn, Uncle Sean's poetic curses and Saint Sammy's harangues are particularly fascinating. Brian is mesmerized by their uneducated (in the formal sense), oracular, and playful use of language.

As a language to stimulate and extend his own thinking, the pop philosophers of the town have a much greater place than the school.

Joe, the drayman, for example, provokes him with the query "'Wonder why a fella always has thoughts into his head?'"

> Brian had never thought of that; he'd never thought about thoughts before. Right now he wasn't thinking any thoughts; there wasn't any thinking going on in there. Yes, there was. He was thinking about not thinking; and he had just got done thinking about thinking about not thinking any thoughts, so he was thinking. Funny—boxes inside of boxes inside of boxes inside of boxes. (174)

Here Brian clearly moves beyond metaphor into the realm of purely abstract reasoning. It is a key development, preparing the way for the intellectual puzzling of the later sections of the novel. Brian's thinking about thinking contradicts Piaget's view that logical thought at this age is restricted to the concrete and perceivable. Uncle Sean's conventional expression of amazement, that the boys are "'growin' up like stinkweed'" (116), takes on a new meaning here. Physical growth is the least of it; what is truly startling is the rate of Brian's intellectual growth. He is very advanced; a psychologist might even say, considering that at age eight Brian is three or four years young for such abstract thinking, that his precocity is impossible. At least there is some corroboration here for those readers who find Brian's reflections strangely adult. And we sense the difficulty that Mitchell faced in achieving a satisfactory thematic resolution through a pre-adolescent boy. But I look at these observations as ways of understanding the character of Brian, not as keys to flaws in the novel. So surely does Mitchell create a convincing sequence of development, so gradually does the process seem to unfold within the novel, that Brian's growth is convincing in fictional terms, however accelerated it may seem empirically.

Part Two sees Brian through the first two years of his schooling; Part Three opens in late July 1935 when Brian is "almost ten" (185). He is "lost in reflection," wondering about the meaning of "dog days" and thinking, again, about thinking:

> Hell!
> As soon as he had thought it, he wished that he hadn't. Sometimes thoughts could not be helped, for they were live and unpredictable things with hidden motivation of their own. *Damn* and *Hell* were the livest of them all; they had a way of popping up full-blown and unbidden—not loud, but there in one's mind all the same. (187)

In many ways Brian is a very ordinary boy. But this interest in the process of thought reiterates how far apart he is from his peers. That the word *damn* in his mind is the livest of *thoughts* seems to emphasize

the irony that as Mitchell moves toward confirming the power of feeling he must make Brian capable of abstract thinking beyond his years.

Having tried to define spirit, or God, through the sacred song-one in Part One and the playland metaphor in Part Two, Brian now has the use of secular literature in Part Three. The boys are still playing, but now within the more limited confines of reciting the Rossetti poem which gives the novel its title. Presumably they have had to memorize the poem in school:

> "Who has seen the wind?" Fat chanted.
> "Neither you not I," returned Brian.
> "But when the trees bow down their heads—"
> "Nobody gives a damn," Art finished up. Fat laughed.(191)

In this exchange Brian, that most passionate asker of questions, is able to give the answer. It is worth remembering that Mitchell's title omits the question mark, so that, although it contains the echo of a cosmic question, it also stands as a description of someone—Brian—who *has* seen the wind. Brian understands, to use Jung's definition, that "in keeping with its original wind-nature, spirit is always an active, winged, swift-moving being as well as that which vivifies, stimulates, incites, fires and inspires".[25] Although poem and question fascinate the boys, Art must detour the recitation lest they show, even among themselves, that worst of boyhood transgressions, love of learning. "Fat laughed," Mitchell says abruptly, leaving us to assume that Brian did not. He, we have already seen, does give a damn.

In fact he gives "'Two million, five hundred thousand goddams'" (224) when he objects to the killing of the runt pig. Not only is this vigorous cursing Brian's most overt act of rebellion in the novel, not only is it an excellent demonstration of the rigidness of a young boy's emerging conscience ("'killin' a thing's no favor!'"), but it confirms his kinship with Uncle Sean. Separated from his parents, brother, and friends because of his father's hospitalization, Brian is discovering "country," the endearing weakness of the cook, Annie, and the hidden gentleness of the severe evangelist, Ab. Now, as he "surprised himself with his fluency" (224), Brian adopts the lyric energy of his Uncle's cursing. As with Sean's speech, this new-found fluency is a guarantee of Brian's independence, his determination to think for himself, his passion for the land, and his respect for other people and creatures.

Undoubtedly Saint Sammy, that other curious loner and most exuberant curser in the novel, plays some part in Brian's new-found fluency. In Saint Sammy Brian finds someone who can carry him back to his four-year-old literal interpretation of God. For that delightful amalgam of King-James-version sonorousness and prairie-sod-buster

slang is as significant a discovery for Brian as anything since the dew-drop on the spirea leaf:

> "To start with He give a flip to the flywhella thought, an' there was Heaven an' earth Him plumb in the middle. She had no shape ner nothin' on her". (197)

Shape is given to the thought, and creation occurs, through words, and Brian, although he resists, realizes that the fervor of Saint Sammy's words has brought him closer to understanding than ever before. Yet it is worth noting that Brian comes "alive . . . as never before" by overhearing a chant "in a monotone, with the singsonging stress of a child's Christmas recitation" (197), which is intimately related to his own playful "song-one". Brian's excitement is intellectual: he is "passionate for the thing that slipped through the grasp of his understanding" (199). But behind the steady progress of Brian's intellectual development, Mitchell traces a counter-current which affirms the playful ecstasy of the four-year-old's approach to God.

Part Four begins almost two years after the death of Brian's father. The time is the spring of 1937; the novel has spanned the bleakest years of depression and drought from 1929 to 1937, as it follows the development of a boy from playful egocentric to concerned and contemplative youth on the verge of adolescence. It is difficult to put completely from our minds that the Depression is about to end in the exuberant ugliness of a world war, and that Brian's peace is about to be shattered by the storms of adolescence.

Brian's attraction to the Young Ben seems to intensify: "It was a taciturn association, almost a communication by silences" (253), as is the communication Brian has with the prairie. But even this communication, particularly his vision at the end of the novel, is made possible by his final and most crucial attempt to work out his understanding verbally. In the midst of the heady discussion between Digby and Palmer on Berkeley, Brian thinks of Saint Sammy and the feeling:

> "You got a feeling?"
> "Huh"
> "You—do you get a funny feeling—like—well—you wanted to know something, only you don't know what you—Have you got a feeling?" . . .
> "It's like you are going to spill over," said Brian. "And you're all—"
> "No," said Mr. Palmer, "can't say I got that in there, kid. I got a hell of a lot, but—I guess that ain't there no—more". He said it, thought Brian, sadly. (292)

Imprecise as this definition is, it is Brian's most extended attempt to articulate the nature of his feeling. Feeling is not only a brimming of emotion and sensation but also, primarily, a hunger for knowledge, for ultimate knowledge. Faced with Brian's intellectualizing about feeling, with the impatient logic that goes beyond his years, Digby has to bring him back, in a sense, to his childhood, to accepting that everything doesn't necessarily have to "figure out". Understanding may come through feeling:

> "A person can do it by feeling?"
> "That's the way," said Digby.
> "Then, I'm on the right track."
> Brian said it with conviction. (294)

A short while later, just after his grandmother's death, Brian confides to Digby that he doesn't think he will get "the feeling" any more. Digby concludes that Brian has achieved "maturity in spite of the formlessness of childish features, wisdom without years. 'Intimations of Immortality', he thought. 'Perhaps' said Digby to Brian, 'You've grown up '" (297). My consideration of Brian's development suggests several possibilities in Digby's qualifying "perhaps". Certainly Brian is intellectually precocious and is able in the last chapters to struggle with such a grand question as the ultimate meaning of life at a surprisingly young age. Similarly, his "new and warmer relationship with his mother" and his "growing consideration for the other members of the family" (251) suggest a moral development, a conception of individual rights, usually associated with adolescence. In Part Four Mitchell points to his father's death as a major influence on Brian's rapid maturing. Another important, if less explicit, influence is social and cultural. Just as Ernest Buckler's rural Calvinist background made "strangely adult" children, so a stern, small-town, prairie Presbyterianism pressured its children to hurry and grow up. In one of its dimensions *Who Has Seen the Wind* is a comment on a society too eager to put away childish things.

The other side of Digby's "perhaps" is obvious: at the end of the novel Brian is still a boy. So clearly and carefully does Mitchell examine the distinct stages of Brian's growing up that we must be very aware of the *next* stage as well. This next stage, of course, is adolescence, a period of sexual awakening, of strong peer pressure, and often of frustration and alienation. I suppose it's this awareness of impending adolescence that causes some readers to find the novel, as I recall a student doing, "Disneyish". But Mitchell shows us many of the adult realities: the love triangle of Ruth Thompson, Peter Svarich and Digby, the racial bigotry which sends Wong to his suicide, the economic realities facing Sean when he tries to get a loan from Abercrombie, the

pettiness of school board politics, and the frequent social and religious hypocrisy. All these are things which have touched Brian scarcely at all. Their presence cannot be ignored; they put an ironic colouring on the novel, one which makes it more of, rather than less of, an adult novel. The same irony is there in the vision of prairie and cycles on the last two pages of the novel, an irony contained in such lyrically captivating phrases that it is often ignored. In its cycles the novel has moved from a sometimes bleak prairie June, to a snowy, grey prairie autumn. If we notice the "twilight" of the end of the novel, if we remember that the vision is of the light *and* dark, then we will not find the novel to be Disneyish but rather a more ironic view of the strength, and the implicit limitations, of the child's perspective.

Recalling Mark Twain's conclusion about conclusions in *Tom Sawyer* gives us some hint of what Mitchell must do:

> It being strictly a history of a *boy,* it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a *man.* When one writes a novel about grown people, he knows exactly where to stop—that is, with a marriage; but when he writes of juveniles, he must stop where he best can.[26]

For, as he tells us at the beginning, Mitchell's is most assuredly a story about a boy. And where he can best stop is where Brian is no longer quite a child but is still a long way from being a man, where he can think of becoming a "dirt doctor" close to the soil and to the cerebral world of science, where the wholeness of the child's vision is still intact, where birth and death, love and hunger, can still be combined in a vision of unity and integrity, where awesome mystery is a feeling sufficient unto itself. Whatever adolescence and adulthood may bring, Brian will find "those obstinate questionings / of sense and outward things . . . these first affections / These shadowy recollections, . . . Are yet a masterlight of all our seeing".[27] Digby's allusion to Wordsworth obliges us to see the final moment in the novel, as well as those many moments when Brian has the feeling, as intimations of immortality, as those moments "most frequent and compelling in unself-conscious childhood, moments when the soul, 'lost' to immediate selfish concern, catches a brief intimation of some ultimate pattern, a perdurable grandeur in the natural world or an elemental dignity in the human gesture".[28] But an awareness of the significance of such moments comes only, as it came to Wordsworth, in adulthood. Mitchell, ending his novel within the child's point of view, must give Brian adult ways of thinking in order to reveal the true value ot these moments—such as his singing the "song-one" or hearing the church bell or trying to see the wind—which give a glimpse of the ultimate pattern.

NOTES

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1 Ernest Buckler, *Ox Bells and Fireflies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968 repr. 1974), p. 74.
2 Buckler, *Ox Bells and Fireflies,* p. 3.
3 Eli Mandell, "The Study of Canadian Culture," *English Quarterly,* 4:3 (Fall 1971), p. 30.
4 Elizabeth Waterston, *Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature,* Methuen Canadian Literature Series (Toronto: Methuen, 1973), p. 147.
5 Ronald Sutherland, *Second Image: Comparative Studies in Québec / Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), p. 106.
6 Throughout I use the term *child* in the particular sense of the pre-adolescent.
7 Peter Coveney provides a convenient and illuminating survey in *The Image of Childhood,* Revised Edition (Harmondsworth: Pengiun Books, 1957 repr. 1967).
8 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Viking Compass Edition (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 7.
9 Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Buried Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 30.
10 Alfred Kazin, "A Procession of Children," *The American Scholar,* 33 (Spring 1964), p. 177.
11 Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child,* Second Edition (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1926 repr. 1932), p. 9.
12 Muriel Beadle, *A Child's Mind,* Anchor Books Edition (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970 repr. 1971), p. 161. Beadle is speaking here of the work of Eric H. Lenneberg.
13 Joseph Church, *Language and the Discovery of Reality* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 25.
14 W. O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947 repr. 1966), p. 4. Subsequent quotations from the novel are identified by page number in parentheses.
15 Church, *Language and Reality,* pp. 96, 98.
16 Piaget, *Language and Thought of the Child,* p. 38.
17 Piaget, *Language and Thought of the Child,* p. 14.
18 J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950 repr. 1955), p. 119.
19 The psychologists' term for this mental process is transductive reasoning.
20 The years from seven to eleven or twelve are known as the period of "concrete operations". For a useful condensation of Piaget's theory of the stages in the development of thought see Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1947 repr. 1950), P. 123. Of course, almost all introductory psychology texts will also provide an outline of Piaget's scheme. See, for example, Guy R. Lefrancois, *Of Children: An Introduction to Child Development* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1973), p. 156.
21 For an outline of Kohlberg's levels and types of morality see Lefrancois, *Of Children,* p. 301.
22 Piaget, *Language and Thought of the Child,* p. 166.
23 I am using the terms "metaphor" and "simile" interchangeably, leaving aside for the moment the idea that the simile seems more congenial to the child since it makes the link more visible, more grammatically available.
24 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* p. 17.
25 C. G. Jung, "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales," *Psyche and Symbol,* ed. Violet S. de Laszlo, Anchor Books Edition (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958). p. 65.
26 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* Harper and Brothers Edition (New York: P. F. Collier, n.d.), p. 292.
27 William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," 11.142-153.
28 Jerome Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 4.

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