

TALL TALES IN THE FICTION OF W. O. MITCHELL

O. S. Mitchell

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE W. O. Mitchell has been influenced in various ways by the tall tale tradition of the west. As a child in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, he recalls listening to the tall tales of his Grandmother and his Uncle Jim.¹ During the Depression he worked as a farm hand and door-to-door salesman of magazines, insurance, and encyclopedias. He was fascinated by the tall talk and tales of the working men and drifters. By the 1940's he was consciously collecting material for his writing from the people of the small western communities he lived in, particularly Castor and New Dayton (where he was principal of the schools) and High River. At brandings and rodeos, on fishing and hunting trips, in the towns' beer parlours and shops, and on his daily visits to the post office he worked what he calls his "trap line." The High River post office was particularly productive for it was a community gathering place that drew people from all the social and professional strata of the town. He spent a few hours of most week days in the room lined with little hinged aluminum boxes or outside on the heavy fossil-studded limestone steps discussing the current local topics, listening to gossip, and trading stories. Here he caught much of his raw material (dialect, "salty" expressions, character traits, and incidents) for his weekly radio episodes of *Jake and the Kid*.²

The tall tales and talk of the Saskatchewan prairies and Alberta foothills became an important element in his writing, and, in the mid-1960's, he began to develop what has become his second career, professional tall-tale teller. In a way he was reviving not only the oral tradition of tall tales but also a family tradition. His grandfather and father were both known in their days as elocutionists.³ His mother hoped he would carry on this tradition and, when he was 13, she sent him to an elocution school where he first began to learn the tricks of this trade.⁴ As well as reading from his Jake stories and novels he developed what might be called "reminiscential tall-tales" — stories growing in part out of childhood memories but embellished and exaggerated into humorous tales (such as "Melvin Arbuckle: Great Canadian" in which four boys, attempting to build an underground fort, blow up half of Melvin's backyard trapping his grandfather in the

backhouse).⁵ In the past two decades he has given hundreds of readings, or, more accurately, performances, across Canada and more recently in Europe and the United States. His *Jake and the Kid* radio series gave him a reputation as western Canada's "local humorist" (a label which he loathes because he feels it dismisses the universal and serious intent of his work) and this reputation has been bolstered by his performances on radio, television, and the reading circuit (universities, schools, clubs, professional association meetings, and conferences). As a performer he has become very much like one of the first characters he created, Jake Trumper the "creative liar."

The tall-tale influence on Mitchell, then, has gone full circle. This oral tradition fascinated him as a child and became a main ingredient in his written work and now many of these literary tales are drawn on for his performances. But his tales and performances are not simply "local humour"; underlying his use of the tall tale in *Jake and the Kid*, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and *The Vanishing Point* are some very serious intentions.

THE JAKE AND THE KID stories first started to appear in the early 1940's in *Maclean's*. His second published work, "You Gotta Teeter"⁶ was followed by about fifteen more stories (in *Maclean's* and the old *New York Liberty*) which formed the genesis of the CBC radio series, *Jake and the Kid*. This series began in June 1950 and ran for six years. In all, Mitchell wrote some 200 Jake scripts. In 1961 Macmillan of Canada published *Jake and the Kid*, a collection of 13 of the stories published by *Maclean's* and *Liberty*.

The important role played by the tall tale tradition in the Jake stories is indicated by Peter Francis's (the first CBC producer of the Jake series) repeated requests for tall tales: "I hope there will be always a tall story in each script" and, "Don't forget to give Jake frequent tall stories — we always get good comments on them."⁷ Some of the tall tale characteristics which surface in these stories include a first-person narrative frame (the Kid narrates the tales of Jake's heroic exploits), use of the vernacular and dialect juxtaposed with civilized or sophisticated language (particularly Jake's to that of female characters and various urban and eastern greenhorns), language shot through with earthy images and curse, mixture of realistic detail and surrealistic exaggeration, lying battles and boasting contests (particularly between Jake and Old Man Gatenby), and the tall tale hero-teller, a giant character who claims to have accomplished extraordinary feats. Jake, for example, invented hay wire, invented the buffalo jumping pound thereby saving Chief Weasel Tail's band from starvation, "made Chief Poundmaker give in at Cut Knife Crick,"⁸ was a close friend of Wilf (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) and "drunk Catawba wine with Sir John A," "made Looie

Riel say uncle three times — once in English, once in Cree and the third time in French,” and, as a rainmaker (“Sheet-lightnin’ Trumper”), made it rain so hard out Manyberries way in o’ four that it ruined the crops and he had to quit the rainmaking business.

Many of the Jake stories are “literary” tall tales and aspire to be much more than a collection of simple tall tales based on an oral tradition. Through these stories Mitchell explores and humorously satirizes a small prairie community, a community which becomes a microcosm of the Canadian and world communities. These stories also dramatize and explore the process of the Kid’s moral and imaginative education, a process in which Jake and his tall tales play key roles. One of Jake’s rivals in this process is Miss Henchbaw, the Kid’s school teacher. The Kid is caught between the reason-fact-history approach of Miss Henchbaw and Jake’s imagination-lie-tall-tale approach. Miss Henchbaw sees Jake as a historical liar and tells the kid that the history books do not mention Jake and that Riel and Poundmaker “were way before Jake’s time.” The Kid dismisses this — “All Miss Henchbaw knows came out of a book. Jake, he really knows.” When Jake describes how he invented the jumping pound the Kid says, “Jake . . . that’s real hist’ry. That’s hist’ry!” This conflict between fact and fiction culminates in the last story of *Jake and the Kid*, “The Golden Jubilee Citizen.” The Kid has written an essay nominating Jake for the Golden Jubilee Citizen of Crocus. In it he details Jake’s tall tale exploits arguing that Jake is “the man that built the country.” Miss Henchbaw does not agree with the Kid’s nomination, arguing, “we cannot stand for impertinence with our province’s history.” She returns the Kid’s essay and tells him that truth “must not be adulterated,” that his essay “is not truth. . . . Louis Riel did not have dangling from his vest chain a rabbit’s-foot watch fob! . . . Nor did General Middleton wear a bobcat fur vest throughout his Eighteen Eighty-five campaign.”

However, an edited version of the Kid’s essay, containing added factual material about the role of the hired men in Saskatchewan’s history, appears in the town newspaper. The Kid’s nomination has been successful and tribute is paid to Jake Trumper “without whom there could have been no fifty years of history, no Province of Saskatchewan.” Through Jake’s exaggerated tall tales the Kid discovered a truth, the giant role of the hired man in Saskatchewan history. And, ironically, Miss Henchbaw has also been educated through these tales, for the Kid’s essay, though it at first annoyed her puritan and rational approach, opened her eyes to Jake’s and the hired man’s true stature. It is Miss Henchbaw who rewrote the Kid’s essay, a *fact* which enlightens both Jake and the Kid. Thus the pedagogical approaches of the Kid’s two teachers are paradoxically resolved. And this paradoxical relationship between fact and fiction is fundamental to Mitchell’s aesthetic strategy: the writer’s fictive illusion is made up of bits of true autobiographical and factual detail but the whole thing is a lie, a lie which invites

aislin's canadians

ERNIE CARLISLE 'CANADIAN NATIONALIST'

NOT THAT HE HAD MUCH CHOICE...
AFTER THE BOYS IN OTTAWA TOOK
OVER ERNIE'S GAS STATION, SOME
CLEVER TYPE PUT HIS NAME ON A
MAILING LIST. BETWEEN
LUBE-JOBS, HE FOUND
HIMSELF GLANCING AT
THE COLLECTED POEMS
OF KNOWLTON NASH!!
THEN HE STARTED TO
TUNE HIS OLD 'PHILCO'
TO C.R.T.C. RECOMMENDED
PROGRAMMING, NEVER
MIND DROPPING THE
OCCASIONAL ROBERTSON
DAVIES QUOTATION!

BUT MOST FOLKS AROUND
'GLADYARD, N.B.' AREN'T TOO
WORRIED. THEY FIGURE, COME
SEPTEMBER, ERNIE WILL BE BACK
AT HIS PERCH IN 'THE SWORD +
SWALLOW' TAVERN, SUCKING BACK
THE IMPORTED 'CARLSBERG', LAYING
HIS USUAL ODDS ON THE N.F.L.
AFTER ALL, HE NEVER DID CAN-
CEL HIS 'PENTHOUSE' SUBSCRIPTION.



the creative-partner reader to explore various fundamental and universal truths of human existence.⁹

"The Liar Hunter" is a self-reflexive or meta-tall tale. That is, while it is an entertaining story that uses tall-tales, it simultaneously explores the nature, strategy, and rationale of tall story telling. Mr. Godfrey is an anthropologist from the East visiting Crocus to court Old Man Gatenby's daughter, Molly, and to do some field research. He is a folklorist and explains to Jake and the Kid that he is searching for the art of the common people, their tall tales and ballads which "express the life of the Old West." But Jake and Old Man Gatenby misunderstand Godfrey when he bluntly tells them, "I'm looking for liars" and various conflicts arise. Jake and Gate do not appreciate being called liars and each time they begin a tall tale Mr. Godfrey takes out his note pad and pencil effectively smothering their tales. Molly strongly disapproves of her father's tales, which she considers lies, and tension develops in her relationship with Godfrey. He is trying to get Gate to "lie" and she is trying to break him of this embarrassing (to her) habit. The story has two tall-tale climaxes. In the first Jake finally "cuts loose," in spite of Godfrey's pad and pencil and Molly's disapproval, with a tall tale:

That was the night Mr. Godfrey said something about how hot it had been down East that summer.

"Hot here too," Jake said. For a minute he worked on his teeth with a sharpened matchstick and then he said. "Take thuh second week in July — tar paper on thuh roof of thuh chicken house — she all bubbled up."

"Did it really?" said Mr. Godfrey. On the chair beside him was Molly, sitting straight up like she expected something to happen, and she wanted to be ready to take off quick. Old Gate he'd hardly said anything since they came, just stared at the gas lamp in the centre of the kitchen table.

"Bubbled right up," Jake said. "Noon of thuh second day, wispy sorta smoke was coming off of her."

"That a fact?"

Jake gave a little start like he'd stuck himself with the point of the matchstick. "Why — certain'y," he said.

At this point Godfrey makes a move for his notepad to start taking notes. Molly reproves him but Jake continues:

"— a hawin' an' a cawin' jist as I come out," Jake was saying. "That there tar paper on thuh hen house roof was so sticky thuh dumb fool crow had got himself stuck up in it. Real comical he was — liftin' one foot an' then thuh other. Course she was kinda tragical too — that there tar was hot. Musta bin kinda painful. . . . Inside of 10 minnits," Jake went on, "a whole flocka crows was circlin' over, the way they will when they hear another in trouble, an' buhfore I knew it thuh whole roof was stuck up with crows somethin' fearful."

"Herbert!" Mr. Godfrey had his notebook out and was opening it on his knee. He didn't pay any attention to Molly and the funny look she had on her face.

"Aflutterin' an' ahollerin', with their wings aslapping — our hen house sort of liftin' an' then settlin' back agin. I headed fer thuh woodpile."

"What for, Jake?" I said.

"Axe — wasn't gonna let that hen house go without a fight. I chopped thuh roof loose from thuh uprights an' away she went. Cleared thuh peak of thuh barn an' headed south."

Molly was standing up and she was looking down at Mr. Godfrey writing away like anything. Her face looked kind of white to me. "It's about time we were going," she said real soft.

"But we've just come!" Mr. Godfrey said. "This is the sort of thing I —"

"Folklore!" Molly said it like a cuss word.

Molly creates a scene refusing to listen to Godfrey and accusing Jake of being "the biggest . . . two handed . . . clod busting liar" she has ever known. Apparently she has not completely erased what she considers to be her father's uncivilized influence and in unguarded moments of anger she resorts to his earthy language! Like Miss Henschbaw she sees these tales as "senseless and — immoral" and is ashamed of her father's story-telling habit. She and Miss Henschbaw, in their approach to truth, are descendants of Plato and feel that artist-liars should be outlawed from the republic of Crocus, Saskatchewan!

But Molly, like Miss Henschbaw, comes to learn the value of these lies. Godfrey, stoically accepting his failure in the hunt of love and folklore, is about to leave Crocus but has one last opportunity to make his case to Molly. His statement justifying what he does and the role of the story teller is also a thinly disguised statement of Mitchell's conception of the role of the artist. He uses artifice as a tool to explore, make sense of, and cope with the human dilemma of being alive:

"What I do is important. Important as history is important. . . . Not the history of great and famous men . . . but of the lumberjacks and section men, hotelkeepers and teachers and ranchers and farmers. The people that really count. . . . Their history isn't to be found in records or books. . . . Their history is in the stories they tell — their tall tales. . . . And I can tell you why they lie. . . . This is a hard country, I don't have to tell you that. There are — drouth, blizzards, loneliness. A man's a pretty small thing out on all this prairie. He is at the mercy of the elements. . . . These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snow, the worst dust storms, the biggest hail-stones. . . . Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drouth are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they are made ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he's won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn't lying really; it's a defense, the defense of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal. . . . People in this country aren't squealers."

Godfrey and Molly are reconciled, but their courtship has one more major obstacle — Gate. Molly's father now intensely dislikes Godfrey. He believes Godfrey looks on him as a liar (in a pejorative sense), and he has had to suppress an

enormous amount of tall-tale telling energy resulting in a case of badly frayed nerves (“My nerves — plum onstrung — hangin’ lose as thuh fringe on a Indian jacket.”). But Jake resolves this conflict by teaching Godfrey how to tell a tall tale (just as he taught the Kid how to orate in “You Gotta Teeter”). Jake arranges to have Gate and Molly over for a visit and helps Godfrey begin his tall tale as follows:

“This district had them [grasshoppers] terribly, I understand,” Mr. Godfrey said. “Of course they weren’t so big, were they?”

“Big!” Jake said. “One of ’em lit on thuh airport at Broomhead an’ a RAF fella run 100 gallons a gas intuh him afore he reelized —”

“Albin!” Mr. Godfrey said — “Albin Hobbemeyer, they called that grasshopper. I have him in my files. Three years ago he —”

“Is that a fact?” Jake said.

Mr. Godfrey then continues with an elaborate tall tale about Albin, a giant grasshopper, who laid an egg “about the size of the average chicken house.” Mr. Godfrey, the liar hunter, is transformed into a master liar and his tall tale about Albin wins over Gate, paving the way for his successful courtship of Molly. According to Jake, Albin also fell in love. In the last scene of “The Liar Hunter” the Kid asks Jake what became of Albin:

“There,” Jake said, “is thuh tragical part of it. Albin, he fell in love.”

“Fell in love!”

“Yep. He was settin’ in this here Dooley’s back 40 one day an’ he looked up an’ seen one a them there four-engine bombers they’re flyin’ tuh Roosia. She was love at first sight. He took off, an’ thuh last folks seen was two little black specks disappearin’ tuh thuh North. Han’ me that there manure fork will yuh, Kid?”¹⁰

IN “The Liar Hunter,” THEN, MITCHELL explores the proposition that to exaggerate imaginatively, but knowingly (to shovel manure), may be an effective strategy for survival in hostile environments. In an interview with Donald Cameron, Mitchell theorizes on the relationship between tall-tale exaggeration and danger:

One time I had a clever insight — which isn’t the true sort of insight — but particularly thinking of the number of tall stories that eventually clustered around the winter of ’06 and ’07, it occurred to me that the reason that the humour — the *life* humour, not the accepted literary humour, but the humour coinage that you’d run across in the beer parlour or the blacksmith shop, or in front of the post office, or sitting on a corral fence, the impromptu humour — it suddenly occurred to me how much of this exaggerated tall-tale telling involved dangerous things, like an extremely bad winter, or pests, grasshoppers, sawfly, or drought, how dry it got.¹¹

Other critics of the tall-tale tradition have also noted this. Constance Rourke, for example, says, "It was the wilderness with its impenetrable depths, the wild storms of the West, the great rivers, the strange new wonders of every side, that produced the content of the stories — those natural elements that had brought terror and suffering to earlier pioneers and still belonged to the farther, unknown West, but now were apprehended with an insurgent comic rebound and a consciousness of power."¹² But perhaps Mitchell's and his characters' impulse to exaggerate imaginatively, to indulge in tall tales, finds its genesis not only in the specific dangers of a hostile environment but also in what Henry Kreisel calls the "sheer physical fact of the prairie," the impact of a vast open space on the human consciousness.¹³ He suggests that the prairie environment produces two states of mind:

I set the image of the giant in the landscape over against the more familiar one of man pitted against a vast and frequently hostile natural environment that tends to dwarf him, at the mercy of what Grove calls, in *Settlers of the Marsh*, "a dumb shifting of the forces." Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, form the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie.¹⁴

Wallace Stegner, in *Wolf Willow*, beautifully states this paradoxical impact of prairie on man:

Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all the senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.

It is a country to breed mystic people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. At noon the total sun pours down on your single head; at sunrise or sunset you throw a shadow a hundred yards long. It was not prairie dwellers who invented the indifferent universe or impotent man. Puny you may feel there, and vulnerable, but not unnoticed. This is a land to mark the sparrow's fall.¹⁵

I would suggest, then, that the paradoxical impact of the physical fact of the prairie — man as dwarf and man as giant — naturally manifests itself in the impulse to exaggerate, in tall tales and tall talk.¹⁶ Prairie man is a solipsistically defiant child who tells big lies about himself. Man compensates for his littleness in a vast and hostile space through creative exaggeration, but that response is partially suggested by the fact that you *can* throw a giant shadow, that you *are*

the only vertical thing for hundreds of miles, that as you move your horizon moves and you are the *centre* of a vast circle.

In *Who Has Seen the Wind* the “sheer physical fact” of prairie is an almost overpowering presence for some of the characters, and we don’t have to look far for the defence of exaggeration strategy. In chapter two Uncle Sean, a farmer who has been struggling for years with drought, rust, hail, and grasshoppers, tells young Brian the story of the little man on the prairie:

He looked down at the boy upon his knee. “Did you see the little man while you were on the prairie?”

“No,” said Brian. “I saw a boy but he wasn’t little. Tell about the little man, Uncle Sean.”

“Saw him just the day before yesterday,” said the uncle, laying his pipe upon the table. “Monday it was. He popped out of a gopher hole in my south forty. I’d just climbed down from the rod weeder to untangle her, and there he was, standing in front of a Roosian thistle — wearin’ two-inch overhaws and with a rabbit’s-foot fob to his watch. ‘God bless this fine summer fallow and us two that’s on it,’ he sez, ‘an’ good mornin’.”

“Well, I don’t make a hobby out of talkin’ to little men standin’ about as high as a sprig of pigweed and picking their teeth with the fine hair off a crocus near by. I stood there without sayin’ a word for a minute, then I sez, ‘Good mornin’. You’re a stranger around here, are you?”

“‘Oh, no,’ he sez. ‘I come to the districk in ’eighty-five — after they hung Looie Riel for startin’ that rebellion.’

“‘Not much here then,’ I sez.

“‘No town at all,’ he sez. ‘Just the river an’ little green frogs hoppin’ up an’ down on the banks. The town came later.’

“‘By the way it jumps on its *r*’s, yer voice sounds familiar,’ I sez. . . . ‘You wouldn’t be a County Down little man, would you?’

“‘I am,’ he sez.

“Well, we talked an’ it turned out he come over third-class — spent some time in Ontario, then come West to the end of the steel — the C.P.R. wasn’t finished in them days. From there he come on a three-gaited sorrel grasshopper that went lame in the Moose Mountain country. He turned him loose an’ come the rest of the way on foot.

“‘What the hell made you pick this country?’ I asked him.

“‘I liked the look of her in them days,’ he sez.

“‘Look at her now,’ I sez.

“‘You look,’ sez he, ‘she gives me the heartburn!’ An’ with that he — ”¹⁷

When Brian’s father interrupts this tall tale Sean switches into one of his many evangelistic denunciations against the farmers, “stubble-jumpin’ sonsa hunyacks,” who only care about “goddam little red tractors an’ . . . goddam yella-wheeled cars an’ trips to Washington an’ Oregon an’ California.” They do not know or care about the land and their cropping methods are exacerbating the dire effects of the drought:

“ ‘jist look at her — creased an’ pocked an’ cracked — no grass to hold the top-soil down! That’s what happens when you crop her out an’ away fer the winter — then back agin in the spring to scratch at her agin — on agin off agin an’ away agin! You wanta travel an’ so does she! I seen her travelin’ on a first-class ticket by air — she’s bin to the Coast with you — a thousand million sections of her — black clouds a dust blacker than all yer greedy souls — lifted up an’ travelin’ — travelin’ clear to Jesus!’ ”

Uncle Sean’s tall tales and language of curse are ways of coping with adverse and frustrating conditions, are a defiant assertion of his significance and power and enable him to continue to attempt to survive and control his environment. Uncle Sean is clearly one of those prairie existentialists admired by Mr. Godfrey — he is not a “speaker.”

Brian’s grandmother and mother try to protect Brian from Sean’s beer parlour manner and language. But the relationship between Brian and his Uncle is similar to that between the Kid and Jake. Sean plays a key role in the education of Brian’s moral and imaginative identity (which later culminates in Brian’s desire to become a “dirt doctor” and continue Sean’s crusade to turn the desert prairie into a garden). His growth is in part fertilized by Sean’s tall tales, “big” language and evangelistic crusade to farm “with . . . hearts an’ brains.” At the end of Sean’s diatribe against the farmers, Brian’s grandmother orders Brian out of the room but he moves slowly, “half-dazed and hypnotized by the spell of his uncle’s words.”¹⁸

In the first few chapters young Brian wrestles with the abstract concept of God. He visits the Church to talk with God but receives only unsatisfactory answers from the minister’s wife. He later visits the minister, Mr. Hislop, who tries to satisfy Brian’s curiosity about God. In chapter four, obviously influenced by his uncle’s tale about the little man on the prairie, he fabricates a tall tale about God in his first attempt to come to grips with the elusive sense of a divine force. This sequence depicting Brian’s creation of God who is *his* friend and who will give him power over those who thwart his desires, may be read as a recapitulation in miniature of the process by which man creates his religions:¹⁹

The man standing in the center of the light colors, decided Brian, was about as high as a person’s knee, his own knee. He wore a hat like Uncle Sean’s, uncreased just as it had come from the store shelf — a blue gumdrop hat. He wore white rubber boots, and He held a very small, very white lamb in His arms. Brian said: —

“I am pleased to meet you.”

The man wiggled the black string that hung down from his glasses. “You are welcome,” He said. “I am God. I am Mr. R.W. God, B.V.D. You call me R.W.”

“I knew you were. What did you leave heaven for?”

“I am going to get after Artie Sherry for you,” God said. “And I will get after your grandmother too.”

Brian's imaginative creation of God (a conglomeration of his immediate experience of other people in his world — God belches like his grandmother, rides a vacuum cleaner like his mother's and recites like his father) is an attempt to understand the unknown and to control a confusing world that continually outrages his naturally solipsistic outlook. As a four-year-old child he instinctively assumes that he is at the centre of the world and in control of it. When this instinctive assumption is not borne out by the facts of existence, he resorts to a tall tale. Through his tall tale of a little man (smaller than himself) who is a giant God with omnipotent powers, this little boy creates a world in which he is in complete control. Through imaginative exaggeration of realistic details Brian begins to establish his identity and power as a limited human in a world that, he progressively learns, is in fact the giant man killer. But this little "Jack" is already developing the strategy of imaginative exaggeration to begin coping with those giants.

The Ben fabricates a tall tale about his son for similar reasons. He, like every one else in the community, cannot understand his son, the Young Ben. As Digby notes, the Young Ben and Brian are mature beyond their years.²⁰ The Young Ben is the converse of Sean's little man on the prairie — he is a *big* boy who, Brian believes, *owns* the prairie.²¹ The Ben tells how his son was "borned growed-up":

"Thuh Ol' Lady she come tuh me . . . an' she sez, 'Ben,' she sez, 'yuh better go git Doc. I ain't feelin' none too good. The pains is comin' on real frequent now.' So I go out to ketch Dolly, an' her not havin' thuh harness ontuh her sence thuh fall buhfore, I chase her clear down thuh other enda thuh goddam pasture witha panna goddam oats behin' my goddam back. After 'bout a hour I come back tuh thuh house fer tuh git my goddam hat. There is thuh Ol' Lady a-settin' ona goddam applebox a-peelin' some goddam puhtatuhs intuh thuh goddam slop-pail. 'Where's my goddam hat?' I sez. 'Yuh don't need her,' she sez. 'The kid's already bin borned.' 'Whut is it?' I sez, an' she sez, 'A boy — han me that there pot offa thuh table.' I asked where was he at. 'After he finished separatin' thuh cream,' she sez, 'he went out fer tuh chop me some kendlin' fer thuh stove.' Thuh goddam kid was borned growed-up."

Apart from the humour, Mitchell uses this tale to accomplish two things. First, it echoes the theme of the wise or mature child who is intuitively in touch with the Divine. Second, it again demonstrates man's instinctive use of the defence of exaggeration when faced with the mysterious or inexplicable.

One of the significant teachers in Brian's education is his grandmother and again the tall tale figures prominently in their relationship. Although Brian initially sees his grandmother as a bossy ogre figure who thwarts his desires, by the time he is eleven they have become very close. In the last few weeks of her life she realizes she is dying and is almost overcome with a sense of the futility of life:

She wondered why she had been. A girl, a woman, and now an old woman. She did not find it frightening; just senseless. She sneezed twice. She got up from her rocker. She went to bed.

She'd make the boy his hockey stockings.

Brian frequently visits her and as she knits the stockings she tells him reminiscing tall tales. She tells Brian how her husband, Grandfather John, stared down a bobcat, how the bobcat stole a tin of John's chewing tobacco, and how he had trailed it "by following the tobacco juice trail the cat had spit upon the snow." She tells Brian about the coyote that Little Johnny Whiskeyjack trained to "howl tenor" and how Telesphor Toutant had his eye put out by a bear cub and for the rest of his life "used a purple Saskatoon berry for a glass eye." Not only is Brian's grandmother passing on an oral family tradition to her grandson here, she is also using the defence of exaggeration to confront defiantly but with dignity her imminent death. And she dies knitting, asserting her significance through action in spite of the limit of mortality. Like Daddy Sherry in *The Kite*, she continues to hold vigorously onto the "thread" of life, never giving up and refusing "to settle for less."²²

The knitting image is connected to both Hislop's and Sean's attempts to find meaning, to *untangle* the basic Gordian-knot questions of existence. Sean tells Brian that he met the little man on the prairie when he climbed down to untangle the rod weeder. And Hislop, following his attempts to explain the nature of God to the four-year-old Brian, supposes, "Something had been proved" and bends "down to extricate a piece of twine that had wound itself up in one of the mower wheels." Brian's Grandmother is also trying to untangle Gordian knots, but she is knitting together, creating a kind of immortality through generations (the reminiscing tall tales she tells Brian), and asserting to the end her own existential identity through whatever action she is capable of. The human solidarity she creates through stories and action are her answers to mortality and that overpowering sense of meaninglessness which inevitably confronts us.²³

For Uncle Sean, Brian, the Ben, and Brian's grandmother the tall tale becomes a strategy to cope with and survive the unknown and the physical facts of a hostile environment and mortality. Through tall tales and the examples of his uncle and grandmother Brian learns how to be. We learn from his mother that Brian plans to go to university to become a "dirt doctor" so that he can help heal the drought-ridden land. Lying, imaginative exaggeration, is essentially an existential act of defiance against limits and in Brian's case this strategy leads to an active and creative life in spite of its limits. Man is simultaneously a dwarf and a giant — the physical facts of existence dwarf him but through creative imagination and action he gives himself giant proportions which in turn enable him to live an effective life.

IN AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL called "Roses Are Difficult Here," Mitchell creates a character who is a sociologist doing a study of a small Alberta town. He is quite clearly critical of this Eastern academic with her simplistic and reductive impressions and judgements about the ranchers, farmers, and townspeople. The following passage is part of her study in which she attacks the tall-tale humour of these people:

[they] preserve the traditional attitude towards outlanders who may be more sophisticated than they, refraining from the direct question. "I guess," crops up frequently in conversation; they "Are afraid that"; they fall back on the shrug, the wry grimace, the shake or nod of a head, which cannot be entered into the spoken record against them later. Great store is set by the humorous retort which is an easy avoidance of a responsible answer.

There is a crudity and coarseness to the quality of the humour — not wit at all in the higher sense — exaggeration rather, the tall tale, the ludicrous lie.²⁴

This eastern sociologist sees the tall tale and the humour of exaggeration as simply evasive. And she is half right. The defence of exaggeration is a double-edged tool and may become a debilitating escape from the realities of man's external and internal landscapes rather than a means to effective action and true insight into the self and human relations. In "The Liar Hunter" Godfrey says that if a man can laugh at terrible things by exaggerating them in tall-tale lies, "he's won half the battle." But this is only *half* the battle and the lie can only help man prepare himself to confront the various giants that limit his existence. Sometimes man is overwhelmed by the harsh realities of life and he retreats into a fantasy-lie evading truly creative or useful action. Mitchell explores the destructive potential of the defence of exaggeration in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Back to Beulah*, and *The Vanishing Point*.

Saint Sammy in *Who Has Seen the Wind* is a prairie derelict, a farmer who was so frequently rusted, grasshoppered, saw-flyed and droughted out that he became "crazy as a cut calf." He becomes a prairie hermit living in a piano box, collecting matchboxes and underwear labels and looking after a wild herd of Clyde horses for the Lord. He is "Jehovah's Hired Man" and is living in an Old Testament fantasy in recoil from his harsh experiences as a farmer. Uncle Sean's description of him as a "cut [castrated] calf" is apt; he has been emasculated in that he is incapable of effectively confronting prairie farm life. Saint Sammy has regressed and is an adult version of Brian playing with R. W. God and, just as Brian asked his imaginary playmate God to punish Arty, Saint Sammy calls on his Old Testament God to punish Bent Candy. Although in this case the tall tale fantasy comes true (a storm ruins Bent Candy's crops and levels his new barn) and the reader is pulling for Saint Sammy, the true prairie prophet, the *real*

hired man of the Lord, is Uncle Sean. It is Uncle Sean's imaginative but practical schemes of "farming with hearts an' brains" that will eventually be fulfilled. His ideas to irrigate, to mix farm and cover crop will actually bear fruit and turn the desert prairie into a garden.

In his play *Back to Beulah*²⁵ Mitchell explores how the use of imaginative fabrications to explain and to cope with the various enigmas and limitations of existence can backfire. Betty, Harriet, and Agnes are three psychiatric patients who have been released from the Beulah Mental Institute and are living in a "half-way-house." They are still under the care of Dr. Margaret Anders who checks up on them regularly. Dr. Anders' theory is that some patients reach a point where they must be removed from the safe cocoon world of Beulah and placed in an environment where they can begin to learn to cope with the exigencies of everyday life. By the end of the play it is clear that Harriet and Betty are ready to live again in the real world but Agnes will have to go back to Beulah. Agnes has both nymphomaniac and kleptomaniac tendencies. Among other things she steals a small baby doll and a crib and the three women make a Christmas creche. The baby doll becomes the centre of an elaborate fantasy for the three women, particularly for Agnes. We learn that when Agnes was a teen-ager she had a child who was put up for adoption and that while under anaesthetic during the birth the doctor had sterilized her. Her nymphomania and kleptomania are thus particularly resonant. For Agnes the line between fantasy and reality is finally erased: the doll *is* real. Harriet and Betty, on the other hand, simply play along with Agnes's fantasy. Harriet in particular knows what is real and what is not real. In the end Agnes's fantasy about the baby becomes a destructive trap for her because she attempts to live the lie as a substitute for actuality. When Harriet destroys the doll (she smashes it and throws it into the furnace), Agnes falls apart and is reduced to an inarticulate, wailing infant.²⁶

In *The Vanishing Point* Carlyle Sinclair, like Saint Sammy in *Wind* and Agnes in *Beulah*, is in retreat from the harsh realities of existence and in order to cope he frequently resorts to ludicrous tall-tale fantasies and childhood memory trips. Early in the novel he muses on this habit:

How did he justify — explain anyway — his long self-indulgence in fantasy? . . . The habit had grown and strengthened through later years when he had shared manic moments of silliness with Mate. . . . Perhaps that was why he fantasized — at first it had been some sort of day-dreaming escape for him whenever pressure or abrasion had become too much for him. Escape from outer lunacy. But he always played fair when he took these inner trips. They were not comforting ones really. The journeys always began in actuality, with the itinerary already set out for him, the destination determined ahead of time. He must be some sort of artist, a very private one performing only for another part of himself, that stepped back and away to share the illusion and to applaud. And laugh — oh yes, that was it!

Always to laugh! Why not? Life made so many comic promises that the destination simply had to be funny.²⁷

Carlyle has been teaching on the Paradise Valley Indian reserve for almost nine years. In part he has been hibernating from the terrible emotional and psychological experience of losing his wife and child. His child was still-born and following its birth his wife went into severe depression and wasted away in a mental institute. He has also been damaged by a puritan and materialistic culture (represented in particular by Aunt Pearl, Old Kacky, and Fyfe) which programmes its young to distrust the spontaneous and irrational whims of the emotions and imagination. So, he has been living on a reserve in more ways than one. He has been holding himself "in reserve" and has avoided forming any deep or solid emotional attachments. He blinds himself to his real feelings for Victoria. He has taught her since she was a child, and tries to keep their relationship that of parent to child and teacher to student when in fact it has been developing into something else (just as the paternalistic attitude of the whites towards the Indians should have developed into something else). When the realities of the outside world (mainly identified with the city and Victoria's disappearance) begin to infringe on Carlyle's Peter Pan existence, he resorts to tall-tale fantasies.

Carlyle's fantasy and memory trips are a necessary strategy in his coming to wholeness, in his confronting himself and his world and seeing these as they really are. But in the first part of the novel it is clear that these fantasies could become destructively evasive. Carlyle is himself aware that these fantasies could form an imprisoning and destructive cocoon-womb. On one level his still-born child (caused by a calcified placenta),²⁸ and his wife's mental breakdown, are images of what could be Carlyle's destination. But the next few weeks in Carlyle's life prove to be the culmination of a spiritual and emotional rebirth from nine years of hibernation, from nine years of living his "life . . . carefully [in] low key." The novel opens with Carlyle awakening to the sound of drumming ruffed grouse on an early spring morning. With the exhilarating awareness that "the alienating stun of winter" has been reprieved by spring, "young Grizzly Sinclair" embarks on a crucial stage in his life which ends in self-discovery and the salvaging of what is left of the wreck of his life.

Early in the novel Carlyle is confronted by two manifestations of a materialistic civilization which he sees as characteristic of that civilization's spiritual, moral, and aesthetic malaise. The first occurs when he stops for gas at Luton's and sees the lawn ornaments; the second occurs when he is in a department store in the city. Both times Carlyle recoils into wild tall-tale fantasies.²⁹ Mitchell uses these interior flights on two levels. First, their surrealistic exaggerations are a *reductio ad absurdum* of a diseased western culture. Second, they dramatize Carlyle's perilous equipoise between fantasy retreat and existential confrontation. When he

discovers that Victoria is missing and has failed to meet his expectations, he is ready to give up on life.³⁰ In the last part of the novel, when he searches the city streets for Victoria (his "little girl lost"), his tendency to take flight into interior fantasy and memory disappears. When he finds her and she tells him that she is pregnant he is shattered. He retreats to a bar and begins to remember how he and Mate practised magic tricks of disappearance (which are in a way visual tall tales) but immediately catches himself: "— oh, for God's sake, Sinclair, pay attention to yourself — the one that's now hurting you!" Carlyle himself refuses to "vanish" into evasive fantasy here and his ability to confront pain rather than evade it leads to his final reconciliation with Victoria. He has been a "little boy lost," lost partly as a result of a destructive culture, but he is found and made whole again by his "little girl lost."³¹ Partly through the defence of exaggeration Carlyle heals the destructive effects of a puritan culture, comes out of hibernation and embarks on what promises to be an active and creative life.

WHEN BRIAN IMAGINATIVELY creates his companion R. W. God, he runs into some trouble with the adult world. He is playing with God who, like his Grandmother, has a gas attack "necessitating a particularly large belch." His mother overhears the belch, which Brian acts out on R.W.'s behalf, and she scolds him. Brian responds that he did not do anything and when he insists that R.W. did it she admonishes him ("Don't tell stories, Son") and sends him to his room. His father speaks to him that evening about telling fibs and, after listening to Brian's description of R.W., tries to straighten Brian out about what is real and what is not: "It's not the thing for little boys to think that God's a — a gentleman who rides vacuum cleaners. It's not right. . . . It's sort of silly, isn't it? . . . You don't really talk to Him, do you?" The answer in Brian's eyes is that "it was not silly, that he did see Him, that he did talk to Him." His father says, "We'll just forget about Him. Say your prayers and go to sleep."³² Brian says his prayers and finishes: "'Amen,' said Brian fervently, 'R.W.'"

Brian does see and talk to God in what is for him a very real sense. The world created in dream and fantasy by young children has a compelling reality for them because they have not yet developed the rational ability to distinguish easily between the imagined and the actual. For the four-year-old Brian, Uncle Sean's little man on the prairie is as actual as Artie or his Grandmother. Part of the maturing process involves a development of the ability to distinguish quickly and sharply between what is real and what is imagined, between the external world of fact and the internal worlds of thought, fantasy, and dream. The line between what is real and what is not is blurred (if not erased) for Saint Sammy in *Who*

Has Seen the Wind and for Agnes in *Back to Beulah*. They are no longer able to confront the harsh realities of existence and have regressed to child-like states taking refuge in their fantasy worlds. And Carlyle in *The Vanishing Point* is dangerously close to emotionally, psychologically, and physically "vanishing" to a reserve. Sammy is a prairie hermit living in a piano box and Carlyle jokingly refers to himself as a "thirty-six-year-old adolescent, the Paradise Valley hermit." Carlyle, however, succeeds in using his imaginative fantasy journeys to survive and cope with the actual world, to attain insights into the nature of his culture, the Indian culture, and himself and through these insights to begin again an active and creative life.

We nourish our children's imaginations with tales, with creative lies. But they must develop the mechanism which clearly sees the distinction between these exaggerated fantasies and life. Jake knows that his tale about Albin is a fantastic exaggeration and he indicates this to the Kid when he asks for the manure fork. If the individual fails in making this distinction, simply believes rather than inducing a *willing* suspension of disbelief, the defence of exaggeration becomes destructively evasive. We must learn to develop that tacit understanding, which exists between the tale teller and the listener, that a story is being told. But we are aware that the story is not a lie or fib in a pejorative sense, that it is a strategy we use to survive and confront our existence creatively and with meaning. There are some dangerous areas in human experience which, if looked at directly, may immobilize and destroy us. We can look at them at first only with our peripheral vision, or to borrow a phrase from Emily Dickinson, we must look at and "tell the truth aslant." It is a fact that we are limited and mortal beings subject to a variety of internal and external dangers. Mitchell dramatizes and explores how the defence of exaggeration may help us to deal effectively with these limitations and in spite of them live creative and meaningful lives.

NOTES

- ¹ See Donald Cameron's interview, "W. O. Mitchell: Sea Caves and Creative Partners" in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* — 2 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 50.
- ² See Mitchell's article "My Home Town: High River," *Star Weekly* (September 22, 1962), pp. 1-4.
- ³ Many of the pieces my father used in his readings (plus notices, programmes, and newspaper reviews) are in the O. S. Mitchell scrapbook, Box 1, W. O. Mitchell Papers, Special Collections, University of Calgary Library. Interestingly, his repertoire included a piece called "Riding a Bronco" (reprinted from the *Arizona Graphic*) which is a version of a story used by Mark Twain in his readings. See *Mark Twain Tonight! An Actor's Portrait*, selected, edited and adapted by Hal Holbrook (New York: Ives Washburn, 1959), pp. 137-38.
- ⁴ One of his best loved pieces, "The Day I Spoke for Mr. Lincoln," is in part based on his memories of Mrs. Wilkinson's School of Dance, Drama, Music, and Elocu-

tion in St. Petersburg, Florida. When he reads this piece he does an imitation of "Billy" Mitchell reciting "The Fool" with dramatic facial and hand gestures. Other pieces he recalls learning at this school were "The Bald Headed Man and the Boy and the Fly" and dialect pieces such as "Giuseppe Goes to the Baseball Game" and "A Negro's Prayer."

- ⁵ Other "reminiscential tall tales" include "The Day I Spoke for Mr. Lincoln," "The Day I Sold Lingerie in a Prairie Whore House," "Take One Giant Step," and "How to Quit and Win." These pieces were among six taped for class room and resource use by ACCESS in 1970 and have been used by CBC on various programmes beginning in 1962.
- ⁶ August 6, 1942. In this tale Jake teaches the kid how to "orate."
- ⁷ Mitchell/Francis correspondence, Box 7, W. O. Mitchell Papers.
- ⁸ *Jake and the Kid* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), p. 3.
- ⁹ See David O'Rourke's "An Interview with W. O. Mitchell," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 20 (Winter 1980-81), p. 152.
- ¹⁰ Mitchell also uses this tall tale of a giant grasshopper in "The Liar's Chorus" in his musical comedy, *Wild Rose*:

Wellllllllll
 I'm a free lopin', lie ropin',
 Stubble jumpin', lie pumpin',
 High heelin', lie dealin'
 Son of a bitch that's got the itch
 To lie — to lie — to lie and lie!

I knew this grasshopper name of Eli;
 Barefoot he stood near forty foot high.
 He siphoned up our water tanks
 And roarin' wind from his sprung shanks
 Licked all our topsoil off the ground
 For a hundred an' ninety miles around.
 Three long weeks he wandered loose;
 Covered our school with tobacco juice.
 Took off into the foothills air
 And left our district for God knows where.

- ¹¹ "W. O. Mitchell: Sea Caves and Creative Partners," p. 50.
- ¹² *American Humor* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), p. 49.
- ¹³ See Stephen Leacock's comment in *The Greatest Pages of American Humour* (New York: Sundial Press, 1936): "Above all the new West, spacious and unlimited, ran easily to big talk and tall stories" (p. 70).
- ¹⁴ "The Prairie: A State of Mind," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 256.
- ¹⁵ *Wolf Willow* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 8.
- ¹⁶ See also Godfrey's comment in "The Liar Hunter": "The smallness of man — the prairies bring it to one with — such impact" (p. 91); and the Kid's image of man on the prairie as a "Fly on a platter" (p. 100).
- ¹⁷ *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 16-17.
- ¹⁸ Ironically, a few years later Brian will use his Uncle's language of curse *against* Uncle Sean and his hired man to prevent the killing of a runt piglet (see pp. 223-25).

- ¹⁹ See Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962): "The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness" (p. 19). Freud dismisses "what the common man understands by his religion" as "patently infantile . . . [and] foreign to reality" (p. 21) but says that both religion and art are necessary "palliative measures" in dealing with the harsh realities of life (p. 22). However, he says that "the mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs" (p. 28) and that religion cannot help us in the fundamental "struggle between Eros and Death. . . . And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven" (p. 69). Mitchell, however, is an unrepentant romantic in his belief in the efficacy of the imagination and its creations. For him art, and religion, are not simply escapist illusions or manifestations of neuroses.
- ²⁰ "That was it — the look upon Brian's face — the same expression that had puzzled him on the Young Ben's: maturity in spite of the formlessness of childish features, wisdom without years. 'Intimations of Immortality,' he thought" (p. 297).
- ²¹ See pp. 59-60 where Brian tries to explain to his father why the prairie belongs to the Young Ben.
- ²² W. O. Mitchell, *The Kite* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), p. 210.
- ²³ Brian also experiences a profound sense of meaninglessness when he spends a night on the prairie alone: "He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him. As the wind mounted in intensity, so too the feeling of defenselessness rose in him. It was as though he listened to the drearing wind and in the spread darkness of the prairie night was being drained of his very self. He was trying to hold together something within himself, that the wind demanded and was relentlessly leaching from him. His fingers were aching with the cold; he slid his hands between his thighs for warmth" (p. 236). Compare this scene to that in *The Vanishing Point* where Old Kacky straps Carlyle and Carlyle is terrified by the feeling that he is being "vanished" (p. 322). Carlyle thrusts his hands between his legs to mitigate the stinging pain and fantasizes how Old Kacky's oatmeal smell would betray him to coyotes, a tiger or boa constrictors: "Yes! Behind the flat head — just like a sack of coal struggling in the boa constrictor's neck!" (p. 321). The child recoils into fantasies in which his tormentor is destroyed.
- ²⁴ Manuscripts in Boxes 28 and 29, W. O. Mitchell Papers, pp. 227-28.
- ²⁵ *Back to Beulah* was first presented as a television play (CBC, March 21, 1974). It was then performed on stage by the Theatre Calgary company in Calgary and at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto in 1976. A revised version of the play is in *Dramatic W. O. Mitchell* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).
- ²⁶ The stage direction reads, "Agnes screams hysterically and crumples to the floor. The screams subside to sobbing, that changes into the baby's crying that we've heard all along" (*Dramatic W. O. Mitchell*, p. 94). The original television play and stage play end with Dr. Anders, Harriet, and Betty taking Agnes back to Beulah. The revised version of the stage play ends with Harriet, Betty, and Agnes taking Dr. Anders back to Beulah.
- ²⁷ *The Vanishing Point* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 58-59. Carlyle is a little like Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughter House Five* who, to protect himself from the

horrible memories of the bombing of Dresden and the wasteland of modern middle-class, materialistic America, resorts to narcissistic fantasy “tripping,” living less and less in the actual world until he imprisons himself in his sci-fi fantasy world of Tralfamadore.

- ²⁸ Images which suggest nourishment or protection turned destructive appear throughout the novel and their implications apply just as much to Carlyle as to the Indian and white cultures. See for example Fyfe’s orchids which, because they are in a greenhouse and their roots are enclosed in pots, are in “danger of root rot always” (pp. 84-85). Dr. Sanders warns Carlyle about listless ducks and draws an analogy between them and the reserve Indians: “‘Warm water — exposed and rotting vegetation — botulism — they get weaker and weaker till they can’t take off any more. And that’s what you’ve joined, teacher — the reserve-system slough — tepid with paternal help — the more you do for them the more you sap their strength’” (p. 183).
- ²⁹ See also his fantasies about Fyfe and his orchids (p. 86) and about the Caribou crossings for pipelines (pp. 98-99).
- ³⁰ It is interesting to note that in the first version of this novel, *The Alien*, Carlyle takes the ultimate escape route and commits suicide. *The Alien* was submitted for publication in the early 1950’s but retracted; a condensed version of part three of *The Alien* was published in *MacLean’s* in 9 instalments beginning September 15, 1953 and ending January 15, 1954.
- ³¹ Mitchell uses the same irony that Blake uses in “Little Girl Lost” and “Little Girl Found” (*Songs of Experience*) — it is the parent/guardians who are really lost and in finding their little girl they themselves are found.
- ³² There is a lovely irony running through this exchange. One of the propositions the novel explores is Wordsworth’s treatment of Plato’s theories of pre-existence and reminiscence in the “Intimations Ode”: the child is in close communication with the Divine because his soul, which pre-existed with the Divine, enters this world “trailing clouds of glory.” The child thus experiences a vestigial sense or “feeling” of the Divine but as he matures in this material world he soon *forgets* his Divine roots. See Brian’s conversation with Digby towards the end of the novel where he says, “I don’t get the feeling any more” and Digby, thinking of Wordsworth, says, “Perhaps . . . you’ve grown up” (p. 296).

