

W.O. MITCHELL'S JAKE AND THE KID:  
THE CANADIAN POPULAR RADIO PLAY  
AS ART AND SOCIAL COMMENT



by

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A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Communications  
McGill University  
Montreal

August, 1979

## ABSTRACT

Canadian author and playwright, W.O. Mitchell, wrote more than two-hundred radio plays for the CBC between approximately 1950 and 1970, most of them in the series Jake and The Kid.

This thesis contends that, in these popular radio plays, Mitchell discovered and mastered an ideal vehicle for his art and social comment, and developed a uniquely positive and humanistic prairie genre.

The study traces the roots and evolution of that genre in his personal background, within the prairie milieu and the literature inspired by it. His approach to writing the Jake plays is examined, as are the various phases of production leading to the radio dramatic illusion.

In a final assessment, the study reviews critical perceptions of the plays, in their time, by their author and from today's perspective.

## RESUME

W.O. Mitchell, auteur et dramaturge canadien, a écrit entre 1950 et 1970, plus de 200 pièces pour les ondes du réseau anglais de Radio Canada, la plupart pour la série Jake and The Kid.

Cette thèse cherche à démontrer qu'à travers ces radio-romans populaires, Mitchell maîtrise à la fois un moyen d'expression artistique valable, et un genre régional unique.

Cette recherche poursuit les sources et l'évolution de ce genre, dans l'enfance de l'auteur et dans son milieu des Prairies canadiennes; genre unique par son côté positif et humoristique, dans une littérature traditionnellement sombre.

L'étude analyse ses techniques d'écriture radiophonique et dissèque la production de son oeuvre dramatique.

En conclusion, cette thèse se veut d'évaluer Jake and The Kid: en fonction de son époque, de son auteur, et aussi par rapport à nos perspectives des temps présents.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to extend his kindest thanks and appreciation to thesis director, John Ripley of McGill University's English Department, for his insights into the drama process at work in radio, and his guidance and patience, without which this thesis would never have been completed.

Special thanks are due to Howard Fink and the Radio Drama Project at Montreal's Concordia University for making the script holdings so freely available for this study. Also the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of Calgary Library, for access to and copies from the W.O. Mitchell Papers.

Warmest thanks to Bill and Merna Mitchell for their time, memory searches and hospitality during the research phase. Also to Morris Surdin for his technical yet accessible thoughts on radio score, and to Peter Francis, Esse Ljungh, Arthur Hiller and Fred Diehl for their descriptions of producing the plays. To Harry Boyle and Robert Weaver thanks for their CBC and literary views. To Billie Mae Richards and Claire Taylor for their acting impressions and their attempt to describe the broadcast phenomenon that was John Drainie.

To Marian Stenbaek-Lafon of McGill and Hugh Hood, who suggested the idea of a radio drama study in the first place. Last and by no means least, to my wife and children who had to live with me while writing it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT.....	i
RESUME.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
NOTES.....	10
CHAPTER 1. The Litmus Years.....	11
NOTES.....	37
CHAPTER 2. A Time and a Literature of Survival and Isolation.	
i. Hard Times and Hard region.....	39
ii. The Literary Backdrop.....	54
NOTES.....	76
CHAPTER 3. Crocus Under the Microscope.....	79
NOTES.....	137
CHAPTER 4. Writing for the Stage of the Mind's Eye.....	139
NOTES.....	221
CHAPTER 5. The Production Perspective.....	224
NOTES.....	285
CHAPTER 6. Cast and Characterization.....	287
NOTES.....	318
CHAPTER 7. An Assessment and Conclusions.....	320
NOTES.....	340
APPENDIX. A. List of the Jake and The Kid Radio Plays...	342
B. List of Other Mitchell radio plays.....	354
C. Writings by and about W.O. Mitchell.....	357
Works Cited.....	358

## INTRODUCTION

William Ormond Mitchell, or "W.O." as he is familiarly called, is known today as a novelist, writer of stage and screen-plays and a raconteur both on and off stage. Yet, he is still indelibly associated with a series of radio plays first broadcast thirty years ago. Mitchell constantly bumps into people who remember Jake and The Kid on CBC Radio and feels both amazed and stigmatized by the persistence of that broadcast legend. "It is," he says, "like having a benign growth on the back of your neck that everyone notices and remarks on."<sup>1</sup>

The "benign growth" or stigma consists of more than two-hundred Jake and The Kid broadcasts over a period of about twenty years; highly popular radio plays that are long gone but whose broadcast legend lives on. This study analyzes the Jake plays from the factors leading to their conception up to present day perceptions of their legend. The result is, hopefully, not just an examination of the Jake plays, but a total approach to one writer's use of the popular radio play as a vehicle for his art and social comment - all that went into Mitchell in his prairie time and milieu and all that came out in Jake and The Kid as a reflection of that time and milieu. It is also a study of the characteristics of the popular radio play as vehicle, and of the production process which translates the writer's script or blueprint into the broadcast dramatic illusion.

The study is not, therefore, a mere catalogue and description of a series of radio plays. It is an analysis of those plays as literature, as electronic media products, and as a carrier and reflection of Mitchell's concerns in Canadian society, expressed by his dramatic themes.

This endeavour is unique in the context of Canadian radio drama, a field relatively neglected and only now attracting scholarly attention. Work is well underway at The Radio Drama Project at Concordia University in Montreal to organize and preserve radio drama scripts and to issue anthologies and reviews of selected scripts. Old recordings are being located, preserved and catalogued by the Sound Division of the Public Archives, in Ottawa and by the Radio Archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Mitchell scripts, and notes and correspondence related to them, are preserved and documented in the W.O. Mitchell Papers in the University of Calgary Library, as are the scores and notes of the Jake composer, Morris Surdin.

There have been relatively few scholarly studies of the Canadian radio dramatic art and none focusing on the work of a single radio dramatist. Richard Jackson wrote a doctoral thesis on CBC Drama, concentrating upon the so-called "Golden Age of Radio" and upon the 'CBC Stage' productions of Andrew Allan.<sup>2</sup> Also from the United States, Martha Van Cleef of Madison, Wisconsin, associated with National Public Radio's "Earplay" series, wrote a doctoral

thesis called "Radio Drama: The State of the Art in 1974," combining American and Canadian activity in a more contemporary framework.<sup>3</sup>

Several other projects are underway or planned, including a Montreal study of the propaganda drama scripts on CBC Radio during the Second World War, and another concentrating upon the approach of a single radio drama producer.<sup>4</sup>

At least one scholarly study of W.O. Mitchell's writings has been completed, "The Sense of Place in W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen The Wind," an M.A. Thesis written by Tamara Lyn Hulet in August 1978 for Brigham Young University. Other critical writings and references to Mitchell's published works abound, but there are very few references made and no extensive attention given to his Jake and The Kid or other radio plays.

This study does not profess to be a definitive view of Canadian radio drama, or a total survey of the writings and philosophy of W.O. Mitchell. It concentrates upon Jake and The Kid as a popular radio series, and describes the radio art as expressed and practiced by Mitchell and his production associates. Extensive research remains to be done in areas raised by this study such as, the other more 'serious' radio plays by Mitchell and particularly The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon and The Devil's Instrument, as well as adaptations of his novels for CBC Radio. The Jake and The Kid explorations of material later developed in his novels

could be a subject for study, as could the relatively unsuccessful television dramatization of The Jake and The Kid series. A study might also be made of Mitchell's theatre career as actor, playwright and performer of readings. This study also raises the need or value of a more exhaustive examination of the production techniques and aesthetic of the Jake producers involved, such as Esse Ljungh, or of the acting approach, particularly overdue for the late John Drainie who played Jake Trumper.

Any such study is complicated and hampered, as this one was, by the lack of analytical precedents for the study of the radio play and its creative components and contributors. The medium has been sadly neglected by comparison with and because of its more glamorous film, television and stage counterparts. Being an invisible and 'intangible' art expression, radio drama is extremely difficult to grasp. As one of its rare scholar/practitioners, Donald McWhinnie, says, "The Art of Radio cannot be reproduced on the page, except as a pale shadow: it is as uncapturable as a half-forgotten song."<sup>5</sup>

McWhinnie's book The Art of Radio, is the definitive work on radio drama. Written in 1959 and in a predominantly British context, it is out of date technologically, but its aesthetic considerations and definitions are still the benchmark by which all other radio studies must be measured.<sup>6</sup> It operates, however, largely on the personal experiences and

opinions of McWhinnie and his BBC Drama associates, as does Val Gielgud's British Radio Drama survey.<sup>7</sup> These and other writings by broadcasters demonstrate the intangibility of radio drama, described by former BBC Drama Head and drama scholar, Martin Esslin, as a largely "practical and pragmatic" medium in which the broadcast producer operates on an intuitive level.<sup>8</sup> Most broadcasters, in talking or writing about their programs, emphasize the pragmatic and intuitive aspects of the art and few intellectualize the process of mounting a radio drama production to the point of inventing models for such analysis. None are offered in the works of McWhinnie or Gielgud.

Rather than adapting models from literary analysis, or from the mass communications area, a model for this study was found in the drama field. It is supplied by J.L. Styan in his Drama, Stage and Audience, and is adapted to fit the radio rather than the stage play.<sup>9</sup> Styan refers to the "four dramatic constituents" or "focal points" in considering a play - the writer's background and conditions of work as they affect the conception, the "book of the play," or arrangement of the words, the performance of the play with actors, and the audience to whom the play is addressed.<sup>10</sup>

Following that model, this study of the Jake and The Kid plays is also divided into four basic parts or focal points: Mitchell's background and development, his writing approach to the scripts, the production of the plays in the studio, and audience and critical perception of the plays.

Thus, the first chapter explores Mitchell's prairie background and his writing attempts leading up to the development of the prairie comedy genre. The chapter maintains that Mitchell was indelibly marked by a prairie childhood and developed from it a particular and unique form of literary and dramatic regionalism.

The second chapter surveys the time and setting of his stories both in a historical and literary sense, reviewing the social and economic picture and the reflection of those conditions and that milieu by other prairie writers. It thus attempts to place Mitchell and his prairie tales in their social and literary context. Styan points out that "The social history which lies behind the play as a public event can offer unpredictable insights into the source of its vitality. Drama is an expression of community, feeling the pulse of an age or of a moment in time like no other art."<sup>11</sup> The chapter stresses the basic difference between Mitchell's dramatic reflections of that time and community and those of other prairie writers.

The third chapter is based on a content analysis of most of the Jake radio plays and the social themes that predominate throughout. It suggests that these messages about prairie ways, concerns and people, though regional in setting, are universal; that, despite their humorous disguise, they are important social commentary and the Jake broadcasts constitute modern media morality plays that are both significant and persuasive.

The fourth chapter examines Mitchell's approach to writing the Jake scripts for radio. It explores his transition from print to the constraints and exigencies of an unfamiliar medium. The contrasts between writing for the eye and writing for the ear are demonstrated by detailed comparison of two Jake episodes in both short story and radio script forms. Particular emphasis is placed on Mitchell's solutions to the problems of compensating for the lack of descriptive prose or visual reinforcement in radio. The inspirational sources and development of the two sample scripts are also traced. The chapter, in effect, constitutes a literary approach to radio scripts, with particular attention to genre, form, structure, content, characterization, viewpoint, and style. They are regarded essentially as literature, until the point where they are submitted for broadcast consideration.

Chapter five follows the script from its submission by Mitchell through the production process - from literature to radio dramatic illusion. The section emphasizes the role of the radio producer/director in translating the script into a broadcast. It examines the components available to the producer - words, music and sounds - and the studio facilities and other resource people available to him in mounting the illusion: composer, musicians, cast, sound effects men and sound engineers. The chapter constitutes an appraisal of the contrasting practical and aesthetic approaches of the

various Jake producers in mounting the plays and realizing the intent of the author.

The sixth chapter concentrates upon the actual performance of the scripts - the interpretation of Mitchell's lines by the cast, their skills and techniques and their contributions to bringing Mitchell's fictional characters to life.

The final chapter attempts to evaluate the Jake and The Kid radio plays. It does so from three points of view: public and critical reaction to the plays in their time, the author's own views and feelings about the plays, and the broadcasts viewed from today's perspective. These distinctions are necessary because of another major impediment to assessing and analyzing these long-gone plays. It is simply the extreme difficulty encountered in attempting to recover the history and impact of the plays with absolute accuracy.

Few of the recordings of Jake and The Kid are available, or at least readily accessible for detailed study. The 'live' broadcasts are on noisy and extremely fragile acetate discs, few of which have been transferred to tape, or even clearly organized and catalogued. While most of the Jake scripts are available to researchers, they are also mostly on microfilm from faded originals, with barely decipherable notations handwritten by producers or cast. Scripts, of course, can only tell part of the story about a play. Material for this study was, perforce, largely drawn from personal interviews

with Mitchell and with Jake producers, surviving cast members and other production people. Interviews are a less than perfect research resource. Verbal accounts of the past are inevitably subject to inaccuracies born of bias and nostalgia. It is impossible for a producer or actor to remember precisely why he did a particular thing during a particular play, in an extensive series of them, so long ago. The 'magic' they describe pertains largely to the excitement of 'live' broadcasting, which is a notoriously intuitive or 'seat-of-the-pants' proposition. Magic and intuition were never easy to document. It is impossible to recreate precisely how that magic occurred, as it is impossible to document the precise effect of that magic upon the audience. The attempt cannot be made by listening to the plays, or studying them, from today's perspective. The listener or scholar must attempt to place himself in the time and context of those plays.

Given those difficulties and constraints, why should one bother to unearth and probe long-gone radio plays? In the case of Jake and The Kid there is no need for justification. It was a highly successful and popular radio series that commanded faithful audiences of over half-a-million. It was more than simply popular and entertaining but presented a reflection of a time, a region and their social and moral concerns and characteristics. The Jake plays not only reflected and introduced a region to a nation but raised

basic questions about the human condition and human nature. They did so through a medium and with a comedy genre that reached a larger and more receptive audience than could have been reached with any other Canadian medium of that day. As such, they are long overdue for critical attention and historical review, as a unique social commentary and as a valid and significant contribution, in their own right, to Canada's literary and radio dramatic heritage.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Jackson, doctoral dissertation on CBC Radio Drama, referred to in Harry Boyle introduction to Andrew Allan: A Self-Portrait, (Toronto, MacMillan, 1974), p. 3. (No copies of this study could be located in Canada and unsuccessful attempts were made to locate it through Abstracts International.)

<sup>3</sup>Martha Van Cleef, "Radio Drama: The State of the Art in 1974," doctoral thesis for The University of Wisconsin.

<sup>4</sup>For details on these and other studies underway in relation to Canadian radio drama, refer to Radio Drama Project, Concordia University, Montreal, or to English Department, McGill University, Montreal.

<sup>5</sup>Donald McWhinnie, The Art of Radio, (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 151.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Val Gielgud, British Radio Drama: 1922-1956. (London: George G. Harrap, 1957.

<sup>8</sup>Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama, (London: Abacus-Sphere, 1978), foreword. Also personal interview with Martin Esslin, August, 1975.

<sup>9</sup>J.L. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, (London: Cambridge University Press), 1975.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. pp. 1-9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

## CHAPTER I

### THE LITMUS YEARS

"Expose a child to a particular environment at his susceptible time and he will perceive in the shapes of that environment until he dies," wrote author Wallace Stegner.<sup>1</sup> William Ormond Mitchell spent that critical time from his fifth to twelfth years in Southern Saskatchewan and was similarly perceptually branded. "Those are the years that mark you and so does prairie," Mitchell says, and adds that "the geography of an artist's childhood has a great deal to do with the illusion he creates."<sup>2</sup>

While writers such as Martha Ostenso, Stegner and Sinclair Ross were prairie-branded in this fashion, none reacted perceptually and stylistically in the manner of Mitchell. Where they demonstrated an often harsh and sombre outlook on prairie life, Mitchell retained his optimism and humour, particularly with his Jake and the Kid stories. Where Stegner found Southern Saskatchewan to be "as good a place to be a boy and as unsatisfying a place to be a man as one could well imagine,"<sup>3</sup> Mitchell portrayed a prairie life acceptable to man and man-child alike. Mitchell was, however, no stranger to the realities that prompted a characteristically

sombre prairie literature: harsh and unpredictable climate, depression, drought and the effects of war. He lived and worked through them and they are reflected in his writings. He simply placed these realities in a more positive perspective in his plays and novels. His positive approach appears to be partly due to a basically humanistic side to his nature and partly to the fact that he and his family were not among the victims of inimical prairie.

Born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan in 1914, W.O. Mitchell was the second of four sons of a prosperous druggist, Ormond S. Mitchell. While young W.O. was raised with one foot in the prairie, the other foot was firmly planted in a small prairie town. Weyburn had a population of five thousand and the druggist's home was described by Mitchell as "a three-storey house with bells and buttons throughout." Built by an English hotelier, Ormond senior bought the house when the man went bankrupt. Young W.O. lived a life of contrasts in it, running in from playing like a wild, free thing on prairie to a very Victorian mother "who played bridge and had tea parties and so on - the best of two possible worlds."<sup>4</sup>

Mitchell confesses he was "not a rural type" and his family could hardly be described as typically struggling homesteaders. Even when domestic disaster struck with the death of his father during an operation in Rochester, when W.O. was only six, "Mrs. O.S. Mitchell reared the family"

comfortably on her husband's estate."<sup>5</sup>

The death of his father marked W.O. immediately and in the years to follow in two main respects, both of which are reflected in his Jake and the Kid stories and his novels. Mortality is a recurrent theme in his writings and young fatherless boys abound: the Kid, Brian, who loses his druggist-father in Who Has Seen the Wind, and, in The Kite; David Lang the journalist, whose father died when he was eight; and the boy, Keith, whose father also died when he was three. The death of Ormond senior also meant that the family relied heavily upon a hired hand who compensated, to a certain extent, as a father-figure. W.O. grew up close to the hired man and other such earth types. The experience is also reflected in his writings, which feature boys tagging along behind rough but wise hired men.

Mitchell spent those first crucial twelve years of his childhood - the "litmus years" as he calls them - on prairie, in a small town, and learning from hired hands. As a child he gained as much from observation of small-town people and ways as from watching prairie nature at its relentless work. He began to perceive in a special and unique way, entering his observations in what he calls his "subconscious notebook." In those early childhood years he had plenty of time and opportunity to fill that notebook. In infancy, he developed a tubercular wrist and his arm was in a brace. This impairment seems to have

made him less physical, outgoing and sociable and more inclined to contemplation. At the age of twelve, he was sent to a secondary boarding school in St. Petersburg, Florida, for health reasons, but his mother brought him back to Saskatchewan every Summer. On his vacation trips, "unable to participate in... sports at home, he took to wandering about the prairies alone. The solitude induced introspection and developed his imagination."<sup>6</sup> His notebook entries grew and, with them, ambitions to be an author.

He "once picked up a copy of John O'London's Weekly, an English literary review, liked it, took out a subscription and developed writing ambitions."<sup>7</sup> During his Florida high school years of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties and, after his return to Canada, the wrist recovered to the point where he even became a high diver and gymnast of repute, but he still dreamed of becoming a writer.

On his return from Florida, he enrolled in 1931 at the University of Manitoba, in a pre-medical program, majoring in psychology and philosophy. While there, he "wrote a novel about a man who turned into a goldfish and communicated his plight in the bowl by blowing morse code bubbles. A publisher's letter of rejection advised Mitchell to shun the fanciful and stick to reality."<sup>8</sup>

After his second year at university, Mitchell was sidetracked temporarily from studies and permanently from medicine, but not from writing, or from thinking about it. In the middle of the 'dirty thirties', unwilling to be supported by his mother, Mitchell worked as an itinerant farm labourer. He thus put into practice what he had learned from the hired men with whom he had been brought up and gained new insights and notebook entries on earth types. During this period, while "riding the rods to a distant harvesting, he fell in with a hobo who earned a few dollars by making egg-stands out of baling wire."<sup>9</sup> He even helped the hobo sell the contraptions from door to door. The experience obviously helped him in later sales jobs but it also inspired about a dozen short stories, which Mitchell claims were rejected because he "over-idealized the life of the nomadic bum."<sup>10</sup> The experience was not wasted, however. It was echoed in baling wire inventions in later, successful stories, and it brought him closer to literary realism. It was, in fact, his first attempt to write out of his own time, place and experience.

In 1934, he began a series of travels, starting in Europe, which were intended to broaden his horizons and experience, but did nothing to improve his literary realism. After shipping as a deckhand on a Greek steamer, Mitchell travelled throughout Europe and spent a lengthy period in Biarritz. His European adventures and misadventures

will not be detailed here and their chronology is not precisely recorded.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to mention, in relation to the importance of that period to his writing endeavours, that it seems to have brought him little "inspiration" of value. On his return, he wrote "stories about Russian counts who made love to mysterious blondes in luxurious Riviera hotels, and about hunchbacked spies who skittered, dagger in hand, along the alleys of the Place Pigalle."<sup>12</sup> He might as well have written more goldfish novels, because the European fancy did not sell either.

In the late 'thirties, he sought further "inspiration" by planning to ship aboard a freighter bound for South America. Instead of finding a job as deckhand in Seattle, he ended up instead as a reporter for The Seattle Times. While there, he took an extra-mural course in short-story writing at the University of Washington. "This taught me," he said, "that successful writers write about people and places they know."<sup>13</sup> He also studied playwriting under Professor Glen Hughes and did some acting to supplement his previous acting experience with the Winnipeg Little Theatre. In his acting, he drew from his notebook entries to create characterization and to expand his knowledge and skills with respect to both character and dialogue. He may not have inherited writing, but acting or performing in public did run in the family. His father had "raised his University of Toronto fees by reciting poems

on concert platforms."<sup>14</sup> That talent Mitchell put to even greater use in later life, reading from his works and telling anecdotes at public readings.

Mitchell's writing apprenticeship and the final path to Jake and The Kid were embarked upon in the early years of the war. On his return from Seattle, he engaged in a variety of jobs: selling oil rights, life insurance and radio advertisements in Calgary. He also began to write more stories, drawn from his own prairie milieu and experiences. To these he added theory when he resumed his studies at the University of Alberta in 1940 and, there, fell under the literary influence of Dr. Frederick Salter, who recognized his talent and encouraged him to seriously pursue a literary career. Dr. Salter advised him to stick to the subjects with which he was uniquely familiar - the prairie, landscape and people. Mitchell emerged with his B.A. in 1942 but, also acquired valuable advice from Salter on style and form, including annotations to be found on the drafts of his early short stories and first novel, Who Has Seen the Wind. In those first serious writings, he put the advice to good use.

All of his writing attempts during that period drew from his "milieu and experience," particularly prairie farm life. One attempt was a story called "Ab and Annie." Rejected at the time, the story found its way into Who Has Seen The Wind, as one of the sequences in which young

Brian makes a discovery about the vagaries of human nature. It became the episode in which Brian tries to help the hired-hand's woman, with a cast in her eye, by encouraging her to have corrective glasses. He finds to his cost and education that the hired hand liked her just the way she was, complete with cast. Their relationship was based upon care and dependency, similar to Brian's relationship with his 'runt' pig.

A successful story drawn from his own experience followed and was his first published writing. "But as Yesterday" appeared in Queen's Quarterly in May 1942. Although Mitchell described the story as "unsuccessful in itself," it later served as the inspiration for another sequence in Who Has Seen The Wind. The short story was about a dying grandfather making a spinning-top for a young boy. The theme was transformed into that of the grandmother dying while knitting an article for Brian. Both figures are symbolically completing a transition from age to youth, from death to life, and underlining Mitchell's everpresent motif of mortality, lightened and rendered more positive by continuity. The sequence has echoes in his later novel, The Kite, when centenarian, Daddy Sherry, accepts and defiantly flies the kite made for him by young Keith.

Mitchell was now writing about people and places he knew, but he had not yet found the formula for Jake And

The Kid. It came from his memories of his harvesting experiences and, specifically, from an old homesteader "whose hobby was 'figurin'." With the stub of a pencil, the homesteader passed his evenings working out how many cups of tea it would take to fill the south cowpasture slough, or how many grains of wheat would be required to lay an unbroken line of them from Regina to Saskatoon."<sup>15</sup> The old homesteader was the prototype for Jake Trumper, the hired man. Mitchell, as a boy, was the basic prototype for his sidekick, The Kid. The result was a story called, "You Gotta Teeter," which was published by Maclean's Magazine in 1942. W.O. Mitchell had earned his first money as a writer, and Jake and the Kid made their Canadian bow. About a dozen more Maclean's episodes were developed and published over the next few years and the genre and style were firmly established for Mitchell and his Canadian readers.

Most of the Jake stories were written in between teaching jobs in Castor, New Dayton and High River, Alberta. In High River, he settled with his wife, Merna, the daughter of a Baptist minister, whom he also married in that auspicious year of 1942. His High River teaching was limited to part-time substitute work, leaving him more time to write the Maclean's stories and to complete Who Has Seen the Wind, which had appeared in portions in The Atlantic Monthly. Who Has Seen The Wind,

his first novel, was published in 1947. It grew once more from the process of mining his subconscious notebook for childhood and farm-labouring experience on prairie, the source of his Jake and the Kid stories. The Jake stories are, to a significant extent, sources for many of the ideas and sequences found in Who Has Seen The Wind, and in later novels such as The Kite. "There were novels looming behind everything I wrote," Mitchell says, "including Jake and the Kid."<sup>16</sup>

W.O. Mitchell left prairie again in 1948 to become Fiction Editor for Maclean's Magazine in Toronto. There he continued writing magazine stories and articles and creating new Jake adventures and discovered the medium of radio drama.

In terms of artistic satisfaction, Mitchell would probably have been quite happy writing short stories, working on novels and teaching on the side as an economic anchor. Selling stories to Maclean's or Liberty looked both exciting and rewarding to him in the 'forties. His teaching salary was \$1,750 and, in those days, \$500 per story looked very attractive. The \$14,000 in royalties from Who Has Seen the Wind enabled him to build a house in High River. Novels were five-year propositions for Mitchell, however, and he had to live in the meantime. The Jake stories paid well, but only so many could be taken from the same author by a not inexhaustible market.

In fact, over about six years from the time he sold the first Jake story in '42 to his Toronto appointment at Maclean's he sold fewer than twenty. No one can live on such a meagre teaching salary and an average of three such stories a year, nor can he achieve literary satisfaction and acclaim. Mitchell needed the Maclean's job and the security it afforded, but it did not solve the need for more writing exposure and earnings.

His editorial work at Maclean's was a full-time proposition and hardly helped him write. Besides, he discovered that story writing was highly demanding, out of all proportion to the commercial impact of stories or to the rates paid for them. However, he and the other contemporary writers persisted with the short story because:

... it was highly believed at the time that, because the short story is smaller, you would naturally not try to write a novel first, but would do short stories. There was a widely-held view then, and people still say it, that, because of the rigours and compression of the short story, it should be the future training ground for future novelists. There were countless stories, or attempts at them, that made me realize just how long and difficult the apprenticeship period is and how damn hard it is to master the craft. There is that deceptively simple, homespun look about the Jake and The Kid story, for example; a graceful simplicity that requires a great deal more effort than is apparent.<sup>17</sup>

The Maclean's job may have brought him closer to writing for a living, but the overall writing prospects were not good. Mitchell remembers that, when he went to Toronto, there were very few outlets for magazine articles or stories. As for books, he described Canadian publishers as "mostly jobbers for houses in the United Kingdom and the United States." Regional theatre was modest, and, he felt, "only interested in staging the tried and true classics or evergreens already established on Broadway or the West End."<sup>18</sup> Nor were there a Canada Council or writing residencies. There was, however, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with its English network operations right there in Toronto and paying relatively good money to production people, writers, musicians and actors. Enjoying a nationwide audience that had been trained to radio listening by the war years, CBC Radio was, when Mitchell arrived in Toronto in 1948, the most active and attractive artistic institution in Canada. There was no viable theatre, no television outlet or any real cultural competition. It is generally acknowledged that, at that time, CBC Radio Drama had thus become Canada's substitute national theatre, its drama workshop and the prime outlet for artistic employment and output in the country. It kept writers and actors working until Stratford was created and television arrived, and it introduced millions of Canadians to drama and serious music; people

who either had no access to the theatre or concert hall or would not go even if they had. It also encouraged, with such acclaimed drama series as 'CBC Stage', a higher quality of dramatic writing than was found in the mass media of the day. Private radio in Canada and the U.S. featured commercial soap opera as their primary dramatic fare. Writing of that period, Herbert Whittaker, drama critic of the Toronto Globe and Mail, contends that "no other country has had to rely so heavily on one single source for its theatrical knowledge, experience and expression... the CBC subsidized a whole theatre for us for a quarter century."<sup>19</sup>

W.O. Mitchell availed himself of the CBC Radio Drama medium, first with one-hour CBC Stage plays and then, over the years, with the Jake and the Kid serials. Radio drama eventually became his most prolific and pervasive outlet, but there was an apprenticeship to serve in that medium too.

Mitchell's radio début appears to have been made on CBC Stage on March 27 1949, with the play, The Devil's Instrument, produced by Andrew Allan. The story is set in a Hutterite community not far from a Crocus-like town. A young boy, raised in the rigidity of the sect, is seduced away from it and its narrow norms by a devil figure offering a mouth organ, on which the boy plays forbidden airs. The script was prepared from material for a novella,

but so pervasive was the radio medium that an American listener apparently used the story for a novel of his own.

Mitchell might have been deterred at that point but continued to experiment. Unlike The Devil's Instrument, which was highly successful and re-broadcast, his next play was not a good one. A Chaperon for Maggie, broadcast in May 1949, was a weak and fanciful romantic comedy.

His next play marked the first broadcast appearance of Jake and the Kid, also in May of 1949. The Liar Hunter was a one-hour CBC Stage story that later turned up in half-hour form as part of the eventual Jake series. Produced by Andrew Allan, the story was about a hunter of tall-tale folklore who derives a wealth of material from Jake and his Crocus buddies.

The next radio play was a much less successful and less convincing attempt at folksy, anecdotal western humour called Out of the Mouths, and broadcast in July of 1950. A somewhat contrived effort, it is set in a small community like Crocus where the local characters take bets on whether the hero's baby boy will say Mama or Dada first. The hero has an inside track - he has read a book by experts explaining phonetically and physiologically why a baby's first word is more likely to sound like Ma-Ma. It was not Mitchell's most memorable play.

Just prior to beginning a regular series of Jake and The Kid plays, Mitchell prepared a more impressive and successful radio script, called The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon. Closer to Jake and the Kid in style and tone, the play was also re-broadcast and later published as a novella. The story, except for the inclusion of the Devil, could well have been prepared as a Jake episode. The small town in which it is set could easily have been Crocus, complete with similar citizens and institutions, but was named Khârtoum, Alberta. Like Crocus, it is obsessed with curling. The local cobbler, MacCrimmon, makes a pact with the devil in order to compete in the MacDonald Briar Curling Championship. If his team can beat the satanic one, he'll get his chance. If it can't, he'll skip in hell, forever. He tricks the devil and wins the match, the wager and his soul. The play was broadcast on July 20 1950.

That summer, CBC programmer, Harry Boyle, suggested to Mitchell that he do an extensive series of Jake and the Kid plays, starting with a summer replacement series. The summer series of thirteen scripts, based upon the Maclean's short story scripts he already had in hand, ~~was~~ well received and a new series of original radio scripts of Jake and the Kid followed, despite initial anxiety by Mitchell about the problems of turning out a new script every week. More than two hundred were written over the next ten years.

The prairie comedy - a regular half-hour, light-hearted visit to Crocus, Saskatchewan to examine people and social themes in a small-town setting - had caught on and turned the series into a broadcast legend. After three years of Maclean's Magazine and Jake scripts, Mitchell was able to leave the big city environment, to which he and his family had difficulty adapting, and return to prairie to live by the pen alone.<sup>20</sup>

He had found his literary feet and his literary formula, but what was it that drove him to be a writer and, particularly, to be a regional writer? His studies, travels and economic circumstances took him through a variety of professional activities. He might have been in medicine, for which he began to study. He was a high-diver and water clown, a farm labourer, a salesman and a teacher. Much later, he wrote stage and screen plays, read his own works and performed his anecdotes from the stage, and taught creative writing.

During a spell teaching writing students at Toronto's York University, Mitchell was asked about writing motivations and pre-requisites.<sup>21</sup> To be a writer, Mitchell explained, one must compile a 'subconscious notebook' with material from life, material gathered through an almost "extra perceptual acuity or extra spectator quality." However, he claims that even if one does and has both, one must be prepared to undergo at least a ten-year

writing apprenticeship and commit oneself to developing one's craft. He suggests it is not enough to be a perceptive and sensitive person; that writing presupposes a special way of living and being, where the serious writer "develops extra antennae and has his senses cocked in a way that other people haven't."<sup>22</sup> As far as he is concerned, one doesn't just decide to be a writer or play at it on weekends because one feels the urge or thinks one has the background experience or material. He tells how he

....always gets people coming up to me and saying, for example: "Jesus, I've led a real interesting life - I could write a book about it", or, variations such as: "My grandpa was a homesteader in the west and, when it rained, it rained for seven days outside a sod house and two days inside. I think I'll write a book about my grandfather". And I would say - don't do it! Go over to the High River General Hospital, force the surgeon away from the operating table and do a Caesarian section, or take out a gall-stone and the odds that that patient would survive are roughly one hundred times greater than that you will write anything that is, or should be, publishable!<sup>23</sup>

Asked by the York writing students what motivates true writers to write, Mitchell ruled out the following factors as genuine or valid motivations: money, fame, ego-gratification, self-analysis through purging or acting-out and so on. Far from relieving inner tensions, he feels that, on the contrary, the process of mining the subconscious notebook brings to light all kinds of past

experiences, emotions and pains which could create even worse tensions. As for the money motive, he makes a strong point of differentiating between making money, as a fringe-benefit of writing, while devoting oneself to mastery of the writing craft, on the one hand, and, on the other, churning out books mechanically for the express purpose of making millions. Following the advice of Professor Salter, Mitchell counsels his own students to write as an avocation, while supporting themselves through some main but flexible occupation such as teaching.

As far as Mitchell is concerned there is only one valid motive for writing and it involves a process of artistic exchange with a reader, listener or spectator, whom he calls the "creative partner." He sees writing as a uniquely direct and satisfying bridge to the creative partner and as "one of the only human activities done purely for its own sake."<sup>24</sup> Even when a story or novel is successful and "scores," Mitchell insists that it is the bridging that counts. Thus, he claims, the 'partner' has been just as responsible for that success as the writer.

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...It has been a twinning of two separate solitudes ... it's still an illusion because it's impossible - there's really nothing more lonely than humans - but what it is that makes you write is an attempt by man to deny the watertight separation between individual human beings; to re-create something, to share it and then see the effect on someone else's face; to score and get an effect.<sup>25</sup>

He feels he achieved this through a form of regionalism which "differs from most peoples' ideas of regionalism... because there is no more regional regionality than the region of one unique human being and of his unique past."<sup>26</sup>

Mitchell's unique, subconscious, self-past supplied "him with over two-hundred Jake and The Kid stories and several novels. It was the unique self-past of prairie, though it might have been of Florida, Europe, Seattle or Toronto. He wrote mostly about the hometown of Jake and of The Kid - Crocus, Saskatchewan. The town was fictional but was precisely located in "South-Central Southern Saskatchewan" and its people types were just as specifically identified. However, the people and situations might have been found almost anywhere on prairie. Listeners to the radio series said they identified many of the Crocus people and situations as having been inspired by Mitchell's birthplace of Weyburn, Saskatchewan, or his later home of High River, Alberta. Opinions differ as to whether he was reflecting Saskatchewan in his stories.

CBC President, Al Johnson, born in Wilcox, a little Saskatchewan town just like Crocus, and living in Regina at the time of the Jake series on radio, recognized Saskatchewan in the plays. "I remember them fondly," he says,

They were part of the folklore of the prairie. They were entertaining and there was a bit of caricature, but they were also accurately reflecting the small town in rural Saskatchewan and we identified with them. True, certain qualities identified with rural living could be found in many parts of Canada, so it was reflecting that time in general and you could relate to the stories in that sense, but you can also say that some part of Saskatchewan life was being reflected in the process.<sup>27</sup>

CBC literary broadcaster, Robert Weaver, wondered how typical of Southern Saskatchewan the stories were. He felt *Crocus* was "Bill Mitchell's version of reality and not Saskatchewan in any kind of sociological sense."<sup>28</sup>

Fred Diehl, member of the Jake series cast, suggested there was enough general prairie or even general rural Canadian truth in the stories that it could be said "Crocus was Estevan, which is no different from Neepawa, Manitoba, or Lucky Strike, Alberta, or even Georgetown, Ontario, in those days."<sup>29</sup> Peter Francis, the first Jake producer, saw *Crocus* as an imaginary composite of a number of small prairie towns but felt that "Mariposa was more real than *Crocus*; more Orillia than *Crocus* is anywhere in particular."<sup>30</sup> Margaret Laurence recalls recognizing the prairie region in Jake and The Kid. "These stories," she recalls,

...were among the first that many of us who lived on the prairies had ever read concerning our own people, our own place and our own time. When grain elevators, gophers or the sloughs and bluffs of the "bald-headed prairie" were mentioned, there was a certain thrill of recognition.

The same applied to the characters who inhabited Crocus. A prevalent feeling on the subject was, as I recall - that's us; he's writing about us.<sup>31</sup>

Mitchell's Crocus produces, then, not so much a portrait of a precise Saskatchewan town as of a prairie town and, in the process, many of the human situations found in any small town. It is, however, while universal in application, inescapably prairie, not West, nor foothills, but "flat as pea-soup prairie." That is made abundantly clear in the episode "Women Is Humans," featured at the start of his stories and radio plays. Jim Mathews, a suitor to The Kid's Aunt Margaret, scorns those who 'bellyache' about prairie and its roughness and hardships. Mathews fiercely defends prairie farm life in a sequence that clearly reveals Mitchell's specific prairie setting and the author's love of prairie landscape. Mitchell may have taken liberties with his people, but the sequence reveals that he took none with his land.

Maybe being a dirt farmer is a miserable life, but it's a way to live. For a fellow like me that's fussy about dirt and about sky, it's the only way. Maybe I haven't got a fine house in town; I get a kick out of things that ain't so important, like - well, like hearing what happens after a meadow lark's heart swells up and bursts, like clear, well-water dropping ... but that ain't all ... it ain't all at all ... Look at prairie mornings. When I was a kid, I useta walk bare feet through prairie grass cold with ... and sky, prairie sky. There's something else my wife will hafta hanker for. Once, when I was a kid,

I dumped six bags of blueing in my mother's wash water, so I could get the blue that belongs to the prairie sky. Take the smell of wolf willow growing silver along a crick ... gentle honey my mother called it. She loved the prairie - she had to, the way she came out with my father. They didn't have a thing, not even a map for coming across that sea of taffy-coloured prairie grass. Just a compass. They came to where there were Tiger Lilies - millions of 'em. She said that was where - and this's where.<sup>32</sup>

As their reality of Saskatchewan was Mitchell's, so Harry Boyle suggests their reality of prairie was also peculiar to Mitchell's perspective. He felt that the prairie reflection in the Jake stories might differ from prairie reality in the same way that Mississippi reality is not always found to be that implied by the writings of Twain.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the best way to describe the regional reflection that resulted from the Jake stories is to say that they were loosely rooted in a specific region but aimed at wider application and identification through the use of humour and the choice of universal themes. In the process, Robert Weaver suggests that they were "fairly close to some kind of reality as well, a view shared by the late critic, Nathan Cohen."

...Cohen once did a 'Critically-Speaking' about Mitchell in which he made some kind of comparison between him and Faulkner, which is comparing at a fairly high level. In a funny way, he was probably talking, not just about the comic quality, of which there is also a lot in Faulkner, but about the

sense of a real region in the Jake and The Kid stories.<sup>34</sup>

Mitchell was obviously marked by the works of Faulkner and, especially, Twain, whose themes, style and personality have echoes in both his writings and character. The Kid and Brian O'Connell, in Who Has Seen The Wind move in a prairie world reminiscent of that of Huck' Finn and Tom Sawyer; a world both as regional yet as universal as Twain's Mississippi construct.

All of his Jake and The Kid stories and most of his novels are set in the world of prairie childhood. He has become, rightly or wrongly, associated with the prairie regional style and, particularly, with that of Jake and The Kid. He is, in fact, reported to have strongly resented a critical description of him and his prairie genre that read, approximately, "a regional writer in a quaint, rural sub-culture."<sup>35</sup>

Mitchell defends his prairie regionalism with two arguments. First, he claims, it enabled him to write convincingly about people and places he knew. Secondly, he feels that it gave his writings a more universal and lasting quality because he dealt with broad, human issues rather than specific and contemporary ones. While he set his Jake and the Kid stories in a particular place and wrote about specific social or moral issues, neither the place nor the issue was really the primary

point. What was most important in his stories, and to him, was what places and events did to the people; how individuals reacted to or coped with their conditions and how they developed or evolved as a result of them.

Mitchell, as humanist, seems to have started in that direction, both as a person and a writer, fairly early in life; he found himself to be contemplative and philosophical and ill at ease with generalities and abstractions, and, particularly, with pulp art or propaganda writing. He was happier with Mark Twain and Chaucer than with Ibsen or Shaw, for example. He thinks he found himself with the label of a regional writer because, as a prairie child, he became aware of his mortality very early.

I could not settle, in my writing, to write of some immediate and contemporary social ill, or injustice, or political passion, knowing that, given another couple of decades or so, it's gone and the justification for that dramatic illusion has had the rug pulled right out from under it. So that, I think, I became more interested in the gut level and the heart; with doing things that didn't concern themselves about a human condition that was immediate but, rather, about the human condition; about how dreadfully dangerous it is to be a human and to be mortal. The result was that I found myself, because I wanted to be more than regional, concerning myself with ordinary, very regional people and their joys and delights and disappointments.<sup>36</sup>

The result was also the down-to-earth world of Crocus, Saskatchewan; a world where there were social concerns and social ills and injustices, economic and

climatic hardships, but where the accent was on the human dimension. His stories were about people and events in Crocus. However, as Clara Thomas points out about such fictional prairie towns in Canadian literature, they are merely the "setting or psychic point of departure."<sup>37</sup>

Terry Angus also writes in his introduction to The Prairie Experience, "Landscape is setting; it is an element of interest but is the secondary feature of the literature itself."<sup>38</sup> Mitchell's real landscape was the human landscape. He depicted it through the regionalism of his "susceptible time" and its litmus staining. These provided the "point of departure" for his dramatic construct. As he put it:

...what a writer is for the rest of his life will be determined by what he finds from those litmus years, even though he may take the creative leap and impute what he finds to people who aren't in that region. But you can't communicate what you want to through generalities or abstractions. You first have to create the illusions of the smells, sights, sounds, tastes; the wild horses of appetite and emotion. You have to con' people - it's magic! You have to con' them into believing this and there is only one way to do it: through the avenue of the senses and through the specific; through the connotative and denotative. That ends up being regional and ends up with people like Mark Twain, for instance, who was really never taken seriously, until about twenty years ago, by the scholars and academicians and critics and reviewers. He couldn't be important because his works dealt, for example, with floating down the Mississippi on a raft, with these homespun, unimportant people".<sup>39</sup>

The people of Crocus, epitomized by Jake Trumper, are every bit as homespun and unimportant as the Mississippi characters. The Kid and his pals, like Huck and Tom, explore wild prairie nature and wild human nature. What the Kid, usually with the aid of Jake, discovers or illustrates about human nature in his Crocus adventures will shortly be described in a comprehensive examination of the specific themes arising in over two-hundred Jake and the Kid scripts. However, to better appreciate the unique ways in which Mitchell used his craft and the genre of prairie comedy to exploit those themes, it is appropriate first to consider the time and place about which Mitchell was writing, the ways in which his literary contemporaries and predecessors approached the prairie, its people and their concerns, and to place Mitchell and Jake and the Kid, in their social and literary context.

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NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Wallace Stegner, Wolf Willow: A History, A Story and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier, (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Stegner, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

<sup>5</sup>McKenzie Porter, "The Man Behind Jake and The Kid," MacLean's Magazine, Sept. 13th, 1958, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup>Porter, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Porter, p. 50. Also biographical notes on W.O. Mitchell in "Canadian Authors Manuscripts: A Guide to the Collections, (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Library, 1978) pp. 10-12.

<sup>14</sup>Porter, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup>Porter, p. 50. See also notes on "The Hired Hand," by W.O. Mitchell in Mitchell Papers, University of Calgary Library, department of Special Collections.

<sup>16</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>E. Austin Weir, The Struggle For National Broadcasting In Canada (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 394.

<sup>20</sup>Porter, pp. 22 and 50.

<sup>21</sup>Recording of writing seminar by W.O. Mitchell at York University, Toronto, made by researcher, Feb. 1978.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Personal Interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

<sup>27</sup>Personal interview with Al Johnson, January 1979.

<sup>28</sup>Personal interview with Robert Weaver, March 1978.

<sup>29</sup>Personal interview with Fred Diehl, August 1978.

<sup>30</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>31</sup>Margaret Laurence, "A Canadian Classic," Review of Jake and The Kid, Canadian Literature 11 (Winter 1962), pp. 68-70.

<sup>32</sup>W.O. Mitchell, Jake and The Kid: "Women Is Humans," (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1961), pp. 26-27.

<sup>33</sup>Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August 1978.

<sup>34</sup>Personal interview with Robert Weaver, March 1978.

<sup>35</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>36</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

<sup>37</sup>Clara Thomas, "The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence," Chapter nine: "Our Town - Our Tribe," (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), pp. 173-179.

<sup>38</sup>Terry Angus, Introduction to The Prairie Experience (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975) p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

## CHAPTER II

### A TIME AND A LITERATURE OF SURVIVAL AND ISOLATION

#### i. Hard Times and Hard Region

The historical dating of the Jake and the Kid scripts is never clearly established, but it is safe to conclude that the stories mostly take place in the early 'forties. Some of the later episodes are linked to events such as the Coronation, in the 'fifties, forcing us to accept that The Kid is a sort of prairie Peter Pan who never ages beyond about the pre-teen stage throughout the twenty-years of the series. He is known to be about twelve and, in the early stories, such as "A Voice for Christmas" his father is serving in Europe during the Second World War, from which he does not return. The town of Crocus and its environs have, therefore, emerged from the Depression and from the drought that accompanied and aggravated it in Southern Saskatchewan. The older generation in Crocus and, particularly, Jake Trumper and his friend Sam Gatenby, have obviously been around prairie since the 1880's and are survivors of both the pioneer era and of the 'dirty thirties." It is through Jake and Gate that we receive a somewhat exaggerated impression of pioneering and surviving, but one that is rooted in reality.

The Jake stories reflect a town and its dependent farm people experiencing urbanization, world war, and the miracles

of radio, telephone, cars and combine-harvesters. They also survive the perils of prairie, enjoying a love-hate relationship with a romanticized pioneer past, while still licking the wounds prairie nature has just heaped on top of a depression. They are not, however, mere survivors. Crocus people have their ups and downs, but they live fully and optimistically. The tone of the stories suggests that, while these are not the best of times for Crocus, neither are they the worst. There are occasional reminders from weather and crops of how mean prairie can be, but there are as many reminders of how mean an increasingly urbanized society can be, especially in the guise of a small prairie town. The human dangers are both from within and without. The focus is as much on the inhuman seductions of urbanization and the moral perils of small-town society as it is on the dangers from the hostile prairie gnawing away at the edge of town; the prairie that gives the town a shake from time to time to remind the complacent or starry-eyed that the elements can give and take away - everything. The essential focus, however, is on the present, the people and the positive.

To have emerged from prairie positive and optimistic in person and literature is no mean feat for Mitchell. He seems to be almost alone among prairie survivors and writers of that period who found humour in the environment and conditions. Most adopted a love-hate relationship to prairie, praising

its wild grandeur but cursing what it could do to a man's livelihood and spirit. More than thirty years after his childhood branding in Southern Saskatchewan, Wallace Stegner was prompted to write a 'historical-biographical-fictional' book on the area, called Wolf Willow. In it, he bitterly wrote of its harshness and toll of human misery, describing how the original surveyor had called it "one of the most desolate and forbidding regions on Earth," and yet claiming that "there never was a country that, in its good moments, was more beautiful."<sup>1</sup>

The good moments on prairie seem to have been few and far between. The bad moments have tended to permeate and characterize prairie literature. Terry Angus writes that prairie literature "... reflects the geographical nature of the west ... geography and climate dominate the imagination of the prairie artist."<sup>2</sup> That domination is evident in the imaginative as well as the realistic writings set in prairie, which reflect pioneering and settlement hardships. The preoccupation persists in the literature that reflects the climatic and economic vagaries of prairie in the first half of the century - the legendary winter of 1906-1907, the Depression, drought and subsistence farming. Prairie literature is most sombre when obsessed with the combined drought and Depression in Saskatchewan, in the 'thirties and 'forties.

Edward McCourt goes as far as to suggest that any attempt to explain why the Saskatchewan man differs from his other prairie regional counterparts "must take into account the consequences, both physical and psychological, of the dust-bowl years."<sup>3</sup>

The literature in Angus' volume, ranging from fiction and plays to articles, is redolent with wind, dust, grasshoppers, fierce winters, backbreaking struggle, soul-destroying defeat, more dust and more wind. The fact is that there always has been and probably always will be something about prairie that is inhospitable to man and tries to reject him.

The main problem with the area is that it is located within Palliser's Triangle. This five-sided area corresponds roughly with the dry short-grass and the mixed-grass prairies that were condemned as unsuitable for farming by the Palliser Expedition of 1857. Extended periods of drought were not the only perils of the area. Max Braithwaite writes in The Western Plains:

Associated with the drought were three other destroyers - dust storms, grasshoppers and Russian thistle. Farmers still cringe when they think of them. Sloughs dried up completely and water fowl perished by the thousands. Howling winds filled the air with choking dust for days on end, and swept precious top soil in drifts half-way up telephone poles. Russian thistle, a persistent branching weed, covered the land like a fungus and, when ripe, broke off and tumbled across the fields scattering millions of seeds and piling high against fences. Grasshoppers ate everything that grew, and even attacked clothing hung on the line to dry.<sup>4</sup>

Those conditions could not but permeate literary accounts and reflections of the time and region. Stegner is, without a doubt, the most forceful chronicler and, for him, it hardly seems to matter what year one is talking about. His overall message is that prairie is not a very hospitable or, at least, a consistently rewarding place, even for the most determined of men. He suggests that "IF" is the key word in Saskatchewan prairie life, destiny and vocabulary: if there isn't too little rain, if there isn't too much, if there isn't any rust, too many hoppers or gophers, too early a frost, too severe a winter, too late an easing Chinook, then, a good year might become a reality. Stegner's own family was typical of those homesteaders who stubbornly persisted against overwhelming odds, only to succumb. Writing as part historian and sociologist in Wolf Willow, he suggests that, in fact, the dice were loaded against success, that a settler could only learn by living it out that

...no system of farming, no matter how strenuously applied, could produce crops in that country during one of the irregular and unpredictable periods of drought and that the consequences of trying to force the issue could be disastrous to both people and land. There were books that could have told him, (though he might not have believed) that the reduction of the annual rainfall by a single inch, or a shift of the period of greatest precipitation from Spring and Summer to Fall, could mean the difference between a good crop and a burned field. The winds, hail and cyclones he would believe as soon as he had experienced them once. But the large lesson that he would have found

most useful - the marginal nature of agriculture on the arid plains - was precisely the one that, as a pioneer, he found unacceptable, because it denied his hope.

His hope was involved with the myth of the Garden West.<sup>5</sup>

The "myth of the Garden West," the frontier version of the American Dream, the Promised Land, were all features of human persistence on prairie and of the literature it inspired.

Frustration at unfulfilled promise and the stubborn belief that it will all work out some day, are as common sentiments and literary themes in the pure pioneer setting as they are in the latter-day literature about small prairie towns. The back-breaking and mind-numbing struggle for survival would seem to be just as accurate a reflection of prairie reality for the 'forties' and 'fifties' of the Jake and the Kid broadcasts. Climate and adversity do not seem to have changed much even in the Saskatchewan prairie of the 'seventies.<sup>6</sup> However, enough 'stickers' have endured and survived prairie to inspire a legend and a literature based on struggle and adversity.

Commenting on the grim tales of Frederick Phillip Grove, Sandra Djwa says "the Canadian hero doesn't light out, he stays and endures."<sup>7</sup>

What made the real-life prototype for such prairie heroes endure against such impossible odds, apart from sheer physical and mental determination? Was it some supreme religious faith or motivation? It would seem that, faced

with such unremitting hardship, God alone was not enough help, and divine intervention usually came in negative and seemingly punitive forms. As Edward McCourt wrote of the stickers, who held out despite the drought,

... the people now took a kind of defiant pride in showing the world their strength to endure, without flinching, the worst that nature could do to them ... no one could survive nine years of hell without courage. Nor, without faith - not in a beneyolent God, but in one's own capacity to endure.<sup>8</sup>

The "unmitigated discomfort and deprivation" described by Stegner could not but play a vital part in shaping the religious beliefs and temperament of prairie people and their small towns. It also provided a central theme for prairie writers: that of an apparently indifferent deity and a religion of harsh exigencies, equalled only by the demands of prairie nature itself. As Clara Thomas writes in discussing the small prairie town model that is Margaret Laurence's only partly-fictional 'Manawaka,'

Certainly, everything men and women found in pioneer experience would confirm an impression that their God required hard service before rejoicing, as the land demanded battle from them and did not repay love. The God who presided over such a bleak experience must have seemed to the pioneers remarkably analogous to the Old Testament Jehovah, God of War and Wrath and Judgement.<sup>9</sup>

What Crocus, Manawaka or Stegner's Whitemud, for that matter, represent in that period and its literature, are a co-operative response to prairie odds in reality, and a literary laboratory in Canadian fiction. These only partly-

imaginary towns represent the small, struggling communities in which those prairie pioneers banded together for support and company. They gave prairie writers a microcosmic view of prairie dreams and despairs.

What the small town such as Crocus did, in both reality and in its fictional representation, was to add new challenges and dangers to the naturally existing ones. It further eroded the frontier dream, seduced people away from nature with urbanization and its glittering attractions, dehumanized them with institutions, generally restricted freedom and free-will, kept them culturally deprived, and fed them to the myriad monsters of rigid prairie puritanism. The challenges of the town like Crocus were no less harsh than those that beset the lonely homesteader. The small-town dweller had not only nature and economics but also his fellow man and moral vagaries to deal with. To the struggle for survival was added spiritual isolation and moral turpitude.

A quick tour of the small prairie town with Clara Thomas and Wallace Stegner shows it to have become a particularly debatable proposition for the good frontier life by the time Mitchell starting writing about Crocus. To begin with, Thomas points out that the towns had often gone down hill by the Late 'forties.

The towns grew according to various combinations of good land, good fortune - and the politics of railroad building. Their stars were in the ascendant during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first two decades of

the twentieth century, their brightest constellations beaded along the railway networks; after the First World War many of them gradually declined, reeling under the impact of the Depression of the 'thirties' and drained of the young who got out when they could.<sup>10</sup>

The towns that Crocus represents were made from economic interdependence, the desire to fight prairie solitude, and from "railroad politics;" but they were the particular product of "colonization," the influx of Eastern Canadians and immigrants with a pioneering dream. The driving force, as suggested by Stegner, was once an American faith: that a new society striking boldly off from the old would first give up everything but axe and gun and, then, as the pioneering hardships were overcome, would begin to shape itself in new forms. In fact, he asks:

What came? A whole baggage of habits customs, tendencies, leanings, memories political and religious affiliations, codes of conduct, educational practices. Pioneers always try to use the past as a template by which to cut the future. The most viable imports, because the commonest, were associated with democratic, co-operative politics, the English language, and Protestantism, but there were other elements in the mixture, and by no means all of the English-Democratic-Protestant baggage survived.

Of all the habits and customs imported, its religious traditions were least modified by the frontier.

In other ways, too, it tried to tie itself to the forms of what it had left behind, and to bend immigrants from other cultures to those patterns.<sup>11</sup>

Prairie townsfolk thus tended towards a fairly common religious severity and a general social attitude of rigidity and intolerance. The Protestant baggage was added to by the Baptists, Congregationalists and other sects who, as Clara Thomas states, "carried with them religions that balanced far more towards fear than love."<sup>12</sup>

Stegner saw a common and interdependent town triangle of public school, free press and Protestant Church and, to these were added the Masonic Lodge, the curling rink and the women's social and moral activist organizations.<sup>13</sup> To all of these were added much racial and petty intolerance and even more prurience and gossip. The net result of that small-town mixture was a distinct tendency towards Puritanism of the worst kind. Added to rigidity of moral attitudes, there was the traditional white, Anglo-Saxon superiority, narrow-mindedness, lust for community power and reputation, moral hypocrisy and character assassination, fed by gossip.

The results of this small-town prairie milieu for the individual or ethnic group could be just as cruel as climate and far more insidious. They ranged from what Stegner describes as the cruelties of "folk culture", to Thomas' description of the social effects of the Protestant ethic. This is how Stegner sums up the perils of deviating from the 'norm':

The folk culture sponsored every sort of crude practical joke, as it permitted the cruellest and ugliest prejudices and persecutions. Any visible difference was

enough to get an individual picked on. Impartially and systematically we persecuted Mah Li and his brother, Mah Jim, Jew Meyer and his family, any Indians who came down into the valley in their wobble-wheeled buckboards, anyone with a pronounced English accent or fancy clothes or affected manners, any crybaby, any woman who kept a poodle dog and put on airs, any child with glasses, anyone afflicted with crossed eyes, St. Vitus's Dance, feeble-mindedness or a game leg. Systematically, the strong bullied the weak, and the weak did their best to persuade their persecutors, by feats of courage or endurance or by picking on someone still weaker, that they were tough and strong.

Immune, because they conformed to what the folk culture valued, were people with Texas or Montana or merely Canadian accents, people who wore overalls and worked with their hands, people who snickered at Englishmen or joined the bedevilment of Chinamen, women who let their children grow up wild and unwashed ...

Honored and imitated among us were those with special skills, so long as the skills were not too civilized.<sup>14</sup>

Dire and dirty though such "folk culture" traits may have been and felt to their victims, they are the source of what little humour emerged from that time and its literature, certainly in Mitchell's stories, and gave him subject matter for many object lessons in human behaviour in Crocus. Much more deadly in such prairie towns were those social consequences of what Clara Thomas describes as "the drive to build a progressive, successful and Protestant community. "Ideals of Godliness and business enterprise," she writes:

were inextricably meshed and individuals were expected, both by commitment and from need, to adapt and to give evidence of their partnership in the community ideals by

unremitting work, or to fall short of the corporate ideal at great personal loss and social peril. The town was our tribe - not, primarily, a network of kinship and family but a powerful structure of hierarchical relationships. The fact that everyone knew all about everyone else provided the framework of common knowledge, common interest and gossip that held the town together. Talk, resented or enjoyed, malicious or concerned, both feared and welcomed, was the strong human-communication fabric of the town and was often stronger than the individual's communication lines through love or duty, trust or even hate.<sup>15</sup>

It is in that area of small community life that so many prairie writers, and especially Mitchell, found thematic expression, as had American writers such as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. Mitchell's *Crocus* was not, however, a cruel and cynical construct such as those depicted in Winesburg, Ohio, or in Mainstreet. Drawn from the same analysis of small-town chemistry, Thomas places those studies in the category of " ... revelations of individual loneliness and defeat, or satires on the hypocrisy, vulgarity and general meanness of life in small closed communities."<sup>16</sup>

Nor did the Mitchell construct called *Crocus* duplicate the despair and tension found in other Canadian prairie, literary settings. Mitchell treated the prairie town way of life humourously, but seldom with cynicism. The underlying tenor of his stories is optimism, even in the gloomiest of moments.

What distinguishes Mitchell's writings from any other prairie literature is humour, which Stephen Leacock reminds us "is blended with pathos 'til the two are one, and represent, as they have in every age, the mingled heritage of tears and laughter that is our lot on earth."<sup>17</sup>

The picture just presented of life on the prairies in a typical small town in the first half of this century is not one in which it would seem easy to find cause for laughter: cruel climate, marginal farming, depression, drought, defeat and despair, small town Puritanism, intolerance and social cruelty. Mitchell's stories acknowledge all of these sad realities but, through humour, transcend them. He emerges as a humanist whose writings are an essential affirmation of life and the human spirit; of the individual who faces overwhelming odds, perhaps, but can still be optimistic or, at least, laugh at the odds, or at himself. Mitchell's humour is not the Mariposa humour of Leacock with its biting satire and heavy-handed cynicism - a form of social despair in itself. His is the humour of spiritual necessity in the face of those odds that would, otherwise destroy the soul. It is summarized in the Jake and the Kid story, "The Liar Hunter," which, in effect, explains why Jake and his old pal, Sam Gatenby, are always telling tall tales about grim prairie experiences. As the story points out, jokes and tall tales make it easier to endure and prevail. "These men lie about the things that hurt them

most. 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."<sup>18</sup>

Mitchell and his Crocus characters find humour in drought, crippling snowstorms and even crippling gossip, but the humour strengthens rather than dilutes the sense of endurance. His attitude seems to be that life must go on and have meaning even amidst outrageous climate, deprivation and social oppression. That optimism in the face of adversity is described by CBC President, Al Johnson, a native of Wilcox, Saskatchewan. He says that in towns like Crocus life went on, including social life, regardless of catastrophe:

Farmers still planted their grain in Spring. They threw the dice in the face of insurmountable odds and very often they lost. But, even after losing, life went on - a strawberry social, a boxing match on radio, curling too. I remember a baseball match, played with the sheen of grasshoppers overhead. The game went on, even as they were being wiped out. Their characteristic was definitely indomitability.<sup>19</sup>

Mitchell's Crocus or novel characters are indomitable and Mitchell himself is saying, through them, an unqualified "yes, to Man," which he feels is the underlying 'message' in his stories. Most of the characters in prairie literature are far from indomitable and their creators were seldom saying an unqualified yes. As reflections of a time and region, their message is generally one of endurance, but

endurance in an atmosphere of futility and despair.

Mitchell's "Liar Hunter" says prairie people laugh or tell tall tales because they can "either do that or squeal," but, he adds, "People in this country aren't squealers."<sup>20</sup>

Yet, prairie literature is full of squealing, by fictional victims and authors alike. Before proceeding to examine the themes explored by Mitchell in his Crocus stories, a summary of the writings of his prairie predecessors and contemporaries may help place Mitchell in perspective, provide a literary backdrop to his writing and, at the same time, offer a contrast to his prairie approach.

ii. The Literary Backdrop

The writers to be considered are exclusively those who dealt with prairie rural or small-town themes, particularly in real or fictional locations in Saskatchewan; writers Mitchell might well have been aware of, or influenced by, in terms of thematic preoccupations and style. They are confined to those considered to be the leading exponents of what might be called the prairie settlement or survival genre.<sup>21</sup>

Prairie literature can be conveniently described as falling under three main headings, which will be used for the purpose of this summary: the romantics, the realists and the humanists.

Concerning the first, prairie naturally gave birth to a considerable literature of a purely historical or romantic-historical nature. It chronicles or fictionally reconstructs the pioneer adventures and challenges from Indian right through to white settlement. Confining these to twentieth century treatments, three leading exponents of the western historical romance emerge: Frederick Niven, Jane Rolyat (E. Jean McDougall), and Laura Goodman Salverson.<sup>22</sup>

Niven's trilogy of novels tracing the historical development of the prairies are: The Flying Years (1935), Mine Inheritance (1940), and The Transplanted (1944). All three of these works are really more documentary than novelistic. They trace the evolution of western settlement

from the primitive nomadic life of the Indians to the organized society of the early years of the twentieth century. In discussing Niven's three prairie works, Desmond Pacey finds that his "thematic and documentary approach often gets in the way of his characterization", but he nevertheless describes them as "a serious attempt to deal with things as they actually were and are."<sup>23</sup>

Jane Rolyat's prairie works now seem to have been largely forgotten, despite the fact that, in the early 'thirties "she was regarded as the chief hope of Canadian fiction."<sup>24</sup> Of her first novel The Lily of Fort Garry (1930), The Montreal Daily Star wrote that its poetic qualities and sheer lyric beauty "in no wise detract from its power as a study of a historic period, as well as of the emotional reactions characteristic of that period."<sup>25</sup> The novel is a historical romance of the Red River settlement in the mid-nineteenth century. Lily its heroine, falls in love with a handsome and arrogant half-breed with whom she goes off to live in the wilds.

Rolyat's second novel, Wilderness Walls (1933), was intended as the first part of a trilogy that never materialized. It seems to compound the main error of Lily of Fort Garry, which Pacey describes as its failure "to fuse realism and romance in its matter" and "to be consistent in its style."<sup>26</sup>

The third of these romantic historians, Laura Goodman Salverson, specialized in prairie settlement by pioneers of Scandinavian and, particularly, of Icelandic stock, and set one of her novels, Johann Lind (1928), in Saskatchewan. Her first novel, Viking Heart (1923), is more highly regarded. Pacey suggests it "might be considered as a realistic study of western life and be grouped with the novels of Stead, Ostenso and Grove, but is still, essentially, romantic."<sup>27</sup>

Stead, Ostenso and Grove are the leading exponents of that second group of prairie writers, the realists. In discussing them, Pacey suggests that the period of realistic fiction was fairly well confined, between the wars, to the prairies, and that these three, and particularly Grove, "began the systematic transformation of Canadian fiction from romance to realism."<sup>28</sup>

Robert J.C. Stead's works in prairie realism are Neighbours (1922), The Smoking Flax (1924), and Grain (1926). Neighbours seems to give a realistic account of life on the prairies in the first twenty years of this century. It tells of a group of young people who move from a small Ontario village to neighbouring prairie homesteads near Regina.

The second of those prairie realists, Martha Ostenso, is not, strictly speaking, a Canadian prairie novelist at all, but, like Stegner, an American writer, prairie-branded

in youth. She spent her fifteenth to twenty-first years on prairie. Her most successful and best-known work, inspired by prairie upbringing, is considered to be Wild Geese. It is set on a Manitoba flax farm and features a single family in conflict with prairie and with themselves. The work is realistic but extremely sombre in tone and outlook.

It is, however, with the third of those realists, Frederick Phillip Grove, that prairie realism becomes what might be described as a dire and despairing literature. It is also with Grove that prairie literature takes on that admixture of the real, experienced and partly fictionalized that moves closer to what Mitchell was doing. However, Grove's treatments are the very antithesis of Mitchell's. Grove is regarded as exploring two main themes of free-will and humanism, with characters who struggle against, but eventually surrender to, prairie climate and an apparently uncaring god. Such a character is the Swedish immigrant, Niels Lindstedt, of his first novel, Settlers of the Marsh (1925), who wonders who God is, when faced with insurmountable adversity on a daily basis. The main characters also surrender to the odds in Our Daily Bread (1928), or Fruits of the Earth (1933), and The Yoke of Life (1930). They do not succumb without a struggle, but make considerable moral fuss about it.

It is obvious from writings by and about Grove that he was one of the immigrants to prairie who never adapted

and never reconciled himself to its nature. He may have been concerned with free-will and humanism, but he is a 'squealer' and, despite his moral best intentions, his works are not saying yes to man, like Mitchell's. They do not transcend but depress. They would seem, rather, to fall into that category, described by Mitchell, of works written as a purging or acting out of personal frustrations. In his article, "Grove and Existentialism", Frank Birbalsingh goes as far as to suggest that, since Grove's writings do not "enlarge the reader's perceptions", the host of sufferings, torturings, harassments and, ultimately, destructions, only serve to "convey a strong flavour of sadomasochism."<sup>29</sup>

Mitchell may well have found inspiration in the prairie novels of Grove, with their strong-willed characters, realistic landscapes and indifferent nature, or in his essays, Over Prairie Trails, which also reflect the love-hate relationship with prairie. Unlike Grove, however, he did not persecute and destroy his characters. Mitchell confesses that he never used his writing to articulate grudges he personally bore about the society or circumstances of prairie life.

There is little doubt that Grove's works, themes of free-will and humanism, and his preoccupation with the notion of the Promised Land, even if never achieved, must have left a mark, if not directly upon Mitchell, at least on the literary scene of which he became a part in the early 'forties.

Much closer to Mitchell's novelistic style, at least, and almost a hyphen between realism and humanism is Sinclair Ross and, particularly, his novel, As For Me and My House. Published in 1941, the year before Mitchell began seriously to prepare Who Has Seen the Wind, the book has that same realism and humanism which characterize Mitchell's works. Ross's perceptions, sensitivity and guarded optimism produce an Albertan town called 'Horizon', a main-streeted, false-fronted and much grimmer version of Crocus, with all of Crocus' physical and moral ingredients in more deadly interplay. Horizon is, essentially, only different from Crocus in that Ross elects to study human responses to small-town prairie with a heavier moral intensity and a sterner exploitation of the puritanical dimensions. Roy Daniells writes in his introduction to As For Me and My House, that it is " ... an exposition of the Puritan conscience", and lists most of the small-town moral and social attributes catalogued by Clara Thomas, ending in " ... redemption and reconciliation after torments too long for any but the Puritan to endure."<sup>30</sup>

The Ross novel, unlike most prairie realism, at least offers the hope, if not the promise, of redemption and reconciliation. It is grim in parts, but generally more optimistic and humanistic than his short stories, such as his probably best known one, "The Painted Door," written in 1939. In it, the tragic heroine assuages her prairie

loneliness by seeking comfort in another man after her prairie-worn and desiccated husk of a husband is caught by a fierce storm while visiting his father. He miraculously makes it back and, in numbing dénouement, suicidally succumbs to the blizzard he has just overcome. As For Me and My House may be a more human rendering of prairie life but it is still described by Donald Stephens as, thematically, "the unrewarded, unremitting, sluggish labour of men coupled with the loneliness and nameless terror of the women."<sup>31</sup> Sandra Djwa also concludes that, throughout his work, "there is a sense of a bleak, hard nature against which man is insignificant."<sup>32</sup> The bulk of his novels and stories must be considered, despite their humanism, as typical of a characteristically sombre prairie literature.

The literary step between that literature of doom and despair and the outright optimism and good humour of Jake and the Kid is probably Mitchell's own Who Has Seen the Wind. Extremely realistic, the novel acknowledges by its central theme and wind motif, the frailty of prairie mortals; their essential ephemerality in a landscape controlled by elements that take on an almost mystical quality. It is disturbingly sincere in its exploration of mortality amid the cycle of prairie life, but it is also a celebration of life in the process. It falls clearly into what might be regarded as the third prairie literary category of humanism.

There is in "The Wind" as in most of the Jake stories, a realization of the essential unpredictability and inconsistency of prairie nature and prairie man alike. Both, however, are given the benefit of the doubt in Mitchell's works. Prairie can be lived with, just as man's moral vagaries can be lived with, provided one retains one's optimism and common sense, one's sense of balance and, especially, one's sense of humour. Granted, he seems to be saying, both prairie and human nature can be pretty awful at times, but, as Jake cautions, "you've gotta take the bitter with the sweet."

In his Jake stories, as in "The Wind," Mitchell does not romanticize the struggle with prairie, with death and entropy, or with the darker side of the soul. Wind, snow and gophers do their worst with crops and comfort; relatives, friends and pets die and are grieved; small-town people commit moral crimes against each other and indulge in vengeance. There is, however, redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness and, most importantly, growth and discovery. Things nearly always come out all right in the end and on the side of what might be called a neutrally moral acceptability. For lack of a better definition, his works might be described as those of a Christian humanist. There is, however, no recognizably sectarian slant to that humanism. It is simply based on living, acting and deciding on the basis of what feels 'common-sensible' at the time and under the specific circumstances. The arbiter and yardstick for that rightness

based on common-sense is, invariably Jake Trumper, an unsophisticated and very down-to-earth, ordinary mortal with many flaws and shortcomings but with a sense of balance.

Mitchell's humour, based on compassion rather than cruelty, enables him to explore the puritan conscience in Crocus, as Ross did in Horizon, but without being heavy-handed or depressing. He does it partly with tongue in cheek and partly with cheeky tongue but, underlying every story is some positive moral affirmation and vote of confidence in man. The choice of the humorous vein radically alters the complexion of his Christian humanism. While his themes and concerns on the moral level and his descriptions of milieu are accurate and realistic, the humour prevents his stories from being considered as truly prairie realism.

Much of the criticism of the Jake stories and his prairie novels has been directed at exaggeration and parody in his humorous scenarios. Can people really be that funny? Can prairie weather be so wild? Can villains be quite so villainous and always be put in their place so handily?

These are the critical questions prompted by a humorous style that has earned the terms caricature, parody, burlesque and, even, slapstick. The comedy, which will be analysed in detail later, however, was only a vehicle for, and a device of, that prairie genre that Mitchell chose to make his literary and moral point. Mitchell did not introduce humour to that characteristically and traditionally humourless

prairie literature. He simply brought it to the state of a continuing genre and a formula. The humour is benevolent and secondary in purpose. It cannot compare with the truly farcical comedy brought to prairie literature by Paul Hiebert, who represents the step beyond Mitchell in prairie tone. If there are elements of slapstick in Mitchell's stories, what then could be said of Hiebert's Sarah Binks, the 'Songstress of Saskatchewan,' with its blatant satire, parody and underlying cynicism?

Sarah Binks was published in 1947, the same year as Who Has Seen the Wind. However, his style could not be farther removed from that of The Wind or even from the most hilarious sequences of the Jake and the Kid stories. In Sarah, of Willows, Saskatchewan, is found a cruelly stereotypical prairie lass who makes good, by prairie cultural standards, which are equally cruelly portrayed. "Part product" of a Jake-like figure, hired-hand Jacob Binks, Sarah asks, with yearning, after the symbolic prairie underpinning that is the reliable hired man:

Where shall I find a hired man  
for lonely destiny to toil?  
To mend harnesses  
and shovel cement and boil oil?  
Where shall I find a hired man,  
to gather rocks and do the chores,  
to harrow wide and plow deep  
the great outdoors?  
Where shall I find a hired man,  
with simple passion for his job,  
with thoughts of work and nothing else,  
within his knob?

Where shall I search for a hired man  
with corded arms and knotted knees,  
with beamed shoulders and feet  
like Hercules?<sup>33</sup>

Mitchell and Hiebert only have their hired men and grass roots in common, however. There is warmth and generosity in Mitchell's humour, whereas Hiebert indulges in the cruelly farcical and burlesque. As Hugo McPherson puts it, he "satirizes Canada's literary nationalism and academic criticism with such weightiness that the author himself barely escapes the baleful eye of travesty."<sup>34</sup> The portrait that emerges of prairie mores and culture seriously suffers in the process.

An overview of writings about Saskatchewan prairie, that form the backdrop and possibly the literary inspirational background to Mitchell's works, would not be complete without reference to Wallace Stegner. Mentioned at the beginning of this study, Stegner is relatively unknown in Canada and is considered to be an American author. It is worth noting, however, that his initial formative background is almost identical to Mitchell's and, yet, his prairie writings could not be more different. Like Mitchell, Stegner spent his childhood in Southern Saskatchewan and was similarly "litmus-stained" by it. As a writer, he emerges as powerful a prairie realist as Grove or Ross, and his treatment of the themes of prairie survival and isolation are, even more shockingly realistic. After a Cypress Hills

childhood, his family moved back to the United States, but Stegner was still writing about prairie thirty years later.

At least one of his earliest novels, On A Darkling Plain, had a Canadian prairie setting. It tells of "the experiment in isolation made by a young veteran of World War One in Western Canada; the young man, rather significantly in relation to Stegner's later work, feels a need to detach himself from a modern world that has distorted human promise."<sup>35</sup>

Stegner's definitive prairie work was not written until 1955, after he had received a grant in 1953 from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, for a study of village democracy in Saskatchewan, New England and Denmark. That was probably the spark that led to the creation of Wolf Willow and the part-fictional Saskatchewan town of Whitemud; the literary result of being raised in the same Saskatchewan milieu and at the same "susceptible time" as Mitchell.<sup>36</sup> He calls Wolf Willow "a history, a story and a memory of the last plains frontier." In its historical portion, the book expresses a passion for the relatively unexplored early Indian and white settlement of the region, with a harshly realistic view of the hard times experienced by the later homesteaders. His account of the dire winter of 1906 to 1907 contains some tall tales and jokes about the conditions, reminiscent of those of Jake and Gate in the Jake stories, but accentuates the grim reality that

"the year of the blue snow," as Jake called it, "made stock farmers out of cattle ranchers, changed the way of life and had the force a defeat in war has on a nation."<sup>37</sup> There follows a fictional chapter called "Genesis" and its dire sequel, "Carrion Spring" that describes the aftermath of the terrible winter. His study of Whitemud, based directly on the community on the Whitemud River where he spent his childhood, is only partly novelistic. It is, rather, sociological and historical. He visits Whitemud both in memory and in an actual adult return. It does not, therefore, have the stature or scope of the fictionalized towns of Crocus, Horizon, Jubilee, Upwards or Manawaka. The book is, nevertheless, a unique combination of styles and modes that place it in all of the categories previously listed: historical, realistic and, because of its anguish for the plight of the homesteader, humanistic. It does so, however, with a stark, grim realism. Its descriptions of prairie adversity, and what it did to the bodies and souls of those who faced it in the first forty years of this century, are frightening.

Wolf Willow is probably the most accurate and powerful reflection of prairie ever written. It is, however, full of anguished cries, suffering, persecution, defeat, despair and, most importantly, bitterness. Like Mitchell, Stegner uses the symbol of the cruel and uncaring wind, tearing at men's crops, cattle, bodies and hopes - at their very souls.

His protagonists, like Grove's, bitterly succumb. The fictional farmers of Wolf Willow conclude, like Stegner's own family, that "there were better things they could do than break their backs and hearts in hopeless country, one hundred miles from anywhere."<sup>38</sup> Stegner concludes that "Our dream of a wheat bonanza or, failing that, of a home, is as lost as the night wind that used to blow across the Prairie's great emptiness and, finding a little human box in its way, moaned and mourned under the eaves and through the screens."<sup>39</sup>

In Stegner's writing there is the realism, the accuracy of setting and the mystery and pathos; the central concern for the plight of the individual. There is, however, none of the warmth, generosity and revelation found in Mitchell's writings. Stegner echoes and reiterates the sombre message of prairie realism. That message is epitomized by Anne Marriott's poem, The Wind Our Enemy and its theme: "God, we tried so hard to stand alone."<sup>40</sup> The poem sums up that sombre, realistic time and literature with the stanza:  
"God, will it never rain again? What about those clouds out west? No, that's just dust as thick and stifling now as winter underwear. No rain, no crop, no feed, no faith, only wind."<sup>41</sup>

There is no faith to be found in Wolf Willow any more than there is a brighter side to be found in the bulk of prairie realism. The negative theme that results from the

book is that, no matter how resilient a man is, he simply cannot face the "ifs" of prairie life with its oscillating bad luck, its droughts, rust, freezings, and wind "with the breath of a blowtorch." He confesses at the end of Wolf Willow that "I blamed my father for the blind and ignorant lemming impulse that brought us ... to that miserable homestead."<sup>42</sup> He has one final reservation that one has to, in effect, live pioneering and the real American Dream in order to know about it, even if it has to be lived "in unmitigated discomfort and deprivation."<sup>43</sup> It is an apologetic afterthought to negativism, however. He was stained by prairie but bears it no love or affection, declaring, "How much of my remembering senses is imprisoned there where I would not, for a thousand dollars an hour, return to live."<sup>44</sup>

It is uncertain whether Mitchell read Wolf Willow, or any other Stegner prairie settings, while preparing the Jake stories or his later novels. If he did, the book could have furnished him with the most realistic view of Saskatchewan prairie ever written and one that should be recognized as a key part of the literature of that region and of Canada. In interviews, he simply mentioned the fact that Stegner, despite his return to the States, had remained branded by prairie perceptions, and refers specifically to his Pulitzer-Prize-winning Angle of Repose and All the Little Live Things.

Despite their common childhoods and 'staining,' Stegner and Mitchell could not be more different in their literary approach. Stegner's no and bitterness is a direct contrast to Mitchell's decided yes and human warmth. It is difficult to realize that they are writing about the same time and region. Stegner, "the most non-theological of novelists," viewed the world as "the work of a malevolent torturer."<sup>45</sup> Given the same milieu and tortured people, Mitchell does not exactly emerge as a theological writer either, but he does appear as the Christian humanist, giving the last benefit of the doubt to man, and allowing him nobility and dignity in the most trying of circumstances.

Mitchell's stories said yes, however, even while they said no to all that is evil and distorted in men's hearts and actions. His stories have an Old Testament ring to them, even while he is a sort of Puritan against the extremes of Puritanism in Crocus, so, in that sense too, his work is antithetical to Stegner's non-theological approach. An examination of Wolf Willow simply serves to provide stark contrast and to illustrate how the creative construct and the dramatic illusion can be so different, even in two writers who shared the same Saskatchewan childhood milieu.

It is now time to attempt a more precise contextualizing of Jake and the Kid in the prairie and its written culture of the early 'forties; to try to suggest from which

movements or particular influences it was derived or inspired. In a general literary and philosophical sense, it can be safely concluded from Mitchell's comments that his style and themes were seriously influenced by Twain in particular, among world writers, and set against the prairie backdrop of such writers as Grove, Ostenso and Ross. Other Canadian writers such as Leacock and Callaghan were no doubt influential as well.

However, it is the prairie output of a relatively unknown writer that comes closest, stylistically and chronologically, to Mitchell's Jake and the Kid. The writer, almost as prolific as Mitchell, is today as hard to find and as obscure as Mitchell is accessible and legendary. He is R. Ross Annett, who created the Albertan equivalent of Jake and the Kid, four years before the Jake series was born in print.

Annett's stories were published on no less than seventy-five occasions in The Saturday Evening Post, complete with illustrations by Norman Rockwell. In resurrecting his first story, printed in the Post on April 9, 1938, the editors of A Century of Canadian Literature, note that, at that time, the "Post was the richest market in the English language and a magazine of considerable literary repute as well." They claim Annett's Post appearances are a record never approached by any other Canadian writer.<sup>46</sup>

That first Annett story features his main recurring characters, Babe and Little Joe, and their widowed father, Big Joe. Entitled "It's Gotta Rain Sometime," the story is set in the seventh year of the drought (1936). The soil-blowing of 1932 was so bad it buried a tractor and a granary, now partially re-exposed by the desert-like prairie wind. The kids make the discovery and, along with Big Joe and Uncle Pete, dream of the good old times they represent. Dreaming turns to action as they dig out tractor and granary, complete with enough seed to plant a partial crop. Times are bad, however. The cows and hens had already been eaten to spare them from starvation. Wife Emily was lucky, she died "before drought and poverty took all the fun out of life." Times are so bad that, even after they dig out the granary and bring the tractor back to life, gas cannot be found. No one in the town of Benson (or what is left of it) will give Joe credit because he is obviously trying to achieve the impossible. Even if he succeeds in planting the seed, there will be no rain, they remind him. Joe persists and resorts to stealing gas at night from parked cars in Benson to keep the tractor going. He is caught and arrested. Uncle Pete, who makes bootleg liquor from potato peelings and is apparently his own best customer, comes to the reluctant rescue. He exchanges his precious stock for gasoline and the seed is planted. At the conclusion of the operation, and somewhat alleviating the tone of

deprivation and hardship, some rain falls. Uncle Pete is now dry, but the ground is wet with promise.

Even though it might be argued that, in fact, the drought would last for two more years and crush what little hope they had, though the kids are in rags and the climate and conditions are generally desperate, there are in the story elements of style and content quite similar to the Jake and the Kid stories:

The characters, setting and mood are alike in many ways. The preoccupations are down-to-earth and often grim but also warm, human and sometimes humorous. Annett's kids, like Mitchell's, display the same innocence and wonder of childhood, combined with a certain prairie precociousness. Like The Kid, Annett's children imitate adult language with such expressions as "What the aitch," and "Ye'r damn tootin'." Big Joe and Uncle Pete might well be Jake Trumper and Old Man Gatenby or, for that matter, Uncle Brian or The Ben. The dialect is as fresh and prairie natural as in the Jake stories and there is a moral lesson lurking on every page, without stern pretension and with simple familiarity of theme and treatment. Comparing their stories, there seems no doubt that, even if Mitchell was not influenced by the Annett stories, he responded in similar fashion to their common milieu and their apparently common perceptions of it. It is also hard to imagine how such styles as they developed could have been very significantly

influenced by the literary backdrop. Both share a common source: they are rooted in real prairie life and people. The Annett and Mitchell stories would seem to have been considerably if not wholly derived from an oral or folk culture, rather than a written one; by almost traditional tall tales and stories picked up in their raw dialect and transposed into their Babe and Little Joe and Jake and the Kid stories.

The style seems to have its prairie origins and precedent in the Calgary Eye Opener of Bob Edwards, also based on tall prairie tales, anecdotes and oral history. The man who invited Mitchell to write Jake and the Kid for Radio, Harry Boyle, himself a regional writer, sees similarities between the Mitchell and Annett stories and the Edwards material. Boyle suggests however, that Annett was the first to really exploit the genre in prairie fiction. He stresses that Annett had explored the form with the Little Babe series, but hastens to add, "I'm not suggesting Mitchell derived Jake from Annett's stories, but I'm sure he was aware of them in the Saskatchewan scene of which they were a part. Bill was simply the first to bring the genre to radio."<sup>47</sup>

Boyle places the roots of Jake and the Kid squarely in oral folk culture, which had many prairie manifestations:

There was a good oral tradition in the west. There were always lots of 'characters' hanging around and telling tall tales in the Pallisser Hotel in Calgary; Bob Edwards, Pat Burns, R.B. Bennett, Leonard W. Brockington -

drinking pals and real wits. There was also another discussion club in the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon (similar to the Algonquin Club). I worked there as a kid. I can remember the York Hotel in Calgary and the old boys sitting around there - half of them were remittance men who never admitted to what they were. You could sit there for hours and listen to these guys swapping stories and bullshitting each other all day. I worked with men like that as a kid. A lot of them couldn't even read or write - drifters who came up from the south to work on the harvest. Mitchell worked and listened with these types too.<sup>48</sup>

The childhood hours with the hired men, observing and listening around Weyburn, working on farm gangs during the Depression, provided rich material from the subconscious notebook that made the Jake stories real and credible. Mitchell was always adding to his store, especially after he returned to High River from Toronto. McKenzie Porter wrote:

He spends hours shooting the breeze on the steps of the High River Post Office with farmers, ranchers, horsemen, cowboys, storekeepers, mechanics, Hutterites, Indians, Chinese cooks and passing bums. During these colloquies, he's apt to take a notebook from his pocket and write down a bit of salty philosophy or folksy humour. Once an old cowboy, complaining of the drought, said to Mitchell: "It's enough to make a gopher's tail burn." In his next story, Mitchell switched the expression to: "It's enough to give a gopher the heartburn."<sup>49</sup>

His borrowings from prairie and anecdotes, and the High River and other local regional character models, ensured a high degree of prairie authenticity to his stories. The tale-telling approach resulted in considerable popular

identification and grass-roots humour. The credible, folksy style, and amusing dialogue and situations, provided an ideal popular vehicle for social commentary. It was, here used non-pejoratively, a case of sugar-coating the moral pill.

Mitchell has complained that, because the Jake stories were folksy, homespun and entertaining, critics have tended not to take them seriously. He also suggests that the critics fail to realize just how much work went into these seemingly simple stories. Any individual Jake story may, indeed, give the impression of being a simple and socially insignificant tale. Examined as a whole, Mitchell's Jake series of over two hundred episodes can be seen to boast considerable social content and import. There are common themes running throughout the episodes, themes that are just as serious as any explored in the literature of prairie despair; but they are skilfully disguised or attenuated by the humorous treatment. He simply chose a unique mode of writing and dramatization to explore the traditionally grim themes of prairie life and people. He did so by relying heavily on oral tradition and by recreating prairie characters in larger-than-life forms to act out his social and moral issues in the literary laboratory of Crocus.

NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

- <sup>1</sup> Stegner, p. 8.
- <sup>2</sup> Angus, p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Edward McCourt, "The Face of Saskatchewan," in The Prairie Experience, ed. Terry Angus (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975) p. 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Max Braithwaite, The Western Plains (Toronto: Natural Science of Canada Ltd., 1970), p. 23.
- <sup>5</sup> Stegner, pp. 254-255.
- <sup>6</sup> See Heather Robertson, "The Farmer," in The Prairie Experience, ed. Terry Angus (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 75-79.
- <sup>7</sup> Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," in Writers of The Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 205.
- <sup>8</sup> McCourt, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas, p. 183.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 174.
- <sup>11</sup> Stegner, pp. 288-290.
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas, p. 183.
- <sup>13</sup> Stegner, p. 304.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-129.
- <sup>15</sup> Thomas, pp. 175-176.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 175.
- <sup>17</sup> Stephen Leacock in Further Foolishness, quoted in My Remarkable Uncle, (Toronto, McLelland and Stewart, 1965), p. Xi.
- <sup>18</sup> W.O. Mitchell, Jake and The Kid: "The Liar Hunter," (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1961), pp. 100-101.
- <sup>19</sup> Personal interview with Al Johnson, Jan. 1979.
- <sup>20</sup> Mitchell, "The Liar Hunter," p. 10r.

<sup>21</sup> See Desmond Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940" in Literary History of Canada, Vol. 2, ed. Carl Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), hereafter referred to as Pacey.

<sup>22</sup> Pacey, pp. 173-174.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 174.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 174.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 174-175.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 175

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," in Writers of The Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Roy Daniells, Introduction to As For Me and My House by Sinclair Ross (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," in Writers of the Prairies ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> Djwa, pp. 189-205.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Binks: Songstress of Saskatchewan, written by Paul Hiebert and adapted by Tommy Tweed, directed by Andrew Allan, CBC Wednesday Night, May 26 1948.

<sup>34</sup> Hugo McPherson, "Fiction 1920-1940," in Literary History of Canada, Vol 2. ed. Carl Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 232.

<sup>35</sup> Harold H. Watts, Wallace Stegner biographical notes in Contemporary Novelists p. 1290,

<sup>36</sup> See Watts, above and Contemporary Authors, p. 903, as well as Stegner, Wolf Willow, cited previously.

<sup>37</sup> Stegner, p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 231.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 237.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Marriott, "The Wind Our Enemy," in The Prairie Experience, ed. Terry Angus, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 8-15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Stegner, p. 281.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 282.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 277.

<sup>45</sup> Watts, p. 1291.

<sup>46</sup> Introduction to R. Ross Annett and his story, "It's Gotta Rain Sometime," in A Century of Canadian Literature, ed's Gordon Green and Guy Sylvestre, (Toronto/Montreal, Editions HMH/Ryerson, 1967), pp. 195-209.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August 1978.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Porter, p. 46. (Mitchell amends the anecdote and says the real expression is "It's enough to give a gopher's ass the heartburn," obviously modified because of audience sensibilities.)

### CHAPTER III

#### "CROCUS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE"

The title of this chapter is taken from a Jake and the Kid episode in which a sociologist visits the town and produces a biased and distorted report on its people. The episode is a clear indication that Mitchell had an almost identifiable model for Crocus and felt it to be representative of the small prairie town. The episode, which defended the moral fibre of prairie townsfolk, was one of Mitchell's rare uses of a radio play as a social weapon or platform.

He was angered by a sociologist from the east who "libelled" the town of Hanna, Alberta,

...by suggesting they indulged in incest and the professional men were all second-raters and took a sociological-literal view of things and did a dreadful job. The script was quite deliberate and was done as a result of the outrage over what had been done by that sociologist from Victoria College just before the war. She did a monograph after listening to the prurient gossip of the landlady where she was staying. I was so outraged because she had not preserved the anonymity of the people and it was wrong. As a result of the script, there was a complaint from Victoria College ...

Fortunately, a McGill professor wrote in, saying in effect that they had tried to prevent publication of the monograph and had told their people to assess their sources and the accuracy of them, and to preserve the anonymity of the people. The end of the letter said "Thank God for Jake and "Crocus Under the Microscope." He let us sociologists have it with both barrels!"<sup>1</sup>

The Jake stories were not about Hanna or High River, or Weyburn, Saskatchewan or any of the other towns such as Estevan that listeners have claimed as models. They are about Crocus, which is a convenient prairie composite of all of these. Nor are Crocus people perfect. They are simply typical.

Crocus could be almost any small prairie town but it is, in fact, given a specific location in the introductory fragments that occur throughout the openings of the radio episodes. The reader and listener know that, like Mariposa, it is (a literary construct, but they accept it, and identify with Crocus, by a process which is described by Roy Daniells, (in reference to Sinclair Ross' Horizon), as "the pinpointing of a representative spot and the renunciatory agreement between author and reader that this is to be accepted as typical."<sup>2</sup> Mitchell proceeds to challenge the "renunciation" by pinpointing Crocus, not far from his Weyburn birthplace:

It is on that CPR branch line running from Arcola and containing, like the beads on a mail-order necklace, the towns of Brokenshell, Disraeli, Conception and Bluebell. Crocus is not a divisional point, nor is it on the Soo Line, but Crocus people drive easily to Regina for the Fair, to Estevan, or to the border and South Portal in the States. The Brokenshell River runs through the southern edge of town so that, rightly, it has been called the navel of Southern Saskatchewan. Its population is, today, 1236. During the drought years it dropped to 579.<sup>3</sup>

Crocus is not simply in Southern Saskatchewan, but is constantly described as being in "South-Central Southern Saskatchewan" by its proud citizens in the stories.

Like Ross' Horizon or Mitchell's own Khartoum, Alberta, Crocus has its Main Street of false-fronted buildings and often equally false-fronted leading citizens. It has its Presbyterian Church, Rabbit Hill School, its own newspaper The Crocus Breeze, railway station and freight office, barber-shop cum gossip centre, Chez Sadie's Hair Salon cum gossip centre, telephone operator cum gossip central, mayor's dry-goods store cum gossip centre, blacksmith's shop, Wing's Chinese café, beer parlour and so on. Extending out from town, along Government Road, there are the dependent farm families such as the Gatenbys and the Tinchers and, something no other typical prairie town has, Jake and his sidekick, the Kid. Neither sees Crocus as the most exciting place in the world to live. As the Kid says, "Crocus is quiet most of the time - no shipwrecks, murders or real excitin' stuff like they get in other parts of the world."<sup>4</sup> Or as Jake almost regretfully remarks, it's quiet "except on Saturday night in thrashin' time when the coloured lights are lighted over Main Street and you get maybe an argument startin' in front the Maple Leaf Beer Parlour."<sup>5</sup>

Crocus is loosely connected to the outside world by: the radio, which Jake detests because the signals probably mess up the weather, and because it purveys silly, sentimental soap operas and emotional advice to the women, and by the railroad, which mostly bypasses the town, except for the odd and exceptional royal stop (for coal or water). The closest

outsiders usually come to Crocus is when the express goes by and "city folk are a fleeting phenomenon; a mere haughty blur set in a ribbon of amber light as the CPR Transcontinental goes hollering through the prairie night."<sup>6</sup>

Later in the series, Crocus became more important as it became a divisional point for the CNR<sup>7</sup> and boasted three more grain elevators than neighbouring communities. Consequently, Crocus citizens assume regional superiority, amid prairie superiority, as much for its good as its bad attributes. Crocus is described in one episode as the place "where the wind blows harder, the Jackrabbits bounce higher, the dust drifts deeper and gossip travels faster than anywhere else in the world."<sup>8</sup>

The very choice of the name, Crocus, implies there is something fresh, innocent and optimistic about the town and what it signifies. Unlike Stegner's "Carrion Spring" of mud, corpses and despair, the town is almost incongruous in its hostile prairie setting, like the flower pushing courageously and assertively up through the prairie snow and proclaiming colour, survival and life. None the less incongruous and refreshing are the Crocus people who, despite their obvious faults and weaknesses, "are sociable and their sense of humour is as dry as the soil and as unexpected as the roses that tumble along the ditches."<sup>9</sup> Crocus is, indeed, the ideal literary laboratory but Mitchell did not use it to create and examine a rare and highly purified breed of prairie

people. He was as harsh and critical as any sociologist but his criticism was based on social and moral concern and genuine love of prairie people, with all their mixture of strengths and flaws. The issues and situations explored in these stories are varied but, for purposes of this chapter, can be roughly arranged into thematic groups.

The first is the conflict between the natural and simple aspects of the prairie frontier, and urbanization and sophistication. Related to this theme are two others - the contrast between the 'good old days' on prairie and the present trend toward lowered standards, and, the taming of prairie wildness and social over-regulation. The next theme could be called the perils of puritanism - the moral and physical consequences of the small town quest for status, respectability and conformity, and the hypocrisies attendant upon that quest. Another theme is that of the emancipation and social activism of women. Then there is the theme of the failure of politics as an instrument for improving the human condition. There are many others that emerge singly or overlap these areas. Not the least of these is the theme of The Kid as symbol of innocence, youth and purity and the discoveries he makes about life throughout the stories. Such themes are too readily apparent and relate too closely to lessons learned from the preceding themes to be worthy of separate mention at this point.

The social concerns listed as emerging most often in over two hundred scripts are not profound or serious enough to be considered as either major literary or social revelations. No attempt is being made here to suggest that they are, or that the stories are more than good, honest fictional entertainment, loosely based on prairie life and with a lightly-handled social or moral message, contained in those themes.

Three of these recurrent themes are closely interrelated and can be dealt with together, as - the need to stay close to grass roots and avoid the seduction and human betrayal of urbanization.

The epitome of down-to-earth honesty and simplicity in the stories is, of course, the primary character, Jake Trumper, hired man. Jake is not just Mitchell's key device for establishing and resolving the issues and plots in his stories. He is also the symbol of the healthier side of the prairie frontier; the epitome of man in harmony with prairie and with humanity. Jake Trumper may be short on culture, inclined to boasting and exaggerating and somewhat uncouth at times, but he is reliable, honest and human. He stands for 'no-nonsense' coping with prairie and with his fellow man. Others may express concern over social problems in Crocus, indulge in the petty politics of gossip or scandal, or the larger politics of business and town administration. The really important man in Crocus is the one who copes with the natural elements, and some of the unnatural ones,

to keep the place alive and functioning. He could just as easily be the blacksmith or the plumber; but in Crocus, he is Jake Trumper, the hired han, the man who gets up every morning before dawn, puts in an honest day's labour until dusk, in fair weather or foul, and still manages to help others and mediate in town problems. Jake is not just a good-natured and generous, handy and wise citizen selected at random from among a wide range of simple, down-to-earth characters. Jake stands for the legion of hired men that wrestled and came to terms with prairie, remaining human and close to nature by the very intimacy of their daily and unselfish contest with prairie. Instead of whining or squealing about their lot, they toiled to alleviate hardships others only talked or complained about. Nor did they romanticize prairie storms and sunsets, Chinooks or papooses. On the surface, the hired men were earthy, calloused in body and mind, and guilty of the social indelicacies of chewing tobacco, using spittoons, cussing, boasting and 'bullshitting.'

Mitchell makes it clear, however that they should be taken seriously as the most important figures in prairie history. They are the antithesis of urban sophistication and social education, but Mitchell makes it abundantly obvious they are closer to his ideal of prairie humanity. In the story "The Golden Jubilee Citizen," the Kid nominates Jake for that local honour. The Crocus Breeze lauds Jake Trumper in an article that leaves no doubt about the author's view of the crucial role of the hired man:

Let us salute today the man who has seeded other people's grain when the summer fallow steamed under the spring sun; who has driven other men's teams when the meadow lark sang from the fence post. He has run other men's thrashing machines and other men's binders. He has stoked other men's bundles when the strawstacks smoked against the far horizon. He has milked other men's cows, stretched other men's fences, done other men's chores.

His fortunes have been tied to the land as surely as those of his employer, and to the vagaries, cruelties and generosities of prairie nature. This man suffered during the blue snow of Nineteen Six and Seven: he thirsted and went without during the dry 'thirties. Hail hurt him, as did grasshoppers and cutworm and sawfly and low wheat prices. If he walked through a field last fall, his overalls turned blood red with rust.

We venture to say that the bulk of our farm owners and operators today started out at some time in the past as hired men. If not as hired men, then as boys who looked to the status of hired man as one of dignity, a place in farm life to be attained, a time to be reached when they could measure themselves against the worth of a grown hired man, a time when they could stook just as many stooks in a day as the hired man - a time when they could match him bundle for bundle when the threshing machine exhaled its slant plume of chaff and straw.

This man eats at the same table as his employer and his employer's family, enjoying a social equality unknown in other parts of the world and in some parts of our country. He is a hay-wire mechanic, veterinarian, stockman, who answers to the name of hardtail, sod-buster, stubble-jumper, hoozier or John.

His genesis roves the world. He comes from Ontario, Galicia, Poland, Bohemia, Ukraine; he comes from south of the border, from Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Belgium. He wears flat-soled boots, has chores in his blood, straw in his overall bib and binder twine in his heart.

He is in the pool of our lantern light now. You know him. Crocus Golden Jubilee Citizen, without whom there could have been no fifty years of history, no Province of Saskatchewan.

His name is Jake Trumper.<sup>10</sup>

Sentimentally and romantically expressed by The Crocus Breeze, perhaps, but a strong plea for the central role of the hired hand and a complete description of his attributes. Mitchell, fortunately, seldom resorts to that style of rhetoric in his stories and scripts. He lightens the issues and the tensions by portraying a Jake Trumper who does not take himself or others half as seriously as that. It is not surprising that Jake became the key character and Mitchell's first successful literary character in view of the role of hired men in his childhood and his own spell as farm labourer. He thus uses Jake to contrast with and to expose his Crocus antitheses: the sophisticates and betrayers of both prairie and human nature. He is the moral yardstick by which they are measured, exposed and put in their places, not by which they are judged or sentenced. Jake and Mitchell do this with occasional minor cruelty but never with a holier-than-thou attitude. It is that very attitude and its moral and physical consequences that they are combatting in Crocus.

The theme of false sophistication abounds in the Jake stories and Mitchell is described in his High River days as often exhibiting "eyes ... ablaze with his hatred of sophistication."<sup>11</sup> There is, on the one hand, the moral sophistication, usually of a pretentious or hypocritical nature, that goes against the whole frontier tradition. On the other hand, there is the material sophistication of creeping urbanization that betrays the honest simplicity

and self-sufficiency of the frontier settlement; that turns historic 'Fort Marmot' into the Crocus divisional point, complete with fancy automobiles, telephone, radio and other manifestations of 'progress.'

Jake is the prime antagonist of the false moral variety. He is wise himself, but has learned from the book of prairie life, not from text-books. He constantly makes pleas for those not highly-schooled and often tells The Kid that his teacher, Miss Henschbaw, has learned everything from books. He displays scorn for those who quote from the 'armchair quarterbacks of life,' devouring books that tell how to raise children, know oneself or solve problems. The main consumer of such books about life is Repeat Godfrey, the barber, who constantly quotes from them to his tonsorial victims. Jake sits, threatened and abraded by Repeat's blade and equally sharp tongue, as he pours forth advice and maxims from all the self-knowledge books he has been reading as "a student of human nature." It becomes obvious to Jake that Repeat is fascinated by popular psychology, particularly because he suffers from Puritan repression. Jake wonders "...how all them books kin help if he figgers he's got a whole bunch of wild critters lurching around in his 'self-concious.'"<sup>12</sup> Jake's scepticism and scorn for book knowledge of life is typified in a scene from the script "Don't Scratch that Baby." Ma says Johnny Totecole has done post-graduate work in agricultural college, to

which Jake wisely retorts: "Sheep won't know he been to college!"

It is, however, with the organized forms of false sophistication that Jake gets most upset, especially that of the Crocus ladies. His biggest target is the 'Atheniums Book, Discussion and Tea Society' and other associated groups that try to impose their cultural concepts on Crocus, including a moral tone dictated by their book culture. In the script, "Nature's Got Her Flags A'Flying," the Atheniums try to clean up 'language' in Crocus, paralysing male efficiency in the process, since it takes a lot of good honest cussing to keep the town functioning smoothly. Jake kills the language campaign by using the ladies' books to fight them, after discovering that their precious books feature not just explicit 'language' but explicit sex.

Jake is particularly enraged when the Crocus ladies indulge in soppy, sentimental book culture that romanticizes and distorts the realities of prairie life. In several episodes, they invite to Crocus the very symbol of that literary distortion and quackery - the poetess Belvah Taskey. Her works prompt Jake to comment, "when I hear a hunk o' poetry and it gives me the ragin' heartburn, I know she's bad poetry."<sup>13</sup> It is not just her poetry he objects to, bad as it is, but also and especially the use of such poetry to distort reality under the guise of art. In "Grass Roots Is Grass Roots," Belvah romanticizes the wild prairie farm

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life in her schoolgirlish verse, to the delight of the local ladies. Jake reminds her of farm reality by waking her up every morning before dawn. He interrupts her public reading to remind her and her enthralled audience of what prairie is really, back-and-soul-breakingly, like. In the story "Lo, The Noble Redskin," Belvah does a Hiawatha treatment of the local Indians and gives colour to her public reading with a fictional snake-dance. Jake again puts her straight on what it is like to be a local Indian. He also livens up the performance by substituting live garter snakes for the stuffed ones she had planned to use.

In such jabs at false sophistication in a prairie setting, however, Jake and Mitchell are not arguing that 'culture' is a bad or inappropriate thing. They simply suggest in these stories that culture must be practiced and offered in everyday life, in proportion and perspective, and not become a distorted substitute for life experience. nor does Jake want the crocus ladies to 'enforce' or inflict it on others. In the script, "You Can't Lead a Horse to Culture," he comments that "culture don't do too well around Crocus. Guess she's a good thing. She never hurt anybody - yet. Ladies figger it's so wonderful everybody else ought to get their nose into it."

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It should be pointed out that Jake's idea of culture is 'Wranglin' Sonny Coldtart and his Prairie Pioneers,' or Aunt Lil' Playing "The Robbin's Return" at the Christmas

School concert, or a calendar picture of an Indian maiden in a canoe. Mitchell does not note with triumph, however, that these examples are the Crocus cultural average or that the ladies' cultural benefits, with such stars as Belvah Taskey, are resounding failures. Cruelly emphasizing that other prairie town theme of cultural deprivation, he chronicles the failure of such an evening, despite appeals by Jake to bring in the Prairie Pioneers. The men of Crocus almost gloat when the ladies' cultural benefit collapses in a bankruptcy of attendance. Jake says "I told you so," and condescendingly gives the girls credit for trying anyway. Mitchell, in one of those asides to the production crew, unfortunately denied to the listener, notes that "it is a satire on Crocus and not on the ladies." That defence is, however, the exception rather than the rule. Most of the organized cultural manifestations come under attack as cultural sophistication or hypocrisy.

Many Jake scripts serve to illustrate the theme of material sophistication, or progress that betrays the frontier ideal. Mitchell makes it clear through the older characters such as Jake that "things ain't what they used to be," as Crocus moves inexorably into the modern, urbanized age and away from the frontier dream. Several characters make direct reference to the theme and there can be felt, throughout, a nostalgic longing for the disappearing prairie challenge.

The nostalgia is especially revealed through the tall tales of Jake and Old Man Gatenby. While the tales obviously serve to lighten the burden of coping with prairie conditions, they also clearly imply that nothing is quite as interesting or challenging any more and people are not as tall and colourful either.

There has been no 'real' winter in Crocus since The Winter of the Blue Snow in Ought Six and Ought Seven. Then, they boast, the thermometer never stopped dropping; coyotes, frozen in mid leap after Jackrabbits, only unfroze and caught them in Spring; and the drought was so bad the frogs were swimming under dust. In those days, a man could cope with a pair of capable hands, because it took sturdy men to harness prairie. Ranging freely over two centuries, Jake thus boasts that he 'wrassled' and got along with Louis Riel and Chief Weasel-Tail and was offered the Indian's wild daughter. He also disposed of a bear, single-handed, and matched wits with Canada's hard-nosed pioneer politicians.

When Gate contemplates retirement from the struggle of prairie farming, and takes the preliminary steps, Jake helps him back to his senses. He shows him an article describing how, one by one, the dirt farmers such as Gate are dropping off and carrying with them the pioneer tradition and history of prairie farming. Neither Jake nor Gate are truly pioneers, just stickers, but, it is implied, when they are gone, there will only be 'softies' left. Men,

like the west, "ain't what they used to be," either. In the old days, folks were healthy and, says the Kid, "they don't build folks like Jake anymore." Or, as Jake himself puts it, "you had to shoot a man to start yourself a graveyard in those days."

As far as Gate is concerned, in the good old days you could drive around anywhere in a good, faithful old car, in any condition and on non-existent roads. In "The Old Gray Car Ain't What She Used to Be," and in "Sweet Reason Conquers All," Gate gets rid of his faithful old buggy, only to buy it right back again when he discovers it is worth a lot of money as a vintage model, and that he cannot drive a new-fangled one anyway. He was forced to get rid of the car in one episode because the 'authorities,' a presumably distant and seldom manifested RCMP, considered both the car and Gate unroadworthy and would not renew their permits. Jake and the neighbours come to the rescue. They make a path for him through their fields, so that he can circumvent the law and endanger no one. In the process he also manages to achieve that other precious frontier freedom of the past - the freedom from the System and its regulations that tie modern man.

Today isn't what it used to be for the young, either, suggests Jake. He constantly resents Ma's attempts to civilize the Kid and deny him face-to-face experiences with prairie nature. In "The Old Gray West Ain't What She Used

To Be," he claims education is all askew, costs too much and is based on all the wrong values. In the old days, he points out logically, kids walked to school, not just braving the prairie elements and getting toughened up in the process, but also taking care of their bodily exercise. Now, he says, Crocus has to build a fancy gymnasium, at even greater expense than school buses, in order to give them the lost exercise.

The nostalgia and longing for the good old days is most clearly illustrated in the episode "History's Gotta Be Acc'rate." Crocus, with its vaunted fancy storefronts and other modern conveniences, pines for historic roots. It so desperately wants a history to be proud of, and monuments to that history, that it clutches at one of Jake's historical lies. Jake has been telling his tall tale about 'Fort Marmot' which he claims was burned by Chief Weasel-Tail and his band. When a few archeological remains are found in the area, they are pronounced to be those of 'Fort Marmot.' Despite Jake's objections, the citizens erect a new fort on the site of the old one. Jake realizes the remains were those of an inglorious pig farm but he allows the citizens to proceed because, as he asks rhetorically, "What's more important, acc'rate history or disappointin' a lot of people?" His sin of omission gives Crocus an opportunity to stage a special event commemorating the attack on the Fort, complete with tourist Indians. It also gives an opportunity to Crocus' oldest citizen, Daddy Johnson, to recreate his own historical

fantasy, that of saving the Fort from the Indians. The event turns into a stand-off, with Daddy ready to shoot anyone who threatens the Fort. Taking on true historical proportions, Daddy is magnificent in his one-man stand against the townsfolk and Indians, and the RCMP have to be called in to pacify him. The scenario is somewhat farcical, but it does underline the nostalgia for the past and features a key appearance by Daddy Johnson, Crocus' "living link with the pioneer past." In fact, one-hundred-and-seven-year old Daddy Johnson never really left the past. He spends very little conscious time in the present, except on his "good days" when he is vaguely intelligible. The rest of the time, he confusingly verbalizes or fantasizes about yesteryear. The apparent prototype for Daddy Sherry in Mitchell's later novel, The Kite, Daddy is symbolic also of the challenge of mortality theme; and his attitudes toward life and death are prominently featured in the Jake stories, though more cohesively developed and elegantly exploited in The Kite. Daddy is a prairie fossil. Jake says that, "like the Pharaoh's corn, dug up in Egypt, he has been preserved by dust - the prairie soil blowin' like a desert sandstorm preserved him like a mummy."

While Daddy's appearances in the Jake scripts are usually related to the mortality theme, the comic characterization deprives them of crucial importance in that respect. He is most important as Crocus' last living link with the pioneer past. He also, as Jake puts it, gives the town

"community immortality." Daddy is the last survivor of that better past, when people were truer and taller, and he is still capable of great deeds. He has dreamed for a century of sailing 'round the Horn,' or of languishing on some warm-breezed desert island, attended by the dusky maidens of 'Taheetee.' Jake has similar dreams of escaping from harsh and inclement prairie. Jake gives up his dream of becoming a 'travellin' man' because he knows the others could not cope with prairie exigencies without him. Daddy achieves his dream symbolically, in the prairie setting, and thus re-asserts his pioneer qualities. During the flood on the Brokenshell River, Daddy's house is swept away and carries him floating for miles like some second-childhood Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer on a Mississippi raft. Fantasy prevails as Daddy thwarts attempts to 'rescue' him, repelling the 'boarders' who come to his rescue with volleys of buckshot. His odyssey continues throughout the night and, in the morning, a jubilant and rejuvenated Daddy is washed up on the shores of deepest and darkest U.S.A. An approaching black U.S. Customs man is told by a triumphant Daddy - "Take me to your leader!" Daddy has sailed, and Crocus with him, from the 'Shaganappy' or shoddy present into the blood-stirring past, when men were men and free, tough as the prairie and wild as its wind.

Another related-story theme is that of man trying to impose his will upon prairie nature and upon his fellow man. It emerges in the stories as the taming of the wild.

Most prairie realist writers seem to have reflected the impossibility of man adapting to, let alone taming, the wild and hostile prairie. By contrast, and while he promotes a harmony between man and prairie, Mitchell seems more concerned with the taming of the wildness in human nature. He explores both man against the natural wilderness and, at the same time, man against the new urban wilderness he has created to counter the natural one.

In the Jake and the Kid stories, the emphasis is not really on the enmity and threat of the natural elements, with which Crocus folk seem to have found a modus vivendi. It is rather, on the battle against those elements in community life that depress the spirit and reduce individual freedom. The question of the reduction of freedom is doubly ironic within the frontier setting. The Crocus dweller illustrates the paradox of the pioneer quest for freedom and the enslavement created by banding together in a community. The town gave the pioneer new social and moral monsters to add to those of harsh prairie, or recreated those from which he had fled in the East. Urbanization also brought the paradox of loneliness within the crowd - the loneliness of Millie the telephone operator, surrounded by talk but not part of it; a loneliness as bad as that of any of Grove's prairie women. Town conventions, as will be explored during consideration of the moral themes, curbed individual freedom and were more threatening than wind, snow, drought or

crop failure. These conventions, attitudes and institutions were particularly hard on the young, the sensitive or the naturally wild.

The type of person who suffers most is the individualist such as the evangelical Matthew Behind the Rock, living the life of a recluse, with his equally wild horses that serve no practical purpose. Or, Moses Lefthand and his fellow Indians who fight to escape from the reservation syndrome, prejudice and social regulations. So does Mrs. Bent Candy, the token poverty and charity case of Crocus, who lives in squalor and domestic anarchy, complete with goats that roam inside the house at will. She cannot be left alone in the poverty she accepts, however. The Crocus ladies must organize her support and rub her nose in her state. She can never join their respectable groups and yet cannot escape the social mechanisms of Crocus. Yet, Mrs. Candy lives closer to prairie nature and the pioneer spirit than anyone in town. She is almost proud that she has no electricity or any of the gadgets that feed off it and boasts cheerfully that she lives just like the settlers, except better, because they had sod huts and she has a wooden one.

The town system also militates against the freedom of the old-timers like Jake and Gate who are rough-hewn and short on the niceties of social and cultural life. Part of their rough but honest nature, and a freedom that accrues from it, is the desire to continue to be freely rough; to

have a barbershop to luxuriate, swear and gossip in, a beer parlour in which to get away with boasting, 'chawin', spittin' and tall-talin'. It is, of course, a large part of their prairie male prerogative, but it is also a prairie cowboy pre-requisite, without which the wild, frontier life would not be complete.

If the Crocus cowboys have a hard time preserving their ways, and very species, from the cultivating ravages of Crocus and its moralistic ladies, the apprentice cowboys have things even harder. In Mitchell's stories, the prairie landscape would not be complete without a boy running wild across it - as wild and unfettered as the coyotes and the very wind itself. Stegner wrote that Whitemud boys were both free as the wind and just as Sunday-schooled and licked as little Etonians. The Kid and his cohorts were given that tantalizing taste of living like Huck Finn and yet were expected to conform to the social straitjacket of Crocus, and grow up to be, not honest cowboys, but social and economic successes, preferably as far from Crocus as possible. The Kid and most of his Crocus peers, have to find a balance between those two apparently irreconcilable polar extremes. The Kid's idol and life model is Jake, whose knowledge and cowboy ways he hungrily absorbs in equal measure. He often speaks and swears just like Jake. Ma is always quick to remind him, in a kinder and less moralizing way than the Crocus ladies, that gentlemen don't act like savages or cowboys, even if they do live on prairie.

Some kids are not as versatile as The Kid and fail to strike a balance between the tugs of wilderness and society, wildness and cultivation. Such is young Pete Tinchner, direct counterpart of The Young Ben in Who Has Seen The Wind. Like The Young Ben, Pete is hard to round up for school and even harder to harness to his scholastic duties. Brought in from a stock farm, Pete cannot adapt to his social apprenticeship - educational moulding. To the dismay and scorn of all, Pete acts like a wild animal in a corral. He is simply unamenable to learning, stares out of the school window, and draws wild, free mustangs with manes and tails flying in the prairie wild. The normally broad-minded Miss Henschbaw fails to come to grips with the wildness in Pete. Failing to tame him, she approaches his brutish, drunken father, who only shows indifference. She tries to enslave the child by destroying his father's brand of freedom - the bottle, but to no avail. She is finally forced to surrender; to open the door of the school 'corral' and let the boy return to the wilds, before school-leaving age. He will likely return to horse-busting, at which he already excels.

This prompts Mitchell to suggest, in "The Teacher and the Wild One," that some people are not made to struggle through school and might be better off if left to their natural inclinations. The Kid echoes this theme when he says that, looking at Pete Tinchner, he "thinks about a Kiyoot

headin' across prairie," and concludes that "there is tame stuff and there is wild stuff." Jake, wiser and perhaps the more Mitchell of the two, says "most folks are born wild - get tamed while they're growin' up."

The small-town taming process proceeds unchecked in school, church, civic administration, social organizations and, through mail-order catalogues. The people of Crocus, and their life style and attitudes, become farther and farther removed from the frontier dream and from nature; from all the wild things of the prairie land and air. In losing their freedom, however, they seem to reach out to deprive others of it; to get their own back against people or creatures that would be free. Man's machinery tears at the prairie land and Jake mournfully predicts the tractors will eventually leave nothing stirring or alive. Adults and children alike seem to turn upon the creatures of the land and sky that enjoy freedom.

Gophers are shot and 'drownded' in their holes by the thousands, most by young boys with twenty-two's or pails of water, and accompanied by eager dogs. These killings are only partly to control a scourge of the crops; primarily they are part of a boy's education and his initiation into manhood. Wild geese are blasted from the skies, not because they also feed on crops but, as Jake puts it, "because they are up there," and, by implication, because we humans are stuck down here. Even Ma, despite her moral objection to

sport hunting, is drawn in "King Of All The Country" into the unexplainable love-hate relationship with the geese when she, too, shoots them. Jake shouts paradoxically before shooting them - "slaughter the darlin's!"

Like young Pete, The Kid, himself successfully tamed, proceeds to destroy another free spirit. In "Take Her Gentle, Take her Easy," he battles with his wild colt, 'Auction Fever.' With mixed emotions, he finally 'breaks' the animal and then exults in its submission to his will. He has been tamed and, in turn, tames the very symbol of wild prairie nature. The circle is complete.

The next theme to be discussed is closely related to the erosion of free will. It might be called godliness and the perils of puritanism, or, the consequences of the moral "baggage" brought to the prairie town. Worse than lack of harmony with nature, than the physical consequences of urbanization and its spiritual confinement and abrasion, are those "familiar furnishings of the Puritan soul," described by Roy Daniells in connection with Ross' Horizon.

Crocus is well-stocked with sin, meanness, hypocrisy, gossip, scandal, prejudice and other such characteristics of small-town inhuman nature. It is not, however, well developed in major or cardinal sins and most of the time the perpetrators can be corrected or set on the straight path without too much trouble. Although the devil never appears in Crocus, his comments in The Black Bonspiel of

Willie McCrimmon and in The Devil's Instrument, appropriately summarize the main imperfections of the Crocus district:

South-Central Southern Saskatchewan is good territory ... but, for the most part, nothing very flashy in the way of sin ... small novelty sort of thing; petty intolerances, lust for community (tea-pot) power, minor carnal itch, within-the-family tyranny, self-indulgence, snobbery, sins of 'immission,' or just plain gossip.

Many of the object lessons in the Crocus stories derive from the exploration of the area of struggle and standards; with the struggle not simply to survive and live meaningfully, but to achieve status and power through that struggle and to achieve at least the appearance of respectability through those often hypocritical standards.

In their most positive and least harmful manifestation, struggle and endurance enabled a decent living to be extracted from the arid prairie soil and the equally arid culture of prairie towns such as Crocus. The Protestant work ethic, manifested by men like Jake Trumper, was what kept the human settlements alive. In his more fantastic moments, Jake Trumper tries to project the image of romantic hero: he tells of wrestling with Louis Riel and making him say uncle three times (in English, French and Cree), of how he taught the Indians how to make a buffalo jumping pound, or of his acquaintance with Wilf' Laurier. In reality, however, Jake's heroism consists of enduring the back-breaking and mundane travails of the hired hand, with undiminished stamina, morale and reliability. In his wiser and more restrained

moments, Jake portrays himself as far from heroic and boasts proudly of his labour. "Every day my life, he says, I twanged the bedsprings at sundown an' I kicked the dew off the stubble with the rooster. I never had a holiday long as I can remember. Who the hell ever heard of a hired man takin' a holiday!"<sup>14</sup>

He not only refuses to take a holiday and leave The Kid and his Ma in the lurch, but also rejects the idea of retirement, while still healthy. Just how long, one might ask, is the victim of the Protestant work ethic supposed to 'endure' in the masochistic sense described in the works of Grove? Jake suggests there is no precise age limit. In "A Man's Age is His Own Business," Jake, suspected to be a senior citizen, is too proud to admit he is eligible for the new old age pension. He says he is only about sixty and is still able to support himself. His pal, Sam Gatenby, who is much older, decides to give up the constant struggle with climate and fortune. He publicly announces his retirement in "Watch Them Arteries" and puts his farm property up for auction. However, far from slowing down and protecting his health, as suggested by Jake, Gate listens instead to another victim of the work ethic, Repeat the barber. Repeat warns that the body is like a machine and, if left idle, will rust and deteriorate. Retirement, he says, will make the body quit. Repeat points to the glowing example of his father who died working; "who died in harness at the harvest of life. The Angel of Death harvested him in the barley field." Afraid of rusting, Gate cancels the sell-out.

But while Repeat advocates that Jake and Gate and the other prairie work horses keep hard at it, he and other figures in Crocus struggle equally hard to earn themselves status and respectability. Like Repeat, they work assiduously, not just to attract clientele and earnings, but also to achieve "character and reputation," the two sides of the coin hoarded by Repeat's very respectable father. The small town theme of respectability is epitomized by Repeat, who is a walking case-book of moral contradictions and Puritan repressions. Despite his high ideals of keeping "a clean tongue and a clean instrument in a clean shop," Repeat, as his name implies, can never really achieve true respectability, because his establishment is an information exchange and his tongue a purveyor of town gossip. Repeat is, in fact, almost as important a thematic figure as Jake, in that he stands for most of the petty manifestations of Puritanism or serves as a device for supplying additional background or reaction to puritanical situations. Repeat's shop is the key communications device in the stories and the gossip and information center for Crocus menfolk. Beyond that basic structural role, however, Repeat Godfrey is a much more important figure in terms of the moral issues he represents.

Repeat daily relives the example set by his father, an awesome figure whose advice and maxims he passes on to his customers free of charge. His father is described in "Mind Over Madam" as:

One of nature's noblemen - noble example to one and all, family, community. Exemplary, fine old wise man - he gave us constant guidance and daily advice, wise counsel - unflagging. The Golden Rule lived along with us - right along with us in our daily living.

Most of the daily advice given by Godfrey Senior, who was of course also the head of the Durham Breeder's Society and other such organizational pillars of society, would seem to be of extremely limited use in prairie life. Maxims such as "you can tell a man by his whiskers - pattern of the whiskers - where he comes from and his character." Or, in "Nature's Got Her Flags A'Flying," "show me a man which swears and I'll show you a man who isn't his own master. Blood'll tell, in man or beast. Tell a gentleman by his language." The old man's biggest mistake in raising son Orville by the Golden Rule, or his interpretation of it, was to deprive him of minor indulgences.

The extent of the repression and sublimation caused by such rigid upbringing is most evident in Repeat when he talks about matters psychological. At such moments, he lets slip the darker desires or frustrations lurking beneath his business and moral respectability. In "Mind Over Madam," a hypnotist comes to town and selects Repeat for a stage demonstration. Under hypnosis, Repeat drinks and sings dirty songs. Despite his expression of contempt for hunters who go banging off at everything living in sight, Repeat is the only person to grab a shotgun and bang away himself during a goose-calling competition.

It is in that puritan "furnishing" of the "slow realization of forgiveness" that Repeat, and several other Crocus characters, excel. In "Hip, Thigh and Shinbone," Repeat is enraged by the installation of a barber seat at Chez Sadie's. He says that, in such situations, he asks himself what his father would have done. Give in and accept the competition? Never! Godfrey Senior would smite them, hip, thigh and shinbone. Repeat closes his barber-shop and has extensive alterations made. Months later, he returns from 'coiffure college' as Orveel (as the French say it) Godfrey, women's hair stylist par excellence. To stick the knife in those disloyal tradesmen who sat, or were suspected of sitting, in the chair at Sadie's, he has the alterations to his salon done by contractors from Regina. Basically, Repeat does not like the company and ways of women, let alone the intimacy of styling them, but he goes to infinite trouble just to get revenge.

Others too are slow to forgive and quick to avenge themselves. Jake nurtures his grudge against the villain Pete Botten for years. He makes it a matter of community honour to beat him at that goose-calling contest, as though his very life depended on it.

In true biblical punitive tradition, the eccentric Matthew Behind the Rock, literary doppelganger of Saint Sammy in Who Has Seen The Wind, gets his revenge too. Albert Williams, the 'Flax King,' wants Matthew off his land and covets

his Clydesdales. (St.) Matthew gives Williams a taste of Old Testament retribution as he threatens his flax crop with drought. Williams is not adequately awed by this evangelical figure who speaks in parables and shuns the way of man.

Matthew is forced to demonstrate his punitive powers and call upon the elements to destroy Williams' barn. He shows Williams who is in charge - not Matthew but their Maker, who is quick to punish arrogant mortals.,

While direct religious references are infrequent in Jake and The Kid, outside the two Matthew exploits in "Honey and Hoppers," and its sequel, "Prairie's Scarey," religious symbolism operates at many levels. It reinforces the basic morality of the stories and most occurs in connection with Repeat Godfrey, as he illustrates themes of godliness and moral respectability of a Puritan nature. The underlying message of those religious overtones is that God giveth and God taketh away - reinforcing the precarious physical and moral well-being of prairie townsfolk. The most symbolic treatment of that theme is found in the pilot episode "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," which will be analysed later.

It is in the department of "hypocrisy and sexual sin" that Crocus surpasses itself but, again, it is not really extravagantly sinful. There may be frustrations, but there are no ministers of God lusting after lady teachers, who in turn lust after male students, as in Winesburg, Ohio, for example. More is secretly thought or gossiped about than actually done in Crocus.

If anyone in Crocus actually does anything that is sexually sinful by Crocus standards, it certainly is not blatantly obvious or detailed. Nevertheless, the possibility of such falls from grace are much discussed. The rumour mills of Repeat's shop, Chez Sadie's and the party lines, hum with gossip about an affair between Mayor MacTaggart and Millie the telephone operator, who went along with him on a business trip to Regina. It turns out in "Scandal, Scandal, Scandal," that, in a fit of wishful thinking, Millie created the whole thing by circulating an anonymous letter about the 'affair.' Mitchell's script sadly ascribes the problem to an old maid's frustration and loneliness. Millie had overheard the constant gossip and chattering over the Crocus phone, "like the wind over the prairie," and, being neutrally excluded from it, as though she were a component of the mechanical system of the telephone, engineered herself into the gossip network.

Scandalous appearances can be worse than a plague of grasshoppers in Crocus, and a lot more fun. When that pillar of local society, that "man of dignity, credit to the town, churchman, steadying influence," Repeat Godfrey, appears to be involved in a sexual liaison with someone "from the other side of the tracks," it is almost the end of society in Crocus. Repeat's reputation is at stake. In "Phenomenum, Phenomena," Repeat's car is seen parked, on several nights, outside the home of the widow, Mrs. Bent

Candy. It turns out, in fact, that Mrs Candy, in addition to being the local poverty 'case,' is looked upon as something of a clairvoyant. She was simply trying to help Repeat contact the spirit of his stern father. Naive Godfrey was unaware of the gossip and Jake only manages to convince him of the threat to his standing in the community with great difficulty.

It is in one last area that the Anglo-Puritans of Crocus do most damage; that of superiority and intolerance. There is in Crocus none of the outright persecution of those who are different or do not subscribe to community conventions. Crocus bigots, racists and snobs may not be as vicious as Stegner's Whitemud persecutors, but they are active. Many of the scripts feature racial intolerance in Crocus, and most of it is directed against local Indians, with some also for European immigrants.

In "One-Hundred-Per-Cent Canadian," and in several other Jake scripts, the target is Indian, Moses Lefthand, and his family. They have rejected the reservation and, at one point, take over an abandoned property at the edge of town. Mr. Albert Ricky conducts a one-man campaign to get rid of the Indian squatters. For Ricky, Indians are all subject to diseases, physical and social, are always drunk, and live like animals off 'shaganappy' land. Jake intervenes and argues that Indians are just like anybody else and, besides, they are the best stookers he ever had. As

far as he is concerned, the many races and cultures are simply the varied consequences of settlement - "different folks got up and homesteaded different parts of the world" - and he cannot see why everyone gets so excited about racial disparities. In the end, sensing that Ricky's opposition to the Lefthands was overly emotional, he kills the campaign by reminding Ricky that the bigot is at least one-third Indian himself.

In the script, "Lo, The Noble Redskin," Ricky again scorns Jake's decision to allow the Lefthands and all their horses to stay on Ma's land. Ricky predicts they will refuse to work, give the Kid some disease and run off with their money. In this and other episodes, Jake supports the Indians' claim to equality and their refusal to play the role of tourist attraction.

Moses says he is one-hundred-per-cent Canadian and no one is allowed to call him Indian. He naively insists on entering his child, "one-hundred-per-cent damn fine Canadian baby," in the Crocus baby contest. The community ladies object, fearing the Indian baby will give their offspring TB or, at least, germs. Jake intervenes again, conscripting his usual enemy, Miss Henschbaw, the teacher, to lecture them on lineage and prejudice. He circumvents the problem by creating categories of cuteness for the babies, and pleases everyone. Similarly, when there is a Royal Stopover, found in various story versions, Moses' child is allowed to present

a bouquet of wild flowers, to supplement a prize-grown bunch proffered by the daughter of 'Crocus' leading lady horticulturalist, who is, herself, just as socially prize-grown.

Mitchell's strongest thematic treatment of social or racial intolerance occurs in the script "Going To A Fire." It is also his most tragic episode. In the story, the immigrant Kiziw family are newcomers who strive to make a good living and to be accepted by Crocus. They succeed only too well during hard times, however, and prosper in a fine farm and home while everyone else merely gets by. As Jake puts it, once Kiziw is doing well, no one cares for him "now he has the world by the tail on a downhill pull." Jealousy is added to racial prejudice. Resentment of the Kiziw success spreads around the town. Rumours spread that immigrants "harness their women to haul a garden plow .... Hunkies don't fight like a white man ... they're buying land from money made by binding without a thresher ... livin' like a pig." Even community-minded Repeat says Kiziw has "the backward habit of not spending ... the women won't assimilate ... the battlements of democracy are riddled through with folks that aren't assimilated."

The result is that Kiziw is socially rejected by Crocus. The men will not play with him at cards, pool or curling and refuse to drink with him, even if he pays. Worst of all, they will not talk with him, completing his total isolation. Finally, his house burns down and he, in turn,

refuses the help of Crocus townfolk to fight the fire. He asks them if they "know how it feels to be as good as anyone but the only one different in the whole place." His plight tragically underlines Mitchell's other theme of the ultimate horror of social as well as environmental loneliness.

Throughout his Jake stories, Mitchell also stresses another brand of Canadian racial prejudice and intolerance operative in Crocus; regional superiority and intolerance, merging with and becoming that other sin of snobbery. This theme emerges most forcefully in the script "And So Is the West," where Jake describes Old Man Gatenby as intolerant of anything and everything east of Fort William. Yet, he proposes, himself, to send Ma back home for a vacation to "the heart of darkest Ontario." The story is a reminder that there are snobs in the west too.

Historical snobbery's bad in Winnipeg.  
Horsey snobbery in Calgary among the  
ranching families. Blanket snobbery in  
British Columbia, looking down on anyone  
not from there. Climate snobbery in  
Saskatchewan - How far below zero it goes  
in winter, how hot, how dry, dust storms,  
'hoppers, hail stones, the most gophers,  
the most rusty, the most alkali, the most  
sawflies and the strongest wind.

The ladies of Crocus are, however, his largest target in the realm of snobbism, not simply for trying to impose their concepts of culture. One of the major activities of organizations such as the church auxiliary or Burning Bush Chapter, I.O.D.E., is that of charitable support for the

poor. Unfortunately, however, there are not many charity cases in Crocus, except for Mrs. Bent Candy; and helping the Candy family has become a charitable industry in itself. The ladies seem to enjoy having the Candys to look down upon and are kept socially busy with their 'mission' of Candy support. Their hypocrisy is revealed in the scripts "Struck Rich " and "Luck and The Lord," when Mrs. Candy makes a small fortune from oil on her property and doesn't need their help anymore. Mrs. Candy spends lavishly and refuses to change her 'inferior' habits. To make matters worse, she begins to give her new riches to charitable causes, having inscriptions engraved (to the memory of her late and profligate husband) in honour of such donations. The Crocus ladies are speechless. Their mission has been nullified and their industry subverted. Worse still, the stamp of the late and not regreted Bent Candy is upon their beloved institutions. Mrs. Candy also reminds them that she never really needed anyone's charity, as such. Her oil finally runs out and she is once more destitute. The ladies offer to reimburse her donations. They wish to erase the public dedications to her husband and, ultimately, to make her dependent on them once more. Mrs. Candy declines, in fond memory of Bent. In this and other stories involving Mrs. Candy, Mitchell seems to be making a plea for the dignity of the poor but honest. They need, he suggests, to be protected from the professional do-gooders. As Mrs. Candy

comments, "When you're in the shape I'm in, you can afford to be honest - you have nothing to lose."

In one episode, he demonstrates that Mrs. Candy's dignity goes beyond mere acceptance of her lot. It is an intrinsic human dignity that transcends social status or worth. In "Nature Knows Best," she buys a cheap, yellow rose plant from Woolworth's and forgets about it in the back yard. The rose ends up, unpretentiously but honestly, winning a prize at the Crocus Annual Flower Show. It competes with the extravagantly and obsessively hormone-nurtured entries of Crocus' social and horticultural lion - Mrs. Elsie (Do-Goody) Abercrombie. Mitchell hints in a script aside, that the yellow rose was not merely simply and honestly dignified like Mrs. Candy, but has a lot of help from the "luck of the Lord," in the form of goat droppings in her back yard. Once more, then, he belabours the dangers of over-sophistication leading to a departure from God's and Nature's ways.

One other aspect of hypocrisy and ostensible uprightness should also be briefly mentioned here. That is what might be called, thematically, the frauds, phonies and cheats. The stories do not, however, produce a clear and unequivocal definition of what constitutes fair and honest behaviour or talk. Jake himself displays many contradictions in this area. He is, after all, a "historical liar" and a teller of monstrously tall tales. Neither is he above distorting the

facts or loading the dice, in a situation or an argument, in order to improve his chances. Often, he does so in order to help resolve someone else's problem, however, so there are extenuating circumstances. For example, in "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," Jake, pushed into a corner by his boast to Gate that he can make rain, has to resort to hokum. In addition to his carny rain-making machine, he resorts to cloud-seeding chemicals to be used by a local pilot. Mitchell's own ambiguity towards that kind of cheating shows through, however, when, in a television version of the script, Jake finds the pilot did not have time to cloud-seed, so he performed the rain miracle himself after all. Thus, Jake's honesty and heroic proportions were protected.

The fraud who is most mercilessly exposed and punished in the Jake stories is St. Clare Jordon. Originally from Crocus, St. Clare has been extremely successful as a writer of epic, adventure novels based on his own alleged intrepid exploits throughout the world. He is adulated by Crocus on his prodigal return, but Jake is not impressed. He remembers the gutless boy St. Clare was, and discredits him and his fictional boasts by proving that he can't even swim or ride a horse. The St. Clare Jordon character is apparently a real-life parody and a reflection of Mitchell's hatred of frauds from the arts and media world.

The puritan desire to unmask and punish the pretender is shown operating at its extreme in the episode "The Other

Side of the Coin," which again explores Repeat Godfrey's obsession with character and respectability. This story is about a threat, not just to his respectability, but also to his family name. And, as Jake puts it, "once you question the respectability of Repeat's actions, you pretty well knock the props out from under everything in Crocus district." Repeat is so intent on preventing that from happening that he is willing to sacrifice his own brother's integrity. Merton Godfrey fortunately happens to have been everything bad that Orville (Repeat) Godfrey was not. Merton was a "real bad puhtatah," as Jake says, who ran away from home with the very circus that Repeat was denied. In fact, he later gambled and won the circus on a bet. Merton also got a dishonourable discharge from the armed forces, was involved in real estate in California, oil, and rum-running - everything, in fact, that might disappoint or alienate his Puritan parents. The Godfreys never survived the shock of this black sheep in the family; and Repeat wiped his brother out of his memory after Merton failed to return to comfort their dying mother. Merton turns up in Crocus as a traveling evangelist, maintaining that he has seen the error of his ways, but apparently making a good commercial enterprise out of his public purging. Incensed, Repeat unmask him at a public meeting when Merton pretends he repented after confessing his sins to his dying mother - an honest act on Repeat's part, but hardly conducive to Godfrey family esteem.<sup>15</sup>

The most morally ambiguous and equivocal of Crocus characters is not a citizen at all but merely a passing attraction, or a periodic scourge, depending upon one's viewpoint. He is Professor Noble Winesinger, an out-and-out carny con'-man. Winesinger often comes to town with his 'Travelling Temple of Refined Entertainment and Scientific Education - Medical Show and Clinic.' He systematically fleeces gullible Crocus and district citizens with endless variations upon a concoction generically known as Tune-Up Tonic and Lightning Penetration Oil - good for man or beast. Despite its various disguises and applications, the mixture remains the same fraudulent formula. If Jake and Mitchell go along with this con' man and accept his charlatanism, it is probably because he is not doing anything really bad to Crocus citizens and might even be doing them some good, since they are so willingly taken in. To Mitchell, Winesinger is the last remaining holdout of the old-time breed of travelling con'-artists. He is, in short, a fraud but a benevolent one. Winesinger alone, after Jake, comes close to Mitchell's own version of humanism; to the concept of kind laughter at human idiosyncrasies.

Mitchell is not beyond the odd confidence trick himself, while demonstrating the quirks and contradictions of human nature. An example is found in the two-part treatment of a dog-poisoning epidemic in Crocus, "Man's Best Friend" and "Murder Will Out." The scripts are obviously his way

of demonstrating that he is concerned with basic rather than sentimental or distorted humanism. They also counter the criticism by Margaret Laurence that his moral concerns are of the immoderate "be kind to animals" variety. In fact, in the Jake scripts, animals come off a very second best to humans. Pet dogs and calves die; gophers are 'drowned' or "touched-off" with twenty-twos by the thousands, and geese and ducks are mercilessly blasted from the skies. In the two scripts about dog-poisonings, some sick person is gradually wiping out the dog population of Crocus. For almost an hour and over two suspenseful weeks, the plays pull at the heartstrings of the audience. Indignant Crocus citizens demand civic action. The Crocus-Breeze publishes emotional 'obituaries' to the dead pets, listing the child owners in bereavement. Then, just as the killer is apprehended and about to be brought to justice, Mitchell does his 'sting.' The dog-killer vehemently admits he did it because he felt some dogs, such as Doc' Fotheringham's hunting pack, were better looked after than people, "living in luxury ... fat, greedy and comfortable," while some people are "living like a pack of rats." The story and its dénouement underline the fact that, with Mitchell, human beings, their dignity and the quality of their lives, come first and foremost in his concerns.

His moral themes and the characters which illustrate them are, clearly, not sentimental or superficial. He

presents real issues and fairly unromanticized people; people who are far from saints, but are not really 'bad puhtatahs.' As Jake says, "after threshing, everyone gets around to lickin' old wounds ... everyone around Crocus ain't sweet and lovely all the time and Pete Botten sure adds up to a lot of vinegar ... there's always a bunch of fellows standing around to fan her up."<sup>16</sup>

Another prominent theme in the Jake stories could be described as - women as a second-rate species. Crocus is, essentially, a man's world. It reflects those rough-hewn and survival-related traits that accompany the frontier syndrome. On the whole, the women seem to stand for threats to the quality of male frontier life. They tend to be collectively or organizationally depicted in the scripts, therefore; and few of them are developed as characters to the extent that most of the male figures are. It might be said that, in general, women are somewhat cynically portrayed as one of the main deterrents to a rough but honest prairie life. While their men do battle with prairie, Crocus women do battle with men's coarseness, insensitivity, and instinctive desire for freedom and disorder.

The women emerge, in fact, as the prime enforcers of the moral constraints or hypocrisies just enumerated; and local women's groups play a role as critical as those of the forces of law and order. The Atheniums, the Burning Bush, the Louis Riel Chapter and the other 'discussion' groups, are powers to be reckoned with. Mrs. Elsie

Abercrombie and her high moral and cultural priestesses are always getting involved in town 'issues,' from cleaning up language to besmirching someone's reputation. When they become involved in municipal political matters, the mayor and his council tremble and male concepts of democracy are severely shaken.

The organized ladies do, at the community level, what the Ma's and Miss Henschbaws do individually - tame and curb male prairie wildness and force it into their socio-cultural mould. Yet they might as well try to tame the prairie itself as knock the wild, rough spirits out of Crocus males, young or old. After all, the males are keeping the place alive and functioning and the young males are serving a necessary apprenticeship to continue that role. It would not do for Crocus males to become sentimental, sensitive and cultivated. Try as they might, the ladies never win and, indeed, lose respect and credibility in the process.

It might be suggested that the purpose of these moral and cultural encounters is, precisely, to show just how coarse and chauvinistic Crocus males are. The treatment they receive in the stories, however, runs counter to any prospect of sexual equality. They are frequently ridiculed and satirized by Jake and his fellows. Through the dialogue and situations, and through asides to cast, Mitchell seems to be goading from the sidelines. Contrary to his usual restraint, the author appears to have over-emphasized the

female satire, and sounds more as though he were laughing at, than with, the women.

The subject of women brings out the worst in Crocus men. The most complimentary remark about women in the entire series is probably Jake's comment about the Atheniums that "they mean well, but get things stirred up." Even the moderate Mayor MacTaggart is generally good-natured and conciliatory but frequently admits that being mayor would be a nice, clean job if it weren't for the women.

At best the stories imply the women are happily ensconced in a world of soap operas, romantic movies and escapist literature. Whenever they get together in groups, they are a threat. They may be "in their proper place" as women but still indulge in dangerous gossiping at Chez Sadie's or in their clubs and societies. They are condescendingly granted the 'natural' right to be sentimental. As Old Man Gatenby says of his hired woman, she has a right to be happy "just like them women on the radio shows." Woman expert, Jake Trumper, declares of their movie-going that "women make a hobby out of love." The Crocus men become crueller and less generous when it comes to gossip by the ladies. They are portrayed as sitting around in the Hair Salon having their heads baked, shampooed and dyed, with tongues snippety-snipping as hard as the scissors, and reputations lying around the floor like hair clippings. Jake concedes that the men gossip at Repeat's too, but

"wimmen put the real twist to it. They got a nat'ral flare for it, get a thrill, adventure out of gossip." Their gossip, Jake suggests, knows no limit. Getting back at the women for criticizing goose-hunting in "Duel at Dawn," he retorts that "not just geese get hurt when women get tea and discussin' double-barrelled gossip. Aim is real deadly. Just what is the bag limit on reputations this season?"

The Crocus ladies are portrayed at their worst, however, when they emerge from their gossip sessions and act collectively about local issues. If they are not cleaning up morals, doing good or rubbing folks' noses in culture, the ladies are organizing special events, such as "messing up another Dominion Day." When Jake gets involved in an altercation with Miss Henchbaw about her "going off half cock" on some aspect of such an event, she replies, "I'm sorry, I'm only a woman" whereupon Jake, unfazed, retorts, "Yeah, well, I suppose you can't help that." On one occasion the ladies try to combat the male monopoly on historic deeds by seeking famous female citizens as an adjunct to Crocus Golden Jubilee celebrations in, "He Built the Country." During an unsuccessful search for even one such female citizen, women are dismissed with the comment that "the trouble with women is they're too damn female."

The following are a few examples of anti-feminine sentiment. "Wimmen always gotta blow the little things up twicet their size - ain't the stuff in women they is in men," or,

says Jake of Violet Bowdry, of the many husbands, "she was yappin' fer ten minutes straight and she never went over a single word twicet. 'Nough to give a coyote the heartburn." In "Women is Humans," the Kid asks Jake some key questions about women and gets this answer:

Wimmen is fussy about a lotta things that ain't worth a whoop ... that's the trouble with women, they don't see past the outsides; hate to see anythin' that don't fit into the pattern. ... She can't stand nothin' that ain't just so.

As for the intuitive superiority attributed to women, Jake laughingly retorts that women simply close their eyes, charge in half-cocked and, if they end up being right and come out in one piece, they call it intuition.

Jake is particularly critical of that ultimate of female 'weapons,' marriage. Living with a women is depicted as a hazardous and even dangerous business. Violet Bowdry, who unsuccessfully tries to ensnare him, has already buried half a dozen husbands and delights in describing the details of their various 'departures.' Jake finds her "fussy about sorrow, sickness and death," and escapes her morbid clutches in "Love's Wild Magic," by pretending to act like one of the overly romantic figures in her fiction and radio-inspired fantasies. Both Jake and Gate are involved in separate episodes in which they escape female entrapment by the barest of margins. The closest Jake comes to succumbing is in the story, "Woman Trouble," where he undergoes a character transformation while wooing the widow, Mrs. Clinkerby. A

shaven, scented, genteel and mandolin-serenading Jake appeals The Kid. He returns to character and escapes after it is revealed that he was just in need of attention from someone because The Kid and his Ma were paying too much attention to a visiting baby. Jake confesses to the Kid after his narrow escape:

Way I got it figgered, women invented gettin' married ... tie a man up then he's got to supply her with house and grub. Handy for kids. I'd say she's a woman's idea ... kinda grew ... took a long time, didn't happen over-night. Like the combine or thrasher but a lot simpler ... in some cases works a helluva lot better too!

Crocus women are at their deadliest local deeds and Mitchell is most satirical when the ladies seek political power and equality. In "Somethin's Gotta Go," Elsie Abercrombie decides to run for the mayoralty and is viewed as typical of those "participatin' meddlin' and infiltratin' women." Mayor MacTaggart, aghast, quotes all the terrible misfortunes that Crocus and the West have lived through and concludes:

The greatest catastrophe of them all ... the granddaddy, short-sighted, two-handed, deliberate shaganappy, awfulest historical blunder ever pulled in the livin' memory of man was the female vote.

He need not have worried about his seat, however. While Elsie and her lieutenants were agitating, Mitchell was developing a sub-plot with Old Man Gatenby and his latest fad - goats. The crisis is averted and the women are given a vicious put-down when they make their political bid before

Council. They are confronted with three of Gate's goats, brought along for the occasion and, appropriately, named after Elsie and her two main female cohorts. End of issue and end of female political aspirations and image.

Mayor MacTaggart reminds Jake that women are insinuating themselves into every aspect of male sovereignty. He complains that there are women in cocktail bars, wrestling matches, playing hockey and baseball. Why, a man can't even chew or spit any more. However, women in politics is where he draws the line.

Undaunted, the ladies try their hand at another political cause - no vote without representation. They want to be able to vote in municipal elections, even if they are not, themselves, ratepayers. This time, at least, they get a semblance of a hearing. Mayor MacTaggart tells them, however, that it is not Crocus' or society's problem, but rather a matter to be discussed between them and their ratepaying husbands. He dismisses their demand with the advice that they ask their husbands for property transfer in their names. He thus implies that the issue is not a civic political one but one of domestic politics.

Another assault upon male dignity occurs when the women demand equal curling time. This strikes even closer to Crocus manhood and to all that is holy in male prerogatives. All-out war is the response. The ladies are tired and insulted by the curling 'leftovers' on non-tournament days, warm or

off-season periods, and those grudgingly. For the males, equal curling time is enough to give all the rabid rock-hurlers the ragin' heartburn. And, anyway, women throwing rocks? Unnatural, awkward. Throwing them as much as, and along with, men? Unthinkable. Women on the curling committee? Never! The threat is so dire that the locals and their regional association go to extraordinarily militant and expensive lengths to protect the sanctity of curling. The solution is total segregation. A second and separate rink will be built for the ladies and they can have their own committee too. Costly and illogical duplication? The men don't hesitate, regarding it as "cheap at twicet the price."

There are certain things that are sacrosanct for Crocus males; prerogatives that will never be denied them by participatin' women: big time bonspiels, chawing, spitting, swearing, getting their faces smothered in hot towels and talking men talk at Repeat's, playing cards and pool, having a beer with the boys and having a good brawl. In the Jake stories, women are even allowed to try the latter, in another cruel put-down. It occurs in the script "Expert on Wimmen," also called, "Wimmen Don't Fight."

Sadie is about to marry Johnny, but is concerned because every time he takes her to a dance, he spoils it all by getting involved in a brawl. Jake suggests "Fighting fire with fire." On his advice, Sadie, at the next dance, picks a few fights herself. Johnny, aghast, reforms, since, as

Jake suggested, he is typical of those men who don't like to see women swearing, spitting, cheating or fighting. The object lesson is carried out but the dénouement strains Mitchell's literary and social credibility.

The only time that Jake ever comes to the support of a woman is when Miss Henchbaw, of all people, is threatened with dismissal from her school. Albert Ricky's unemployed daughter-teacher is to be brought in and Ricky invents a host of reasons for Miss Henchbaw's moral unsuitability to teach Crocus kids. Jake reluctantly becomes involved after the Kid tells him he found Miss Henchbaw quietly crying at her desk. The Kid and Jake agree that there is only one thing worse than being an old maid and that it is being a lonely and rejected old maid. Miss Henchbaw is reinstated as a result of Jake's intervention, in one case, and simply comes back after a vacation in a modified version of the story.

Women are thus seen in the stories as old maids, romantic fabulists, love hobbyists, gossip-mongers, do-gooders, tamers, ensnarers, and more or less humans. Do the views of Jake, and other Crocus men, approximate W.O. Mitchell's own notions? One of the producers of the Jake stories, Esse Ljungh, was prompted to think that all the "bad cracks and grim take-offs" about women in the stories meant Mitchell did not really like women. He says "I don't think this side of him was just put on for the sake of the dramatic situations ... if he could

needle them, he would. He never really gave them an opportunity to be on an equal level with the guys."<sup>17</sup>

Ljungh and producer Pete Francis claim some female cast members objected to the treatment of women in the scripts. Francis agrees Mitchell does not seem to like women very much, because "they tended to come out in these shows as being a rather cruel, troublesome and authoritative lot."<sup>18</sup> Francis quotes Mitchell as describing even the Kid's Ma as "an awful bitch at times," though Ma emerges relatively unscathed by comparison with the majority of Crocus women. Producer Fred Diehl suggests that this was because Ma was inspired by Mitchell's own former school-teacher mother.<sup>19</sup>

Questioned about his thematic treatment of women, Mitchell denies authorial involvement and the stories about disgruntled female cast members. As far as he is concerned, only Jake Trumper is to blame for purely fictional sexism.

Jake is saddled with and is the victim of his own context. Jake is a male chauvinist. Jake simply knows that women do certain things like looking after the family. The role of the woman with Jake is probably Old Testament - I mean probably not much better than the role of the woman in the Hutterite brotherhood or any other group in which the woman was definitely second class to the man.

The thing that bothers Jake most is some woman who breaks out of that role. He's always going on about how Miss Henschaw cracks the whip over the kids and everyone else. He just doesn't think that women should be the dominant sex and, particularly, dominate him.<sup>20</sup>

Jake may be the characteristic chauvinist, but he has many allies throughout *Crocus*, including the Kid, who sits on the sidelines and observes and imitates the attitudes of his elders, and particularly Jake's.

The fine line between the Jake construct and the author seems to disappear however, when women "break out of that role." Then, Mitchell is cruel and cynical but, he stresses, not a sexist writer.

No, actually I am probably the least chauvinistic person in that regard, in my generation, that you could possibly find. ... The one thing that could enrage me as a child and later on was somebody who moved in through the neutral territory between us and moved into my own self-determining, non-neutral privacy.<sup>21</sup>

He claims that, on the contrary, he wants everyone to develop his or her full potential; he regards relationships as primarily human to human, and refuses to accept that there are "women things." Those who read sexism into such stories as *Jake and the Kid*, he feels, have failed to understand the point of the situations and are "confusing me, the artist, with my chimera."

Such confusion is understandable when his treatment of women is seen to take his writings, uncharacteristically, into the realm of cruelty and ridicule. Besides, he is at least guilty of provocation, as one discovers in a script aside to the cast in "Women On Ice," when Mayor MacTaggart tells how he dealt with the ladies who wanted equal curling rights. The bracketed aside tells John Drainie how to say "Oh."

MACTAGGART: "I told them - don't let this emancipation go to your head. You women are all emancipated."

JAKE: "Oh." (THAT'S TOO BAD - HAVE THEY TRIED ALL-BRAN?)

The final thematic area to be considered is that of politics as an inappropriate means for improving the human condition, or, as Jake describes it "pink cotton-candy promises."

By politics is meant, not the petty machinations of Crocus citizens, but the larger social or economic issues which occupy governments at either the federal or provincial level. There is in his Crocus scripts little sense of those distant seats of political power in Ottawa or Regina. The scenarios never indicate what kind of government or party is active in either centre, or, for that matter, with what issues they are concerned. The citizens of Crocus, to judge from their activities and preoccupations, are almost apolitical.

The lack of political conviction or action by both Mitchell and his Crocus constructs is a commentary in itself and both can be explained as follows.

Mitchell insists that he is not a political crusader and that he did not use his writing to advance burning social issues of the day. He could easily have used his stories and plays to tackle the reasons behind the crippling of the prairie farmer, labour unrest on the prairies or the

socialist movement. He says he rode the freights and went without food during the depression and drought and yet never used his art to make a social moment on the ills of that era or to place political blame for the conditions.

There emerges, in reading his Crocus scripts or talking with him, a sense that he does not view politics or political solutions as the answer to improving the human condition. In the prairie context, politics was one of the results of the urbanized, collective and organizational approach to prairie life already ruled as inhuman and unsatisfactory. Thus, politics is portrayed in the Crocus milieu as an unacceptable path to solving prairie social ills; indeed it is itself one of those ills.

Besides, his creation of apolitical, or at least highly sceptical, Crocus citizens may well be an accurate reflection of the political uncertainty and disillusionment of the prairie dweller. In "The Face of Saskatchewan," Edward McCourt describes the reasons for the unpredictability and inconsistency of the prairie voter and suggests he is not quite as apolitical as the Crocus specimens would lead us to believe.

The Saskatchewan man is politically minded but distrustful of all political parties, remembering that no government did more than keep him barely alive during his time of greatest need - hence his willingness to indulge in far-out political and social experiments and his refusal to conform to any voting pattern that makes sense to the orthodox outsider. What, after all, is one to make of an electorate which, for twenty years, returned a socialist government to power, supported

the introduction of Medicare, replaced the Socialists with a government of Liberals led by an ex-socialist, and at the same time sent a solid phalanx of Tories to Ottawa?<sup>22</sup>

Mitchell never takes as scientific a look at the political animal of the prairie. He simply makes cynical remarks about the remoteness of politics from Crocus reality and about the lack-lustre performance and lack of integrity of politicians.

Regina is merely a place to drive to on business; and Ottawa is just part of "deepest, darkest Ontario," in that distant country called "The East." Jake never talks about politics, except to tell tall stories about his friendship with Sir John A. MacDonald and Wilf' Laurier, with whom he hobnobbed. In "You Gotta Teeter," he reveals how Wilf' taught him the 'secret' of political speaking - the oratorical trick that helped cement the provinces together. It consists of "teetering" on the platform and of using the water pitcher both theatrically and psychologically. The precise details of this stratagem are never clearly spelled out, probably since they constitute the closely-guarded "Trumper Election Prediction System." As far as can be determined, the system consists of observing how various candidates are served by local communities in terms of the drinking water required during their strenuous orations. If a candidate is offered no water at all, he is obviously in deep trouble. If he is given his water in a plain glass, accompanied by an equally plain jug, his chances are slim. If, on the other

end of the scale, his water is served from a silver carafe, he is obviously in good favour. If he makes theatrical use of his water to punctuate his points and allow his more dramatic utterances time to penetrate, while appearing casual himself, his chances are even greater.

This stratagem, presumably accompanied by "teetering," is used by Jake in a rare 'political' script, "Dirt Independent." Mayor MacTaggart decides to extend his power beyond the boundaries of Crocus and run for an unspecified provincial or federal seat. He engages Jake as a campaign manager and embarks on a platform that is 'bread and butter' but lacks sparkle. MacTaggart conscientiously sticks to issues of prime importance to the local farmer. When his minimal charisma and his voice wear out, Jake becomes substitute salesman at the hustings, in a complete parody of political campaigning. Jake not only has the advantage of his Prediction System and 'teetering,' he knows full well that the electorate don't want mundane issues. They want to be excited by high-sounding dreams. He emphasizes the hoopla and recites an impressive string of meaningless clichés, heavy with drama and even heavier with promises impossible of practical fulfillment. Jake knows full well that the voters are as fickle and unrealistic as the politicians. He tells them to their faces that all they are really after is "promises like pink cotton candy that taste sweet for the moment but quickly melt away." He promises them the prairie

equivalent of the moon - that, if elected, his man will make the U.S. - Canadian border run North-South instead of East-West, reflecting prairie isolation from eastern Canada and ties with the border states. In the end, his promise seems to be taken seriously and the only question that remains in the minds of the electorate is how far east of Fort William the new border will pass. Ironically, it is in "Dirt Independent" that the only precise reference is made by Mitchell to political issues of the day. In the original script, Mitchell has MacTaggart plan to talk about such burning concerns as irrigation, freight-rate differentials, parity, de-centralization and free-trade. However, presumably because the script ran over, the platform details were cut from the broadcast version.

The series may be short on politics, but Jake makes it clear that politics are held to be somewhat unclean and an abuse of the taxpayers' monies. Jake may have hobnobbed with the best of them, but for him, shovelling cow manure is morally cleaner.

I could of bin in the Senate - walked in velvet up to the fetlocks ... smoked House of Senate cigars an' spit into gold goboons like the rest of them down there. I ain't. I'm a hired man. Except for a couple times in the year when she gets piled to the barn windows - it's cleaner.<sup>23</sup>

The theme of the indolent and inefficient politician is underlined in one of the only other episodes of a political nature, set during the flooding of the Brokenshell River.

Jake and others predict that a bridge, that should have been raised and reinforced, will be washed out during the spring flood. The local member, Doc' Fotheringham, is somewhat idle rich, with his pack of hounds and his professional distance from Crocus. He has long promised to have the bridge attended to, but assures everyone, in his political wisdom, that the bridge is really in no danger. The political stalemate is broken when the bridge is, in fact, washed out. It has taken divine intervention, not politics, to solve the bridge problem. So much, indeed, for politics as an instrument for improving the lot of Crocus citizens.

These, then, are just some of the recurring themes to be found throughout the Jake and the Kid scripts. All are dealt with fairly casually and are clothed with humour and attenuated in the most satirical or cynical of moments by Mitchell's basic human warmth. The moral scenarios that emerge, in individual scripts and, particularly, over the spectrum of the radio series, cannot be considered as unique or unprecedented in literary or media terms. They should not, however, be underestimated or dismissed because of their light-heartedness or because of the medium used to convey them. It is not pretentious to suggest, after viewing the social and moral content of the series scripts, that they constituted modern-day media morality plays at a time when the radio drama medium and its audience were extremely accessible.

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

- <sup>1</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.
- <sup>2</sup>Roy Daniells, Introduction to As For Me and My House by Sinclair Ross (Toronto: McLellan and Stewart, 1970), pp. v-vi.
- <sup>3</sup>W.O. Mitchell, introductory notes to Jake and The Kid play series, 1969 contained in program publicity brochure (Montreal: Radio Canada International, June 1970).
- <sup>4</sup>"Mind Over Madam," directed by Esse W. Ljungh, CBC Radio, Nov. 9 1953.
- <sup>5</sup>"The Old Gray West Ain't What She Used to Be," directed by Esse W. Ljungh, CBC Radio, April 12th., 1953.
- <sup>6</sup>Porter, p. 22.
- <sup>7</sup>Producer Peter Francis tells how, after a particularly cruel take-off by Wayfreight Brown, the CPR complained, whereupon Mitchell promptly made Crocus a CNR point. Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.
- <sup>8</sup>"Scandal, Scandal, Scandal!" directed by Esse Ljungh, CBC Radio, May 3rd., 1953.
- <sup>9</sup>Radio Canada International brochure notes by Mitchell.
- <sup>10</sup>Mitchell, Jake and The Kid, pp. 182-183.
- <sup>11</sup>Porter, p. 46.
- <sup>12</sup>"Mind Over Madam," dir. by Esse W. Ljungh, CBC Radio, Nov. 8 1953.
- <sup>13</sup>"Grass Roots is Grass Roots," directed by Peter Francis, CBC Radio, Sept 12th, 1950.
- <sup>14</sup>Mitchell, Jake and The Kid, p. 177.
- <sup>15</sup>Mitchell uses an almost identical situation in his Foothill Fables and it underlines his own ambiguity towards frauds and cheats. In the story, "Sixty-Per-Cent Sire," the undertaker, Ollie Pringle, who also has a strict father, a circus complex and a repentant brother (Elijah), is faced with the same dilemma, but acts differently. When Elijah comes to town in the role of an itinerant evangelist, Ollie is more indulgent than Repeat. During Elijah's public repentance, Ollie remains silent, explaining that he "knew that was how [Elijah] wished it had been." See "Sixty-Per-Cent Sire," directed by Esse Ljungh, CBC Radio, December 31 1961.

- 16 "Duel at Dawn," prod. by Arthur Hiller, CBC Radio, Feb. 1 1953.
- 17 Personal interview with Esse. W. Ljungh, March 1978.
- 18 Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.
- 19 Personal interview with Fred Diehl, August 1978.
- 20 Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Feb. 1978.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 McCourt, "The Face of Saskatchewan," p. 7.
- 23 Mitchell, "Jake and The Kid," p. 177.

## CHAPTER IV

### WRITING FOR THE STAGE OF THE MIND'S EYE

When Mitchell arrived in Toronto in 1948 to work for Maclean's Magazine, CBC Radio Drama activity there was reaching the peak of its popularity and prestige. Andrew Allan's 'CBC Stage' series, in particular, had since 1944 achieved international standards and acclaim, and attracted the cream of Canadian, British and American acting talent.<sup>1</sup> Especially in the absence of other consistent and remunerative writing outlets, it is not surprising that Mitchell was attracted to radio and to its vast audience. After one or two false starts, he 'scored' with The Devil's Instrument and the one-hour Jake script, The Liar Hunter. The Jake and the Kid material lent itself perfectly to a comedy series, but Mitchell was not quite ready to write regularly for radio. He first had to learn to write for the ear instead of the eye, and to learn to write original scripts for the medium instead of adapting written works.

What he had to cope with was that radio writing presents particular problems related to the fact that the medium is inherently underprivileged in communications terms.

Radio relies upon the sole perceptual sense of hearing. The radio writer and the production crew must, therefore,

rely upon the spoken word and sounds alone to be understood by the listener. The radio message lacks the printed word that clearly and graphically imparts and sustains meaning. It is totally devoid of visual cues or clues that can enrich, clarify or reinforce the message. The radio communication proceeds, unabated, with no possibility of stopping to refer back to previous parts or to clear up misunderstandings. Failure of any part of the message can cause confusion that can well accumulate and compound itself throughout the remainder of the communication. The message, without being overly simplified or redundant, must be skilfully conceived by the writer and totally reinforced by the production crew.

These shortcomings or limitations of the radio medium could be viewed as serious impediments. They can also be viewed and utilized as distinct dramatic assets. In the radio drama, they amount to a communications paradox - a set of limitations that free. They transfer a large part of the responsibility for understanding and appreciation of the message from the sender to the receiver. The listening audience, as Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, becomes more active and participatory than a viewing audience. He thus describes radio as a "hot" or engaging medium, as opposed to the more passive viewing role associated with film or television.<sup>2</sup>

For Mitchell, the audience or reader is a "creative partner," playing an active role in the "bridging" or the

"twinning of solitudes" to which he referred earlier. In decoding the production of a Mitchell script, the radio "creative partner" compares the components of the dramatic illusion with his own experiential and perceptual referents, the contents of his own subconscious notebook. From that process, the listener recreates the illusion in a uniquely personal way. Guided by Mitchell, he mounts his own dramatic illusion on the stage of his own mind's eye.<sup>3</sup>

Given the fact that the medium can rely on the effort of the listener to provide the fine details of landscape, milieu or appearance, radio writing and production can be implicit rather than explicit. The regular listener to Jake and The Kid provided the physical description of Crocus and its inhabitants in his own unique portrayal. This meant that the writer and production crew were freed from the realistic constraints that would have plagued a film or television crew. Mitchell found he could reach the mind of the audience more directly with this implicit medium, that there were fewer barriers between the writer and the audience than in the visual media. There were no unconvincing yet costly sets and other realistic details. There were also fewer production people between author and listener than in the visual media, therefore fewer minds and sets of hands to alter his original concepts before they reached the audience. Radio drama became for Mitchell the next best thing after the novel. Paraphrasing his writing mentor,

Professor Salter, he describes radio drama as a "beautiful medium," because, "the higher the form of art, the greater the demand it makes upon the creative partner to contribute to the art experience." Mitchell concludes that, if that is the case,

... then, obviously, poetry and prose, which are only the written symbols, place the greatest demand upon the ability of the creative partner. Film would make the least because you have the human voice too, but you have the visual and you don't have the formalities that strain willing disbelief. But, with radio you have a beautiful half-way thing in that you have the human voice, but the imagination of the listener must body forth those people behind the voices. It's a beautiful balance.

I think of all the forms of writing I have done, I did radio writing with the greatest of ease.<sup>4</sup>

To be a successful communication, a radio script must take both the limitations and their freeing effect into consideration. In order to be fully radiophonic and exploit the qualities and characteristics of the radio medium, the radio script should, ideally, be an original work for the medium.<sup>5</sup> When Mitchell was invited to prepare a series of Jake scripts, he resorted to adaptations of published Jake stories, rather than writing new scripts. In terms of searching for new plots and situations, this may have been less demanding and time-consuming but, he discovered that it is almost as much work 'translating' something from one medium to another as it would be to write an original script.

There's no such thing as a simple adaptation. Frequently you can have things that are done in prose which are so internal that, if you're going to adapt them into a more dramatic form -

something more outer, which is what radio, stage and film writing would be - you have to do such new invention in order to make external something that is internal and, therefore, not evident in the other medium. You may have to do something quite different, ironically, in order to accomplish the same thing that was done in the other medium.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately for Mitchell, the Maclean's stories already published about Jake and the Kid lent themselves readily to translation to radio. Most crucially, the published stories relied heavily upon dialogue which is the key device and basic foundation of radio drama. This is especially evident when one compares the Maclean's story "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," with the script of the same title which Mitchell adapted from it as the pilot program in the radio series. The difference lies in the means used to compensate in the radio version for the descriptive or internal dimension possible in print.

Jake tells Old Man Gatenby a tall tale about a man who was hired as a rain-maker during a drought. Gate, sceptical and contemptuous, shows his disbelief as clearly as he expresses it. The observer and narrator in the story is The Kid, who reports part of the confrontation thus:

"Was not!"

"She was!" Jake looked right into Gate's eyes, the way they were like cloves stuck into a little round apple - one you let lay around a long time till it got all puckered and shrivelly.

Old Man Gatenby pulled out a plug and squeezed off a corner with his knife. Then he lifted her to his mouth. "No rain maker," he said with his voice stubborn and slow and like it hurt him to keep it down the way he was

doing, "with no rain machine, never brought no rain to nobody!" Then he spit.<sup>7</sup>

Without resorting to a story-teller to provide a 'running commentary' on the action, not a very effective radio-  
phonic device, the script could not capture the Kid's description or interpretation of the scene. In the radio pilot, Mitchell resorted exclusively to dialogue to depict that argument, dialogue that would be accentuated by sounds:

JAKE: She was.

GATE: Was not.

JAKE: She was.

GATE: Well, I say she was not. She was because he couldn't rain worth a whoop and that was why they run him out of ...

JAKE: THERE was a big pot. They was playing a hand of seven-toed Pete ...

GATE: No rainmaker ... never made no rain-machine ... nor never brought ... no rain ... to nobody.

SOUND: GATE SPITTING.

JAKE: Don't do that.

GATE: Huh? What?

JAKE: Don't spit like that ... so liberal.

GATE: Why not?

JAKE: Sinful.

GATE: Sinful?

JAKE: Wasting your moisture that way ....

SOUND: WINE DOT. (Wyandot hen.)

In the radio version, the key component of radio drama - dialogue - has taken over almost completely. The inner and

outer atmosphere is denied or, at best, implied. However, it should be noted that, in reading through the printed "rain" story, as almost all of the early short stories from which he adapted radio scripts, one finds they were already quite close to radiophonic style. They contain a higher quantity of dialogue than is generally found in short stories and it is of a crusty, sod-busting nature that is even more realistic when read aloud. One could, in fact, read only the dialogue portions of the printed "rain" story and still understand the plot and follow the events. There would be no atmosphere, inner or outer, and the printed story would read flatly, colourlessly and disjointedly, but it could be followed, even without recourse to the narrative portions.

Conversely and to further illustrate the proximity of Mitchell's stories to radio requirements, one can compare them with Stephen Leacock's Mariposa stories and their radio adaptations by Tommy Tweed. Though highly similar in their small-town themes, humour and characterization, the Leacock stories could not be farther removed from radio style in their printed versions. Nor could they be more difficult to render radiophonic. In "The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe," for example, there is no dialogue at all for four pages and no real sense of the conversational texture of this Mariposa barber (similar to Repeat Godfrey of Crocus) until one reaches page six. The dialogue in the entire story could fit into one page, so predominantly does Leacock resort

to the narrative form. The same applies to "The Hostelry of Mr. Smith," and to "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias." Only in one small section of the latter is the action carried by an exchange of dialogue between Mr. Gingham and Mr. Smith. None of these stories could be followed by simply reading the dialogue portions.

The comparison with Leacock's Mariposa stories is not, however, invidious or inappropriate in discussing adaptation for radio. All three of these stories were 'translated' to radio by Tweed only months before the Jake series began. These adaptations might well have served as a genre precedent and a radio stylistic model for the Jake programs. In fact, Mariposa for radio is the very antithesis of the approach taken by Mitchell in turning his Crocus stories into radio plays.

Tweed resorts in his adaptations to an omnipresent Leacock figure and a presumed stranger to Mariposa to whom the author-narrator is explaining the story. These two predominate in the radio scripts, and the dialogue, as in the written stories, is at a minimum. The two narrative figures in "Jefferson Thorpe" actually take twelve radio script pages to get to the story of what happened to the speculating barber. In "The Marine Excursion," forty-two minutes of the sixty-minute script go by in this form of 'conversational narrative' between the author and stranger before the story of the sinking of the Mariposa Belle is

reached. Leacock did, of course, resort to a similar delay in his story in order to heighten the suspense. However, Tweed could have availed himself of all the revealing and colourful advantages of dialogue in order to make the stories more radiophonic. He could not have done so, of course, without radically altering the original material by writing new dialogue portions to replace the long sections of narrative. He chose instead to stay close to the text and style of the Leacock stories.

Rather than resorting to near-licence by attempting to coerce the Leacock material into radio form, Tweed made minor concessions to the sound medium. In "The Marine Excursion," the opening sequence takes place in Jeff' Thorpe's barber-shop, from where the distress signals of the Mariposa Belle are heard. The barber-shop is thus used in the same manner as Repeat's in *Crocus* - as a communications device that permits sounds and dialogue and introduces the action. That departure from the written structure enabled Tweed to avoid lengthy narrative portions with the author/narrator and the visitor to Mariposa.<sup>8</sup>

Narrative, which so abounds in literature, is not an ideal radiophonic practice. It is invariably performed by an announcer or by an omniscient author figure operating outside the dramatic action. The result of using such a narrator is that the production tends to sound like a reading from literature. Furthermore, the person providing

this descriptive narrative or 'running commentary,' destroys, or at least weakens, the radio dramatic illusion. He disturbs the intimate, one-to-one relationship between the dramatic cast and the listener. His presence creates a triangular listening situation. When his narrative or commentary is prolonged, as in the case of the Leacock adaptations, the listener will beg him to depart and allow the characters to proceed with the story. The audience does not want to hear a lengthy narrative description of the kinds of conversation Jeff' makes with his barber-shop customers, any more than it would want to hear a description of the antics and chatter of the loquacious Repeat Godfrey of Crocus. It would prefer to hear both first-hand. However, complete dependence upon dialogue and sounds would not supply the missing information or atmosphere available through narrative.

Mitchell confronted the same problem when he wrote his first radio scripts for Andrew Allan and was not altogether successful in rendering the material radiophonic. The best of those early radio plays illustrate the narrative problem and provide further contrast with the technique he developed to circumvent it in Jake and The Kid. The problem was, essentially, that Mitchell could not avoid narrative of some kind to help supply some of the missing inner or outer atmosphere or expository detail lost in the medium of sound.

In The Devil's Instrument and The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon, otherwise effective productions were marred by his failure to reconcile that need with radiophonic style.

In "The Black Bonspiel," broadcast in 1950, he resorted to an unnecessarily elaborate narrative device, where a simpler radio style could have sufficed. Cobbler Willie MacCrimmon of Khartoum, Alberta, is approached by the Devil, who offers to satisfy Willie's dream of winning the MacDonald Briar curling championship, if Willie's rink can beat the satanic team. The story only begins to be told in radio dramatic terms, through dialogue and sound, at about seven and a half minutes into the production. Prior to that, Andrew Allan himself introduces the Faustian legend themes for one minute, followed by music. Then, another narrative voice comes on for thirty-five seconds talking about Willie winning a curling match. This is interrupted for twenty-seconds by the voice of the CBC announcer, explaining that the narrative voice is that of a sports commentator. The commentator continues to parody a sports commentator for a further minute and ten seconds. At this point, actor and narrator Budd Knapp, not involved in the play as a dramatic character, introduces Willie, his shop, his character and other details of Khartoum. He describes the arrival of a dark stranger in town, and women-folk are heard gossiping and musing about his identity. The strange person thus takes four minutes and ten seconds of Knapp narration to arrive at Willie's shop, which is also described. The Devil's request that his curling boots be repaired is only partly rendered through dialogue between him and Willie,

and mostly by Knapp as narrator. A complicated montage follows in which Willie's curling cohorts are introduced, partly through their dialogue and partly through Knapp narration. Willie's 'Walter-Mittyish' fantasy of winning the MacDonald Briar is also rendered through a combination of his dramatized fantasy and Knapp's description of it. The story only settles down to dramatic unfolding, through dialogue and action, in an encounter between Willie and United Church Minister Pringle, when they discuss a hell-fire and damnation approach to religion, and Willie asks the minister if he believes in the devil. This sequence ends with his telling the minister that he was approached by Satan himself that very day.<sup>9</sup>

Mitchell and the producer could have improved the flow and radio dramatic strength of the play through different handling of the narrative. They came much closer to doing so with The Devil's Instrument, in 1949, but, even there, the most effective device eluded them. In that play, following the music and opening announcements, the announcer provides background on the Hutterite colonies in the west for one minute and twenty-seven seconds. This is accompanied by forty seconds of background music theme. When the announcer touches on the involvement of the devil in the story, his narrative is cleverly assumed by the voice of the actor who plays the devil, Henry Comor. A further descriptive narrative by Comor follows for one-minute and

(

twenty-five seconds, as he talks about the severity of Hutterite laws and the kinds of sins in which he deals in that territory. His focus becomes the local Chinese restaurant and store, complete with juke-box, ice-cream and other enticements to a particular Hutterite boy. After approximately four minutes and ten seconds of this exposition, action is joined, in progress, so to speak, inside the shop, where the locals attempt to seduce the Hutterite boy away from the severity of the sect, and finally succeed with the aid of a mouth-organ.<sup>10</sup>

In both "Bonspiel" and "The Devil's Instrument," the Devil could just as easily and far more effectively have been used as the narrative voice from the start. He would have been acceptable as a dramatic figure involved in the action of the story, and the exposition and description could have been achieved more economically. The dramatic illusion could have begun more rapidly and credibly and the overall result would have been more like radio and less like a reading from literature.

( )

Unlike Tweed, Mitchell was writing directly for radio and could have avoided ungainly narrative forms by relying heavily on dialogue. He succeeded in doing this, and achieved a less obtrusive narrative form, with the Jake and the Kid pilot, "The Day Jake Made Her Rain." He provided necessary exposition, and inner and outer atmosphere, while simultaneously advancing the plot, through a narrative form

with a difference - narrative supplied by the dramatic characters themselves, and, usually, by the two leading characters, Jake and The Kid. It was narrative, but not of the literary kind, so often rendered by an announcer or an omniscient authorial figure observing the action but not involved in it. Challenged concerning the legitimacy of narrative in radio and asked whether the device was valid in drama as opposed to literature, Mitchell replied:

I can't remember who it was, but it was some knowledgeable, smarmy son of a bitch who made a comment, or maybe it was in a review - anyway, he said "Maybe Mitchell isn't at home in this medium of radio play-writing, because he's using a narrator."

Now, what that person meant was that, if one were not successful in revealing something through dialogue exchange in a scene, then he might have to use the 'crutch' of having a narrator come on, so he really thought I had to use the narrator as a crutch because I was inadequate, not as a novelist or short-story writer, but as a dramatist. Now, he was quite wrong because one of the things I discovered very early, probably during that first Summer [series] was that, what you lost from the short story or novel was that interior - the inner conversation - and most of the people I create have a lot of things going on in their interiors. Suddenly, I realized that I could use a narrator, and I did, moving in between the Kid and Jake, always. Most of the time I used the Kid, though, because I wanted to capture the thoughts of the child.<sup>11</sup>

The two leading characters in the Jake episodes thus became themselves the narrative devices, describing their inner feelings and emotions and commenting on the details or atmosphere of an event, usually in progress, to the listener. They thus created a direct dramatic bond with

the audience and never really stepped out of character while providing this necessary and useful narrative function. These interventions are so completely in character that they never seem to stem from a barely-hidden author.

These narrative portions, usually occurring outside of, or separated in time from, the dramatic action by pauses and music bridges, were described by Mitchell as a form of soliloquy, particular to the radio medium. "The result was," he tells us,

... that I could have the Kid in a monologue, in a soliloquy, and I did this very consciously. Now, you can't get away with soliloquy on stage or in a film. You just cannot, when you actually see someone. I think you can on radio ... because you are not seeing a person with nobody else present. You're just overhearing what the person would be thinking. So I didn't think and I still don't think that soliloquy was unrealistic in radio drama.<sup>12</sup>

Soliloquy is, in fact, not a very satisfactory term for the narrative device resorted to by Mitchell. Soliloquy implies thoughts spoken aloud in a "to be or not to be" fashion, simply overheard by the audience and somewhat rhetorical in nature. The narrative used by Mitchell was addressed directly to the radio listener for purposes of supplying the external and internal details that could not be fully conveyed by dialogue and sounds. It was closer to the theatrical device of the aside in its directness and intimacy. However, it did not quite constitute an aside either. Neither Jake nor the Kid ever stepped outside their role to whisper something private in the listener's ear.

Nor does the monologue of Jake and The Kid satisfy the description of the aside as a "form of complicity between the actor and the audience in the pleasure of putting on a play" offered by J.L. Styan.

The view that their apparent purpose was - merely to inform the spectator of what was passing in the character's mind, like an interior monologue in the modern novel, is the mistake of superficial anachronistic and literary thinking. The fundamental purpose of the aside or the soliloquy is to engage the spectator directly, to throw him a face-to-face challenge to agree or disagree; they are a reminder to all that a play is in progress.<sup>13</sup>

Mitchell's asides in fact constituted no more personal challenge, no more "complicity" than that suggested by acceptance of the conventions or licence of the radio medium itself - the simulated intimacy with the listener, and the mutual acceptance of manipulation of time and space. Mitchell is using this form of 'aside' to the listener to create a monologue that is often, among other things, interior but only partly soliloquy. He described its use to reveal the feelings of The Kid, particularly in combination with a music score:

I not only used the soliloquy, but I could ask Morris Surdin for music and have him write it solidly behind these lines. I was using soliloquy and music, however, in the way a novelist uses atmosphere + emotional staining of a scene, depending upon the emotional state of the person experiencing the thing. When Morris saw the emotional state of the child, who was thinking, whether it be sadness, loneliness, bitterness, delight or whatever, he would do the music as a background to the child's thinking voice, which would then give the emotional staining.<sup>14</sup>

The music was an integral and inseparable part of the Mitchell soliloquy, and it was prescribed by him in his scripts as an atmospheric complement to such soliloquy, as will be examined during discussion of the music in the series.

It is perhaps unfortunate that Mitchell relied so often upon the Kid for such soliloquies, beyond their use to describe his feelings and emotions. They worked when the Kid was revealing his own feelings but were less credible when the Kid became the narrative character. Obligated to describe or comment upon external situations or events, the Kid often evinced language skills, and a degree of wit inconsistent with his age and character. The soliloquy, monologue or narrative was more credible when rendered by Jake. The pilot story "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," can again be used as an example. Jake is the narrative figure throughout, supplying exposition, description and personal reaction to the story. He, rather than a broadcast announcer, sets the scene at the opening of the play. His soliloquy is not, technically, an aside, but more closely resembles the Leacock-to-stranger technique of the Mariposa adaptations. Jake is talking to an imaginary salesman who had difficulty making it through the mud to the Kid's house because of Jake's rain. In reality, the salesman is never heard and does not turn up again until the very end of the story:

MUSIC:       SERIES THEME FOR JAKE AND THE KID - EST AND FADE BG.

JAKE:        (TALKING TO RALEIGH MAN WHO HAS JUST DRIVEN INTO  
              YARD)

You kinda picked an off day to call Mister. Kid's Ma she's away to a W.A. meeting. She's the boss here - me, I'm the hired man. Just me and The Kid and his Ma. Widda. War. I wouldn't know what she needs. Heard her say something about garlic salt - floor wax. Shame she ain't here - roads the way they are. Sticky. Lucky you made it through that low spot by the gate. All my fault. My fault and Old Man Gatenby's. He's the sorta yella coloured house beyond the correction line. Hadn't been for Gate, I wouldn't of made her rain the way I did.

MUSIC: UP TO FINISH AND OUT.

In less than thirty seconds of script time, this device has revealed everything the listener needs to know, without the usual agency of an opening announcer. Jake reveals the family situation, the relationship with Gate, Gate's role in the rain-making and Jake's own claim to have caused the rain that has turned the yard into mud. The imaginary conversation in which the narrative-expository-soliloquy is disguised, does not continue throughout. It ends there and makes way for a 'dialogued' version of the events leading up to the rain-making - the boasting sequence with Jake and Gate.

Mitchell claims he used the soliloquy solely as interior monologue or for atmospheric colour; that he "did not use the narrator to advance the plot economically, to move from A to B or to get a new commitment or bridge time at all."<sup>15</sup> This is largely but not entirely true. There are instances in "Rain" where Jake is indeed used to speed the plot, for example after the Kid shows him the advertisement Gate has placed in the local paper about Jake's boast he will make rain:

JAKE: I got to work the next evening - tuned up the old gas motor in the chop house. I borrowed some parts from the wind electric - got hold of a couple of lightning rods - two blue bulbs off of my rheumatism machine - sort of violet ray. I set her up ... and I tinkered with her. Evening I had just about done, I stepped out of the chop house - run right into Old Gate with his chin nearly touching his nose... (FADE)

MUSIC OUT.

JAKE: Yeah? (COLDLY)

GATE: (A LITTLE FLUSTERED) Uh - um - dropped over ...

JAKE: So you did.

GATE: I - uh - figured to borrow your post hole augur.

JAKE: Did you now?

GATE: Yeah - oh - and about that there machine of yours - a lot of folks been asking me when she'll be ready.

Granted that there is music behind his 'soliloquy' but it more closely resembles a transitional bridge than an atmospheric or descriptive narrative. Much more typical of the soliloquy mode and almost poetic in its language is Jake's moving narrative sequence at the conclusion of the "Rain" episode. Taking great liberties again with radio time and space, the soliloquy occurs in conjunction with the enactment of the rain-making. It is, however, an unobtrusive and acceptable dramatic part of the grand finale. Jake is there with his rain-machine, along with the crowds of spectators. He has made his plea to the crowd to lend their faith and has used his machine. With the crowd going wild as the rain starts, complete with music and other sound

effects, Jake supplies the description of the magic moment. It is not a case of Jake the participant, breaking away from the event, turning to the audience and delivering an aside. It is Jake the initial narrator figure, on the sidelines and in flash-back, so to speak, recalling the scene:

CAST: CHEERING OF THE CROWD.

VOICE 2. The Lord be praised.

GATE:. The Lord nothing - Sheet Lightnin' Trumper!

SOUND: CROWD GOING WILD - NOW AND AGAIN THE NAME OF SHEET LIGHTNING TRUMPER.

MUSIC: WIPES OUT CROWD - BRIDGE - AND DOWN BG.

JAKE: She'd sort of burst - didn't start off with a few drops spanking you on the head or the cheek or the back of your hand - she up and let go all of a sudden. Folks they stood with their lower lips over their upper ones - like it was something to taste and eat - the hides on all the teams was all of a sudden dark and gleamy - shoulders on my coat was soaked in no time - drops was runnin' white tracks down through the dust on fellow's faces - women's dresses was plastered to them real indecent like a cotton bathing suit after a swim - Johnny Totcoal he off with his coat - ripped open his shirt without undoing the buttons - stood there with the rain streaming through the hair on his chest. Me - I just stood there in MY rain.

MUSIC: UP AND OUT TRIUMPHANTLY.

Mitchell had found a solution to the problem of revealing inner and outer atmosphere without recourse to an official narrator. It was not as revealing or reliable a mechanism as literary narrative, but it blended realistically and acceptably with the dialogue, music and sounds in the radio illusion. For the most part, however, he relied heavily

upon natural dialogue and sounds to convey the basic story and events. The soliloquy form gave him greater depth and detail, although the dialogue remained his key device and could almost have stood unsupported.

The dialogue is true to life and always appropriate to the characters portrayed. It is most credible when it is the sod-busting dialect of the earth types such as Jake and Gate. Mitchell's forte in the stories is precisely the recreation of those verbal mannerisms, vocal idiosyncrasies, oaths, interruptions, pregnant pauses, and the systematic repetition of key, characteristic phrases. The short, elliptic, understated and mordant utterances of Jake are almost as predictable to the regular listener as his basic behavioural traits.

The dialogue derives much of its humour and realism from its roots in prairie vernacular. Sentence structure is clipped, terse, sometimes almost monosyllabic. Comments come out, not slowly or lazily, but sparsely and clipped, as though it were somehow a great effort to utter them under the trying circumstances of prairie life, or an inordinate waste of precious physical energy. This style of the older men such as Jake and Gate contrasts starkly with the loquaciousness of Repeat the barber or the smooth urbanity of Mrs. Elsie Abercrombie.

Jake and Gate and the apprentice Kid personify everything in the female gender, including the neuter 'it' object: the

day Jake made her rain, the day she rained, when is she going to rain, she's sure a 'aitch of a mess, and so on.

Use of the female gender thus extends far beyond its common use to refer to cars or ships or, in this context, tractors. Everything is she or her, including Death.

'Language' abounds and is indispensable to the male population of Crocus, old or young. It is largely confined to "sure as 'aith," "damned" or "darned" and the odd protracted string of 'cusses' more sonorously impressive than they are offensive, and designed not to offend the sensibilities of the period.

Prairie metaphors picked up from local characters accentuate the colour and expressiveness of the dialogue. Jake constantly uses graphic yet unlikely expressions such as "nough to give a gopher the heartburn," or "no more chance ner a greased gopher through a thirty-six inch thrasher," among historical anecdotes and tall tales. Jake's dialogue is straight from prairie grass roots. With few exceptions, the Crocus characters are given dialogue that is a close approximation of the loosely structured, unplanned and sometimes grammatically incorrect utterances found in rural life. Naturalistic performance and the addition of pauses, 'ahems' and other devices by the studio actor, render the dialogue 'talk talk,' as opposed to the smooth and premeditated 'written talk' characteristic of much literature and drama. The answer, in radio terms, is

to achieve a half-way form which is planned and written but, especially when acted, sounds as though it were being improvised on the spot, entirely in the character of the dramatic personality.

Mitchell has said that the writer needs an "extra spectator quality," and it might be added that the radio writer, relying so much upon the unaided voice to reach the unaided ear, must also have an extra auditory quality. He must learn the music of human speech in all its varied forms and idiosyncrasies. Mitchell learned to use that ear for voice during his acting experiences in Seattle and with the Winnipeg Little Theatre. He also picked up the expressions, vocabulary and speech rhythms while living and working with the earth types on prairie. Listening and acting gave Mitchell what he calls a perfect sense of timing, rare in writers. "People think of it as a dramatic quality," he says, "and it isn't."

Sure, it should belong to an actor and to a playwright, but it belongs more to a writer because the medium of novels and short stories has that other, inner dimension and the writer knows that, in fact, actual talk is elliptic; that, in fact, for actual dialogue there is a helluva lot of inner and maybe contradictory dialogue going along...

He ends up, therefore, if he writes lines or acts, being aware of this and it determines his timing and where the gaps should be and how long they are, because he knows what's going on in the mind of the person who is saying it. ...In the case of Jake and the Kid, when you do one of those things every week, you know your characters as well as you know your own family. Fictional as they are, you know what they will say

when someone asks a question and then that person, because of his inner state, refuses to answer, for example. You know how to say so many things without actually saying them, even without dialogue and just with pauses and silences.<sup>16</sup>

Exploiting the possibilities of a sound medium where silence is critical, Mitchell's timing creates built-in pauses in addition to particular vocabulary and speech rhythms. When these prescribed pauses are used by actors, they become important parts of the dramatic construct: pauses of resistance, double-take, disbelief, contempt, speechless frustration, satisfaction, revenge, or menace. Spoken, or rather unspoken, they become more eloquent and powerful than they could be on the printed page. Given his vocabulary of pauses and verbal shadings and interplay, it might well be said that his use of language was close to being musical. He exploited the sound medium to 'score' combinations of dialogue exchange that were, in effect, contrapuntal and contrasting. This musicality is particularly evident when Jake and Gate start quarreling or outboasting each other. Their encounters are characterized by the abrasion between them and the tension that gradually mounts to some climax or crisis in their exchange, one bouncing off the other, as, for example, in the "Rain" episode:

GATE: Rain-making. Ahh.

JAKE: If they got the right kind of machine ... they can do it.

GATE: They can do it in a pig's ear.

JAKE: Awkward place to raise a crop of wheat in.

GATE: It's impossible to rain with a machine. They can't do it ...

JAKE: They can so.

GATE: They can not.

JAKE: They can so.

GATE: They can not.

JAKE: They can so. I seen it done.

GATE: You ain't.

JAKE: I done it myself.

GATE: You sure did n - (PAUSE) you what?

JAKE: (PAUSE) why ... I ... uh ... certain'y... certain'y I did ... it ... uh ... it was afore I come to Crocus district.

GATE: You bet it was afore you come to Crocus district. I been here as long as you ... and you ain't done no raining since I been here. (LONG LONG PAUSE ) Just ... where ... did you ... do any raining? Just - where the ...

JAKE: Ought four. Manyberries way.

GATE: Is that so? IS ... that ... so?

JAKE: Yep. (PAUSE) They - uh - used to call me Sheet Lightnin' Trumper.

So much did Mitchell rely upon dialogue and sounds rather than narrative to reveal his scenarios, that it might be said he erred in the opposite extreme. In his earlier scripts such as the "Rain" episode, there are instances where the dialogue is, in fact, forced beyond its ability to carry the plot to a 'blind' listener. An example from "Rain" illustrates the point that, while one can "get away with more"

in terms of the implicit nature of the sound medium, one has to be extremely careful when plots are complex.

Mitchell wishes to create a plot within the overall plot of Jake's bid to make rain with his machine. The sub-plot is that he has secretly engaged a local pilot to cloud-seed with chemicals while he takes Crocus spectators up for joy-rides during the rain-making 'show.' The script and the sound effects imply, somewhat secretively, that Jake gets the idea when his horse and cart are buzzed by the plane, that he has ordered a special parcel but does not wish to talk about it, and that the sounds of the plane during the 'show' are more obvious than they might be. Mitchell attempts to do all of this, however, almost exclusively through dialogue and devious dramatic enactment. The hints and facts have to be extracted by the radio audience from the rest of the dialogue and sounds, guessed and shared in order to make sense of the resulting confusion. If they are not, there still remains a 'trick' ending, in which Jake tells the Raleigh salesman that he actually enlisted the help of modern scientific methods of cloud-seeding, while trying to keep this fact away from the hero-worshipping Kid. The entire sub-plot is introduced and served by one sequence of dialogue exchange and sound effects that simply does not 'work' in radio terms. Here Mitchell might well have resorted to narrative technique, to have had Jake squarely address himself to the listener in one of his explanatory asides.

Instead, Jake describes, in such a narrative, how he saw Jimmy Shoelack's plane approaching, while out with The Kid and the team, and then tries to handle the seeding inspiration with this complex scene:

SOUND: PLANE HAS COME ON AND IS ROARING ALMOST ON TOP.

JAKE: Duke reared up in his harness - then Queen....

SOUND: STARTLED NEIGH OF HORSE.

JAKE: ....then the both of 'em began to run.

SOUND: ANOTHER NEIGH. PLANE ROAR STILL LOUD. JINGLE OF HARNESS AND HORSES AS THEY BEGIN TO RUN.

JAKE: I took off - backwards - lit on my head, I guess ...

SOUND: PLANE RETREATING RAPIDLY INTO DISTANCE. WITH IT RETREATING HORSE HOOVES IN HEAVY GALLOP. BOTH SOUNDS DIE OUT BEHIND NEXT SPEECH.

JAKE: ... next thing I knew (FADING) I was spitting out a mouthful of ...

KID: (UP A LITTLE) Jake - Jake - you all right, Jake?  
(LONG PAUSE) Jake - are you hurt? Don't just sit there ...

JAKE: (GRUNT AND GROAN AS HE GETS TO HIS FEET (LITTLE OFF) Wanta use Tincher's 'phone. (FADING AS HE BEGINS TO STUMBLE AWAY) ... wanta use Tincher's phone ... wanta use ... Tincher's ...

KID: (CALLING) Where are you going, Jake? This way - you better come home, Jake. (FADING AS HE RUNS AFTER JAKE) Take a lay down till you feel better ... (OFF) That's the wrong way, Jake!

JAKE: (COMING ON) Gotta get Jimmy Shoelack. Wanta use Tincher's phone - gotta phone him.

KID: (OFF) I'll go phone Dr. Fotheringham.

JAKE: (ON) Tincher's Phone. Wanta get Jimmy Shoelack bad.

KID: (ON NOW THAT HE HAS CAUGHT UP WITH JAKE) Just report him - that'll fix him for what he did.

JAKE: Wanta use Tincher's phone - wanta thank him ...

KID: Jake! You come home with me (FADING) on that rack!  
Jake - Jake - come home with me.

MUSIC: WEIRD CONCUSSION BRIDGE WIPE KID OUT. COMES UP  
AS BRIDGE AND FADES BEHIND FOLLOWING NARRATION.

JAKE: I got to the phone - I got a hold of Jimmy Shoelack -  
made arrangements to see him the next day - Sunday.  
"I didn't go to church with the Kid and his Ma the  
next morning. Kid told me the Reverend Cameron  
prayed for rain again, said for everybody to go  
right on praying through the next week and he'd  
take another try at her the following Sunday. (FADE)  
That evening .....

The action then reverts back to the main plot with no  
further reference to the bang on the head, to the call to the  
pilot or the reason for it. The plane is included among the  
sound-effects for the rain-making finale. The explanation  
of the secret of cloud-seeding is finally given to the sales-  
man in the last seconds of the play.

There must have been a temptation to think of the  
inspirational sequence as offering radiophonic possibilities:  
the noises of the horses, of the approaching plane, of the  
bolting team and the excitement of The Kid. The resulting  
sequence only confuses the unaided ear and it does not prove  
useful or credible within the larger story. Here is an  
instance where the initial narrative by Jake could simply  
have been re-worked to suggest that he had an idea after  
his horses were frightened by a low flying plane. The script  
would not have suffered by the elimination of the entire  
dramatic sequence. Dialogue not only cannot reveal all in  
radio, but there are also times, such as that one, where it

becomes forced, unnatural and confusing. It also underlines that Mitchell was still thinking, at that early point, in terms of the short story plot.

The contrived sequence in the "Rain" episode raises a point with respect to plot and dénouement in the Jake scripts. It is an example of a tendency Mitchell had to exploit dramatic situations or dénouements. While some of these, unlike the 'plane sequence, 'worked' in terms of radio clarity, many were far from credible. Such scenes or endings severely strained willing suspension of disbelief because they were manipulated to reinforce the humour or the moral point. In fact, the only negative comments to be found in audience mail about the Jake series were directed at unsatisfactory or hasty dénouements.<sup>17</sup>

Mitchell maintains, however, that his plots grew naturally as he wrote the scripts and that they were never contrived to fit a preconceived, clever ending. He maintains that the idea of helping Jake make rain with cloud-seeding was a dénouement that simply developed from the initial idea and from the plot that grew as he worked on it. His comments about the plot and ending of "Rain" also reveal much about the inspirational process.

The story takes place in the early 'forties during a drought year. It is not 'the' drought, though there are references to it in the script. Mitchell says he picked up the basic ingredients for the story;

During the seven years of the Depression and then the drought years, while I was mostly in the West, riding freight trains ... Now, every Fall, I would end up working on a threshing crew ... and I was all over Western Canada during those dry years. Laid down on me, as on all of us, was this disaster of drought.<sup>18</sup>

As usual with Mitchell, disaster is turned to relief and humour as he mixes real-life problems with local colour and some fancy. He drew from local folklore in this instance for his model for Jake, the rainmaker.

There had been a dry year before and somebody, a folk artist, did a thing which I think was called "Johnny Chinook," when it became 'in' around those years to discover folk art. Part of that folk art was tall tales. There had also, of course, been the Paul Bunyan legend before that. About that time, for some reason, the idea of a rainmaker surfaced with me. There had been a guy on a flatcar by the name of Hatfield who, during an earlier drought in 1904 or 1905, came through Medicine Hat and the dry part of Alberta and was hired, supposedly, as a rainmaker.

Then, added to my own consciousness of the drought, I just suddenly thought it would be marvellous to have Jake as the rainmaker. Jake is a liar, you know, that frontier humour type of thing which is largely exaggeration but is also understatement and mordant.

Then it just seemed to grow out of the abrasion between Jake and Old Man Gatenby - Jake talking boastfully about rain-making - and then it just grew organically, the way things grow from an initial curiosity and interest about rainmakers, because I didn't really know whether a rainmaker was a possibility or not.<sup>19</sup>

As Mitchell moved farther away from adaptations of written stories and wrote continually for radio, his plot structures tended to become simpler and more easily conveyed by dialogue and sounds. Later episodes were not, however,

as the mail indicates, immune to the contrived or trick ending. Mitchell's own favourite episode, which was written three years into the radio series, was "King of All the Country." The plot is fairly simple and there are very few characters. The dénouement, on the other hand, is so unusual and unexpected that it invites questions concerning its "organic" growth. His comments in defence of the dénouement again serve to explain the inspirational process. The story is as follows:

Jake wants The Kid to join him in the/goose hunt. He buys him a light, twenty-gauge shotgun and the two join in the annual goose-hunting 'fever.' Ma finds out and, opposed to the hunting of wild creatures, forbids The Kid to take part. An ethical argument ensues. Undaunted, the pair creep stealthily away at dawn. Just as the geese are in range, Ma appears, looking for The Kid. She is subdued and the shooting begins. She inexplicably uses the light shotgun herself and is drawn into the hunt. Does this constitute a trick ending or preconceived dénouement? Definitely not, retorts Mitchell. It all grew, he says, out of an argument he had with his wife, Merna, about the ethics of hunting, and by the time the story developed, the surprise ending was just as much of a surprise for him.

I hunt. Shotgun. Took it up rather late in life. Merna hunted with me and then she quit and we got into a conversation and I asked her why she wouldn't go shotgunning with me and she said - "Because it bothers me - it's

killing." I said, "Not really, that's not really the important thing about it." And she and I got into an argument and the argument Ma has with Jake, was from our argument about hunting. That was the genesis of "King of All The Country."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the script, Ma tells Jake that she hates guns and doesn't want the Kid to use them. She claims unnecessary killing brings out the primitive instincts in man, coarsens his character and is wanton. She also feels the odds are against the geese because they are not armed. Jake counters that hunting is a necessary part of a prairie child's education. He says Doc' Fotheringham and the Reverend Cameron are not any coarser or less sensitive, as human beings, or toward other human beings, just because they hunt. He reminds Ma that she is not exempt from eating meat. She is ready for that point, too, and pressures him into losing the logic of his argument and into revealing some of the mystery of the goose-hunting cult.

MA: That's no answer at all. I would disapprove just as much of a man who worked in an abattoir for the fun of it. We eat to live. I'm talking of killing for fun. (PAUSE) Why do you shoot geese, Jake?

JAKE: HUH?

MA: Have you ever asked yourself that? Have you?

JAKE: Why ... I ... the reason a fellah ... you don't ask yourself ... I like it!

MA: Why?

JAKE: Because ... I don't know ... look ... it's none of your damn business!

Ma: But you must have wondered ...

JAKE: You wanta know why' (WITH FEELING) They're up there, and I'm gonna knock'em down!

MA: That's no answer, Jake.

JAKE: Because ... (ALL STOPS OUT) ... they're up there! That's why.

MA: All right, Jake.

JAKE: (VERY SERIOUS) I guess it ain't -- any answer. But ... but ... woman ... there's lots of stuff a human does he ain't got a solid, square, six-be-six reason for. Maybe that's what a fellah does a lot of things for ... because they don't make sense ... they don't make him a nickel ... he just does 'em to do the thing. Maybe it's the way a human critter is .. he don't have enough no-reason things to do.<sup>21</sup>

No answer, indeed, for Ma, nor for the puzzled apprentice-man, The Kid. Ma's own behaviour in the end confuses him even more, and the complex sound picture drawn by Mitchell in that dénouement might perhaps confuse the listener as well, both technically and morally. Involving as it does the moral contradiction and the use of a narrative aside combined with dramatic sequence, it again becomes somewhat confusing and forced in radio terms:

MUSIC: WILD GOOSE BRIDGE DOWN SLIGHTLY TO LET:

SOUND: WAY OFF AND FAINT, FAINT APPROACHING GEESE ...

MUSIC: UP THEN DOWN BG FOR:

JAKE: They come ... they come ... way off ... low stragglin' an' driftin' from the horizon to the southwest ... like thin an' thready smoke agin the mornin' sky ... only you don't git smoke in a wide, shallah, honkin' vee! Then, we seen this dark figger comin' towards us ...

MUSIC: UP BRIEFLY THEN OUT FOR:

SOUND: GEESE STILL FAINTLY IN BG FOR:

MA: (OFF) Jake! JAKE!

JAKE: Aaaaaah!

KID: Ma .... it's Ma, Jake ... she's ...

MA: Son ... Jake! Where are you! (SHE CAN'T SEE THEM IN THEIR PIT UNDER THE STUBBLE.)

JAKE: She's gonna ruin ... she ... (HOLLERING) Here ... over here ... come a-runnin' ... belly to the groun' - you're gonna ruin it for us just when we got 'em by the tail-feathers on a down-hill puuuuuuulllll!

MUSIC: UP WITH GOOSE MUSIC THEN DOWN BG FOR:

JAKE: I pulled her down intuh the pit with us. She said somethin' about the Kid bein' out here and the gun. I said:

MUSIC: BREAK ABRUPTLY TO STARTLE:

SOUND: GEESE MUCH NEARER.

JAKE: (AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS) SHADDUP!

MUSIC: TAKE UP AGAIN THEN DOWN BG FOR. ( TO X)

JAKE: They come ... they come ... siftin' sidewise ... oh, they was comin' sweet! The sound their wings come to us like the rush of wind ... like she was our own blood whangin' in our own ears. Then we saw 'em lower an' lower ... gagglin' ... barkin' ... shrill an' untidy ... crazy ... crazy wild ... peelin' off an' wheelin' down ... tiltin' this way an' tiltin' that ... so low you could see their feet gittin' ready. (X) Then ...

SOUND: GEESE UP FULL IN ALL ITS BEAUTIFUL DISORDER BG THROUGH:

JAKE: (THIS HAS TO BE THE SCREECH OF AN INSANE MAN) SUH ... LAUGHTER THE DARLIN'S!

SOUND: THREE SHOTGUN SHOTS. THESE ARE JAKE'S HEAVY 12 GAUGE.

THEN: ONE SHOTGUN SHOT - LIGHT. THIS IS THE KID'S 20 GAUGE.

CALL OF GEESE RECEDING IN DISTANCE.

THREE CRUMPING WHUMPS AS THREE GEESE HIT THE STUBBLE.  
(PAUSE) THEN ONE WHUMP AS LAST GOOSE HITS THE STUBBLE.

JAKE: YOU done her Kid! You knocked down your first ...

KID: I never, Jake. I never even had the gun.

MUSIC: UP THEN DOWN BG FOR (TO X)

JAKE: She was standin' there ... the smoke still  
breathin' outa the twen'y gauge she held in  
her hands. She looked down at it, sorta  
dazed. Then she looked up at me an' I seen  
the wind had tooken out a lock her hair an'  
laid it across the ... her cheek to the corner  
her mouth ... an' I seen the tears too. (X)  
(PAUSE) She handed the Kid the gun an' she  
turned away an' she didn't say nuthin'.  
She didn't say nuthin'.<sup>22</sup>

MUSIC: FINALE.

A dramatic ending, indeed. Even if it is not a trick  
dénouement, it nevertheless presents problems for the  
listener. The combination of Jake-narration with dramatic  
sequence does much to provide an understandable picture and  
the music supplies added pathos. But, while the section  
that relies upon distinctly different sound effects of guns  
and "whumps" may seem adequate on paper, it results in a  
very complex sound picture that is anti-climatic, forced and  
confusing. Furthermore, the ending, on first hearing,  
strikes one as inconsistent with the previously and labour-  
iously constructed character and views of Ma, throughout the  
story and the series. Mitchell disagrees:

No, No! What she had failed to realize was  
that all of the intellectual and honest  
discussion and everything about it, you know,  
when Jake says "because they're up there," -  
the sort of passionate takeover, and Jake saying  
it's a human thing and everything else - well,

Ma is not outside of that. So, when she goes in and the geese are coming down and then she has the shotgun, it's not out of character. It's an inadvertent and very tragic thing that Ma, too is caught up in that passionate episode and does that. No, it's not out of character at all.<sup>23</sup>

Inconsistent behaviour or not, the ending still has a contrived and slightly incredible aspect. It is not alone among Jake stories that prompt the listener to feel cheated, tricked or even angered. Another case is the dog-poisoning scenario with its unexpected dénouement, which is a veritable confidence trick upon the dog-lovers in the audience. Similarly, the humiliation of Mrs. Abercrombie and the other emancipated ladies whose hopes of running for civic office are met with that cruel, male practical joke - three local goats named after them.

Mitchell was at his weakest in terms of structure and plot when the exigencies of weekly production deprived him of the time necessary to carefully plan an episode. He would, thus, sometimes fail to resolve a script in a satisfactory manner within the allotted thirty minutes. The ending would, therefore, either be rushed and frustrating, or carried over into a second part. Some of these two-part episodes were his poorest Jake offerings. They stretched out or recapitulated the initial episode into an unsatisfactory second instalment, where a tighter and more carefully conceived first part would have sufficed.

The trick endings, hasty conclusions and weak two-part scripts weaken the overall integrity of the series and earned him at least two critical comments from otherwise loyal and discerning listeners. Elsie Park Gowan commented on his abrupt endings and appealed to him to "give us time to enjoy the climax and the point of the story."<sup>24</sup> S. Ernest Sprott of McGill University wrote in about one "compressed conclusion," because he was "so mad, I can't forbear." He complained that Mitchell's lack of careful attention to fine structural details marred an otherwise moving and entertaining series. He told Mitchell that he came "So near to satisfying my taste that I am enraged when you do not!"<sup>25</sup>

These difficulties can be attributed in large measure to the pressure upon Mitchell to deliver his weekly script, with or without sufficient preparation time or inspiration. However, some of the blame must also be placed on his failure to come completely to terms with the demands and characteristics of the radio medium itself. They seem to occur, for the most part, where he attempts to undertake scenarios or sequences that are too complex, or to retain too many of the subtleties and intricacies of the short story. As the series progressed he seems to have learned, often the hard way, to simplify his scripts, to avoid relying too heavily upon dialogue and sounds to convey meaning and atmosphere. His later scripts become less ambitious in audio terms and rely more upon characterization than upon complexities of plot

and action. His soliloquy portions also absorb much of the role of description and explanation as he learns to perfect that narrative device. It should also be stressed that the trick endings, hasty conclusions, overly complex sequences and unsatisfactory two-part scripts are the exception rather than the rule. The majority of the scripts are effective, satisfying and essentially radiophonic. Most are complete entities within themselves and bely the loose generic description of the Jake scripts as a family serial. With the exception of those few two-part episodes, most of the scripts had their own distinct story, theme and moral message and could be, and were, used in any order within a given chronological series. In that sense, they were closer to the "rigours and compression" of the short story than to a truly episodic radio serial.

Mitchell seldom resorted to that traditionally facile technique of the radio serial - the cliff-hanger ending. Whether a listener heard the previous episode or not, he was likely to gain and retain something from each program, so much were they self-contained. Apart from the fact that the themes and moral thrusts of the scripts satisfied and left distinct impressions, the Jake stories also gave the illusion of being part of an almost episodic series. They thus gave the regular listener a feeling of continuity and attachment. This was due, not so much to episodic plots or themes, as to what has sometimes pejoratively been described as the "formula comedy" of the series.<sup>26</sup>

The formula was largely based on an element of predictability and on variations of it. Mitchell created a small group of highly developed leading characters whose behaviour could be anticipated and even relied upon. They entertained, and attracted a listener following, both by living up to those expectations and by departing from them. These leading characters frequently came into contact with less important but thematically symbolic figures and the encounters created 'situations.' Figures such as Jake or The Kid, could thus be brought into contact with a character representing dishonesty, avarice or prejudice, for example. The confrontation and often conflict that arose would represent or demonstrate the moral issue or concern of the story. Through the agency of Jake and his moral counterpoint to the symbolic figure, The Kid and the listener were given the moral object lesson. The device was largely founded on humour, however, so it never became very heavy-handed. Without the humour, the moral lessons would have sounded pretentious.

The leading characters are, Ma and the shotgun notwithstanding, almost completely predictable to the regular listener. As Mitchell came to know exactly how his characters would react in a given situation, so the listener had behavioural and conversational precedents to guess from. The characters, by their preoccupations, reactions, language patterns, expressions and moral traits, had clearly

established shapes and tendencies, reinforced with every episode. Much of the continuity, identification and humour derived from audience anticipation of such reactions and expressions from one episode to the next. Certain standard Jake lines could have more humorous value or importance in the listener's mind than they might appear to have as lines on paper. To suggest that the element of anticipation of such humour constituted 'slapstick' in Mitchell's stories, is to do them an injustice.<sup>27</sup> The anticipatory aspect of the comedy formula was, of course, designed to produce a laugh, but the humour only clothed situations and moral lessons that had intrinsic value and importance.

Predictable patterns of character traits, behaviour and mannerisms are one of the main ingredients in that formula. Jake, in particular, has his standard repertoire of verbal exclamations, such as "nough to give a gopher the heartburn." With or without provocation, he tells and re-tells the same repertoire of tall tales, often with inconsistencies of detail: how he wrist-wrestled Louis Riel, resisted the advances of Chief Weasel-Tail's dusky daughter, or taught the tribe how to make a buffalo jumping pound, how cold it was during the Blue Snow winter of '06-'07, or how he hobnobbed with Wilf' Laurier and Sir John. A. These he trundles out, on cue, as soon as anyone steers the conversation to acts of historical courage, relations with women or the world of power and politics. Associates such as Gate know

full well that they will be treated to such anecdotal clichés and frequently remind Jake that they have heard it all before. Even the Kid sighs in anticipation of these tales and sometimes points out the detailed inconsistencies from one telling to the next. The repeated tellings serve not only to provide humour by their predictability, they also create interesting tensions with Old Man Gatenby, who is himself an inveterate boaster and tale-teller. Gate usually starts off by dismissing Jake's standard anecdotes as nonsense. He is quickly drawn into the game, however, and adds to the stories from his own repertoire with anecdotal modifications, corrections or improvements. Before he knows quite what is happening, Gate is inventing the names and predicaments of even more improbable characters than Jake's, and ends up arguing vehemently with Jake about whose version is more accurate. The inevitability of contrapuntal arguments between the two is as easy to anticipate as their anecdotes. their encounters follow a pattern of rising tension and abrasion, which Mitchell adroitly feeds by steering them into conflict situations.

Repeat Godfrey provides similar wealth for the formula. He is predictably prone to bedevil his tonsorial victims with moral sermons, inspired by the example of his stern father. The lessons preached and practiced by Godfrey Senior cannot be avoided. They must and will be told, in between clippings, shavings and tidbits about Crocus goings-on.

Even Jake, apparently unaware that he inflicts such 'repertoire' on others, remarks that he has heard it all before or, when pressed beyond the limits of tolerance, completes the anecdotes himself. Double-entendre is frequently employed, as is deliberate confusion and misunderstanding. Jake may, for example, be telling some tale while being trimmed, and has to compete with Repeat's instructions for him to keep still, turn his head and so on. He may be telling a tale about a drought and cannot sufficiently emphasize the aridity of it. Repeat interrupts with the question, "Dry?" meaning, of course, Jake's hair. Jake impatiently replies that, as he already said, it was dryer than a gopher's ... and so on. Any vulgarity, oath or improper suggestion would produce an equally predictable reminder that no such behaviour is tolerated in his shop, where clean tongues and clean instruments prevail.

Other characters are just as predictable if less flagrantly so. Ma traditionally tempers the juvenile excesses of both The Kid and Jake. She always acts as mediator and conciliator between Jake and Gate when they are involved in a raging adversity. She is invariably dismissed and placed in 'perspective' by Jake who reminds the listener that she was once a school marm and will always be.

Predictable scenarios are constructed around the appearances of many lesser characters as well. Professor Noble Winesinger always gets into trouble over his ubiquitous

patent medicine and inevitably transforms the potion into an even less likely application. He always fails to recognise Jake at each encounter - a formula designed to place the other party at a disadvantage. Wayfreight Brown the station-master predictably launches into dramatic quotations from railway brochures or posters describing the beauties of the continent that can be viewed and visited by rail. He is a walking travelogue.

Situations, as well as characters, are predictable parts of the formula. It is inevitable that Jake will become involved in every situation as mediator or corrector of ills and injustices, or because he has boasted his way into a contest of some kind. These situations are usually created by the appearance of one of the lesser characters who epitomizes a particular theme or trait: prejudice, avarice, fraud, intransigence, or whatever. It is Jake's job to solve the resulting problems, take the villains down a few notches, and set things morally straight.

Often, institutions, rather than individuals, perform this role according to a set pattern or formula. The various ladies' organizations feed that formula when they predictably become involved in matters of social conduct and community causes. They are just as predictably berated by Jake and the other Crocus menfolk for their cultural snobbery. Their desire to over-organize historical and social events guarantees their involvement in any historical, national or regional

festive event or local celebration. They predictably blow it out of proportion. Similarly, Miss Henschbaw and the Rabbit Hill School Trustees perform in patterned ways conditioned by precedent. Repeat Godfrey's barber shop, Repeat himself and his regular customers perform as a predictable institution. Local problems are first raised there, given a forum for discussion and often resolved on the premises. The shop serves, therefore, both as communications centre and link, and as a benchmark and barometer of prevailing sentiment. By the same token, it can be said that the very town of Crocus itself acts predictably. It is quick to accept rumour as fact and to condemn or judge precipitously on that basis. It demonstrates as a collective whole the same human weaknesses illustrated by its individual members. It is traditionally fond of gossip, easy to stir up, slow to forgive and difficult to convince. As an entity, Crocus is vain and self-satisfied. It predictably preens itself upon its regional accomplishments and expresses its superiority over neighbouring Conception or Disraeli. Such smugness predictably causes rivalry.

Performance by individuals and institutions according to these set patterns is only one part of Mitchell's formula. The other part is the introduction of minor variations in that performance or complete departures from the anticipated norm. Mitchell skilfully sets up the usual preliminary indications in the scenario. The character or institution

is expected to react in the traditional manner but, for once, does not. Crocus and the listener are shocked, but it use-ally all comes out straight in the end. Thus, for example, Jake, almost allergic to women and their obsession with romance, woos Mrs. Clinkerby and appals The Kid by becoming sentimental. Repeat, the paragon of virtue and respectability, appears to be having an affair with Mrs. Bent Candy. Ma and Repeat abhor sport hunting, then both shoot geese. Jake, symbol of unremitting labour on prairie, decides to give up and head for warmer parts, to take the vacation that is anathema to the hired hand. Gate, determined to die in harness, decides to sell out his farm and retire. Worst and most uncharacteristically of all, Daddy Johnson, the very antithesis of all that is moribund, decides he wants to die and orders his coffin and grave-maker. None of the characters do any of these things in the final analysis. The situations created by their uncharacteristic behaviour and the moral points made in bringing them back to their proper paths are, in themselves, the message and the dénouement. Jake was not looking for romance but for attention not given him at home. Repeat was simply using Mrs. Candy's clairvoyant talents to communicate with his father. Ma and Repeat were caught up in the mystery of the hunt. Jake, seeking to escape from his toils, had merely forgotten his own maxim that you have to take the bitter with the sweet. Gate realises you get rusty and decline if you step down and retire from the

Protestant work syndrome. Daddy Johnson had just become depressed by winter confinement and forgotten that Spring gives a new lease on life.

Apart from characters and institutions, other larger elements are often introduced in counterpoint to serve the formula. In keeping with the main themes outlined earlier, situations are constantly introduced that underline tension, strain and conflict. The tugs between the longing for the pioneer past and the benefits of urbanization create many scenarios. The implication that the old and natural are better than the modern and synthetic abounds in situations and scenarios, as does the suggestion that proximity to nature and natural methods is richer and more authentic. It is thus predictable that once Gate gives up his faithful old car for a modern, automated vehicle, troubles will proliferate and he will return to his old car. It is also predictable that Mrs. Bent Candy's abandoned, manured, Woolworth rose will win against the artificially nurtured specimens of Mrs Abercrombie. By these scenarios, Mitchell both feeds and creates the formula of predictability and underlines those social tensions between past and present, durability and change, natural and synthetic, quality and 'shayanappy,' genuine and false.

While social themes, institutions and behavioural traits are often used in these predictable and modified-predictable fashions as part of the comedy formula, the principal

ingredient of Mitchell's technique is, nevertheless, characterization. The recreation of thoroughly credible characters drawn from prairie life remains the keystone of his technique; and those characters, rather than the plots, tricks, scenarios or other devices, are the mainstay of the radio episodes.

It is difficult to consider characterization in the Jake and The Kid scripts as a purely literary phenomenon. The portrayal of those characters by actors over a period of several years contributed so much to the establishment and realism of those fictional figures that the separation of literature and radio becomes awkward. Mitchell did, nevertheless, clearly establish the portraits of his main characters with his Maclean's stories, long before they became radio illusions. They did not quite come to life as they did on radio, but they were already firm and credible character constructs. How much of the characterization was basically supplied by the author in his scripts, before they reached the production stage and were bodied out by cast?

Viewed purely on paper, without the added actorial dimension, very few of the Crocus characters are fully developed, or, in the round. The only people developed to any great extent are those members of what might be called the 'inner family' - Jake and The Kid and those closest to them who appear regularly in important roles. The majority

of the eighty-odd Crocus citizens featured in the series are flat and relatively undeveloped. They are accessories to the action or are even symbolic figures who represent human qualities or shortcomings.

Jake Trumper is the most important and the most developed figure in the Mitchell scripts. He is the epitome of the tough but honest ordinary man engaged in constant struggle against prairie adversity; but he is also struggling against inhumanity. Without recourse to profound philosophy or sophistication, Jake usually manages to come out on the side of right and social justice. Except to The Kid, Jake is no super-hero. He has minor faults, some of which he admits to and a few of which he reveals unwittingly as object lessons for The Kid and the audience. His real heroism consists of being a prairie sticker, the hired hand who helped make the West. Mitchell suggests that what Jake lacks in greatness of birth, station or daring, he makes up for in pure dignity.

A hero can be a very common person, Mitchell argues,

...but he better have nobility of character and he better have heroic leadership qualities. I think Jake, whatever he was, has that. He is noble in this regard. He is a decent and responsible human being and he can solve problems for other people and lead them out of difficulties, small as they may seem to be. Now, that's a hero and so he has certain characteristics of heroes.<sup>28</sup>

Some of Jake's heroic actions spring from his encounters with Crocus problems and his approach to solving them.

Others are caused simply because he has to extricate himself

from situations in which he has placed himself through boasting. His heroism is not really important in itself, however. What really counts is what he reveals about his attitudes to life and morality through those encounters and solutions. Even his boasting, tale-telling and white lies are not faults if they are viewed as local folklore or as compensatory responses to prairie environment. Jake is genuinely modest and unassuming. He never pretends to know the answers to questions that are beyond the boundaries of his knowledge or experience. What he particularly reveals is basic respect for an honest, hard-working life, close to nature, a devotion to duty, no matter how menial, and an abhorrence of hypocrisy in all its forms.

His philosophy has not been learned in books but from the school of life and he is proud of that experiential training. He displays contempt for those who parade knowledge, who try to impose their versions of society, culture and truth upon others, or who give themselves airs or moral pretensions. Jake is a grass-roots pragmatist who can be relied upon to keep his head and lend his muscles in the most demanding of situations.

He may appear stubborn and adamant while engaged in a contest of wills with Old Man Gatenby, but that is not generally his nature. He usually listens to the other man's side and explores all aspects of a given situation before deciding in favour of what he instinctively feels to

be right. He is usually quick to intercede between two opposing factions, pointing out the weaknesses of their respective positions and calling for moderation. He is patient with, and tolerant of, those who show basic good will or good intentions. With the stupid and malicious, he is merciless and even overtly cruel. He often makes mistakes in judgement but is the first to admit later that he thought he was doing the right thing at the time and under the circumstances. He is not above cheating on occasion, manoeuvring or re-arranging the facts, where necessary, if small sins can help erase larger ones. This he calls "fighting fire with fire" and he frequently stacks the cards in favour of what he feels to be good common sense.

Jake has no enemies, except perhaps villainous Pete Botten, who is always being unmasked or outdone by Jake and envies his qualities and accomplishments. He is Crocus' favourite citizen, nominated by The Kid and accepted by the Crocus Breeze as "Golden Jubilee Citizen," without whom the prairie and Saskatchewan could not have been won.

Physically, Jake Trumper is clearly drawn. In his early sixties, wizened and showing the creases of prairie wear and tear, Jake can still put in a solid day's work from dawn to dusk and pitch loads with the best of them. Rough and ready, he is always dungareed and booted, with chin as stubbly as his fields. Chewing Black Judas tobacco and spitting the juice everywhere, Jake may be coarse in

aspect and habit, but not in mind or manner toward his fellow man. Attitudinally, Jake is a moderate with liberal tendencies. Ostensibly, this salt of the earth figure, this pioneering, self-reliant type with whom prairie types and Canadians everywhere can identify, is ultra-conservative. His moral stance, however, is liberal and the listener is almost seduced into a more liberal viewpoint.

The creation of an intricately detailed Jake Trumper stems from Mitchell's fascination with the hired hand. He obviously spent considerable time observing and making notes about this prairie species before designing Jake. As previously mentioned in the thematic chapter, the general description of the hired hand can be found in the story "Golden Jubilee Citizen." A more detailed and revealing study, in which Jake Trumper can be recognised, is found in the form of unpublished notes by Mitchell called "The Hired Man." They read, in part:

Now the hired man was a special and individual sort of person. He was not to be confused with the thresher or the harvester or the stoker, who was hired for those days and weeks that a particular job had to be done on the farm - seasonal employment - not so with the hired man - he joined the farm ... and pretty generally he was a good example of a frontier democracy for he took his meals with the family.

His wages - a dollar and a half a day... during the first two decades of the century ... then during the dirty 'thirties and the drought years his pay went right down - ranged between nothing or simply his room and board, to the usual five dollars a month of the Depression.

Many of the hired men were remittance men - invited to leave England and the country estate -

these men were quite laconic about their background.

Leather neck, great knuckled hands, turkey red face to the line of his hat on his forehead, then mushroom pale above. It seemed to me that hired men were always thin and most generally between the ages of forty and fifty... it seems, inevitably that the hired man must be seen and appreciated through the eyes of a boy, for he stood half-way between the world of the farm boy and the world of the adult.<sup>29</sup>

It is not surprising that the hired man should be the heroic figure and that The Kid should hold him in such worship, when the importance of the hired hand in Mitchell's own life is taken into consideration. Jake Trumper is the composite of all the hired hands Mitchell grew up with and he drew him straight from life:

Alan, who taught me to touch off a gopher with a twenty-two and who rescued me from a manure spreader ... when I was about six ... and he was my hero. Another one was Tom, who, after I was farmed out south of Weyburn when my father died, would take me out in the buggy and so on ...

The hired men weren't fathers, really, because a hired hand had sort of one foot in the child world and one in the adult world. They were heroes, not fathers. They would teach you how to make a whistle by tapping a piece of willow until it loosened and slipped off, or how to make a minnow net or pike spoon... They were kind of like a kid, like one of your pals.

You couldn't have a hired man without a kid or kids around. They just simply went together ... He was kind of like a much older brother too, but he took more interest in you than a brother would.<sup>30</sup>

As Mitchell grew up learning from Alan and Tom, so his second most important literary construct, The Kid, grows up learning from Jake Trumper and says in turn, "It was Jake

taught me to hold a twenty-two and touch off a gopher. He's made me all kinds of things because he's kind to kids. I never known him to thin a kid's hide once."<sup>31</sup>

Jake is The Kid's life model, moral yardstick and behavioural paragon. It is to Jake that he turns for advice, explanation and clarification. Jake gets him his pony, helps him break it in, replaces his lost dog, shows him how to win races or contests, raise prize-winning wheat or make a speech at school. The Kid may be twelve, but Jake treats him like an apprentice adult and is never patronizing. The Kid is made to feel like an equal partner in their many adventures. As a character, however, The Kid is much less crucial than Jake. If both Jake and The Kid are 'foils' to illustrate moral situations and to contrast with other symbolic characters, then The Kid is a foil to Jake as principal character. While there could not as effectively be a Jake without a Kid tagging along, there could even less be a Kid without a Jake to lead him. In fact, The Kid is merely a device used to raise, in a naive fashion, the ethical questions. Such issues can thus be raised without authorial intervention in narrative, and neatly answered or illustrated by Jake with his practical demonstrations or maxims.

In addition to raising the moral questions, The Kid is an object lesson in moral and personality development. In the script situations, The Kid is therefore both a

sounding-board for Jake's object lessons and a symbol in himself. He stands for the purity, innocence and naivety of youth. His discoveries and revelations about prairie and people serve to illustrate the inevitability of the loss of those very qualities. He is one of those naturally wild, free spirits that is particularly well attuned to prairie, but must be tempered to fit into social structures that are in contest with it. As Jake warns, he will learn to take the bitter with the sweet. Many of the situations involving him are amusing, but many too are moving and pathetic. His taming and shaping for the battlefield of life includes many bitter discoveries and revelations that form the basis for scenarios. Pets and close relatives die. Kids are cruel to animals and people are cruel to other people. Life is a fragile and uncertain thing, especially in the harsh environment of prairie. Adults do not really understand kids, even if they were once children themselves. Adults lie or, at least, stretch the truth and display serious contradictions and inconsistencies, Jake and his Ma included. This latter revelation occurs in many of the scripts but perhaps most strikingly in "King of All the Country." The story is a telling lesson for the Kid in terms of his growth and development. It confronts him with the moral and behavioural inconsistencies of the very adults from whom he is supposed to learn about life and ethics. He never does have the opportunity to shoot his first geese despite all the secret

preparations and encouragement from Jake. The argument between Jake and Ma provides no straight, clear answer as to whether hunting is good or bad. And, to make matters worse, Ma's contradictory behaviour, in shooting the geese herself after forbidding him to shoot them, is ultimately confusing.

As a central character, The Kid is well detailed and developed, particularly where he reveals his inner emotions and searchings in the revelatory sequences or in his soliloquies. Physically, he is about twelve years old. He is insatiably curious about life and fascinated by animals, which are an insecure yet more approachable form of life. He is what might be called 'a good kid' rather than a nasty, mean, or uncontrollable one - many versions of which can be found with which to contrast him in Mitchell's *Crocus* and other writings. Having lost his father in World War Two, he takes Jake as his role-model in behaviour, vernacular and values. In that sense, he sounds and acts like a miniature, apprentice Jake Trumper, despite, and in contrast to, all Ma's efforts to turn him into a civilized and sophisticated man-child.

Viewed more closely, the character is less convincing. He is, essentially, the adult man's nostalgic, and overly mature and somewhat romantic portrait of the boy he once was. There is no doubt in observing The Kid, and Mitchell partially confirms this, that his own childhood self was the model for the nameless *Crocus* Kid. There are simply too

many coincidences for it to be otherwise: their fatherless states, their hired hand "brothers" and their authoritarian and urbane mothers who once were, and always will be, teachers at heart. Mitchell says he spoke through and related to both Jake and The Kid as primary figures in the series. It is, precisely, when he relates too closely to The Kid that the child character becomes least convincing, especially during the narrative 'soliloquies.' Mitchell obviously accurately recalled childhood thoughts and emotions from his notebook. However, he often couched The Kid's narratives in language which surpassed the vocabulary, perceptions and poetry of a twelve-year-old. The narratives were acceptable when The Kid was describing his own excitement or disappointment, doubts, childish fears or pique. His soliloquies could be both convincing and moving in such episodes as "Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy," when he breaks his pony. A twelve-year-old might, in fact, be capable of such metaphors as that of his pony finally moving him across prairie as "smooth as cream pouring." It is unlikely that he would comment of Jake and Gate arguing that they reminded him of kids arguing at recess at Rabbit Hill School. The Kid is even less convincing in the short stories than on the air. His narrative sequences tend to be longer and more flowery in the stories. In the "Rain" story, for example, The Kid says of Gate that he was sitting with "his long legs kinked up at the knees, just like a grasshopper ready to spring," or, later, that

Gate's face had "enough wrinkles to hold a three-day rain." Later, he says Gate talks to Jake with his voice stubborn and slow, like it hurt him to keep it down the way he was doing," or, in another confrontation, that "old Gate looked at Jake like he was a fork going into a threshing machine."<sup>32</sup>

Fortunately, in the radio script of "Rain" the narrative is assigned to Jake and such descriptive inconsistencies are avoided. There are, however, many instances in the radio productions where overly mature expressions or observations find their way into The Kid's mouth. Because such utterances would sound even more out of character on radio than they might appear in print, it might be supposed that Mitchell would be more cautious about assigning them to The Kid in the radio scripts. On the contrary, the fact that they would be spoken by an experienced, adult actress made such utterances possible. Billie Mae Richards could handle the lines and make them sound childlike. It was, however, necessary to accept their attribution to a twelve-year-old as just another part of the radio dramatic illusion. After all, the radio Kid wasn't a kid at all and he remained about twelve-years-old throughout the nearly twenty year history of the radio broadcasts - a veritable prairie Peter Pan.

It should be emphasized, however, that, academic and critical considerations notwithstanding, once the audience realized they were being tricked by a middle-aged housewife, they totally accepted the illusion and Mitchell's character,

mature lines and all. Incredible child character or not, The Kid was never challenged by thousands of readers and hundreds of thousands of listeners.

The next closest member of the Crocus 'inner family,' Ma, is not fully developed. She suffers most from the Mitchell tendency to treat women as a secondary human sub-species. He puts her through situations and dialogue in mechanical fashion, making her relate and react in predictably stereotypical ways. She was, and will ever be, a school marm. She wants to over-protect and over-clean The Kid. She is the epitome of moderation. She defends the Crocus ladies on female principle. She is a leading exponent of that overrated feminine prerogative and characteristic fraudulence - intuition. Despite her constant appearance throughout the episodes, however, nothing is really revealed about the inner Ma. She never talks about the loss of her husband, what she felt about him or what he was like. He only appears once (in "A Voice for Christmas"), when he speaks over short-wave radio from the European front. Ma does not speak to him. He talks only with Jake and The Kid. She seldom reveals her emotions or moral values, except when, for example, she gives her reasons for objecting to goose hunting in "King of All The Country." For the most part, she serves almost as a prop or accessory. The Kid has to have a mother and she has to react in conventional motherly ways to what the Kid is doing or saying. As a

character, she is no more developed or emotionally revealed than many of the cameo figures who make brief visits in the stories. Although she must be considered as a primary figure, she is decidedly flat. The stories could almost occur without her, so well do Jake and The Kid complement each other and so superficial is Mitchell's treatment of her:

Ironically, a female character not really within the 'inner family' is given far greater development than Ma. Mabel Henschbaw, The Kid's teacher at Rabbit Hill School, is the epitome of the domineering and know-it-all pedagogue. Unlike Jake, her knowledge of life is not so much experiential as book-learned. Jake cannot abide the general assumption that, because she has read and knows everything, she must, therefore, invariably be right or be seen to be right. Her greatest sin is in seeing through Jake Trumper. She, more than anyone else in Crocus, can prove the glaring inaccuracies in the Trumper version of history as relayed to her by The Kid. She is not vindictive, however, for even as she corrects the inaccuracies, she supports The Kid's nomination of Jake as Golden Jubilee Citizen, herself editing the glowing tribute to Jake in the Crocus Breeze.

Mabel Henschbaw may be portrayed as the typical, bossy, school-marm but she is not just a stereotype like the other Crocus ladies. She is revealed in considerable detail throughout the series. She always displays concern for injustice, prejudice and anti-social tendencies. Her iron-

rule in the classroom is not tyranny but is based on a genuine desire to elevate and help the children. A woman of high ideal and strong principles, she still knows where to draw the line. She fights injustice in the school board and has no false pride when her position is threatened. Up front, she is firm and bold in opposing the powers trying to oust her unfairly. In private, The Kid discovers her crying quietly at her desk. Miss Henschbaw does not fight lost causes stubbornly. When wild young Pete Tincher cannot be tamed to fit the system and his drunken father cannot be made to see reason, Miss Henschbaw releases the boy from the constrictions of the school system. It is not an act of resignation on her part but an affirmation of the boy's right to be free and happy. That episode is her greatest, most human and most revealing moment. It reveals, beneath the prim and repressive exterior, a sensitive and emotional being and a whole and credible character.

Another ostensibly secondary figure in the 'inner family' of Crocus emerges with all the force of a protagonist. Repeat Godfrey, the barber, is detailed out of all proportion to his apparent importance in the stories. Essentially, Repeat is more of a clever device used by Mitchell than he is a credible character. He is the town communications device, providing Crocus with a dissemination center for information and gossip, and Mitchell with a way of filling in the audience on town sentiments and situations. He also stands for all the Puritan

quirks and repressions; the obsession with standing, reputation and respectability in the community, hard work, godliness, cleanliness and, to a great extent, moral hypocrisy. In selecting Repeat above all other Crocus figures to represent these, Mitchell creates an extremely amusing and yet basically pathetic figure. Repeat, especially in radio portrayal, is much closer to caricature than character. His clipped, confusing and highly comic delivery, tonsorial instructions and free sermons, chirped incessantly at customers, make him most entertaining but rather unreal. No such confused human composite could be found in real life: professional gossip, civic paragon, minister manqué, Puritan victim and traditional yappy barber, all rolled into one. Mitchell perhaps tries to do too much with this one character for Repeat to be entirely credible.

He nevertheless tries hard to penetrate the very depths of Orville Godfrey's soul, and an extremely detailed and rounded figure emerges throughout the stories. His most obvious and active character role is as information pivot for the town. His shop is that "strong human-communications fabric" of the town described by Clara Thomas in "Our Town, Our Tribe." However, the shop and Repeat play a larger structural role in the scripts. Mitchell uses this loquacious barber to supply, under the fictional guise of gossip, much of the exposition and plot advancement concerning people and events in the various episodes. The tonsorial victims,

and the audience alike, receive this information, not hot from the press but faster - hot from steaming daily shaves and philosophical discussions.

Repeat is not merely a device for disseminating information and gossip, however. Partly because of that role and partly suiting him ideally for it, Repeat is a student of human nature. He seems to be just as concerned with what is going on inside a man's head as with the state of the hair on it. He has an endless captive audience of laboratory specimens to study in great detail. No one in Crocus can escape his scrutiny. Mayors and hired men alike must, sooner or later, receive his ministrations and conversations.

Repeat is superficially knowledgeable and religious in his own, and in his father's Puritan fashion. His life and ways are both the example and the contradiction of clean, Christian morality. Deep down, Repeat is an insecure, psychologically repressed and disturbed individual. The extent of his repression is best revealed and Repeat achieves his fullest development in the script "Mind Over Madam." The visit of a hypnotist to Crocus prompts him to discuss psychology with Jake and reveal some of his own subconscious conflicts. Jake senses, as he hears Repeat talk about the strange workings of the human mind, that the barber has a love-hate relationship with that moral paradigm, Godfrey Senior. Repeat talks in ostensibly general terms about the hidden urges in the attic or basement of the house of the

soul; and attributes the discovery of these hidden urges to his reading and to radio programs on the subject. When Repeat says some people secretly want to do terrible things in public or take a thirty-thirty to their fathers, Jake suspects the truth. Godfrey Senior was too hard a moral act to follow; too stern and self-denying an example for his son. Mitchell takes the listener deep into Repeat's soul with a moving and pathetic anecdote from his youth - the story of his greatest repression, when his father prevented him from going to a visiting circus:

Father knew what was right for our family. When the circus came through our town ... lions, tigers, elephants, ... father laid down the law with a firm hand. No circus for us. He knew the godless type of people they were - sort of life they led. Travellin' cesspools of sin and wickedness. Hear him, standing there in the arch of the parlour with his long beard ... spangled and painted women. I remember a pal told me about it the next day. They had this eastern magician - one of them sideshows, not the main tent, wearing a turban and dark as copper, with a small boy in a basket and sticking swords through the basket ... the alligator-skinned woman whose eye opening and closing looked like a snake's... the pickled mermaid, Jumbo, the biggest steer in the world. Didn't seem anything wrong about that - about me seeing Jumbo ... sort of educational for a child. They gave us a holiday that day of the circus and I spent the day with father, forking hay. I remember I went over to the field when they left ... crackerjack boxes, pop bottles, a circusy smell of hot dogs, mustard and wild ... I guess a jungle would have smelt the way that CNR right-of-way smelled when I was a boy.<sup>33</sup>

The retelling of that incident occurs in proximity to the talk about secret desires, such as wanting to shoot one's own father. Something in Mitchell's own background

may have prompted this scenario, since it also occurs in his later Foothill Fables. Ollie Pringle, the undertaker, relates similar circus deprivation. Neither Ollie nor Repeat could see anything in a circus that could possibly warp a child's outlook of life. A circus might not warp a child, but lack of one might help warp the adult. Jake realizes that there are many hidden and dark urges in Repeat himself, that there are unmistakable inner cracks in this pillar of Crocus society.

Repeat may, structurally, be a dramatic device, even bordering upon caricature at times but, with such revelations, Mitchell plumbs the depths of a highly-complex character. While some of Repeat's deep confessions or philosophical sermons are frequently designed to forward the action or explain his subsequent behaviour, they often occur independently of plot, almost as character portraits in their own right. No more fascinating and basically contradictory character could have been chosen. The very contradictions in his psychology enhance the naturalism of the character. Despite his concern with respectability, for example, Repeat unmasks the fraudulence of his own brother. He opts for knowing the truth, even if it can be dire and he tells Jake that he cannot accept false security, nor bury his head in the sand if truth is at hand. Caricature, contradictory and disturbed he may be, but Repeat Godfrey is another noble protagonist - a likeable and fully-developed character.

Another leading member of the Crocus 'inner family' is Sam 'Old Man' Gatenby. Gate, an almost permanent fixture in the Jake and The Kid household, acts as a constant partner to Jake and brings out the best and sometimes the worst in him. Gate has most of Jake's characteristics, background and mannerisms and is from the same approximate generation. He is just as important a 'foil' to Jake as is the Kid. He is, at once, Jake's closest friend and worst enemy. They are constantly at loggerheads over their respective versions of everything, past and present. They stubbornly try to out-boast, and out-lie each other and are the human equivalent of cat and dog. Credit must be given to Jake as the more moderate and reasonable of the two, and to Gate for being the more stubborn and provocative. Inevitably, they become reconciled in the end, and complement each other so well that they would obviously be miserable without such contests. Gate is similar to Jake and yet very different in several important respects. He is, perhaps, what Jake in all his earthiness, and unsophistication, might have been - just another crude and cynical sod-buster. In terms of characterization, Gate serves to make Jake look more human and civilized. He has none of Jake's redeeming qualities. He is crustier, cruder, more stubborn and more cruel. He has no sense of moderation or perspective and his cussedness knows no limits. Jake knows when and where to stop, but Gate does not or, if he does, does not want to. Jake knows

how to tell a tall tale and how far he can push it. Gate is the biggest congenital liar in Crocus. Jake describes him in the script, The Liar Hunter, as "forty-per-cent wheat farmer, thirty-per-cent plain liar and thirty-per-cent magnifying glass." The Kid comments that sometimes Jake "will give the truth a stretch or two, but not like Old Man Gatenby. When Jake is done with her, she'll snap back into place; with Old Gate, she's stretched for good."

In terms of dramatic structure, the Gate character serves as a catalyst, as an agent-provocateur to goad Jake into giddy heights of tall tale telling or tricky situations. It is part of that predictable comedy formula that Gate is always on the sidelines like some diabolic alter-ego, prompting Jake to do or say things he would normally have the wisdom to avoid. Gate may be older than Jake, but he is far from senile. He has a sharp tongue and a sharper repartee. He is supremely adept at riling Jake, sensing to the nearest inch and insult just how far he has to push, or can afford to push, Jake. Their abrasive encounters often verge upon physical violence, so keen is Gate to have the final word and the ultimate victory. They literally come to grips in one story when they have a wrist-wrestling session, taken as seriously as if their lives, or at least their reputations, depended upon the outcome.

Despite his regular appearances, however, Gate does not emerge as a fully-developed character and also suffers from

the caricature syndrome. On only a few occasions are his inner complexities revealed and these, generally, concern his attitudes towards ageing and death. They are expressed in the script "Watch Them Arteries," when he contemplates retirement but changes his mind, and in "Love's Wild Magic" when he unsuccessfully tries to retain a valuable hired woman. Even in those sequences, neither Gate nor the topics are taken seriously. In the latter story, he almost aborts the hired girl's marriage by appealing to her maternal instincts to help him, a tired, old, beaten man, about to be left to his own devices.

Death will be coming for him soon he tells the girl and there will be no one near him in his final hour. His pathetic plea to her, moving though it seems, is just another example of Gatenby anecdote and pure prairie melodrama:

She'll be coming for me any day now ...  
coming to get me ... like a tired,  
broken-down, sick old workhorse in the  
pasture. Death, comin' whisperin' an'  
callin', sweet an' gentle. "Here, Sam,  
here Sam." Pan o'oats whisperin' in front  
of her. Lift my head, there ... give a  
tired sorta whinney ... go up to her. "Here,  
boy," she'll say, we won't bother nobody ..  
we'll just slip off together. Won't call for  
Doc' Fotheringham ... just head out together."  
And she'll hold out her pan o'oats and she'll  
lift up the halter she's hid behind her  
back - halter o' old age.<sup>34</sup>

Gate is viewed largely in the flesh and little in the spirit. He may be a member of the inner family, but he is two-dimensional. He is physically described and graphically depicted, but he is really only another prop for Jake.

A character less frequently seen and yet more internally developed is the strange travelling medicine man, Professor Noble Winesinger. Winesinger is perhaps the most fully developed Crocus character after Jake and the Kid themselves. He obviously stems, like the rain-maker, from Mitchell's fascination for travelling con' men, carnival and circus figures and performers of miracles. Winesinger has many literary and theatrical antecedents - the wandering prophet, the itinerant singer, the hermit with magic powers brought from other cultures and climes.

Winesinger's elixir is based on a secret formula whispered to him by a dying Indian medicine man. Its strength is more for the soul than the body, however, since it is so potent that only strong bodies or livestock could survive it. It is clear that Winesinger and Mitchell view the 'Lightning Penetration Oil and Tonic' in its various disguises, as harmless hokum. What really count are the psychological effects of Winesinger's pitch, his educational medical side-show and his free philosophy. Winesinger, like Repeat, is a student of human nature, but he has had more practice. His hard, carny eye "looks into the suffering faces of prairie humanity" and sums it all up at a glance. He knows that people are gullible and that they all yearn for immortality. He gives them his Tonic, billed at one point as a longevity formula and derived from essence of gopher, that epitome of prairie tenacity and survival. His immortality

potion, a mixture designed to check the ravages of time, wins him nationwide fame and markets. Professor Winesinger 'drops out,' however, and returns to his travelling medicine show and his former scale of operations. This important act is a key to an understanding of this character who so fascinated Mitchell that he almost wrote an entire novel about him.

Winesinger is not all bad, and perhaps performs a beneficial function. He believes that one cannot be entirely honest and scrupulous in life. If God placed "taps" everywhere to be fleeced and thank one for it, can his trade be all that harmful? He confesses in his more philosophical discussions with Jake that he has some regret about exploiting people, but feels no sense of shame. He trades, not completely immorally, upon mankind's dream of eternal life and offers at least temporary relief from mortal suffering. Winesinger has a conscience. He admits in a revealing discussion with Jake that he is a cynic who has had a troublesome, bleak and negative existence. The path of suffering through that mortal existence, he firmly believes, leads only to that ultimate goal of a better and an immortal afterlife. His tonic and educational medicine show are merely crutches to help smoothe the mortal travails of prairie humanity. He knows full well that he is trading upon their foibles and fears, upon their gullibility and superstitions. His conversations with Jake are gems of cynical commentary on the essential irrationality of rural search for panaceas.

Jake says of Winesinger that "he ain't a bad puhtatah, but he sure as aitch ain't a good one either." If he were that bad, both Mitchell and Jake would have had him ejected from Crocus like all the other frauds and cheats. Instead, Mitchell enters the well-exposed soul of the benevolent charlatan to reveal both Winesinger and his Crocus victims, the 'taps.' Winesinger holds up a cruel magnifying glass to the ordinary people of prairie and all their incurable warts are revealed. There is affection and generosity behind the scrutiny, however. Winesinger may be a con' man but he is intelligent and sensitive. It is no coincidence that his Christian name is Noble.

The only other regular character to be explored in any detail is Mayor MacTaggart, who also owns a dry-goods store in town. MacTaggart is what might be called a representative civic landmark. Ostensibly, he is there because there has to be some visible, if not particularly active, indication of authority in Crocus. In the near absence of the actual instruments of law and order, The RCMP, the mayor and his council become the arbiters of public decorum. His local rule is, however, without severity or grandeur. He is, first and foremost, local storekeeper, and Crocus mayor second. Like Jake he is simple and unpretentious, down-to-earth, honest and decent and somewhat rough around the edges. He constantly displays moderation and a reluctance to act authoritatively for or against any particular faction or

interest. Except, that is, when the organized ladies start exerting their influence. When they attempt to run for office, insist on the right to vote in municipal elections or impose their values on the town, MacTaggart loses his civic objectivity.

The mayor is more of a symbolic than a human and central character in the scripts. He stands for a benevolent and non-repressive local government that is flexible and sympathetic to the needs of ordinary people. It is particularly sympathetic to the rough and ready menfolk and their desire to remain just that. He is clearly on Jake's side in the fight against the civilizing influence of the Crocus ladies.

MacTaggart is also the epitome of the rare politician who remains accessible to the mere mortal. He is able to stay close to the people because of his double role as storekeeper. Like the barber-shop, MacTaggart's store is a local landmark and a link in the gossip chain. More importantly, the store symbolizes that close contact between municipal government and the citizens it serves. As a merchant, he has daily contact with his constituents, on an equal and man-to-man basis and is seen to work and compete for a living, just like them. By contrast, the man who holds the county seat, Doc' Fotheringham, cannot be seen without an appointment. MacTaggart is folksy and approachable. His actions and comments indicate a more conciliatory and sympathetic view of the use and misuse of political

power than is suggested by the undisguised cynicism of Jake. Where Jake is sarcastic and sceptical about the indolence and ineffectiveness of politicians, MacTaggart is sincere and idealistic. He still believes that politics can be an honest and beneficial activity.

Outside of his symbolic functions, however, Mayor MacTaggart could hardly be said to exist as a clearly perceived human being. He is an important member of the Crocus 'inner family' but performs purely mechanical and functional roles in the scripts. He is never given any inner dimension as a character. He merely reacts to the various municipal situations and never displays any thoughts or philosophy about Crocus or life and he is a flat and two-dimensional character.

The last member of the 'inner family' to be examined is both Mitchell's boldest and most controversial Crocus construct, Daddy Johnson. The centenarian is more than just Crocus' last living link with the pioneer past. He is the most entertaining character in the series and the strongest element in Mitchell's comedy formula. Potentially, he could have been the most moving and human of characters in Jake and The Kid but Tommy Tweed's interpretation of the role placed the character in the burlesque category, for better or for worse, so it is difficult to take Daddy seriously as a credible construct.<sup>35</sup> He is, nevertheless, a compellingly interesting and well detailed character.

Daddy reveals himself sparingly and tantalizingly, and only on his "good days." The rest of the time, he is largely incomprehensible and unable to distinguish between past and present. On the good days, relatives and strangers alike ply him with questions, searching for the secret of his longevity. All he ever offers them is "puhtatohs an' Irish Twist, a crock o' buttermilk a day, keepin' reg'lar and keepin' outa draughts." The bad days predominate. Daddy rambles about his old and long-departed friend, Ramrod Parsons, with whom he fought his greatest campaigns and achieved his highest and most exciting deeds. He constantly mumbles maxims or confusing anecdotes. His criterion for a person's maturity and reliability is that they be entrusted with a lighted lamp in a barn. He was once saved from making a fool of himself with some flightly young thing in her sixties or seventies, by being told that she had set fire to a barn with a lighted lamp. Crotchety and beyond senility, Daddy provides material for a wealth of comic sequences. He is a dreamer of heroic adventures; an adventurer and last-surviving western hero, imprisoned in the brittle and almost miraculously-maintained shell of a centenarian. He has always wanted to be an acrobat, again underlining Mitchell's fascination with the circus, and the contrast between the soaring spirit and the mortal coils. Daddy also wants to shoot buffalo again and take part in a goose hunt. Most of all, he wants to sail around

the Horn and retire to some desert island to be pampered by dusky maidens. In various symbolic sequences, Daddy fulfills those dreams in a Crocus setting. He attempts a hair-raising acrobatic stunt in the hayloft. He shoots Gate's vicious bull when it threatens The Kid and his Ma. In his greatest exploit, he sails the local Horn when his house is swept down the raging Brokenshell River.

There is only really one point in the series where Daddy reveals something of his soul and, then, it is in a moving communion with The Kid. This is possible in "Time Is My Enemy," because the one-hour script provided the time and flexibility, unlike the regular half-hour episodes. It is in that script that Daddy is best revealed as Mitchell's way of thumbing his nose at Death. The mortality theme had previously been dealt with somewhat superficially and farcically, as, for example in "An Aitch of a time to Go," where Daddy decides to die then changes his mind when he realises that Spring is an inappropriate time to depart. Daddy is not beyond daring Death, but he wants to decide, when he wants to die. Only in "Time Is My Enemy," however, is he allowed to reveal his thoughts about Death and life. In a rare and prolonged spell of lucidity, Daddy tells The Kid that man goes through three basic phases: carefree youth, unconcerned with the prospect of old age, then maturity, obsessed with the proximity of old age, and, finally, ripe old age itself, unconcerned anew and, by

implication, reverted to a second youth. Daddy advises The Kid to live loose and decontracted, not tight and serious, or ultra-careful. As he points out, drunks never get hurt, whereas the ultra-cautious often do.

Daddy's stubborn determination, not just to survive, but to take life by the tail, is best illustrated in that one-hour script. To mark his latest birthday, Daddy is offered a grandfather clock by a well-meaning but unimaginative Crocus committee. At a public meeting to mark the occasion, Daddy destroys the clock, a symbol of mortality that marks the leakage of time. The Kid, in simpler contrast, makes him a kite, symbol of the free, soaring spirit. Delighted, Daddy flies the kite and yanks aggressively on the string. His soliloquy to The Kid and the audience depicts the hold upon the kite string as the hold upon life itself. He is determined to keep the kite up there forever and to pull aggressively upon the string to show who is master of his mortal destiny.

That one-hour script is the exception rather than the rule. It shows the potentially wondrous and credible character he might have become in the series if Tommy Tweed's interpretation and Mitchell's writing had not overlooked character revelation in favour of comic effects.

The remainder of the Crocus characters can best be described as dramatic devices, almost as local landmarks. They represent trades, positions, character types or human

traits particular to Crocus. Since they serve as landmarks or stereotypes, these very secondary characters are consequently without dimension. Mere symbols to help illustrate moral points or reinforce action within a given civic setting, they never take on an intrinsic life of their own outside the trade or characteristic that they represent.

Most of these figures are female characters, further illustrating the superficial treatment accorded women in the stories. Mrs. Elsie Abercrombie epitomizes the morally righteous, cultivated, charitable and somewhat bossy ladies of Crocus society who would like to organize everything and everyone. She is portrayed as a snob, a busybody and a seeker of community power, but is never revealed further, nor are her associates in the various women's groups. The two women who try to ensnare Jake, Violet Bowdry and the Widow Clinkerby, are little more than cardboard cut-outs. Even the Crocus ladies who have no matrimonial or political designs upon unsuspecting males, emerge as flat and token characters. Ma's sister, Aunt Margaret, is presented as pretty, but hardly more developed than Ma. At one point in the stories, she is courted by Crocus suitors but reveals little of herself. In another stage, she visits Ma, complete with cute baby, but is never physically or mentally revealed. Aunt Lil, despite frequent individual and organized female appearances, is without inner or outer features. With her gall-stone and other ailments, she appears to stand for hypochondria carried to a fine art.

The characters who represent local trades and professions are equally flat. Malleable Brown, The Blacksmith, and Pipefitting Brown, the plumber, do mechanical things well and speak as one would expect them to - briefly, mechanically, and to the rhythm of their implements. Wayfreight Brown, the station master, is a parody of the over-written and romanticized publicity tract on the joys of exploring the Canadian continent by rail. The tradesmen are the character signposts that mark Jake's or The Kid's travels about town and provide predictable reactions to community situations. In themselves, they are no more important than props on the sound stage. Often they, and other very subsidiary Crocus citizens, serve merely as the vocal components of a crowd scene. Even Chet Lambert, the editor of the Crocus Breeze, more literate and socially engaged than the others, exists but superficially. He speaks almost entirely through announcements in the paper and, only infrequently, in sparse conversation with Jake. He is more the symbol of an institution than a character in his own right. He stands for the free but locally concerned press; for the democratic principle of freedom of expression and a journalistic civic conscience.

Then there are the subsidiary characters who serve almost as morality-play figures. Albert Ricky is an even worse "putatah" than Professor Winesinger because he has no redeeming qualities. Albert is a bigot and an exploiter and, to make matters worse, he is rich. He frequently

represents racial intolerance and narrow-mindedness. At one point, nepotism leads him to push his daughter into Miss Henschbaw's job at the school; at others, he uses his clout on the school commission to get his own way. Stubbornness and vindictiveness are personified by George Solway, a red-haired and red-bearded figure who looks and acts like a goat. In a parody of the legal system Mitchell) ridicules interpersonal vendettas, the folly of legal recourse and the essential asininity of the law. Seeking compensation for being called a goat, Solway is confronted with a real goat brought to court as evidence of their similarity. Case dismissed. Another stubborn, nasty and rich person with whom no one sympathizes, is Albert Williams, the Flax King. Albert has no character depth, just depths of cussedness and covetousness. He wants to evict the evangelical figure, Matthew Behind the Rock, who had squatter's rights from the previous land-owner. Albert also wants Matthew's Clydesdale Horses. Matthew himself (alias St. Sammy in Who Has Seen The Wind), is an evangelically stereotypical figure, straight out of the Old Testament.<sup>36</sup> He preaches and threatens in modified versions of the scriptures but, in his more private moments within his packing-crate abode, talks in riddles and collects strange trivia. His private thoughts and feelings are never revealed, even to The Kid, to whom he seems to relate.

Of the morality play figures, two stand for all that is rotten and mean, if not downright evil, in man. They are Pete Botten, who promotes everything underhanded, spiteful or irregular, and Doc' Toovey, the gambler, cheat and loader of dice. Pete is bent on mischief, unlawful gains and winning at any price. Toovey is so much of a cheat that he even slips the Kid's horse a wad of chewing tobacco to make it lose its breath during a horse race. Worse, apparently, than the cheat or trickster, is the phony who pretends to be what he is not. The phony is epitomized by the character St. Clare Jordon. He is the local boy who makes good elsewhere and comes back to rub Crocus noses in his fame and fortune. In several different or circumstantially modified episodes, St. Clare tries to impress the locals with his reputation as a writer of books drawn from his international exploits. Jake, who knew him as a puny and ineffectual specimen at home, tests him and, finding him fraudulent, exposes him to the community. Only his fictitious adventures and the subsequent ridicule are seen. There is no other sense of St. Clare as a person. Given the claim that he was the satirical representation of broadcast personality, Gordon Sinclair, perhaps Mitchell felt he was well-enough known in real-life without further sketching.<sup>37</sup>

Serving as symbols of those on the receiving end of racial discrimination and intolerance are Indian, Moses Lefthand, and Steve Kiziw, typical western 'hunky.' They

bring out the worst in Albert Ricky and all those who subscribe to clichés and myths about Indians and immigrants. There is, however, no sense of how Moses thinks about his situation. There is no character development of the type found in Mitchell's later novel set on a reservation, The Vanishing Point. Moses is simply a token and a symbol. Steve Kiziw makes his impassioned speech about bigotry but never really emerges as a distinct character. He is, rather, the focus for narrow prejudice and envy in "Going To a Fire." He is a dramatically essential victim.

Even that dramatically developed token case, Mrs Bent Candy, serves as victim of social stratification, snobbery and professional charity. She may be as naturally dignified as her prize-winning Woolworth's rose, but she is just Mitchell's weapon for embarrassing Mrs Abercrombie's do-gooders. Never is Mrs. Candy's simple interior revealed.

These, then, are the main leading and subsidiary characters among the eighty-odd developed in the Crocus stories. Only a bare half-dozen of them can be said to the fully-fleshed out and have validity as characters. The majority are mere fictional devices serving the morality plays, - components of his comedy formula. But, of the 'inner family' of well-developed characters, Mitchell admits to a particular affinity to, or identification with, four. That affinity expresses itself almost as a sense of viewpoint in the Jake scripts. Denied the editorial possibilities of literary

( narrative, Mitchell still managed to inject some of his own views or comments into the episodes through the soliloquy narratives. The listener 'sees' Crocus and its inhabitants and problems through the eyes of the characters performing these narratives, rather than through the descriptions of an authorial story-teller of omniscient perception. In as much as some of Mitchell emerged in such sequences, the characters of Jake, The Kid, Repeat and Winesinger must be considered as more realistic and fully developed than the others. Mitchell says that a sense of voice in the scripts is "the one quality that constitutes characterization." He used that character voice as a frame

through whom we saw or listened to, worried about or hated, some eighty different people. So I became many different voices, or tried to, in the course of writing the stories but, in the end, the frame was usually Jake and The Kid. In these instances probably I most identified with what I had been as a child or whatever innocence of childhood residue there was in my subconscious notebook with The Kid or Jake. Many of Jake's opinions, probably in a more homespun fashion, could be my opinions. Many of Repeat's, with his bigotries and his pompous quality - they're probably qualities that I may have felt in myself that I'm ashamed of; that I get catharsis out of putting down, by imputing them to a yappy barber. As a matter of fact, the loquaciousness of Repeat is quite characteristic of me.<sup>38</sup>

( In concluding this section on the characterization and on Mitchell's approach to writing the scripts, it should be stressed that radio characters can hardly be fully explored or appreciated through the printed script. It is but a flight

( plan or guide that enables the producer and, in turn, the cast, to turn what is still basically literature into a radio dramatic simulation of real-life town and people.

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## NOTES

### CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>See Weir, Chapters 1 and 4. Also, Howard Fink, "Canadian Radio Drama: Some Notes on its History and Influence," in Journal of Canadian Fiction, (Montreal: Vol. 3, no. 1 Winter 1974), pp. 70-72.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (London: Sphere, 1967).

<sup>3</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August 1975.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Personal interview with Martin Esslin, June 1975. (Esslin distinguishes original radio play scripts from literary or theatrical adaptations in his definition of what constitutes an original radio work).

<sup>6</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

<sup>7</sup>Mitchell, Jake and The Kid, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup>"The Hostelry of Mr. Smith," "The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe," and "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias," by Stephen Leacock, adapted by Tommy Tweed and produced by Esse W. Ljungh for CBC Wednesday Night, Nov. 30 1949, Feb. 1 1950 and June 14 1950.

<sup>9</sup>The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon, written by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Esse Ljungh for CBC Summer Stage, July 20 1950.

<sup>10</sup>The Devil's Instrument, written by W.O. Mitchell, directed by Andrew Allan for CBC Stage, March 27 1949.

<sup>11</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Feb. 1978.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Styan, pp. 181-182.

<sup>14</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See audience mail concerning Jake and The Kid plays in the Mitchell Papers, University of Calgary Library, Department of Special Collections.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "King of All the Country," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Esse Ljungh, CBC Radio, Sept. 29 1955. (Script and score provided for study from W.O. Mitchell Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Calgary Library).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977.

<sup>24</sup> See letter in W.O. Mitchell Papers, Univ. of Calgary Library, Department of Special Collections.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For review of critical comment on Mitchell's humour formula see final chapter of this study.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1978.

<sup>29</sup> W.O. Mitchell, "The Hired Man," unpublished notes in the W.O. Mitchell Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of Calgary Library. See also "The Hired Man," by Harry Boyle, in Mostly in Clover, (Toronto: Paperjacks, 1972), pp. 95-102.

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1978.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, Jake and The Kid, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> "Mind Over Madam," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Esse Ljungh, CBC Radio, Nov. 8 1953.

<sup>34</sup> "Love's Wild Magic," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Peter Francis for CBC Radio, January 20 1952.

<sup>35</sup> A more developed version of Daddy Johnson is found in W.O. Mitchell's novel The Kite but Mitchell again succumbed to the temptation to treat him in a burlesque fashion. W.H. New writes that "Structurally and thematically, Daddy . . . is a minor figure, but the vividness with which he is drawn and the frequency with which he appears in the novel combine to draw attention away from David Lang. Neither character is sufficiently created to take a central position." See W.H. New, "A feeling of Completion: Aspects of W.O. Mitchell," in Articulating West ed. W.H. New (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Many of the situations involving Matthew Behind the Rock are identical to, and more fully developed in, the sequences about St. Sammy in Mitchell's earlier novel, Who Has Seen The Wind. St. Sammy's appearance and character are also more fully developed than Matthew's.

<sup>37</sup> McKenzie Porter claims Jordon was the satirical representation of broadcast personality Gordon Sinclair who had written in a column that Mitchell was "drying up." See Porter, pp. 46-47.

<sup>38</sup> Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE

The Jake and The Kid productions were mounted over a twenty year period by five CBC producers. Andrew Allan produced the first script on May 21st, 1950, for 'CBC Stage.' Peter Francis produced the first series from the Summer of 1950 to approximately the end of 1952. Arthur Hiller then took over following Mitchell's return to High River from Toronto. Esse Ljungh produced the programs from 1954 to late 1956 and in sporadic episodes in 1957, 1959, 1961 and 1963. A revival series of twenty episodes was mounted by producer Fred Diehl, with Esse Ljungh brought back from retirement as director, from late in 1969 to the end of the Summer of 1970.

That first script, in 1950, was Andrew Allan's only Jake production although he did produce other Mitchell plays on CBC Stage. As an isolated 'Stage' presentation of one hour, The Liar Hunter was not typical of the series episodes and differed radically from them in pace, tone, style and cast.

The Liar Hunter is the story of the collector of tall prairie tales who makes a study of Old Man Gatenby's and Jake's tales and lies while courting Gate's daughter. The story turns up later in the first Jake series as a

two-part treatment called "Is That The Truth?" and in a modified one-part play in 1953 and 1955 as "And So Is the West."

The Allan production of The Liar Hunter, preserved on disc in the Public Archives, is careful and leisurely. The cast is obviously closely directed and takes time to draw meaning and impact from every nuance of the script. The only resemblance between the play and those in the series that followed is the identity of the author and the casting of John Drainie as Jake Trumper. The Kid was played by Robert Jackson in an unconvincing and sneering voice that elicits no sympathy from the listener. Allan cast Tommy Tweed as Old Man Gatenby, giving him a senile and crotchety sound and an apparent age well beyond that of Jake, his pal and verbal sparring partner. The rest of the cast read their lines, as written, with no great conviction and, in one or two cases, in uninspiring fashion. Even Drainie had not yet become accustomed to the character of Jake and his interpretation was inconsistent. The music score was written by the prolific radio composer, Lucio Agostini, and was, uncharacteristically of him, one long cliché. To Agostini, Canadian West was apparently synonymous with Hollywood West. The music theme and motifs were straight out of a Western movie soundtrack, complete with clip-clop, "ambling along" suggestions, and a cowboy gait. There are many clever

transitions and tricks, such as the music mimicking a western door-knocking line, completed by two final sound effects knocks on the door and Jake answering in dialogue. It is, however, not in character with the story and setting. Compared with later, half-hour productions, the one-hour script sounds static and belaboured. The humour formula is self-conscious and forced. Repartee between cast members playing together for the first time is slow and unnatural. Pauses for effect seem unduly prolonged and impair the flow of the story.

Jake and The Kid's style and tone were simply not appropriate to the established repertoire of the serious and deliberate 'CBC Stage' Series and to the theatrical, literary style and production 'touch' of Andrew Allan. That style had worked with Mitchell's Devil's Instrument two months earlier because that play, with its Faustian legend theme and suspense, lent itself better to Allan's theatrical bent. His approach also worked later that summer with The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon, again because of its more serious theme. However, the Allan treatment became heavy-handed and pretentiously out of character for a Jake script. Jake's long narrative descriptions also sounded more like readings from a short story than a radio enactment. Much of this failure in radio terms must be attributed to Mitchell's somewhat literal translation from short story to radio script. After all,

it was his first attempt at adapting a Jake story for radio. Much of the problem also lies with Allan's approach, his choice of cast and the use of the one-hour format. A good deal was learned, however, from the relative failure of Allan's production. For the series which followed, the half-hour format was chosen, a less 'esoteric' drama slot than 'CBC Stage' was selected, and the series was re-cast.

When Harry Boyle invited Mitchell to prepare a half-hour series for the Summer of 1950, a 5:30 to 6:00 p.m. family, peak audience was selected and maintained until after the establishment of television, when a period just prior to the 10 p.m. national radio news was chosen. The series was aimed at a large and continuing audience of all ages. Humour was accentuated and no attempt was made to present Mitchell's scripts as anything more than dramatic entertainment.

Peter Francis was chosen to produce the initial series and his approach was the antithesis of Allan's. The secret of his success was in the casting, for which he was described as a genius by both Mitchell and Esse Ljungh. He kept Drainie as Jake Trumper, but used a woman to play The Kid. He thus solved two major problems in one stroke. An actress with a boyish voice could give him the maturity necessary to handle the lines and situations in an equal partnership with John Drainie and, even more importantly, her voice would not break as would a boy's as the series progressed. Thus re-casting was avoided.

Billie Mae Richards played The Kid for the entire broadcast series.

Francis cast Drainie's wife, Claire Murray, as Ma, thus ensuring that they would sound like people who lived in the same household and were used to each other. Instead of casting Tommy Tweed as Gate, he assigned him to the role of the senile and crotchety Daddy Johnson, a part for which he was perfectly suited. He also played a number of minor roles from time to time as well. Frank Peddie was cast as Gate, with an accent and age more in keeping with Jake's. The choice and regular inclusion of such performers as Ruth Springford, Paul Kligman and Sandy Webster, who were used to working together, ensured a Crocus 'family' sound as the series progressed over the weeks and months. Francis changed composers for the music theme and transitions. Instead of Agostini, he worked with Morris Surdin, who had a great enthusiasm for and identification with the Mitchell scripts and Mitchell's personality. The result was a theme and score that blended more happily with the mood and tone of the stories and evolved with them.

Francis set the tone and pattern for the broadcast tradition of Jake and The Kid, a pattern that remained relatively unchanged throughout its history.

As a radio producer in the forties and fifties, Peter Francis was typical of those early CBC pioneers who

learned their craft largely by trial and error in a relatively unexplored field. They often listened to what the BBC drama department was doing, or to the work of more serious American producers such as Norman Corwin and Orson Welles. Francis says he was particularly interested in Corwin's approach to radio drama at that time, but that the unique problems encountered at the CBC obliged him to find his own solutions.

As a CBC drama producer, Francis was charged, almost single-handedly, with the task of translating a writer's script into a dramatic production. He was expected to seek promising script material, discuss production of it with the author, cast it, negotiate himself, or with the aid of a talent department, the fees and conditions for author and cast, composer and musicians, obtain studio time and a broadcast slot for the play, call and direct rehearsals, and, most critically, accept responsibility for the dramatic end-product. He was expected to be both entrepreneur/producer and artistic director; matters mechanical and aesthetic were equally his province. He was thus forced to divide his attentions between two seemingly conflicting areas. On the one hand, he was practically preoccupied with the exigencies of live broadcasting and limited funds. On the other, he wished to escape from such pragmatic concerns to devote sufficient time to aesthetic considerations and to work closely with the cast.

How the radio producer trod that difficult path from script to broadcast will now be examined. The process began upon receipt by Francis or his successors, of a script from Mitchell, apparently a considerable task in itself. Mitchell wrote for Francis under trying circumstances. He had not reconciled himself to life in Toronto and his boisterous children and social life were not conducive to meeting writing deadlines.<sup>1</sup> Francis also discovered Mitchell could not write, or was not interested in writing, to the half-hour format:

" Mitchell was a kind of disorganized person in some ways. It was very hard to get him to finish scripts ... I remember those scripts - they'd come in, sometimes, five pages long, with a little note on the bottom, saying, "The rest will be along tomorrow." Sometimes it actually arrived, I can remember cutting stencils for production copies of the script, myself, an hour before showtime.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of extracting scripts from Mitchell was aggravated by his return to High River from Toronto when communication with Arthur Hiller, and later Esse Ljungh, was by mail and telephone. Hiller recalls that

^ If there was any real problem working with him it was that sometimes we would be approaching the air date - a Sunday when we were going to be producing. And, on Tuesday or Wednesday, I might be wondering why we hadn't seen a script yet, and I would phone him and he would say something like: "Well, Arthur, I guess you've been out to the traps and found 'em empty, eh? I haven't written, but

I thought I might write ..." Then he would outline a story and another two days later it would arrive in the mail and, almost invariably, what we presented on the air was what he had written, and we made very few changes.<sup>3</sup>

One of the major problems encountered by Francis and the other producers, when they finally received scripts, was that Mitchell seldom wrote close to the thirty-minute format. If changes were made in his scripts it was usually because they were too short or too long. Timing became a standing joke among the production crew and, when Mitchell went back to High River, they presented him with a stopwatch; but to no avail. Producer Fred Diehl, who was a cast member in the early series, suspects delivery of scripts and timing problems were all part of an "absent-minded professor" game frequently played by Mitchell with the production crew, and one that had other important consequences.

What may not be known is that there were not, actually, about three hundred scripts. I think Mitchell really wrote about ninety-five. The rest were put together with bits and pieces. That's why certain characters and situations cropped up in different episodes.

His disorganization was a whole side-show in itself. I remember the show used to be done on Sunday and we started rehearsals at ten in the morning and the show went live. By Thursday, the calls weren't out because Francis, or Hiller, or Esse Ljungh, as the case may be, didn't have a script. I've seen Esse take what he had on the Thursday and add bits from other scripts to make up

the difference, because it was too short. I've also seen Mitchell turn in the script one page at a time, partly because it was fun and games - the presentation of the stop-watch and so on.<sup>4</sup>

The first thing that the producer would do upon receiving a script from Mitchell was, therefore, to check it for length, usually reading it aloud with a stop-watch, and making such changes as were necessary for purposes of bringing it to the half-hour length. During his Toronto residence Mitchell was consulted about such changes. Later, in the long-distance situation, they often had to be resorted to without authorial consultation. They were, however, essentially changes of form and not changes of story content. Although the radio producer could require the author to alter or rework a script, none of the Jake producers ever did so, probably because Mitchell's writing was so radiophonic and its quality was so consistently high. All three seem to have kept to a tradition established earlier by Andrew Allan, who saw the writer as the key figure in the radio dramatic process and considered himself as a broadcast servant of the writer's vision and word. He determined to make radio drama "a writer's theatre right from the start."<sup>5</sup>

Mitchell was not a difficult or overly demanding writer to work with. He clearly prescribed in his scripts and production notes the approach and effects he

envisioned, and allowed the producers considerable personal freedom, and does not appear to have engaged in any artistic contests of will with them. Peter Francis described Mitchell's instructions as "full and explicit, too full at times," suggesting he often placed the onus on the producer or composer to compensate for effects inadequately developed in the script.<sup>6</sup> Hiller and Ljungh enjoyed even greater freedom in interpreting the script because of their long-distance relationship with Mitchell. Under those circumstances, Hiller suggested that his aesthetic freedom was virtually unlimited.

...I just had complete freedom. I did what I felt was going on in the scripts. We didn't ever especially discuss direction and I presume that was because he was happy with the work I was doing or, probably, I would have heard from him. He was very easy to work with, in the sense of talking with him and having him outline the kind of story he was going to write. In every way he was very clear in his knowledge of his characters - they always fitted into the molds he had created for them. He came up, every time, with interesting and always theatrical, and always intriguing episodes.<sup>7</sup>

Esse Ljungh was forced, largely by his distance from Mitchell and by deadlines, to rely very heavily upon the notes contained in the scripts. He was also obliged, for those same reasons, to take certain personal initiatives, but he stresses that he never turned that freedom into licence.

.... his comments and instructions with regard to the casting or the music were little gems of wit ... He'd say, "Watch it, here!" or "Don't do this, here," or, perhaps, "Don't, for God's sake, cast so-and-so because I'm so sick and tired of hearing their voices!" I wish the audience could have shared these little communications with us.

With respect to what we were allowed to do with the scripts, he was very free with us. Seldom did he come out with anything that would indicate he was displeased with anything we had done with a script. He allowed me to edit script material, as long as I remembered, of course, that there were certain things that he wanted, distinctly, to have in. I didn't want to change any characters and I never did in any of the scripts I dealt with, because I felt that was the priority of the writer to do himself... Nor did I refer to the scripts in a critical fashion. I let it stand for itself, because it enjoyed an enormous amount of popularity.<sup>8</sup>

There were several occasions where the producers might have exercised their critical prerogatives and called for substantial changes; indeed, their reluctance to do so resulted in several episodes where dénouements were unconvincingly forced or where the story continued over two episodes, when it might have been more convincing and compelling as a tighter half-hour piece. Francis was well aware of the problem, and noted that it particularly occurred in scripts which came to him a few pages at a time.

He was having trouble, because you can't be creative seven days a week. I'm not sure even he knew, himself, quite how they were going to work out when he

started them. He had a general idea, no doubt, but sometimes a thing just won't come off, though you still have to produce it ... Another thing he'd do, occasionally, was to say a script was going to be a two-parter - in other words, he hadn't gotten to a resolution or he'd written too much for one part and there'd be a rather hurried, semi-resolution and you'd finish it the next week."<sup>9</sup>

It is, in fact, in the two-parters that the plots are least convincing and Mitchell's writing is at its weakest. "Dual at Dawn" is unnecessarily extended to two episodes. "The Tongue is Worse Than the Binder Whip," drags out into "Prairie Lawyers." The dog-poisoning tale could have been completed in "A Man's Best Friend," but was stretched out into "Murder Will Out" the following week. In such two-part episodes, much time was wasted in the second part recapping what had happened in the first. In the case of "Dual at Dawn," nearly two-thirds of the script was taken up with such recapping and atmospheric digressions not related or essential to the plot. In such instances, anecdotes and 'stock' situations were often included that seemed designed merely to 'pad' the script to the thirty-minute length.

Whether the producers might have been able to exercise their prerogatives and insist on tighter, one-part treatments is impossible to determine at this remove. The constraints of weekly deadlines, Mitchell's distance from the studio and problems of under or over writing, might

well have made some of the two-parters unavoidable.

Neither is it certain whether a distant author was undesirable. The feelings of the respective producers are mixed as to whether an author should be directly involved in preparing the script for broadcast, let alone be physically present during the actual production. Fred Diehl felt that because of his powerful personality and wit, Mitchell would have been well-nigh uncontrollable in the businesslike environment of the live broadcast studio. Hiller and Ljungh did not face the problem while Mitchell was out West. Francis found his presence a positive benefit.

In theory, a director doesn't want to have the author within miles of the studio or theatre, and I can see why, but it was not an embarrassment to have Mitchell around, for whatever reason. He didn't bother you. He was frequently enjoying the stuff himself, laughing his head off, and he didn't try to intervene or to throw his weight around in any way. But it was Bill's show.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that all the producers looked upon Jake and The Kid as "Bill's show" and were reluctant to challenge or alter his vision and intent. Because of this and due to the production patterns established in the first series by Peter Francis, there are no dramatic differences between their respective productions, no clear labels or trade-marks that might distinguish their broadcasts to the casual listener. What characterizes their various

( production approaches are the different ways in which they controlled the 'mix' or the aesthetic combination of sounds, rather than their approach to the story material itself. The components of the mix are the three basic levels and ingredients of radio drama: the spoken-word, music and natural and artificial sounds. The producer translates these into dramatic action through his use of actors, a composer and his musicians, and a sound effects man. He captures and controls these sound components in the studio, manned by a sound engineer, and mixes them through the agency of a control panel. But, before he reaches the stage of studio production, he has to work with the other members of the production crew, as he earlier worked with the author on the script, to ensure a mutually acceptable plan for the use of the words, music and sounds in parallel.

The spoken-word is the primary component of radio drama and this was particularly the case with the Jake scripts. They presented a challenge to producer and cast alike because of that apparent homespun simplicity to which Mitchell refers. On the one hand, the predominant dialogue was so straightforward, grammatically simple, colloquial and often telegraphic in quality that it read very flatly in script form. It had to be invested with life by the actors, with their different vocal timbres, textures and accents bringing colour, power and

special significance to the words. The narratives, on the other hand, were often so poetically descriptive as to sound too colourful and out of character in such a natural, prairie setting. It was a concern of Peter Francis that Mitchell's frequent and lengthy narratives should appear to take place naturally within the more rough-and-ready dialogue and not seem out of character with the grassroots style of *Crocus*.

There was an inordinate amount of this kind of narrative, at times ... but there were good reasons for it, in that a few lines of narration could replace two pages of dialogue. I didn't meddle with this narration, unless I felt the action was bogging down or it was becoming too flowery or sentimental or, if the script was too long, you had to cut some of it.<sup>11</sup>

Esse Ljungh also felt some of the narratives were lengthy, but he left them largely alone because he felt they contained some of Mitchell's most lyrical writing, particularly his descriptions of prairie atmosphere and The Kid's inner states of mind.

The narrative portions were left alone with good justification, quite apart from their lyricism. They were all Mitchell had to provide the connotative and subjective dimensions on radio. They were the aural equivalent of the close-up shot on the screen, or the interior monologue or descriptive narrative of literature.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from his own sensitivity to Mitchell's use of words, the key to the producer's success in mounting a credible illusion with those words was the cast. He had to work with the actors to extract the precise effects and nuances called for by the script, directing them with respect to interpretation, characterization and delivery. After casting and initial discussions of the particular script, the producer led them in a run-through in the studio.

The Jake cast performed with respect to a real or an imaginary chalked-line on the floor, indicating the sensitivity range of the microphone for close-up and distant perspectives. The actors constantly faced the microphone, even when withdrawing from that 'close-focus.' A run-through without music or sounds was the first order of business, to familiarize the cast with the lines and dramatic situations. Rehearsals varied in length according to the complexity of the script and the time available. Time spent rehearsing with the musicians was, perforce, doubly limited by cost and availability of all concerned. Talent contracts in recent years provide for arbitrarily fixed periods of rehearsal time for specific program durations. Exceeding that time involves overtime payment to cast and musicians. At the time of the Jake productions, there were no such stringent contractual provisions concerning overtime or fixed performing

rates. They often had to bargain for their rates and be extremely flexible as to time worked. Esse Ljungh tells of two cast members in the late 'forties who shared five dollars for their roles. The Jake producer of the early fifties had many serious problems in working with the cast: the perils of live broadcast, inadequate talent funds and rehearsal time, late scripts and, by no means least, a basic conflict between producing and directing.

The producer such as Francis, Hiller and Ljungh was obliged to concentrate upon managerial duties related to the practicalities of a weekly broadcast. Aesthetically, however, he wished and needed to be as close to the cast as possible. The producer part of his producer-director title prevailed. Quite apart from his duties as entrepreneur, the control room jealously demanded his physical presence to direct the program mix. To work closely and personally with the cast, he should have been in the studio with them as much as possible, directing their performances. He was expected to perform as a theatrical or movie director, but unlike them, did not have a host of other production people to take care of the mechanics of the show. Ironically, in the radio medium, the producer could have been physically present in the studio, silently directing the cast from close quarters and unperceived by the listeners. Instead, he had to settle for that closer rapport during the run-through and then

return to the technical exigencies of the control room for the broadcast or recording.

Although somewhat tentative at this remove, a rough picture of how the various producers approached the direction of the Jake and The Kid cast, despite those constraints, can be recreated through interviews.

Of all the producers, Andrew Allan seems to have exercised the direction portion of his title the most. Essentially a theatrical director without a stage, Allan used radio in a more theatrical manner than the others. In the studio, he stayed close to the cast and was pre-occupied with them, relegating control room duties where possible to a competent assistant and a sensitive operator. He felt he was working to serve the vision and intent of the author, whose ideas and words were his prime concern. To extract the most from those ideas and words, he devoted himself to the cast, constantly coaxing and coaching them. He conducted, through his productions, a virtual national theatre workshop from which legitimate theatrical talent would spring. Mitchell, who wrote his first few radio plays for Allan's 'Stage' series, said of his approach to the cast:

If they hadn't experience, Andrew trained them and they learned. Andrew conducted his rehearsals as though he were trying to turn a bunch of illiterates into cultured ladies and gentlemen and used their last names ... he went beyond just acting.

He even suggested they were illiterates and told them, for God's sake, read, read, read.<sup>13</sup>

The mark left on the members of the Jake cast who worked for Allan never rubbed off. Claire Murray felt he was incomparable and particularly sensitive as a director. None of the Jake cast members spoke that way of the other producers, probably because they did not, or could not afford to, bring Allan's degree of care to a continuing weekly series. Again, however, it should be stressed that Allan only mounted one Jake and The Kid play and that his directorial style and preoccupation resulted in an overly theatrical and inappropriate 'reading.' His Liar Hunter emphasized the spoken component to the detriment of the others. The production sounds like a stage production heard by a blind person, with every spoken syllable clearly articulated and in foreground perspective, with occasional sounds and music clearly subordinated and accessory. Lines of lesser importance competed with sounds or music or were even allowed to trail off. Weak lines by secondary characters or unconvincing actors, came out with painful clarity.

By complete contrast to Allan's approach, the first series producer, Peter Francis, seems to have best reconciled his production/direction strains and directed the cast more harmoniously for the radio medium and the nature of the Jake material. Francis was obviously thinking

radio and not stage and he spent less time with the cast and more on trying to do justice to the blend of his three sound components in the control room. Yet, even from that remote position, he consciously felt that he was directing and even manipulating the cast, more so in radio than could have been possible for the single individual in film or theatre productions.

(Radio) enabled me to control more personally and closely. I don't always get away with it, but that's my style and instinct. I could even put in pauses and give direct instructions as to the tempo for a particular sequence. A lot of people say you shouldn't do this: that you should let the actors have their head, but it's my instinct to do it, and you can get away with it in radio.<sup>14</sup>

Francis' productions of Jake were, therefore, carefully directed, but the spoken component did not dominate the rest of the program: it simply predominated. The lines blended unobtrusively into the aural ensemble. His characters delivered their lines with more restraint and seemed more conscious of the intimacy and closer focus of the microphone that did not demand theatrical delivery. He used the Mitchell lines and instructions as an approximate basis for their delivery; improvising with the emphasis and interventions according to the dramatic situation. Every word and syllable written by Mitchell was not slavishly respected by Francis. He edited

the scripts, tightened up lines and knew the difference between essential words that must be clearly and dramatically delivered and others that could be subordinated to music or sound or even allowed to trail off or be de-emphasized to heighten others. In the "Rain" episode, for example, Jake is working on his rain machine and mumbling to himself in the background as The Kid discovers Gate's announcement in the paper about the rain-making demonstration. Half of the mechanical calculations mumbled by Jake, as the Kid reads out advertisements, are allowed to become unintelligible or faint. Yet, on the script, they are clearly written by Mitchell, as clearly as The Kid's excerpts from the paper about livestock cures and local events. Drainie gradually gives Jake's lines more and more emphasis, climaxing in his 'double-take' as he hears the Gate announcement in the Kid's excited voice. Francis sensed the value of the relative strengths of different sound sources and assigned them clearly different dimensions and values in his direction of the cast and in his mix. He exploited the pause, the silence, the de-emphasis and understatement particularly well.

The next producer after Francis, Arthur Hiller, perhaps gave the cast more freedom than any of the other producers. He encouraged the actors to contribute actively to the creation of the final product. Rather than attempting to impose his own conceptions on the Jake plays,

Hiller viewed the productions as a more democratic enterprise, brought to birth and nurtured by a pooling of collective creative insights.

Each show ... changes and grows because of the contributions made by the actors or by the director; ideas that do come up during the production, and the director has to take those suggestions that may come from the actors or simply come about, and mold them so that they fit into the particular show or so that they make a real contribution; to say, in effect, yes, that's a good idea, but it doesn't enhance this story, or, yes that does. That is always a directorial contribution in itself and, hopefully, I made it in the case of Jake and The Kid.<sup>15</sup>

The least directorially manifest of the Jake producers, Hiller also inherited a radio-dramatic fait-accompli from Francis. It was difficult for him to alter meaningfully the established patterns or to impose his distinctive character and tone upon them. He chose instead to direct by encouraging cast contribution and by mediating the overall effect of their performances.

Even though the stamp was already set and the characters were playing their parts when I took over, I still had a contribution to make. The actors look at their particular story from their own particular point of view. The director ... is the person who has to take the overall view; who makes sure that there is balance in the relationships that are going on.<sup>16</sup>

Succeeding Hiller in the third Jake series, Esse Ljungh brought with him a theatrical approach similar to that of Allan. As Allan had come to the CBC from the Hart House Theatre, so Ljungh's background was the Dramatic Academy in Uppsala. Ljungh was more manipulative in his approach to the cast than Hiller or Francis. He is reported to have spent hours exclusively with the performers, attempting to impose his conception of the plays upon their interpretation. Fred Diehl says Ljungh went over and over scenes until he achieved exactly what he wanted, leaving little room for spontaneity. Diehl says this was sometimes done with weak material in an attempt to bring it to life, sometimes at the expense of the rest of the production; that he "sculpted" the performance to his own dramatic ideal.<sup>17</sup>

Like Allan, Ljungh had an overriding concern for the author's ideas and words. He says Mitchell's forte was in his utterly natural use of the spoken-word, in conjunction with narratives of descriptive beauty and his incomparable wit. He feels the writing in Jake and The Kid represented Mitchell at his best, rivalling portions in Who Has Seen The Wind, and that the radio plays placed Mitchell on a level with Leacock as a leading Canadian humourist.<sup>18</sup>

This explains Ljungh's tendency to over-direct the humorous sequences in the Jake plays. Ljungh, more than

any other producer, extracted the maximum from those sequences. He did it through unbounded enthusiasm for the material and a strongly developed sense of the theatrical potential of the stories. If the series was criticized as slapstick or burlesque at times, it is largely because of Ljungh's approach and his failure to restrain the cast, and particularly Tommy Tweed, in their comic portrayals. He abetted the outright humour of Mitchell's scenarios by allowing the actors to exploit their lines and by using music and sound effects with very little subtlety, in order to heighten the comic effect.

It is impossible to state which of the four producers dealt most appropriately with cast direction and came closest to Mitchell's own designs. He obviously meant his stories to be funny and entertaining since the humour is supplied in the lines and the production notes. However, in view of the fairly serious themes hiding behind the humour it can be speculatively concluded that humour for its own sake was not his basic intention. The humour simply rendered the morality plays more accessible and palatable. Only the productions of Peter Francis seem to have come to terms with Mitchell's intent in terms of his balance, sensitivity and restraint. Only he succeeded in securing that judicious harmony of the words with the other sound components, and happy medium between humour and pathos. In order to appreciate the reasons for and

extent of that harmony, it is first necessary to examine the two other sound components the producer works with: the music and the natural and artificial sounds.

The music in Jake and The Kid played a role that was second to that of the spoken-word but closely supportive of it. Working with Morris Surdin, producers were assured of a score that would not function merely as background or 'mood' music in a Hollywood film sense. Movie score had a pervasive influence in those days and was replete with atmospheric clichés. Agostini, as noted earlier, adopted a Hollywood approach in his score for the Allan production which had cowboy-opera overtones. Surdin prepared a score that was more original and was composed as a direct adjunct to the dramatic action. Peter Francis' use of music in the episode "The Day Jake Made Her Rain" offers a ready example of the important role played by music in the series and the precise ways in which it was used as part of the dramatic illusion.

Scripts sent by Mitchell to Francis carried clear, if general, instructions about music. Mitchell knew approximately where and why he wanted music, but not precisely what kind. His comments were designed to guide both the producer and composer in their search for the specific score or effect the script demanded. He enjoyed a close rapport with Surdin, both in Toronto and through

his script instructions. Although Mitchell claims he was tone-deaf and Surdin illiterate, that assessment does both author and composer a severe injustice. Mitchell may not have been a potential composer but he knew how music should be used on radio and the approximate effect he desired. For his part, Surdin had a particular sensitivity to the Mitchell stories and characters, with whom he developed a keen broadcast affinity. Surdin saw the stories as serious material to be lightly handled and, while he composed amusing effects, took his Jake score as a demanding musical assignment:

Jake was a series which represented a light-hearted approach to a very serious subject. Most comedy, in the end, and underneath it all, bears a heavy message. I felt that the theme music, for example, was a sort of hook to catch the audience by giving them something light-hearted that they would remember. You have to have a grabber in the theme, then, when you've got them sitting down and listening, having, as it were, set the scene, time and place and then departed, letting them get down to the real business at hand, which is the story.<sup>19</sup>

The theme, then, opens each episode, providing ready identification for and with the Jake series. It makes an opening statement and then supports the traditional opening announcements. In the case of the "Rain" episode, it becomes, after the initial bars, the background to Jake's opening narration, where it is developed and modified to suit the expository atmosphere and is then

gradually lost as the action begins. How does a composer conceive a theme? In this case, Surdin wrote it as a sort of musical synthesis of Jake Trumper himself.

The Jake theme was a simplification, really; something to take all of Jake and put it into eight measures. Really, one of the most impossible things to do is to reduce a man's thinking to eight measures, with a chance, then, to elaborate upon it, vary it and spread it. As it turned out, we used it as a theme and seldom used it in the interior of the program. We developed other themes in the interior, but, as a theme, it did work because eight bars gave you a nice base upon which to work your theme and variations.

The theme was light, amusing and suggestive of entertainment, rather than of serious or momentous drama. In addition to spilling over, in variation, to clothe the opening narration, the theme also served both to close out the episodes and as 'cushion' or 'pad' to bring the program out to cue more flexibly than spoken material could do. If the program ran slightly under, the theme could be continued in variation until cue time; or if the program ran over, the theme could be faded out on cue.

Its other purely mechanical functions, to be illustrated shortly, are transitional. Short music bridges are used in the Jake stories to indicate or assist transitions from one physical scene, time, or atmosphere, to another. In that mode, Surdin saw his music as a curtain, a scene-setter and a time-machine, describing it as a primary and

active component of the dramatic illusion, "because music will move you from left to right, from one scene or setting to another, and will do the physical movement for you."<sup>21</sup>

The music in Jake and The Kid enjoyed a role and importance far beyond mechanical functions, however. It was prescribed by Mitchell as an indispensable adjunct to his special narrative form, as an extra device to help achieve the atmospheric dimension lost through radio's dependence upon dialogue and sounds.

You relied upon your music composer to give you what could be done by atmospheric tricks in the novel or short story, or by the sensitive camera director in a film. The result was that, more than anything else in radio, you had to have some awareness or knowledge of what the composer would be bringing to it. You didn't just write your dialogue, you called your music shots too ... because you wanted the composer you loved and trusted and knew could understand what you, a tone-deaf person, was asking him for, that he would supply the emotional staining. My directions to Morris would call for specific effects, knowing he would do it. He was so good, he was so successful in capturing the mood, the emotion, the resonances.<sup>22</sup>

Surdin would score many of these effects after reading the script. Others might be added extemporaneously during the studio production as he and the musicians entered into the spirit and mood of the dramatic sequences. Inspired by the delivery of the cast, musicians played closer to their lines, accentuating or counterpointing the

humour, suspense, or prevailing mood of the sequence.

Surdin felt this was only possible because cast and musicians were performing together and live in the studio and could hear, interact, and balance their respective contributions. "When music goes under (behind the cast)," Surdin tells us

it will lift up the words so that it supports them, so that the words, even in straight drama, become part of a song. You write a background to what the man is saying; you reflect his ideas - those of the narration. There is so much narration in Jake and The Kid. It had miles of it and I have miles of music to prove it.<sup>23</sup>

A study of the episode, "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," illustrates the function of Surdin's score as a support for narrative and as a mechanical device.

The Jake theme identifies the program and "lifts up" Jake's opening narrative. This narrative is, however, more expository than atmospheric, so the theme is merely developed in variation, almost as accompaniment. As Jake's introductory remarks, providing background to the rain-making story, give way to the story itself, the action is joined in progress. The modified theme simply dissipates along with the fading out of Jake's opening description. When the action of the first scene is joined, the music has disappeared.

The next use of music occurs after Jake and Gate have entered actively into their argument about rain making.

As they indulge in their childish counterpoint of "Can so!" "Can not. Can So, Can Not!" the music 'stabs' accents into the gaps between their exchanges, heightening both the sense of counterpoint and of rising tension. Its sudden cessation also reinforces a 'double-take' by Gate.

At the end of that sequence, Jake spits, after chastizing Gate for doing the same, claiming it is a waste of precious moisture in time of drought. This time, Jake says he is doing it for the Wyandot hen that is thirsty. The hen responds, as does Surdin's music in parody of the hen and in comic reply to Jake's wry joke. That reply rapidly evolves into what might be called a 'busy bridge', and takes the scene forward in time to the evening, when Jake collects material for his rain machine.

Music again occurs after Jake reprimands The Kid at supper for talking too much about the rain-making boast. Jake warns him that there is probably some worse fate than being laughed at, but he doesn't know what it is. A serio-comic musical comment suggests a combination of derisive laughter and impending humiliation. This comment evolves into a transition to the next sequence, in which Jake describes how he was working on his rain-making machine when Gate arrived to find out what was going on. As the action is joined, the music disappears.

In the ensuing dialogue, Gate manages to achieve the real purpose of his visit: he extracts from Jake a

date for the completion of the machine and for the public demonstration of his rain-making powers. The date, he declares, is exactly what he came to find out and one senses that Jake has been trapped as the music becomes gleefully triumphant with a touch of malice. The music cue then develops as Jake begins a narrative explanation of how he stumbled upon the idea for cloud-seeding. This is the rather complex and somewhat confusing sequence in which his horse team and cart are 'buzzed' by Jimmy Shoelack in his low-flying plane. As Jake describes the incident and the arrival of the plane, light 'plane noise on disc is interspersed with plane motifs on the strings that lightly echo Jake's comment that the 'plane was buzzing like an angry insect. The real 'plane noise takes over for the actual incident where the team is scared and bolts, sending Jake tumbling on his head. In the confusion that follows, during which Jake wants to 'phone the pilot and The Kid thinks him seriously injured, the music re-enters, suggesting bewilderment and possible harm, with an effect described in the script notes as a "concussion bridge."

Later, as Jake tells The Kid to pray for rain when he goes to bed, the music briefly suggests ecclesiastical optimism before it becomes an emotional backdrop to Jake's opening description of the rain-making sequence. It thus evolves from comment, to bridge, to atmospheric reinforcement. Jake sets the scene, describing the assembled crowd, their

scepticism, the machine, his preparations and his own uneasiness. As he completes his narrative and the action resumes, the music dissipates.

The rain ritual is depicted solely through dialogue and sounds. Jake tells the crowd what is being attempted. The crowd reacts sceptically and almost to the point of heckling him. The machine is activated and described, rockets are set off, and Jake appeals to the crowd to lend him their faith. At this point, Jake as narrator re-enters, providing description of the scene. As he calls for their faith and declares "I aim to rain!" an assertive and determined music sequence begins. This sequence clothes his narrative description and accompanies the sounds of the machine, rockets and the occasionally perceived but distant 'plane, sometimes imitating both. As the rain-machine coughs and dies out, the music dies abruptly with it.

The crowd once more becomes sceptical, and even Jake begins to have his doubts. Gate challenges him from the crowd, repeating that no one ever made any rain. His three attempts to complete the phrase are interrupted by peals of thunder. The rain begins and, with it, the acclaim of the converted crowd. The music reinforces the applause with triumphant comment, which gradually subsides as Jake performs his last and most moving narrative. He gives a poetic description of the long-awaited rain

pouring down on the jubilant crowd and their varied individual reactions to the deluge. The music moves behind him, reinforcing the combination of triumph, relief, excitement and beauty of the rain scene. Jake concludes by saying, proudly and almost defiantly, "Me, I just stood there in my rain!" The music gives a final triumphant chorus to that boast and then vanishes. The action has gone full circle and the flash-back to the story is over. Jake returns to his initial explanation to the travelling salesman to whom he reveals the secret deal with the pilot to seed the clouds during the rain-making ritual. When he completes his sly confession, the music repeats its triumphant chorus, which, in turn, becomes the closing bridge, capping the episode off to the closing announcement. Finally, the Jake theme returns, rounding the time out until the network cue.

It might well be asked what sets such musical effects in the Jake score apart from what is often called, pejoratively, mood or background music, particularly in movie scores. The Surdin score did not sound sentimental, melodramatic or overly sweet, nor was it ever excessive, too strong for the dramatic action, or too forcibly contrived. It may have reinforced some of the emotional or atmospheric situations, but it never resorted to musical clichés to that end. Just as certain movie-score conventions and clichés have grown up around the most

blatantly obvious of these moods or atmospheres, so a radio vocabulary of almost sterotypical musical effects was inevitable. In supplying his motifs and "resonances", however, Surdin was particularly inventive and original. Furthermore, it is relatively easy to supply the comments or "resonances" when they apply to objectively-perceived or denotative situations or states of mind. It is when they are called upon to clothe the connotative material that they become most difficult to supply. The composer is obliged to make subjective rather than objective musical statements, to draw upon his own interpretation of, or reaction to, the script as opposed to the author's or the audience's. Morris Surdin reacted skilfully to both musical challenges: avoiding the cliché in scoring the obvious and denotative, and finding appropriate expressions for the subjective and connotative:

As for the cliché aspect, the so-called musical cliché has always been with us. What we sometimes call facetiously 'cliché' is often really the genre of the piece itself. As for the accusation that a lot of this dramatic atmosphere music is 'schmaltzy' I just can't write 'schmaltzy' music because I can't harmonize it. My type of harmonization calls for dissonance and, the older I got, the more dissonant the music for Jake became harmonically.

As for the other extreme of subjectivity, I am very aware of that, but I must, at that moment, become the composer and conclude that a particular way is the way it will sound best. However, it was, of course, just my feeling of what was going on in the script, though I didn't profess to being right all the time. It's just part of being a composer and being trusted.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the musical effects prescribed by Mitchell were almost impossible of achievement by Surdin on the basis of the script instructions. This perhaps underlines the point made by both Peter Francis and Esse Ljungh that Mitchell was lazy at times and leaned heavily upon Surdin to supply missing atmospherics or even 'pad' out short scripts; that he was, as Francis put it, "being used as a crutch." Mitchell's instructions were at times not only unclear about the type of music required, but often constituted a humorous game with Surdin. Mitchell described one such script, "Nature Knows Best," where Mrs. Bent Candy picks up the yellow Woolworth rose plant and forgets it in her back yard, only to have it win the Colonel Hepner Grand Championship Cup:

...So, right at the beginning, I want to suggest this woman, and so I say to Morris:

MUSIC: (GIVE ME TOBACCO ROAD WITH ONE YELLOW ROSE)

Now, that kind of music direction Morris would actually come up with! Or, again, in 'Old MacLaughlin Had a Farm,' which is Scottish, I would tell him:

MUSIC: (MORRIS - THE BAGPIPE MUSIC AND PIBROCH ARE BASED ON THE OLD PENTATONIC SCALE OF DAMASCUS. I WANT YOU TO APPROXIMATE THAT, WHICH HAS ONLY THE FIVE NOTES, AND GIVE ME MACSURDIN (Morris is Jewish, you know,) PLUS 'THE WEE CORRIES OF THE TINY FORD.....)

...or something like that, and that's what we would get, with a touch of the sound of coyotes, calling at night, thrown in. 25

Surdin's music became, in fact, a comic aspect of the productions in its own right. It not only reinforced the humour in Mitchell's scripts, but had a 'formula' mode in which to make its own statements - the Crocus town band. The band made its appearances, and its painful sounds, every time there was any kind of public event or festivity in Crocus, with its apotheosis during visits by Royalty or other dignitaries. As the Crocus Band, Surdin and his musicians entered into the small-town spirit, delighting in playing as badly as they possibly could for a change. Mitchell gave Surdin and his musicians many opportunities to ham it up with such 'musical jokes' as the Crocus Band. He recalls some of the situations:

Mr. Tucker directed the band and he would say, for example, "All right, now, hold it. French horn, the rest of us bear you no animous. Let us try again and let us move together in friendship and put aside ... guerrilla warfare!" And then Morris, with that goddam band, would come up with the most awful stuff! Then we also had 'Jumpin' Sonny Coldtart and his Prairie Pioneers!' Another situation would be the Christmas concert in which Steve Kiziw would always play his violin, and always play "When The Work's All Done This Fall," and it was awful! The First Violin of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Hyman Goodman, was brought in by Morris to play Steve Kiziw at his concert worst. I would ask Morris how he could do that to Goodman, and he would answer, "You don't know it, but to play "When The Work's All Done This Fall," on your fiddle, authentically as badly as this guy, without corning it up, takes the first violinist of

the Toronto Symphony." Or, you would have little Cora Swangle who'd play "The Robin's Return," and she'd get up to the top and the robin would barely make the return.<sup>26</sup>

Musical jokes and comic reinforcements were only one aspect of the Jake score by Surdin. There was much pathos in his music too, as well as considerable lyricism behind the narratives. The most memorable and moving of the "musical stainings" behind a narrative of the inner dialogue type, was in the episode "Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy," in which The Kid struggles with and finally breaks his pony, (Auction) Fever. Mitchell was so impressed by the effect of the Surdin score in creating the mood of the highly lyrical sequence that he used the episode to try to interest Hollywood and U.S. television in running a feature-length film or series of Jake and the Kid, without much success:

...(That script) ...had a great amount of music. In fact, it was a montage with music and The Kid, music and sounds, and so on. There were horse sounds when he was breaking the horse and so on. When he finally made it and the horse straightened out and the Kid was there, thinking to himself and feeling the wind cool on his face and wave rhythms of that lovely horse under him, "smooth, smooth as cream pouring," I wrote a monologue. Morris had the music suggesting the violence of the earlier breaking-in sequence, but then it changed and Morris got into this lovely, sweeping, rhythmic melody that went behind it all. I remember I was at MCA in Hollywood and had taken some discs down there with plans to do it visually (but like so many of these things, it got loused up) and there were a number of these hard-boiled

jokers there and, as they listened to that disc of The Kid and his horse with that galloping, freedom music and the Kid's voice, they cried.<sup>27</sup>

The Jake music had integrity and was lyrical, rather than being merely background or accessory, because it was being used by Surdin to imply moods, emotions and even situations. In many of the Jake episodes, the score exploited the ability of the radio medium to imply rather than explicitly detail scenes or moods that would have been difficult to portray through words and sound effects, or would have sounded incredible. Surdin describes the use of music to replace sound effects in "Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy."

Where the Kid is breaking his horse, we didn't use any horse hooves, we just went with the music and it carried you throughout the whole thing and was very exhilarating. Music used this way is actually scenic and more credible than unconvincing, artificial sound effects. That's what the music is trying to do in such instances - it is establishing a focal point for your imagination. When The Kid goes off on that horse, you don't want to hear those phony clippety-clop sounds - it's an emotional thing and music is essentially an emotional thing.<sup>28</sup>

It was, thus, common in the Jake episodes to hear Surdin's music either perform the symbolic role of sound effect or paraphrase and imitate sound effects being used. In "King of All The Country," for example, goose calls are used by the sound effects man during the actual shoot.

However, throughout the episode, Surdin's musical comments and bridges take on a goose-call motif. These musical honks suggest the story theme in a variety of emotional and circumstantial contexts, sad, ironic and comic. Surdin explains that he decided to use music for the calls in an intuitive and somewhat impulsive way:

I just picked it right out of the air. I picked up these feelings about the episode, including the goose calls, which I had never really heard before we did the program. As to the question of real goosercalls or not. I said that, generally, I didn't want to hear them, although at certain points during the climax, for example, I did mix musical goose notes with the sound effects, but it was my decision to make, at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Surdin made a similar decision in the "Rain" episode, turning Jimmy Shoelack's plane into a musical motif. The strings perform that angry, buzzing insect effect when the plane flies low over Jake's team. When the plane is performing its cloud-seeding operation above the crowd gathered for the rain making, the music also incorporates plane sounds, in somewhat insolent parody, in the background score to the rain sequence. The plane motif is heard during that montage and almost seems to chuckle in secret connivance with Jake's sham ceremony.

In such sequences, the music conveys images to the imagination of the listener, implicitly rather than explicitly, poetically rather than realistically. It helps the producer avoid a purely representational approach, through sometimes strained or incredible approximations of realistic

sound such as the coconut shells used for the hooves of the galloping team scared by the plane. Music supplies connotative quality to events and leaves completion of the image to the listener, without the strain upon the listener's "willing suspension of disbelief" often caused by inadequate sound effects.

This is not to suggest that the Jake production crew resorted to music to supply all the sounds for the series. These musical sound motifs were simply another important dimension of the Jake score, quite apart from its use as narrative "resonances," bridges and 'stings.' Some sound effects were still necessary.

The sound effects constitute that third sound component available to the radio producer - the natural and artificial sounds. They were added to the words and music, either accoustically in the studio by the sound effects man or the actors themselves, or from recordings from a repertoire of 'stock' sounds prepared commercially or by the CBC Drama Department. Availability of the precise sounds required for a given dramatic situation was always a problem.

The Jake sound effects men were, therefore, obliged to improvise their own sounds in the studio to a large extent. Where this was not entirely possible, music might be used both to suggest the effect and, in some cases, to 'mask' the imperfections of the sound recording. Rightly or wrongly, a special mystique and glamour have attached

themselves to the radio sound effects man, largely due to his inventiveness in improvising studio sounds with a variety of improbable devices and deceptions.<sup>30</sup>

Sound effects cannot be considered as a key level or component in the Jake and the Kid programs because of the importance of the words and music and the often implicit rather than explicit nature of both. The effects were simply an accessory that took the studio action, where needed, out into the town or prairie. Where they proved realistically possible, the sound effects provided the purely mechanical sounds of the town environment: train noises at the station, the sounds of Malleable Brown working at his blacksmith's forge, or the echoing sounds of rocks being hurled at the Crocus curling rink. They added the sounds of the great outdoors, bird whistles, livestock noises, or the noise of the elements. Some effects, such as the opening of doors, doorbells, and telephones, were produced mechanically in the studio. Others, such as footsteps or even certain animal sounds, could, where jurisdictionally permissible, be made by the actors themselves. Mitchell himself produced gopher noises on occasion.

Because of the heavy use of music as effect, the sound effects in Jake were confined to those sounds that were, in and of themselves, devoid of any special poetic or emotional strength or significance. Ironically, those very mundane effects, so crucial to realistic illusion,

proved to be the weakest element in the productions. Much of this was due to the unavailability of convincing effects on disc and also to the unimaginative use of those that were or could be supplied accoustically. The scratchy 'stock' recordings or the unconvincing 'live' noises, such as the coconut shell horse hooves, marred the atmosphere of the sound picture.

If any major criticism were to be made about the Jake productions, it could well be in the area of naturalistic sounds as opposed to pseudo-realistic effects.

Typical of the drama productions of their period and even of some less imaginative contemporary radio drama, the Jake programs resemble the early movies shot entirely in the studio. The dramatic action sounds quite clearly to have been created within the perfect and sterile atmosphere of the broadcast studio. Into this artificial atmosphere, is occasionally injected the odd sound reminder that the action is supposed to be taking place in different inner and outer environments. The odd but isolated mechanical noises are supplied, on cue, indoors. Largely token outdoor sounds tell us that the action has moved outside - a car horn in a street scene, the moo of a cow being milked in a barn, or the occasional chirp of a bird.

While the early producers did not have tape recording facilities and had to rely on the disc repertoire, and did not have the flexible means to record on location, they

could have done more to increase the natural ambience of their productions.

The dramatic illusion would have been more complete had environmental noises been sustained throughout sequences of the Jake plays, without resorting to inadequate artificial effects. For example, when Jake and The Kid are discussing some issue over a meal, or the setting is somewhere in the house, domestic sounds are seldom apparent. Kitchen noises could have hovered behind these sequences or a real radio, tuned in to the daily soap operas, might have muttered in the background. Noises from the outside could have been heard faintly - the sounds of livestock in the barn or fields, or the omnipresent wind or wail of a distant train. The lack of natural ambience, as opposed to artificial effects, is particularly evident in the outdoor sequences. In "Time Is My Enemy," produced by Esse Ljungh as late as 1956, no attempt is made to supply that ambience, even through recordings. Daddy Johnson and The Kid sit outside on the porch and talk about life and death for more than ten minutes and only an odd bird call reminds the listener that they are surrounded by prairie, the elements and the faint sounds from the distant town. The CBC's Toronto studios were notoriously susceptible to unwanted sounds from neighbouring streets. These, purposely captured with a remote microphone and discreetly injected, along with some recorded sounds, into the town or other outdoor sequences, would have been

far more convincing. A nearby school yard and a plentiful supply of local dogs could have provided those two universal background ingredients of children playing and dogs barking.

Such criticism is easy to make today. Deadlines and technology probably militated against such an approach at the time. The result was that most of the Jake productions and other radio dramas of that period, sound more like clever readings of stories than convincing dramatic illusions. The secret of mounting a credible illusion lay in the mix of the various sound levels. Peter Francis was, as will be seen shortly, capable of mounting a thoroughly convincing outdoor illusion in the "Rain" episode through his carefully controlled approach to total ambience.

Whether live or pre-recorded, the producer's 'orchestration' of the various sound components was performed in the control room and, at this point, it would be useful to elaborate on the available technology and its dictates, since the studio constitutes an extension of the producer.

Though primitive by today's standards, the studio equipment available to Peter Francis in the early 'fifties was as aesthetically important to the illusion as it was indispensable for the actual transmission of the program. While studio acoustics and microphone characteristics could be used creatively to provide certain qualities of sound and a suggestion of spatial dimensions, most of the sound operations were conducted in the control room, through

the agency of the console or, as the BBC described it, "the dramatic control panel." The number of inputs on the panel or console determined how many sound sources Francis could handle at one time from microphones, turn-table for sound effects, remote studios and so on. Potentiometers or 'pots' - the volume level controls - enabled Francis and his technician to control and apportion the desired sound levels of the respective elements or sources. The 'pots, could dose sounds anywhere from the almost inaudible level of the fade-in (of course a contradiction in terms, but the accepted misnomer), to commanding explosions of sound, short of outright distortion. The fade-in or fade-out thus became a part of a communicative code of sound conventions: a device for compressing time, abbreviating a dramatic sequence, or for creating a transition from one scene to another. A cross-fade consists essentially of subtly replacing one sound with another. The level of the first, dominant sound element is gradually lowered while simultaneously the level of the new element is raised until their relative dominance has been reversed. The new element is gradually raised to a foreground perspective, while the previous element fades under until it disappears. It is a radio device roughly equivalent to the lap dissolve in film, just as the straight fade-out and fade-in could be compared to the cinematographic fades. More fundamentally, however, the volume controls determine the respective levels accorded

the various sound components, both on the studio floor and in the 'mix.'

Further manipulation of sound could be achieved through equalization, or filter controls, which allowed upper or lower frequencies to be removed, to alter tonal characteristics of voices or sounds. The illusion of thin or fat characters could be created by rendering voices squeaky or booming. They could also seem to be talking over the telephone. An echo chamber was used to add reverberation to the acoustic quality of the studio, creating the illusion of vast space -- an amphitheatre, public square, or underground cavern.

The equipment may have been somewhat primitive by today's audio standards but the Jake scripts demanded little in the way of avant-garde sound. They were down-to-earth stories and the studio equipment was more than adequate for live or recorded productions of Jake and The Kid.

The use of the studio during the 'mix' involves an established set of fairly predictable technical operations and applications. The aesthetic effects, on the other hand, are only roughly conventionalized and are subject to the personal reading of the production by the individual producer. The relative strengths he accords to the three basic sound components and the pace and tone of the production are determined by his own unique and largely intuitive approach to that mix and to the various sound conventions he is both using and breaking. The listener, in turn, must

understand and appreciate these conventions, deciphering radio tricks such as fades and transitions, and sensing the overall impression conveyed by the treatment of the various components in the sound tapestry. If the texture is too complex or confusing, or the combination of sounds or choice of effects unconvincing, the listener will reject the dramatic illusion or at least experience a certain uneasiness.

The onus was squarely upon the producer to delicately balance his sound components; to harness the potentially competitive artistic forces at work and ensure their harmony and intelligibility. If he failed to balance those forces in his dealings with author, composer and cast, and in the final mix, he not only did the script an injustice but also endangered reception of the production by the audience. It must be remembered that, in the 'forties and 'fifties, the studio equipment and especially the microphones, were not of a technical calibre to provide audio discrimination of a consistently clear and reliable degree. Frequency response and fidelity were poor. Transmission quality was inferior and breakdowns frequent. Home receivers were primitive and usually imprisoned in bulky wooden cabinets. This made the early radio sets bass resonant, whereas intelligibility hinges upon accurate reproduction of the upper frequencies and key consonants which are the carriers of meaning. To attempt overly complex sound structures or to fail to achieve balance in the mix, especially 'live', would be to confuse

and possibly lose an early AM audience. Furthermore, as Martin Esslin of BBC Drama points out, early drama listeners had not been exposed for long to the communicative code of the radio drama and would have enough difficulty trying to decipher what was being attempted aesthetically, without the further distraction of a poor mix or technical shortcomings.<sup>31</sup>

It is impossible to make definitive statements about the nature of a given producer's 'mix.' The subtleties or essential rightness of a sound mix can only really be appreciated by actually listening to it. Some of these subtleties may only be clearly evident to another producer, aware of what is going on. The listener will sense whether a production feels right or wrong, but will not generally be able to articulate precisely why. It is possible, however, to make certain general observations about the approaches to the mix adopted by various *Jake* producers.

As stated earlier, Andrew Allan was preoccupied with direction and with the impact of the words. His production of The liar Hunter consequently displays a neglect of the overall sound structure. It might just as well have been a reading of the story, with a minimum of dramatized effects and sound situations. The production is characterized by a lack of sensitivity for the interactions of words, music and sounds to control pace, interest and unity. The rhythms of spoken passages are not closely keyed to those of the music and sounds. Pauses and silences are not related to

dramatic effect or skilfully used in combination with the music and sounds - they merely give the impression of protracting the sequences and impeding the overall flow. Music, often inappropriate, does not blend cohesively with the dialogue or narration and support or heighten it. The words dominate, even when non-critical. The cast are allowed to soar indiscriminately above the other mix components. The actors consequently project unrealistically, as though this were a recording of a stage presentation. What little music or sound manages to emerge is thoroughly subordinate and almost an afterthought. It is not a subtle or convincing mix.

Peter Francis' productions represent the most cohesive, subtle and skilful blending of the sound elements into a harmonious and pleasant mix. His production of "The Day Jake Made Her Rain" is the epitome of that finesse. Only when listened-to can that 1950 production reveal its subtlety and aural complexity. Not all of its qualities and dramatic intensity are even apparent at the first listening; and new dimensions may be discovered with every playing of the program. Even as a pre-recorded proposition, "Rain" would have been a remarkable dramatic accomplishment. As a 'live' broadcast, recorded on an old acetate disc, its mix is little short of miraculous.

It was suggested earlier that overly-complex mixes were undesirable for a variety of reasons, not the least

being intelligibility. It has already been stated, in discussing the forcing of dialogue and sounds to reveal action, that one sequence in that play, where the plane buzzes Jake's team, is not totally effective. It is the exception rather than the rule, and it should also be remembered that it was the pilot show for the first series. The remainder of the program is ambitious yet understandable, complex yet cohesive. It reaches its highest intensity and complexity in the actual rain-making sequence, involving elements and challenges that might, even today, be difficult to achieve through laborious multi-tracking on tape. An analysis of what Francis was coping with, 'live,' reveals his sensitive grasp of the mixing process, as well as his mental agility and professional control. During that grand finale of "Rain," Francis achieved the following aural combination.

Jake addresses the sceptical crowd about rain-making and appeals to them to lend their faith to help him make it rain. In the background and sometimes interrupting him and clearly heard, the crowd expresses its scepticism and impatience, ranging from mumbling to outright heckling. Three distinct family or heckling groups emerge in the 'near background,' and their reactions are developed and clearly audible right up to the point where Jake makes it rain. Among these participants, but more in the 'foreground' of the background, is Old Man Gatenby, who adamantly rejects Jake's endeavour, almost in counterpoint to Jake's exhortations

to the crowd to have faith in him. While the chatter proceeds, the rain-making machine chugs along, in the foreground, but subordinate to Jake's lines; and the Kid sets off rockets to add to the effect, after receiving instruction asides from Jake. Occasionally buzzing around in the more distant background is Jimmy Shoelack's plane, busy taking people for joyrides and, presumably, seeding the clouds in the process. In the more immediate background, rain-making music accompanies, punctuates or accentuates parts of the rain-making sequence, counterpointing the noise of the machine and rockets and imitating the plane - all in meticulous synchronisation with the action. To top all of this off, Jake slips out of the dramatic character of the rain-maker and becomes narrator, parallel to the sequence, compressing time, advancing the action and supplying the atmospheric description.

At no point during that extremely complex sequence are any of the fine details lost or the balance disturbed by over-emphasis of any one element to the detriment of the others. Francis impeccably controlled the levels and relationships in his mix to the point where one is hardly aware of the dramatic complexity and intensity of the sequence. It is also a tribute to the finesse of his mix that all of this complexity is faithfully rendered through the primitive, monaural, medium of an acetate 'aircheck.'

Such a production tellingly illustrates the true place and strength of the producer in the control room and his role

as mediator and harmonizer of the creative thrusts of writer, composer, cast, sound effects man and engineer. "Rain" demonstrates that Francis had the sensitivity and the control. He never allowed Mitchell's script to drown the other components or Surdin's score to conflict with or detract from the script. His mix was subtle and smooth and his sense of proportion perfect.

His successor, Arthur Hiller, respected and retained the workable precedents established by Francis but his mixes did not have the finesse of Francis' and he did not seem to have the same sensitivity for the sound picture. On the whole, Hiller's Jake productions are conservative and restrained, almost understated. It is easier to use a negative example to contrast his mix with those of Francis. "Goin' to London to See The Queen" is not a pleasant or harmonious mix and illustrates a lack of producer control.

In that episode and its sequel, "Finger of Chance," Hiller departs from mix patterns set by Francis and uses Surdin's score in unconventional ways. Whether he did this by personal choice during the mix or was influenced by Mitchell or Surdin, is immaterial. The result was a jarring and confusing mix where the music was obtrusive. As Francis says, "Mitchell did not always know what was best for him ...and he had a tendency to lean too heavily upon Surdin."<sup>32</sup> Even prior to the mix, Hiller could have exercised his prerogative over Mitchell and Surdin and called for a re-working

of the episode to make it 'work' better than the following.

Hiller uses the opening Jake theme both to introduce the series and to lift up The Kid's opening narrative description about advance plans in Crocus to mark the Coronation in London. After the opening announcement, The Kid returns with further narrative, accompanied by appropriate 'pomp and circumstance' motifs. As The Kid introduces the first dramatic sequence in MacTaggart's store, the motif becomes a musical parody of the cash-register ting-tinging behind the opening lines. After MacTaggart and Jake discuss preparations for the local celebrations of the Coronation event, the music is once more regal and accompanies The Kid in an updated narrative, moving the time sequence a few months ahead. The preparations at that point are revealed in a discussion between Jake and Steve Kiziw. A comic bridge ensues which takes the action forward yet another season through another Kid narrative. That concludes with another fanfare and the advance sale of Coronation lottery tickets is described through the comments of a local lady promoting them. The music bridge returns and the Kid's narration with it, introducing the Crocus ladies' attempt to over-organize the celebration. Another fanfare creates the transition to Mayor MacTaggart sending off a Council message to the Queen. Yet another bridge becomes a background to The Kid's introduction of the notorious Crocus Band, preparing for its 'salute' to the Queen. This bridge becomes the

raucous tones and musical mayhem of the Crocus Band in full-flight. A sequence with the frustrated band-master ends with the band again, which becomes another bridge into an accompaniment to a Kid narrative update. This in turn becomes a telegraphic staccato bridge that takes the action into Way-freight Brown's office at the station, to introduce the idea of trips to London to see the Coronation. Another bridge introduces the Mayor's idea of a lottery draw for a trip to the Coronation. Yet another takes us to a very brief sequence in Repeat's shop concerning the sale of lottery tickets.

The music is used in all of these instances with uncustomary frequency, as a scene shifter and time-contractor. It often accompanies narratives by The Kid, confirming that it was prescribed by Mitchell. The narratives and music bridges were obviously used in order to avoid unwieldy explanations or transitions. The solution is worse than the problem. The over-use of music and the profusion of short dramatic sequences make for a jarring and dislocated mix.

All sequences and transitions, for more than the first half of episode one, are extremely short and the transitions brusque and contrived. Some of the music bridges are longer than the spoken sequences. As a result, the pace and cohesion of the episode is choppy and impeded. There is no sense of dramatic flow and the plot seems disjointed and more complex than it should. Mitchell could just as easily have

revealed the idea of a lottery draw with one narrative sequence and concentrated on longer dialogues to supply the atmosphere. Hiller could have insisted on a reworking of the script to this end. Instead, he tried to rely on short narratives and musical effects in the mix. The result, while unusual, seems to suggest more concern with invention and originality of mix than with harmony and clarity of plot. There is nothing wrong with the basic story, despite its being one of those unfortunate two-part treatments. The story could simply have been told far more elegantly and cohesively by more conventional methods. Hiller could have arranged the material to lend itself to a more straightforward telling with the sound components in perspective.

Mix problems start to manifest themselves following Mitchell's departure from Toronto, when a lack of producer control and subtlety are felt. The least subtle of the productions were those of Hiller's successor, Esse Ljungh, who brought back a high degree of theatricality and exaggeration to the programs. This is most evident in his production of "Time is My Enemy," where Ljungh, in his desire to stress the comedy and pathos, used all of his sound components to relative excess. He allowed the cast to exploit the humour to the point of farce. His musical jokes were loud and outrageous. His comic sound effects were insolent. Everything seemed to be performed and blended together with ultimate impact in mind. Subtlety was not a characteristic

of that mix. Apparently unwilling to lose any of the values of the script, score and effects, Ljungh allowed them to tend to blatant overstatement and to compete with each other in the foreground. Where gradations of the various sounds were the rule in Francis' productions, comedy and impact were ruthlessly sustained in Ljungh's programs as though he were afraid something might be missed if it did not proclaim itself. His use of outright comedy in "Time Is My Enemy," for example, deprives that script of its inherent pathos. The mortality theme is subjugated to the gags and raucous music bursts. It is all about as subtle and moving as a pie in the face of the blind listener.

Francis had perhaps been fortunate that the two main artistic forces - Mitchell and Surdin - were available to him and to each other to ensure a harmony of the spoken and music layers. Back in High River, Mitchell was not always happy with the mix, especially during those key narrative passages. He was frequently frustrated by the competition between the words and the music. He blamed the person at the helm in the control room, but did not single out Hiller or Ljungh, or their technicians:

Our problem was with the joker on the mix, handling the voice and sound levels. It was a real problem until we really got on top of it - when you are in that small studio with those big, heavy instruments and all those people - and you would get the level of the background music going so high that it would not just detract from, but would muddy, interfere with and sometimes even erase the script. By the time we went back out West, I would be on the phone and one of the big things I would

say was that the goddam level of the music was too high for the voices. The same thing happened many years later during the Jake productions but, by that time, I hadn't as much clout in being able to point this out and people were settling for less. Apparently, it was quite a problem, but it was dreadfully important for the words to be heard in those narrative bridges with music in the background.<sup>33</sup>

Morris Surdin was particularly aware of the mix problems cited by Mitchell and felt there were simply too few producers with sufficient aural sensitivity, particularly with respect to the use of music. Are such considerations beyond the interest or conscious awareness of the radio audience, however, quite apart from the basic question of aural comprehension? Generally, Surdin felt the audience was not consciously aware, but added

I think the audience are unconsciously aware of the music, for example. If it is wrong, they become consciously aware of it. If it is right and is mixed properly, they don't know what has happened - it has gone by like a good score in a film, because it was right. In most cases we were right and it subtly moved by. Maybe in some cases it was a little loud, but it was the right sound, and I think that it is the rightness of musical sound and balance that you hardly really notice and it is the wrongness that comes out and really bangs you. And I think wrongness of music is worse than wrongness of balance. But if a producer or technician haven't got that sensitivity, and they should have, then they should have the composer work right along with them.<sup>34</sup>

Such critical considerations notwithstanding, imbalances in the Jake productions were the exception rather than the rule. Particularly under Francis' production, the episodes were sensitively mixed in a spirit of almost collective

creative endeavour. Producers changed over the years but that sense of professional community persisted throughout.

If it is difficult to isolate the precise artistic contribution of the various producers of the Jake programs, it is because of a family spirit that prevailed among the production team. There was a production as well as a writing 'formula' attached to the programs and it was difficult for any individual producer to depart from that 'formula' - difficult and perhaps even hazardous. The formula 'worked' so why change it? The three main producers had to be content with confining their own artistic drives and expressions to the mix and with leaving questions of overall tone and interpretation to the 'family,' and particularly to the cast.

The Jake broadcasts represented a family series in more ways than one. It was inevitable that, with the creative people working so closely together and the cast performing their roles for so many years, strong bonds and rapport should have existed among them. They anticipated each other's styles and intents. The cast became a professional as well as fictional family. Robert Weaver says of this phenomenon that the series "was much closer to theatre than most radio drama because of the community production aspect."<sup>35</sup> Harry Boyle feels that the close rapport of the Jake team and their collective contributions to the success of the plays were unparalleled in CBC drama terms.

There really was a great familial sense among the Jake people. The only other case I've seen was that of The Craigs and other family farm broadcasts. Jake had that quality you found in Britain's The Archers series, of continuity, family feel and audience identification. And yet, you know, none of the Jake cast, except Tweed and Drainie, who was a west coast man, knew anything about the prairies, and yet they were believable.<sup>36</sup>

Another factor behind the collective contribution, and necessitated by it, was the reality of broadcasting 'live.' The producer simply had to be able to cope with the technical challenge of the live mix. He had to be able to rely upon the consistent and unstinting collaboration of the other members of the production team. There was only one chance to get the play on the air and as perfect as possible. Everyone had to be totally present and committed and no one could possibly afford to miss cues, make mistakes or have 'bad days.' The degree of intensity that this produced led members of the Jake team to suggest that there was an almost indefinable 'magic' quality about those live broadcasts; something that was both dangerous and exciting. None of them suggested for a moment that they would prefer to work 'live' if they had a choice. They simply felt that the excitement and pressure, and the knowledge that there was an audience out there listening intently at the precise moment of production, lent a special quality and commitment to the programs. Peter Francis said of his Jake broadcasts:

...they were heard exactly at the moment they were performed, flaws and all. There was no tape to be edited, no device for eliminating mistakes. Considering the hazards, it's amazing how few mistakes there were. When there is no chance of retrieving an error, it's wonderful how seldom you make the error. What you do get with a performance of this kind is something electric - an excitement you seldom get on tape.<sup>37</sup>

The live broadcasts placed considerable strain upon the musicians and composer to be both note-perfect and capable of altering their pace to fit the time requirements of the program; to slow down and stretch out with a script that was running short or to speed up and condense or compress their score and effects, should the program start running over. Morris Surdin felt the live broadcast not only made for an exciting performance, but kept the crew alert and professional:

You've got to be good and you've got to be immediately good because, if you aren't, you break the spirit. So, if you can go through a whole play like that, with thirty-six different Jake music cues and many of them 'under' it really separates the men from the boys.<sup>38</sup>

In live or pre-recorded productions, everyone in the Jake family knew he could trust and depend upon the other members of the team. Mitchell and Surdin, together with their respective producers, could depend upon all of them and plan them into their scripts and scores with confidence and certainty. In terms of art and innovation, this may not have been an entirely good thing. Talent and approaches never really

changed in over fifteen years. Fred Diehl feels the advantages of the community approach or the "sense of colony," as he calls it, outweighed other considerations.

You live by the clock and you only have so much time to achieve excellence ... now that was one of the reasons for the clique. You could count on a John Drainie and all those other people in the cast pulling together. You didn't want to take a chance on young, new talent that hadn't proved itself once or twice on 'CBC Stage.' I'd tell them to start with crowd scenes, then bit parts and gradually work their way up to leading roles and into our confidence. Now, in Jake and The Kid, everybody was a principal. Frank Perry and I once did all the crowd scenes and we were just as important a part of that show as Drainie was because, without us, there wouldn't have been a show... We had a sense of colony.. We were a coterie, that's true, but I can justify it in terms of the end result.<sup>39</sup>

"Nowhere was that "sense of colony" more evident than among the Jake cast, on and off the studio floor, as they approached the challenge of turning Mitchell's fictional characters into realistic sound personalities.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>Porter, p. 50. (Harry Boyle also recalls how inappropriate the Mitchell's Toronto household was to serious writing or to meeting deadlines. Boyle says a gentleman with several lovely daughters lived in the same building and there were always parties, which Mitchell would share with his writing duties. Boyle expresses astonishment that some of the scripts for Jake and The Kid were ever completed under these 'trying' circumstances). Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August 1978.

<sup>2</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>3</sup>Taped exchange with Arthur Hiller, June 1978.

<sup>4</sup>Personal interview with Fred Diehl, August 1978.

<sup>5</sup>Andrew Allan, as quoted by Harry Boyle in his introduction to Andrew Allan: A self-portrait (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p.3.

<sup>6</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>7</sup>Taped exchange with Arthur Hiller, June 1978.

<sup>8</sup>Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1978.

<sup>9</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>For a more detailed consideration of radio narrative, see McWhinnie, pp. 115-116.

<sup>13</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August 1975.

<sup>14</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1978.

<sup>15</sup>Taped exchange with Arthur Hiller, June 1978.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Personal interview with Fred Diehl, August 1978.

<sup>18</sup>Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1978.

<sup>19</sup>Personal interview with Morris Surdin, November, 1977.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August 1975.

<sup>23</sup>Personal interview with Morris Surdin, Nov. 1977.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Personal interview with Morris Surdin, Nov. 1977.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>For a more detailed view of the tradition and use of radio sound effects, see Gielgud, pp. 89-90.

<sup>31</sup>Personal interview with Martin Esslin, June, 1975. (Esslin describes a specific communicative code for radio drama, the understanding of which demands considerable exposure of an audience to the conventions of that code. He suggests that the decoding by such a 'trained' audience of an ambitious sound drama is as difficult and demanding as listening to a complex fugue.)

<sup>32</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1977.

<sup>33</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.

<sup>34</sup>Personal interview with Morris Surdin, Nov. 1977.

<sup>35</sup>Personal interview with Robert Weaver, June 1977.

<sup>36</sup>Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August, 1978.

<sup>37</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1977.

<sup>38</sup>Personal interview with Morris Surdin, June 1975.

<sup>39</sup>Personal interview with Fred Diehl, Aug. 1978.

## CHAPTER VI

### CAST AND CHARACTERIZATION

No matter how skilfully Mitchell drew his Crocus characters and how imaginatively and accurately the producer and composer translated that script into dramatic direction and score, the crux of the dramatic illusion was the actors. A good script, read by unconvincing actors, cannot succeed. A passable script, read by actors of consummate skill may still 'work.' Or, as Mitchell puts it, "There has been much bad drama writing but ... the curse can be taken off bad writing. A writer can get away with more when he has actors like Drainie and Tweed lifting up the lines.<sup>1</sup>

The Mitchell lines were seldom bad but, delivered by actors of the calibre of John Drainie and Tommy Tweed, they took on a value and strength beyond the words themselves. Unfortunately, since both men are now dead, their approach and contribution to the series can be assessed only through surviving discs and the recollections of those who worked with them.

John Drainie may have been a fine comic actor and may well have become identified with Jake Trumper, but there was nothing typecast or stereotypical about him. He was infinitely versatile and could play Jake, "Mr. Arcularis," Stephen Leacock or serious Shakespearean roles with equal

ease. Radio was his artistic home and his favourite medium and he devoted all his life and energy to it. Mitchell points out that Drainie had no stage experience whatsoever, that "he was totally the product of radio acting."<sup>2</sup> Lacking in confidence and hampered by a bad leg, Drainie never really made an impression in television. He established a reputation, instead, as the acknowledged master of the radio acting craft in Canada, bringing to the medium a unique devotion and application. As John Reeves puts it:

He never forgot that his chief job was to match exactly the meaning of what he said and the way he said it; he did this supremely well because he understood both completely; and he attached value to the work in direct proportion to the value of the whole content, grounding his art on the hope that it should make men wise. Wise through laughter or wise through grief. This was the complete actor.<sup>3</sup>

No role, including that of Jake Trumper, came easily to John Drainie. He was not, apparently, a born actor. He did not have a rich or commanding voice and his co-actors on the Jake team claim that he approached each new role or challenge with great difficulty, to the point of appearing clumsy and amateur during initial rehearsals. "Each of his roles," John Reeves recalls,

reflected his career in miniature; he could stumble through a first rehearsal like a novice, then would spend hours going over the script and marking it profusely with his own brand of hieroglyphics, and finally he would emerge with a performance as complete as a Bach fugue, all the notes dead right and some of them astounding.<sup>4</sup>

Witnesses of his first rehearsals testify to their astonishment that so clumsy and inept a beginning could culminate in consummate illusion. Tommy Tweed remarked on one occasion:

I am personally convinced from frequent observation that, without a hurried look at the "words" before that first reading began, he was, beyond doubt, the lousiest reader it has been my anguish to hear. In fact, his first readings were so incredibly awkward as to cause newcomers, who didn't know him, to shake their heads sadly and mutter "Even with no lessons, I could do better than that."<sup>5</sup>

John Drainie, as Jake or any other character, had to try harder than most. To make matters worse, his voice was of nearly tenor timbre and had none of the rich resonance, of a Lorne Greene or a stereotypical radio announcer, that would lend grandeur to almost any line. What he lacked in voice and confidence, however, he made up for with persistence and total immersion in the character he was interpreting. His wife, Claire, portrays him as a perfectionist who stayed up until two or three in the morning, agonizing over a role or sequence until he got it absolutely the way he wanted it.<sup>6</sup>

Mitchell found in Drainie the perfect actorial approach to Jake Trumper. The producers, and particularly Allan and Ljungh, found in him the devotion to the spoken-word and the notion of the sanctity of the author's intent. Drainie sounded as Jake should sound. He grew into the character to the point where Mitchell could use him and his predictable portrayal almost as a springboard for new dramatic situations.

Mitchell was convinced that Drainie's approach to characterization as an actor was highly similar to his own as a writer. He felt Drainie had that invaluable "extra spectator quality," a gift which led the actor to watch and listen to Mitchell himself as a model for Jake Trumper:

People used to come up to me and say:  
"Gee, I really used to enjoy hearing you  
when you did Jake on Jake and The Kid."  
The reason was that John was a real artist and  
worked from life models and that's what he did  
before he went on. He used my intonations. I  
remember ... sitting in the CBC canteen with  
Drainie and I said - "John, do you work like a  
writer - do you invite life to help you?" I  
said, "I don't have to ask you. I know. Whether,  
you know it or not, you, too, have a subconscious  
notebook and you've filled it with speech,  
mannerisms and idiosyncrasies, and you don't  
carpenter and contrive. You invite that sub-  
conscious notebook to give it to you." He said  
I was right, and I continued: "You frequently  
have life models for what you do as an actor  
and what grows for you in a role." And he said  
I was right. Then, I said, "Now I come to my  
question - did you have a life model for Jake  
Trumper?" He said sure he did - W.O. Mitchell  
and some others he'd met, but that I was the  
closest one.

Listening to Drainie as Jake is, in fact, almost like  
listening to Mitchell telling his anecdotes. It is as like  
the theatrical Mitchell as Hal Holbrook is like Mark Twain.  
As Jake Trumper, Drainie sounds deceptively casual and simple.  
His portrait of the sod-buster allowed no resounding actorial  
embellishments to any of the lines. It might even be said  
that Drainie's main gift was his ability to underplay his  
delivery. He used Mitchell's lines as a basic foundation  
for his performance, but improvised upon them to fit the

situation. He knew instinctively when the words were supremely important and had to be clearly heard and when, conversely, they could and should be underplayed as a background part of an exchange. Again, all of this sounds deceptively simple and is not readily apparent at first hearing. Subsequent hearings, particularly with the script in hand, reveal the painstaking attention to fine details; to the vocal shadings and nuances that distinguished his craft.

Two examples from the "Rain" episode illustrate the effects Drainie achieved in order to flesh out Jake Trumper from the script skeleton of the character.

In the opening sequence, it is clear from the start that Jake is about to tell a tall tale and launch into a boasting match with Old Man Gatenby. Drainie gives us the characteristic signal that he is about to take the plunge - a special way of clearing his throat. That throat-clearing has a warning, yet slightly embarrassed tone to it. He launches into his story about Hatfield the rain-maker. When Gate balks, Drainie assumes a more persistent tone, injecting details of the story quickly so as to overcome Gate's resistance. He ignores the first few objections by Gate and proceeds with the story. Gate bites and is drawn into the fictitious part about the rain-maker being run out of the town of Broomhead. Seeing that Gate is now involved, Drainie's tone changes and he embellishes the story with the yarn about a

poker game. Every time Gate asks an embarrassing question, Drainie sounds as though he didn't hear or didn't care. Off he goes on tangents, designed to steer him clear of too detailed explanation. When Gate drags him, in turn, into proving his claims about the validity of rain-making, Drainie resorts to a more assertive and boastful tone. Like a primary school-child, he is drawn into proving or looking foolish. He boldly asserts that he has even 'rained' himself. Gate has him and, in the same instant, Drainie perfectly renders the sudden realization by Jake that he has been tricked. Pauses, stammers, ahems, choking noises and an almost whining tone convey his embarrassment and the realization that he is now in too deep to extricate himself. Gate seals his fate by pinning him down to details of his 'raining.' Within seconds, recognizing that there is no way out, Jake regains his confidence, and invention. Drainie's tone changes once more and he projects Jake into the fray, piling up fiction about his previous 'raining' exploits and revelling in the rhetoric of the tall tale. Drainie's voice takes on the customary 'tall-tale-tone' as he weaves a yarn about too much success with previous 'raining.' Once again, he has Gate hooked and presses his luck with further digressions about mice mixed up in the threshing. His tone, as Gate balks again, suggests Gate is stupid because he cannot understand the connection between rain and mice. When Gate begins to understand that there is none, Drainie changes

tone completely once more and, with a combination of innocence and surprise, claims he never said anything about mice. Gate persists and Drainie is forced to return to the tall-tale tone, this time to launch into a tangent about the health repercussions of his previous excessive rain. Undeterred, Gate goads and dares him to produce a rain-machine. He suggests Jake is lying. Drainie's tone changes radically. It suggests the worst possible affront to Jake's character, and carries even a hint of physical threat. Assertively, almost belligerently, he promises to make it rain - when he feels like it. The sequence ends. Domestic sequences and Jake's work on the machine follow. A particularly revealing exchange takes place between Jake and Gate when the latter attempts to pin Jake down to an acceptance of the challenge and the selection of a date for the exploit, during which Gate seems to be hoping he can force Jake to admit defeat. The sequence follows, with an attempt to describe the nuances of Drainie's delivery in double parentheses:

GATE: (LONG PAUSE) Weeeeel now ... what sort of a critter is that!

JAKE: Rain Machine. ((Proud, defiant, but slight tremor.))

GATE: You call that there a rain machine.

JAKE: Sure do. ((Are you calling me a liar?)) Ain't got her perfected yet ... ((Self-doubt, maybe he's right. Descending confidence scale to apologetic tone.))

GATE: Turn her on.

JAKE: Can't. ((Pouting, almost sulking.))

GATE: Why not?

JAKE: (PAUSE) ((Oh, oh, trouble - think fast.))  
She's set for hail. ((Stupid. This is more  
scientific than you could realize. Take that!))

GATE: Is she now?

JAKE: She is ((Do you want to make an issue of it?))

GATE: Well then, ... onset her.

JAKE: Can't. ((Sulking again. Anyway, why should I just  
for you? Push me harder.))

GATE: Why can't you?

JAKE: That's what ain't perfected yet. ((Slightly un-  
certain and almost apologetic.)) All ready to go  
'cept for that one little bug in her. ((Confidence  
mounting and, anyway, even superheroes have minor  
problems.)) I ain't bringing down no hail on ...  
((That line about hail is good for a tangent, let's  
develop it.))

GATE: Say! Them bulbs ... them two flat blue bulbs ...  
Ain't them sort of familiar ...

JAKE: (HASTENING TO SHUT HIM UP) That there's the self-  
same machine I used Manyberries way when I brought  
rain in ought two. She worked then. She'll work  
again. ((Stutteringly, stammeringly, with frantic  
clearings of throat and ascending confidence. A  
tall tale tangential escape is imminent.)) Sure  
dry in ought two - had this drought skinned a mile.  
((Tall tale tone resumes.)) (BEGINNING TO ROLL)  
Not a slough in the district - just dust. ((Waxing  
poetic-pathetic)) Seen the frogs settin' up to  
their eyes in dust - just their two bump eyes  
showin' ...((Slight quaver in voice and pathos -  
even he is moved by his own performance.))

GATE: Them two blue bulbs ... ain't they off of ...

JAKE: (HASTILY) ((Preceded by the nervous clearing of  
throat, stammering, waning of confidence.))  
All over the prairie where the sloughs used to  
be - ((Back in control again. Poetic-pathetic tone  
recaptured and lyrical calm prevails.)) - little  
puffs of dust - frogs diving in. You'd see a

frog jump - there'd be a plop of dust - then you'd see him swimming the way a frog does - underdust swimming, (POETICAL) hear them croaking in their dust spring nights was kind of nice - ((The poetic invention is running down and reminiscence may be needed)) - make a fellow remember ... ((trailing off - pushed too far.))

GATE: Them two blue bulbs is right off of your old rheumatism ...

JAKE: (FAST AGAIN) ((Preceded by frantic clearings of throat and stammering, and injected hastily into Gate's dogged curiosity.)) Then she got really dry - them winds licking up the top soil - piling it against the fences and the houses and the barns and the granaries - ((quick, think of something else before he catches on - say it fast before he can get a word in edgewise. OK. Here's something to divert him. Tall tale throat-clearing again and let's take the plunge.)) - first thing we knew there wasn't a speck of dust left in them poor frog's sloughs ... kind of tragical the way they died ... ((poetic-pathetic again and even he is impressed.)) lack of dust.

GATE: (DOOM) When - do you intend to rain?

JAKE: ((Stammer, stutter. Oh, oh. Now he has me.)) They'd got so used to swimming around in that there dust - ((The jig is up. Can't put it off any longer. Gulp. Stall. Weak collapse.)) Oh, - why - ((Here we go. There is no getting out of this one now. Better bluff.)) - end of this week - ((Nervous clearing of throat for lie and with apparent confidence he does not feel)) beginning of the next. ((Almost a question in his own voice and a suggestion of self pity. The fat is in the fire))

GATE: (TRIUMPH) That's all I wanted to know!<sup>8</sup>

Drainie was particularly skilled at improvising the fine details of a sequence only roughly sketched in Mitchell's dialogue. The "Rain" sequence where Jake is mumbling about the details of his machine while The Kid reads aloud from the Crocus Breeze is a perfect example of his ability to improvise. }

Drainie was also master of the interrupted dialogue. When supplied with lines that are intended to be truncated by the intervention of another character, actors often stick too closely to the amputated lines in the script, giving an effect of artificiality before being cut off. Drainie took great care to extend the script line well beyond the interrupting dialogue with remarkably naturalistic results.

He was particularly inventive and convincing when approached by The Kid for some explanation or other while he was engaged in a chore. He made the physical noises and grunts associated with milking or pitching hay or manure, meanwhile singing or humming some prairie ballad, off-key, and with words missing or modified. He would, simultaneously, interject replies to The Kid between the grunts or verses of the songs, in a veritable coup de théâtre.

Drainie was extremely sensitive to the roles and rights of his co-actors. He clearly recognized when the contrapuntal lines of another character such as Gate had greater priority than his own. Nor did he steal scenes from others, though his skills could have permitted him to dominate cast members of less experience. On the contrary, he seems to have served as a guide and inspiration to the entire team. Even his wife, who played Ma in the Jake series, found him inspiring:

People always said about John that, if you were working opposite him, you had to be just a little bit better than you intended to be in the first place: that you really had to be great to keep up with him and to do him justice. There

really was a bit of genius going on there that inspired other people and that's why I think working on the Jake series was so great.<sup>9</sup>

Billie Mae Richards, who played The Kid, did not feel eclipsed by Drainie; indeed she implies that the illusion of The Kid was as much a credit to Drainie as it was to her own skills:

I learned my craft, week by week, watching this kind-hearted, sincere, wonderful human being ... as he brought understanding, warmth and life to the role of Jake. Under his paternal gaze, The Kid blossomed into reality. What a debt of gratitude I owe this versatile, creative artist.<sup>10</sup>

Morris Surdin found that Drainie had uncanny sensitivity to music. The actor's rapport with Mitchell was easygoing and jocular. He teased the author by his take-offs of him in the Jake interpretation. Mitchell, for his part, took great pleasure in writing Drainie into awkward situations. "I used to put booby traps into my scripts," Mitchell recalls,

because by this time, I was out west and John Drainie was a great guy for 'booting' a line now and again and, when he did, he'd draw a great big boot out on the side of the script to remind him next time he read it through. What I used to do was put verbal traps in, honestly, quite deliberately. I remember one in particular. Jake was in a really passionate argument with Ma, because he did not like the Atheniums Book, Recipe, Flower and Discussion Club - it was pre-tentious and phony and had such members as Elsie Abercrombie and Mrs. Doc' Fotheringham and Jake thought the worst of them. In this argument with Ma there was this line - it was a build, an emotional build and John was a really great gut actor and would feel it and respond to the line, especially when they were not rehearsing it a lot and they'd come along

and he'd start feeling it. So he'd come suddenly to a climatic thing and the line I gave him was to, literally, scream at Ma: "I don't give a damn (meaning for the women of the Atheniums) for the whole clucking flock of them! But, the way I wrote it was:

JAKE: I DON'T GIVE A DAMN (BUILD ... WATCH IT DRAINIE! ...) FOR THE WHOLE CLUCKING FLOCK OF THEM:

And I could hardly wait until the next Sunday when I could hear it come off because I knew that if Drainie was going to 'boot' something badly on the network, it was going to be that one. Well, on it came and Drainie said:

JAKE: AND I DON'T GIVE A DAMN FOR THE WHOLE ... damn ... eh ... (softly) .. clucking flock of you ..

I TELL YOU I'M .....

So, you see, he made it anyway.<sup>11</sup>

His studio manner may have been jocular, often to the point of clowning around with Tommy Tweed, but Drainie took his acting job with deadly seriousness, even the relatively light role of Jake Trumper. None of his fellow members of the Jake production crew was able to clearly articulate Drainie's approach to playing Jake. His own available comments on acting are also somewhat general. They indicate, however, the degree of his commitment to the art and to the radio medium. That devotion, his total production approach, concern for his fellow actors, and his feelings about the sanctity of the author's work, are revealed in his unfinished letter to the Ontario Arts Council after it created the 'John Drainie Scholarship.'

In the preparation of his role, I would demand that the actor bear in mind his responsibility to the concept of the playwright. He should strive to make his work harmonize with that of his fellow actors in the development of scenes and to make his conception of his role an integral part of the whole production.

Actors trade tricks back and forth, smart directors sometimes inspire actors to new approaches and techniques, but the well-spring of inspiration is life itself. Close, acute, constant observation of people, animals, birds, in day-to-day life, imparts a constant stream of true and exciting expression for the actor.<sup>12</sup>

Drainie's acting insights and approach are best described by someone outside the Jake team - producer John Reeves. Although the actor's grasp of technique was superb, his real strength sprang from something deeper. "His technique was vast," according to Reeves,

but was never an end in itself. Always, it was simply the means to portray the character and to convey the author. Other actors have had superficially the same dexterity: but the ability to speak one-hundred and ninety seven dialects accurately at any age level is not often accompanied by the two other pre-requisites of greatness, a profoundly compassionate insight into character and a ceaseless concern with what the play means ... there was never a trace of the stereotype in his characterizations: other actors assume a character like clothes; he built his from the spine outward. That's why he was able to do so much; he wormed his way via the script into the core of the role and then came back out, transmuted; any other approach was, to him, false and shallow; understanding was the key. It was on this that the validity of all his playing rested.<sup>13</sup>

Drainie's friends and Jake associates maintain that he considered his radio work as much a mission as a profession. He seemed to feel that radio had a particular duty to preserve the spoken-word, and it was his particular

responsibility to protect and promote it in his portrayals. His comments at the inception of the 'John Drainie Scholarship' make the point abundantly clear:

I should hope that the recipient of this award would be aware of his tremendous responsibility - one which far exceeds that of the mere entertainer. It is his duty to be the custodian of the spoken-word.

It is becoming more and more evident, in our modern life, that the written word is giving way to the electronic word, and it is incumbent upon the actor today to protect the beauty, form and proper usage of our language.

Our communication through words, which we call our native tongue, is constantly threatened by ignorance, bad usage, the mindless babble of commercialism. Even the sacrosanct classics of literature, poetry and drama are in danger of distortion and misuse as our modern society finds less and less time for the old fashioned practice of reading. The great words must come to us now through one of the 'media' and here is where the actor must stand as the guardian of the word.<sup>14</sup>

Jake Trumper was not the most serious of roles, nor would Jake's use of the native tongue constitute a model of English usage. However, his character, interpreted by Drainie, was an accurate reflection of the prairie sod-buster for the rest of Canada to hear and appreciate. Drainie's interpretation of Jake, or of Leacock and so many other literary characters, no doubt helped the audience to identify with and perhaps further explore the literature from which they derived.

Esse Ljungh considers that Jake Trumper died with John Drainie in 1966 and paid this moving tribute to the actor and the man who was Jake Trumper to millions:

A gentle breeze rustled the long sweet-grass on the peaceful hillside ... I heard it whisper ... "You're welcome to a bit of rest, old boy ... It's been a hard day ..." I thought I could even hear the voices of his old friends from Crocus come to greet him ... "That's nice," he'd say, his weather-beaten face creased in a smile. So, now, I reckon there'll be tall stories to tell again .. up there, as tall as they ever were when Jake held forth in the Maple Leaf Beer Parlour ... or at the Sanitary Café - any place, for that matter, where two or three old cronies would get together for a chin-wag or an argument, big enough "to give a feller heartburn."

So Jake Trumper is gone ...  
... that lovable rascal Jake! We're not all too young to have known this world of make-believe made so real to us by the man who worked and lived and was Jake Trumper ... John Drainie...

Look up the hillside now ... and you, too, will see him standing there ... a broad smile on his lips ... Jake's beat-up old hat at a jaunty angle ... the faded, blue-patched overalls flapping in the gentle prairie breeze ... it's Jake and John in one! ...<sup>15</sup>

Such is the power of the radio dramatic art that Ljungh's words can evoke in the minds of those who remember Jake Trumper the image of their choice, even though they may never have seen Drainie in person. Similarly, they may easily remember Jake's side-kick, The Kid, as a twelve-year-old, miniature Jake. The radio illusion prevents them from thinking about the mature housewife and mother who played The Kid for twenty years.

For the first few years of the series, Billie Mae Richards was simply credited as Billy Richards in order to disguise the necessary deceit. She describes how, one day during a rehearsal, a young boy arrived while she was, fortunately, in the control room and asked to see his 'friend'

The Kid. Torn between the desire to satisfy his wishes and a fear of destroying his illusions, she simply told him The Kid had left but that she would give him a message. She remembers doing so while trying to make her voice as unlike The Kid's as possible and with great feelings of guilt. The boy left, disappointed but not disillusioned.<sup>16</sup>

Billie Mae sounded so much like a young boy that audience mail indicated a substantial portion of the audience believed the voice they heard was indeed that of a male youngster. The truth eventually emerged when Billie Mae attracted publicity but, by then, the illusion of The Kid was firmly planted in the public mind. The listeners accepted her, just as they accepted The Kid's eternal pre-adolescence.

The choice of this actress by Peter Francis was, indeed, a stroke of genius, providing both acting maturity and a voice that would not alter with the years. When the role was played by young Robert Jackson in the Jake play produced by Andrew Allan, The Kid did not sound like a twelve-year-old or even a fourteen-year-old but, rather, like a sixteen-year-old changing his voice to imitate a pre-teen.

Billie Mae only had to speak naturally to sound like The Kid and confesses that she had no special aptitude or acting preference for the part. She simply became the Crocus boy almost by accident rather than by intent:

I was locked into playing boys by the time Jake and The Kid came along. I was type-cast the minute I got out of the Lorne Greene School in 1947 and kept getting selected for that type of role from the start.

I didn't do anything consciously with my voice in order to sound like The Kid. As far as I'm concerned, I wasn't acting; I had just assumed the personality of a child and that's the only way I could do it. When I play a role like that, I slip into another dimension because I do not feel like myself but like that other person, whose feet are on the floor, and I can feel them right through.<sup>17</sup>

Her real accomplishment was her ability to become a twelve-year-old in the studio. Her own children were too young to serve as models and she says she simply had an affinity for children and the way they talk and react. Her most impressive sequences occur when she is portraying The Kid in the process of satisfying his natural curiosity. That insatiable desire to obtain answers to everything from the facts of life to how things and people work is aptly conveyed by Richards in an impatient and persistent tone. She simulates his excitements, complete with near incoherent babblings, his yearnings and frustrations and his moments of moving revelation. When she plays him reading advertisements aloud from the newspaper, she perfectly imitates the classroom monotone, complete with wrong inflections, mispronunciations, muddled sense-groupings and other traits common to child renderings of adult reading material.

The essence of the Kid role, as Richards saw it, was the innocence and naivety of the boy. She had to preserve that innocence from two threats to the credibility of her

portrayal: the maturity of Mitchell's writing for him, and her own acting maturity. It would have been easy to render those poetic and comic lines with too great a sophistication and then create an adult interplay among cast members. She neatly avoided the danger by her respect for the Kid character and by virtually becoming a child in the studio, oblivious to the subtleties of the adult behaviour around her.

If anything was happening that was, say, double-entendre, I purposely didn't hear it... and there could be no way I could play that part and be thinking anything else but that child. He had to be kept innocent, otherwise I just couldn't do it. The innocence, the down-to-earth quality of The Kid, was combined with a sort of intuitive understanding or foreknowledge of things; an elemental sort of side to him ... and I think the quality that comes through is the wonder of the child and the things he gets into. Playing the role, you felt that wonder and magic and excitement.<sup>18</sup>

The child illusion was most difficult to perform credibly when a script assigned the narrative function to The Kid. As mentioned in the sequence on soliloquy, Mitchell often assigned descriptive narratives or monologues to The Kid with language or vocabulary perhaps too mature to be totally in character. With such sequences, Billie Mae had to sound like a child and yet do justice to the imagery of the Mitchell lines. The Kid performed the narrative role in "Time Is My Enemy," for example, and Billie Mae had to cope with this unchildlike description of Daddy Johnson:

I guess, inside of Daddy's wrinkled old hide ...  
I guess if a person was to step inside of him  
it'd be a lot like the prairie ... when the sun  
is high and there's a high-up wind that moves the  
clouds over ... and the shadows slip over the

grass . . . so she's dark . . . and then bright . . .  
and then dark again . . . Daddy has his bright,  
sunlit times and he has his dark, cloudy times . . . 19

The narratives did not bother Richards. She felt they were intended to lend a lyrical beauty to the scenes or inner dialogue and that their effect was more important than whether they were entirely in the character of a twelve-year-old. But, she emphasizes that they could not have been read by a child actor, because,

. . . to be able to put into words what Mitchell wanted to convey in some of the long narrations which were so beautifully written and just flowed out of your mouth, unless you had an adult mind behind it, you just couldn't do that kind of imagery, which was in the words themselves. In order to bring that off, you need someone who knows the wonder of it. Well, a child is experiencing it, but he's in the process and he could not put into words what he's feeling. So that's why Mitchell had to write into me what he wanted, so that it could come out the way he wanted it, but in a child's words and with the feeling of the way a child would do it if he were old enough to be able to put it into words.<sup>20</sup>

The dramatic compromise of a mature adult mind reading the lines with the voice of an innocent child minimized the danger of The Kid becoming incredible. The audience certainly did not seem to be unduly disturbed by the fact that some of The Kid's lines were too clever, funny or poetic to have come spontaneously from the mouth of a pre-teen, or that they were listening to an actress. As Alan King puts it in describing the Billie Mae Richards 'deceit' on radio, "What did it matter that The Kid was a married woman - her audience adjusted the truth until it became a new truth; in Jake and The Kid, she was The Kid and that was that."<sup>21</sup>

After Jake and The Kid, the next most important and frequently recurrent figure in the episodes was Old Man Gatenby. In the Andrew Allan episode, as noted, Gate was played by Tommy Tweed, who interpreted him as a senile, crotchety figure, too old to be Jake's buddy and, to judge from his voice, too frail to engage in most of the adventures Mitchell prepared for him. In the early series, Gate was played by Frank Peddie, whose voice and approach were compatible with Drainie's interpretation of Jake. Peddie developed an affinity with the Gate character and an immaculate sense of repartee and timing with respect to Drainie's lines. So much was the Gate character based on abrasive encounters with Jake that the contrapuntal nature of their performances is almost a pre-requisite part of the Gate role. Peddie plays the role tauntingly, maliciously and with acid tongue that both bites and chuckles. He is heard to particular advantage in the "Rain" episode, where he goads Jake into performing. His boasting and tale-telling are the subject of "The Liar Hunter." The "Rain" sequence previously analysed with respect to Drainie's performance could also serve as an illustration of Gate's irritant effect upon Jake. Peddie irritated to perfection. He complemented and almost reverberated to Drainie's performance. It is a tribute to his skill that he sustained such roles at the same dramatic height as Drainie and was not eclipsed by him.

Although the 1969 revival of Jake and The Kid by Fred Diehl is not featured in this study, special mention must be

made of Doug Master's portrayal of Gate. Master was not competing with Drainie and, in several episodes, he succeeds in making Gate the key figure and the most impressive role. In "Cabin Fever" and "The Man Who Came to Rummy," Master is the equal of Peddie. Jake and Gate are confined by a fierce storm and get on each other's nerves. Master superbly controls the gradual escalation of that friction. As they try to madden each other with their irritating habits, such as loud snoring, noisy eating, cracking of knuckles, cheating at cards and boasting, Master's performance is superlative. In addition to providing thoroughly cantankerous Gates, Peddie and Master ensured by the strength of their performances that Jake Trumper would appear warmer, and more positive by contrast. They are, after all, what Jake might have been without his redeeming qualities.

One of the most challenging of the major roles in the series is that of Repeat Godfrey, the barber. The role was played in the early series by George Robertson, who seems to have come short of the potential of the character as revealed earlier in terms of his thematic importance. Robertson's reading tends to be almost gratingly ludicrous. His Repeat seems squeaky and unassertive, not at all a man to hold customers like captives with his sharp tongue and menacing instruments.

Again, mention must be made of James Edmund's interpretation of Repeat in the 1969 revival. Edmund achieves the sense of Repeat's moral righteousness and assertiveness, combined with a

certain pathos and ridicule. His every utterance seems even more clipped and staccato than it appears on the script; and his comments are finely timed to the clicking and snipping of his instruments. Their noises are suspended to give emphasis, become more agitated to accentuate his words and excitement, or click away in silence after a particularly meaningful comment. He skilfully interlards philosophy and gossip with equivocal instructions to his victims, delivered in telegraphic style. Orders to move the head this way or that, and remarks on the condition of the hair or scalp are uttered in precisely the same tone and character as his musings, serving as double-entendre and heightening the comedy.

Although Repeat still speaks in a high tenor sing-song and sounds somewhat ludicrous, Edmund extracts from the more satirical or pathetic lines a depth and conviction absent from Robertson's interpretation. Repeat emerges with his dignity intact.

Character dignity, or lack of it, is also crucial with respect to Tommy Tweed's interpretation of Daddy Johnson. Tweed's reading of the one-hundred-and-seven-year-old "living link with the past" is both a dramatic highlight of the series and a point of contention. In view of the suggestions that the series tended towards slapstick or the burlesque, it raises the question of how far an actor should go in comic portrayal, or, at least, how far he should be allowed to go.

It is in the sequences involving Daddy that the series most often becomes farcical. The very combination of Tweed and Drainie in a humorous situation was an invitation to slapstick. They were so accomplished and so firmly established as Daddy and Jake that they needed little direction. What they really needed was to be restrained. Peter Francis was acutely aware of the problem. He exploited Tweed's abilities as Daddy but, "I felt strongly," he says,

. . . that Daddy Johnson shouldn't appear very often because you would lose the magic if he appeared in too many shows and his parts were too long. Now, that's the way I approached it as long as I produced the shows, but I think my successors, Arthur Hiller and Esse Ljungh, let it get a bit out of hand. The performances became wilder and Daddy Johnson would turn up just about every week for about ten minutes at a time, and I didn't approve of that.

Mitchell, you see, didn't always know what was best for him, either, and you had to be a director, in other words, and say, -"no, don't do that, it's not going to come off or, can you do it some other way?" He was reasonable and would accept this but, if nobody said it to him or if they fell in love with the comic thing so much themselves that they wanted to see it exaggerated, that's what would happen. I guess it would happen more easily after he wasn't physically in Toronto.<sup>22</sup>

Arthur Hiller defends the caricature of the impossible old man, suggesting that such characters were simply "theatrical, which is just fine. That's what drama is made of - theatrical characters in theatrical situations."<sup>23</sup>

Esse Ljungh gave Tweed a free rein to indulge in the Daddy role and he was fascinated by the way the actor entered the role completely, both mentally and physically. He remembers watching Tweed through the control-room window.

Nobody could ever beat Tweed for Daddy Johnson. He could wheeze for a full minute and a half . . . Then, of course, he'd take out his false teeth to deliver the lines and it would be excruciating. We didn't dare look at him. The people in the control room were often absolutely bent over - they couldn't read the meters or watch the sound levels for anything. I'd tell the technicians to dive down behind the controls and just watch the meters, not show their faces at all, because Tommy was a real 'ham' and, when he saw he had an audience, boy, I tell you!<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note the physical involvement of Tweed in the Daddy role for two reasons. Tweed seemed to feel that, radio or not, entering physically into a part could bring greater realism to his performance. Ljungh says that, in addition to removing his teeth, Tweed adopted the stance of a centenarian as well. Alan King also notes that when Tweed was playing a character being introduced to another person, he would actually shake hands to enter into the mood of a new encounter. Conversely, in his role as Daddy, Tweed's antics, while they may have inspired the other Jake cast members, also threatened to take realism too far and drag the rest of the cast along into burlesque.

This was clearly the case in Ljungh's production of "Time Is My Enemy." Crocus is preparing to fete Daddy's one hundred and seventh birthday and Jake and The Kid are trying to find out from Daddy what he wants for a present. Daddy wants thirty years off his age to go out and hunt the geese he sees through the window of his room. In the sequence in question, Daddy does not immediately tell them this. He

simply mumbles incoherently about seeing specks on the window and wanting to shoot them. He imitates their calls and Jake and The Kid think he has choked or become delirious. Tweed outrageously exploits the situation and Drainie and Richards abet him. The sequence is outright farce. It is now transcribed from the recording with comments in double parentheses to indicate Tweed's treatment:

JAKE: Just what do you figure they are?

DADDY: ((exasperated and impatient with these obtuse youngsters.)) I don't have to figure - ((idiots)) I KNOW ((secret triumph . . . gasp, wheeze as coughing spasm spoils his build-up))  
GRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOIIIIIIIIII.....

KID: Daddy?! Mr. Johnson?

GATE: Daddy.....? Are you all right, Daddy?

DADDY: GRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOOOIIIIIIIIIIEEEEEEEEEE!

KID: Golly!

JAKE: Oh boy, what's wrong?

DADDY: STAND CLEAR! ((He is back in the past again, reliving his identification with the oldest and most elusive goose he ever hunted.)) I'm captain for tonight and I'm coming for your sugar fallow fer I hate that stubble prickin' into my wishbone. I've got a five-foot wingspread and shoulder muscles made o' whang leather. ((I'm indestructible - just let anybody try to tangle with me. I'm smarter than all of them. Triumphantly...)) They're peelin' off and tippin' in behind me. I'm leadin' ma grey army into feed....

KID: Daddy?

JAKE: Take her easy, Daddy!

DADDY: GRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOOEEEEEEEEEE

JAKE: N, no..... now, take her easy, Daddy....

DADDY: GGGGGGRRRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOOEEEEEEEEIIIIII

JAKE: LAY BACK AND RELAX, DADDY!  
He must have somethin' stuck in his throat.....

DADDY: GROOOOOOOOOOOEEEEEEEEEEEEEE....

JAKE: Give him a slap on the back, Kid!

DADDY: GRRRRRRROOOOOOOOOOOOOEEEEEEEEEE....

NOISE: (SLAP, WHACK.)

DADDY: GRROOOO...((becomes terminal-sounding gasp, interminable wheeze, gasping for breath))

JAKE: There! That oughta knock 'er free there....

DADDY: ((He is within inches of death. A total syncope, with struggle for the saving breath. This achieved, he sucks air greedily in, gulps it down with every aural nuance, swallows loudly, finally exhales greedily and begins to splutter and gulp.))

JAKE: Eh, there.... I ...((He is contemplating another blow that will no doubt finish Daddy off.))

DADDY: ((Realizing these people are dangerous meddlers as well as obtuse, he gasps out a plea for his life.))  
LEAVE ME...((For God's sake, desist.)) LEAVE ME BE!  
I'M ALL RIGHT! ((Or I would be if you'd keep your hands off me.))

JAKE: Yeh, sure... sure ye are! Just ain't one o' yer good days!

DADDY: ((What the heck do you know about it?)) I ain't had a better day in ten years!

JAKE: Well, ye sure ain't acting like she was one o' yer good days!

DADDY: ((Screaming with exasperation... molly-coddling a man, wanting him to keep quiet on his birthday, attacking him...)) I KNOW WHETHER I AM OR NOT. HOW ABOUT YOU?!

JAKE: Me?

DADDY: YOU havin' a good day? ((Young fools so confused and bored they gotta take it out on the old - helluva way to entertain themselves, knockin' me about.))

JAKE: Up till we come to visit you I wuz...

DADDY: Whe.... ((gulp, hey, wait a minute, something wrong here))  
TEETH... TEETH! ((They are dangerous. These kids'd even take the teeth from a centenarian!)) Round up 'em teeth o'mine ye knocked outa me when ye whanged me 'cross the shoulders....

KID: I didn't see any teeth....

DADDY: WHAAAA.... WA.. ((Absolute panic. Can't trust kids to do anything right. Can't even stay still when there are teeth on the ground. Irresponsible. Insult to injury))  
WATCH YER STEP AN' DON'T GO TROMPIN' ALL OVER THEM.....

KID: I didn't...

JAKE: We didn't...

DADDY: ((They're not even aware of how much a menace they are!))  
'Slappin' folks... ((aren't you ashamed of yourselves,))  
trompin' on their teeth... ((of all the low-down, childish things to do, that's the lowest!))

JAKE: We ain't trompin' on yer teeth... YE AIN'T WORN THEM  
IN OVER FIFTEEN YEARS!

DADDY: ((Geez ... now they're lying and making excuses ... trying to tell me I've become doddering and forgetful. This is the last straw. Utterly exasperated....))  
ONE O' YOU SLAPPED ME ON THE BACK AND SENT THEM FLYIN' ON THE FLOOR!... ((Let's see them try to deny that! Now I've got them.))

KID: Here, Daddy, they're settin' right here in this glass on the bureau.....

DADDY: Huh.....eh.....? ((Trying to trick me now, eh, What's going on here?))

JAKE: We figured you kinda had somethin' went down the wrong way....

KID: Yeh!°

DADDY: Wha.... (gulp, wheeze, gasp.... ((what's going on now - some kinda trick. It's not true. Aggressive again.))  
You didn't .... gasp, wheeze... you asked me, what's in the window ... I told you. ((No mystery here, what's all the confusion and violence about?))

JAKE: Not very clear you didn't!

DADDY: GEEEEEEEEEESE! ... GEESE! ((They still don't get it...  
what do you have to do to make them understand...))

KID: Hunh?....

DADDY: ((In utter exasperation and as to a kindergarten...))  
GREY CANADA HONKERS! ((Get it now, you simpletons?))  
Lines of 'em ... past my window ... all day long...

JAKE AND

KID: Oh, ohhhhh.

DADDY: Dawn, when I wake up ... an' make sure am still alive ...  
then again from four o'clock on ... evenin' flight...

KID: Ohhhhh ..... is that what it is?.....

JAKE: Geese! Flyin' across your window pane....

KID: Of course!

DADDY: ((Don't be patronizing with me. It's a tragedy, that's  
what it is! You young folks can't understand...))  
Wheeze... Thir.... thirty years younger, I'd be outa  
this rocker... ((oh the humiliation of it - the pain))  
I'd be out there. ((whine of self-pity, then gives way  
to rising excitement of recreation of other hunts in  
his mind. He's off again.)) Pitted in .... waitin'  
fer 'em ... watchin' fer 'em.

JAKE: Sure ... sure!

DADDY: ((I'll show 'em all who's boss. Mounting aggression.))  
Paste 'em right in the beak ... with double-r shot BB!

That sequence, though mercilessly protracted, is highly  
amusing but was grossly overplayed by Tweed. This is unfortunate  
because the one-hour play, more than any other Jake episode,  
offers a tantalizing glimpse of how moving and dignified this  
extraordinary old man could be. The script contains many  
impressive lines about the plight of the aged and about adjusting  
to one's mortality. Ljungh and Tweed seem to have been unable

to resist the temptation to exploit the humour at the expense of the deeper message. In all fairness to both of them, however, much of the fault lies with Mitchell. The author did, after all, supply Tweed with the farcical lines. Tweed may well have come very close to precisely what Mitchell was seeking to achieve with the Daddy character. Harry Boyle claims Daddy Johnson was born outside Mitchell's writings. "Tweed," he says, "was doing his old man act at a party. Mitchell saw it, liked it, and wrote the character into the programs."<sup>26</sup> Tweed had created the prototype for Daddy while playing Gate in the Allan production.

It might well be argued that farce is an effective form of comedy, that the audience of the day was well versed in vaudeville and the burlesque and could appreciate Tweed's clowning. It is difficult, however, to reconcile that sequence with the final sequence in the play when Daddy is presented with and flies The Kid's present - a kite. It rivals the writing found in Who Has Seen The Wind.

Farce or not, Tweed was superb in the role." Even Peter Francis, so consciously aware of the danger of drifting into burlesque in the series with the Daddy character, is forced to describe Tweed's interpretation with reverence:

He'd come on and there'd be a long pause and then a faint, feeble sound that would seem to be coming from many miles away as this ancient man's voice began to articulate. This was the effect it conveyed to the listener - it was almost painful and, eventually, he'd get something out and then the voice would die and what would come out wasn't

intelligible at all; just the sort of empty sound of a very old man whose mind was gone. Eventually, he'd get out two or three words and sometimes they'd be meaningless... then, a long pause and you never knew quite what it was all about, but it was a marvellous piece of absolute creation.<sup>27</sup>

These, then, are the major and fully developed characters as portrayed by the cast. The minor roles, or those left flat by Mitchell are, as noted earlier, primarily functional and consequently made few demands on the actors who played them. The only real exception is the role of Professor Noble Winesinger, played by Howard Milsom. But, despite the fact that Winesinger pops into the episodes occasionally and is convincingly played by Milsom, especially in "Ingredient H" and "Not With a Bang But a Whimper," he remains a cameo character and leaves little room for interpretative development.

Similarly, the cast members who played Ma, the other Crocus ladies, and other cameo roles such as Malleable Brown, Mayor MacTaggart, Pipe-Fitting Brown, Wayfreight Brown, Doc' Fotheringham or Pete Botten, did what was required of them; and one could hardly expect more. The actresses in particular seemed incapable of overcoming the stigma attached to Mitchell's female figures. They read their lines mechanically and largely unconvincingly as though accepting the Crocus emphasis on the man's world. Only Billie Mae Richards escaped that lack of deep involvement and female stigmatization and she was, after all, playing a young male.

All were, nevertheless, playing important parts in that collective role. They completed the professional radio family

and lent an appropriate degree of support to that family effort. They were, in turn, inspired and guided by the leading cast figures, Drainie and Tweed, who kept the whole illusion together. In the case of Tweed, his importance to the work and morale of the entire cast was out of all proportion to the relatively unimportant role he played as Daddy Johnson. Tweed brought to the role, and to his work with the rest of the cast, a commitment that prompted Esse Ljungh to comment he was the dramatic equal of John Drainie.<sup>28</sup>

When Fred Diehl attempted to revive Jake and The Kid in 1969, both Tweed and Drainie were dead. Diehl did not even attempt to re-cast Daddy Johnson. He simply left him out of the new series, saying his inability to include Tweed in the programs was "one of the real regrets of my career."<sup>29</sup> One-hundred-and-thirty people were auditioned for the role of Jake Trumper, but to no avail. Diehl was forced to attempt the role himself but confessed

You don't follow an act like Drainie's ... I don't think there ever has been or ever will be an actor who understood radio as an art form as Drainie did. I still haven't heard anyone who can touch him, and there are some good ones. He had that sense of occasion; that sixth sense about the medium, and I had him hanging over my head when I did Jake.<sup>30</sup>

The deaths of Drainie and Tweed had proven the crucial importance of their actorial and moral contributions to the creation of the programs. When they departed, the broadcast legend came to a close.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER SIX

- <sup>1</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August 1975.
- <sup>2</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.
- <sup>3</sup>John Reeves in special tribute, John Drainie: 1916-1966 (Toronto: Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists, 1966), hereafter referred to as ACTRA tribute.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Tommy Tweed in ACTRA Tribute.
- <sup>6</sup>Personal interview with Claire (Drainie) Taylor, Aug. 1975.
- <sup>7</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977.
- <sup>8</sup>"The Day Jake Made Her Rain," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Peter Francis for CBC Radio, October 31 1950 (Script provided for study by The Radio Drama Project, Concordia University, Montreal)
- <sup>9</sup>Personal interview with Claire (Drainie) Taylor, Aug. 1975.
- <sup>10</sup>Personal interview with Billie Mae Richards, Nov. 1977.
- <sup>11</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, November 1977.
- <sup>12</sup>Personal letter to O.A.C. by John Drainie, completed by Claire Drainie after his death in 1966. Copy provided by Claire (Drainie) Taylor from her own collection.
- <sup>13</sup>John Reeves in ACTRA tribute.
- <sup>14</sup>Drainie letter to O.A.C.
- <sup>15</sup>Esse W. Ljungh in ACTRA Tribute.
- <sup>16</sup>Personal interview with Billie Mae Richards, Nov. 1977.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup>"Time Is My Enemy," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Esse Ljungh for CBC Stage, February 5 1956.
- <sup>20</sup>Personal interview with Billie Mae Richards, Nov. 1977.

21 "As Time Goes By," documentary program on radio drama written by Alan King, produced and narrated by J. Frank Willis for CBC Radio, date unavailable. (In CBC Archives, Toronto.)

22 Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1977.

23 Taped exchange with Arthur Hiller, August 1978.

24 Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1978.

25 "Time is My Enemy," by W.O. Mitchell, produced by Esse Ljungh for CBC Stage, Feb. 5 1956.

26 Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August, 1978.

27 Personal interview with Peter Francis, Nov. 1977.

28 Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1978.

29 Personal interview with Fred Diehl, Aug. 1978.

30 Ibid.

## CHAPTER VII

### AN ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

"Jake and The Kid has now become part of broadcast mythology," maintains Harry Boyle.<sup>1</sup> As such, and at this remove, it is almost impossible to perform retrospective analysis of the critical and public reaction to the series in its time. This final evaluation, and the conclusions emerging from it, will, rather, be a view of the programs from three vantage points: as they were received in their time, as they are perceived by their author, and as viewed from today's perspective.

There is no doubt that public reaction to the series was overwhelmingly favourable and enthusiastic. No series could have survived over a period of twenty years without a large and loyal public following. An idea of the extent and strength of that support can be obtained from reading through the surviving audience mail among the Mitchell Papers at the University of Calgary. Critical comments are extremely hard to find and some of the hand-written letters suggest their writers looked upon Jake and The Kid as a highlight of their week and a moral and cultural focal point in their lives.

It would be impossible and even pretentious to attempt to gauge the cultural and sociological impact such plays might have had upon the audience of that period. It would be a modest claim to at least suggest that the previously listed moral themes were not lost upon the listeners and that the series helped other Canadians become more aware of prairie

culture. Harry Boyle, then responsible for such programming, reminds us that "In those days, Canada was still a series of relatively small cities towns and hamlets, with a majority of people living in rural areas. It was connected by two railroads and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation."<sup>2</sup> The potential of a highly popular regional drama series to make an acquainting and uniting contribution was, therefore, great. Peter Francis saw this role, not as a primary one but rather as a side benefit to the entertainment; as a "means of acquainting some parts of the country with other parts, and helping establish a certain sympathy and understanding for those regions in other parts of the country."<sup>3</sup>

The Jake series worked in more specific ways as well, with its underlying social messages. Mitchell already noted the public and academic reaction to his script satirizing the sociologist's indictment of Hanna, Alberta. One listener wrote in to stress that the audience was quite aware of what "was going on" in Mitchell's scripts. He specifically referred to Mitchell's theme that values are changing for the worse and that we are living in a phony age, and wholeheartedly agreed. Apparently referring to the script "Going to a Fire," about the treatment of immigrant, Steve Kiziw, the Executive Director of the Canadian Citizenship Council, John Kidd, wrote in to congratulate Mitchell. "Last Sunday, Jake and The Kid packed real punch," he wrote, and added, "I'm sure it will have a positive effect upon a number of people."

There appears to have been some mail critical of the programs but no trace could be found of it, other than a letter from one lady who said she had to turn an episode off, exceptionally, because it contained some "ideas about birth" that she did not wish her children to hear.

In his administrative capacity, Harry Boyle saw most of the mail concerning the series and described it as overwhelmingly positive. Some audience criticism of the language used in the series or of "smut" he kept out of Mitchell's sight for fear it would discourage him.<sup>4</sup> Other letters concerning alleged "take-offs" of prairie citizens, he answered personally. Boyle says he had similar experiences with characters in his Ontario writings and usually managed to convince the listeners that the description, because it was such a composite of so many characteristics, could apply to a wide variety of people.

Other criticisms were levelled at the portrayal of prairie townsfolk as "country hicks." One irate gentleman complained to Esse Ljungh that he and many others like him, drove late model cars and read Reader's Digest. Ljungh also recalls how some listeners wrote in, not so much in criticism as out of curiosity, to find out just who Mitchell was satirizing or parodying with a particular character or script. Such letters came from people in those towns suspected of being the real models for Crocus. "Of course, he sometimes took little swipes at people and characters," says Ljungh, "and he was quite severely criticised for it."

In most cases you'd find people would ask themselves just who the Crocus characters actually represented and, in a place like High River, it became a game to try to figure out who he was satirizing or ridiculing at a particular time. But he had a good-natured way of doing this and he didn't use the medium to swipe or hit the community. There were those who claimed that Repeat Godfrey was a bit of a take-off, as was Wing, the man who owned Wing's Cafe. We also received a couple of letters in which people complained he was ridiculing ethnic groups in that respect.<sup>5</sup>

Members of the Jake production crew recall how they constantly bumped into people who were ardent fans of the series and Billie Richards remembers fans who could recite entire passages from Jake episodes. Despite the close identification with Mitchell's fictional characters, English Canadian responses were less intense than those of French Canada's radio and television audiences to such characters as 'Seraphin', miser and misogynist. Jean-Pierre Masson, who played the role, was frequently recognized and insulted or abused in the streets because of his fictional behaviour. Nevertheless, according to Mitchell, "We did become household names."

... and I can judge, as a result of the number of people who still come up to me and mention it, that it must have been pretty salient. Of course, John Drainie was, and Tommy Tweed. These people were as well known then as John Wayne or Elizabeth Taylor. You see someone of a certain age and, suddenly, their face lights up and they say "Hey, hey, I used to listen to Jake and The Kid!" It shows you the power of a mass medium that hits everybody at once and is popular, and people slide into it and pick it up - and the length of time it went on! It evidently really, really worked.<sup>6</sup>

The public may have responded generously and enthusiastically but the same cannot be said for the critics. It is not that

they were harshly critical but simply that Jake and The Kid seems to have escaped their interest or, at least, their serious attention. Criticism of the radio plays is almost non-existent and the printed stories received scarcely more critical attention. These comments will now be reviewed together with certain content and stylistic criticisms of the short stories and relevant novels where they are equally applicable to the plays.

Apart from the occasional mention by broadcast columnists and Porter's profile, "The Man Behind Jake and The Kid," there are very few references to Mitchell's broadcast stories. The Literary History of Canada notes in commenting on Who Has Seen The Wind that "the charm of Mitchell's recreation of boyhood, as well as this inevitable bias of his humour towards formula comedy, account for the popular appeal of his subsequent radio series, Jake and The Kid."<sup>7</sup> The author's comments about the lack of "satirical bite" and the "sugar-coating" of the actualities of the Saskatchewan town in Mitchell's writing, are echoed by Margaret Laurence in a critical review of the published collection of Jake and The Kid stories. Laurence says they represent "comedy with no bite of acid to cut the sweet taste," and charges that the "emotions expressed in these stories ... now appear to contain a large measure of sentimentality." She also finds that "in addition to the thick coating of emotionalism, each tale has yet another layer in the form of a clearly indicated moral." She unkindly concludes that she can see Jake and The Kid, as a book for children, becoming a Canadian classic.<sup>8</sup>

Laurence was, of course, referring to the short stories, but they are close enough to the radio scripts for the remarks to be relevant to the radio scripts. Had she reviewed, or, especially, listened to, the entire series of radio programs, she might have found them much less over-simplified, sentimental and emotional.

Brief mention is given to the radio and printed stories by Edward McCourt, who discusses Mitchell's "emphasis on the anecdote at the expense of the overall design." In his reference to the written collection, McCourt makes a comment that illustrates especially well the difficulty of deriving satisfaction or insight from a reading of the scripts, as opposed to listening to the plays, complete with actors, sounds and music.

His Jake and The Kid stories, originally written for radio, commanded a wide listening audience, but they are essentially anecdotal, and the printed page denies them the support of the actor's voice and of the appropriate sound effects that are needed to give them life.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the critic of that period or the critic or analyst of today would find considerable difficulty in assessing the plays on the basis of reading the bare scripts, or in articulating the impressions derived from the actual broadcasts.

It is not an easy thing for a critic or scholar to analyze or assess the broadcast of a radio play in terms of its value or likely impact. One can critically state and describe Mitchell's approach to, and achievements in, the medium of the popular radio play. It is, however, quite another matter to delve theoretically and sociologically into that achievement.

Radio plays function in mysterious ways and their practitioners tend to do rather than to theorize their art, but they do feel or sense value and impact more sensitively than the critic or the academic. "It is one thing for a scholar to say that a play is fascinatingly interesting," as Martin Esslin puts it, but, he adds, it is

quite another to take the decision to actually put it into production and offer it to a general public. As head of a production unit responsible for something like a thousand such decisions each year (the radio drama department of the BBC,) it is only natural that the second, the practical and pragmatic, consideration prevails for me. And as a working director, I am equally compelled to think of the plays I am confronted with in terms of practice rather than theory: how to make them work.<sup>10</sup>

The success of the Jake and The Kid plays may not be supported by a body of serious criticism, but there is no denying that they 'worked' in the above terms. Though a quantitative rather than qualitative commentary, ratings of more than three-hundred thousand and sometimes more than half a million per episode are extraordinary, even by today's radio standards and especially by today's CBC Radio Drama standards.

That popular success may, to a large extent, be an explanation in itself for the lack of critical attention paid to the series. The point also brings us to Mitchell's own perceptions of Jake and The Kid since he is convinced that if the programs were not taken seriously it was because they were viewed, essentially, as entertainment rather than as art. Mitchell says the critics ignored the series because they

failed to realize just how much work and integrity lay beneath the apparently homespun simplicity of the scripts.

Jake and The Kid was perceived by its production team and, particularly, by producer Peter Francis, as entertainment.

"I read no particular thematic significance into the plays," he says, and adds that most of the production people "thought that what they were doing was providing entertainment."<sup>11</sup>

BBC program officials are noted as treating the entertaining family serial most condescendingly and describing the "lunatic fringe" that tends to identify with it.<sup>12</sup> CBC President, Al Johnson, made no excuses for Jake and The Kid. "There is," he points out, "nothing wrong with pure entertainment if, as Jake and The Kid, it reflects on the human condition and personality and on the milieu and its people."<sup>13</sup>

The Jake plays were not intended as, and made no pretence of being, highly intellectual. The series never considered itself to be in competition with 'CBC Stage' and its more serious offerings. Jake and The Kid was simply doing something quite unique and socially valid, on its own terms, with the popular play form. "It was an entertainment serial and its purpose was entertainment," comments broadcast historian, Howard Fink, but, he stresses that:

The excitement generated by it was that it was hitting home on some human things that nobody had talked about before. He was very frank about things which, before, had been either conceived with contempt as being 'country hick,' or not talked about at all: the conventional conception of what a child was or what a hired hand was. Those were, especially in the Canadian psyche,

much more a cliché. So, he made that alive and sympathetic and that was what was so attractive about the series.<sup>14</sup>

Jake and The Kid was not a shattering and unprecedented literary or broadcast revelation. Nor was it designed to be a harmless bit of escapist nonsense for the mindless masses. To suggest that Mitchell's use of satire, caricature, burlesque or even farce, is somehow illegitimate and unworthy of critical attention is to disregard those movements in the popular stage play which used just such modes: the comedy productions for large, popular audiences by Shakespeare, Jonson, Molière or Feydeau.

Similarly, Jake and The Kid may have been a more powerful and pervasive vehicle for Mitchell's art or social comment than a 'serious' 'CBC Stage,' or perhaps a novel or stage play. By selecting a comic genre and a fictional setting, and by sticking to people rather than politics, to the human condition rather than the social condition, Mitchell "got away with" his social observations with ease. Others, such as Len Peterson, were being dragged before CBC program officials to justify or explain their drama or documentary forays into matters of burning social concern. Sometimes, they were even told their material could not be aired because of its controversial content.

In his more pessimistic moments, and no doubt influenced by the lack of serious critical treatment of Jake and The Kid, Mitchell expresses obvious regret that he is so well-known for the series, the least serious of his literary children. Sometimes,

he wishes he had adopted a more socially-engaged dramatic form. He remembers going to see the film "Z" and reflecting sadly afterwards that he had wasted his whole life writing humorous and folksy stories when he could have tackled serious social concerns of the day. Then, he remembers the social themes disguised beneath his humour and confesses he wasn't a 'pulpit writer' but, in a broader and more human way, was perhaps just as 'engaged.'

I take just as seriously as sociological or political truths the truths of the ways of humans and of the universe; the truths of the heart. I did my share of social scripts but I was not one of those crusaders like Len Peterson or Lister Sinclair because, in the end, I guess as a person I don't take political or sociological facts seriously. I'm more interested in greed, loneliness, fear, compassion ... It's probably a lack in me but, you see, the danger lies in the fact that, when you start dealing in societal abstractions, you forget your people, you forget your illusions.<sup>15</sup>

Mitchell is quick to point out that, had he wished to, he could have traded upon his first-hand experience of prairie hardship and written stories of a scathingly social-critical nature, set in the drought and Depression.

Don't forget that I'm a guy who was an unpaid guest of the CPR. I rode the freights, went three days without meals, all through those Depression days. I'm not proud of it but never once, conceptually, did I say - what's wrong with society, what's wrong with the system? No way did I try to use the medium to get such a message across forcibly. Yet, I think that's an important use of the stage, but not for me, because of the kind of critter I am.<sup>16</sup>

Mitchell's comment about being yet not being an engaged writer with the Jake and The Kid scripts is typical of his

mixed feelings about the series. His positive feelings are few. He says for example, that writing the Jake plays gave him great challenge and pleasure. It not only afforded him a means of financial support at the time but introduced him to that creative contribution described earlier. In the Jake production crew, he found a creative supplement to his writing, as well as a critic and modifier of his artistic intent. "A novelist or a short story writer or a poet," he says, "is engaged in a pretty lonely pursuit," whereas,

... the lovely thing about radio drama compared to that loneliness of writing is that... as soon as you turn on that radio set and hear other skilled and perceptive people: your director, your composer and your cast ... You are able to distance yourself from your illusion ... and be more objective. Even as you write, you hear those various voices and sounds and, even when they do something different from what you heard in your mind, it may be better because they are making their actorial contribution to it.<sup>17</sup>

Writing the Jake plays was a more immediately satisfying experience for him, compared with writing a novel, which he describes as a five-year proposition. The weekly plays were regular accomplishments and elicited considerable and rapid feedback. Robert Weaver suggests that the radio play seems to have been an easier medium for Mitchell to work in and one that was more congenial to his own personality. People everywhere, and particularly in his home town of High River, he notes, would stop and talk to him about his Jake plays.<sup>18</sup>

Mitchell's negative feelings about Jake and The Kid predominate, however, and are concentrated on the fleeting

and intangible nature of the medium itself. He knows full well that the Jake plays enjoyed immense popularity and vast network audiences that far surpassed those he could ever have achieved through his books or stage plays. But the ephemeral nature of the radio play still worries him.

The one thing that bothered me was the one bash; it hit them all - ba-do-i-ing - and then, no contemplation, no time, no coming back to it, the way one does with a novel, which has a more lasting effect...

It's a false thing but it's one I'm stuck with because, I guess, right from the beginning, my Dad taught me to read when I was four years old, when he was ill with an infected gall bladder ... and I used to crawl in with him and he taught me to read from the newspaper. Then, after he died, in our living room there were two walls of books and I guess I'm a product of my generation. Radio and television were not a part of me.<sup>19</sup>

Millions listened to Jake and The Kid and thousands still remember it. Mitchell is concerned that the series will only last as long as those who remember it. "The ephemeral nature of the medium is such," he fears, that "when those people die, it's gone - probably forever."<sup>20</sup>

Mitchell obviously feels the years spent writing more than two-hundred ephemeral Jake scripts would have been better spent writing novels. He equates the work and volume of the Jake output with ten unwritten novels. None of the production crew for the Jake series take that argument seriously. Many suggest that Mitchell was lacking in self-discipline and the constant radio deadlines provided him with a much-needed incentive. Besides, the Jake stories were, by Mitchell's

own admission, the proving ground or source for a variety of sequences developed in later novels.

Nevertheless, the Jake scripts do not seem to have left him the same artistic and spiritual satisfaction as his published works because of their ephemeralty. Mitchell clearly views the more 'tangible' art forms: books, music, sculpture and painting, as extensions as well as expressions of life. The final sequence in the Jake script "Time Is My Enemy," and in his novel, The Kite, clearly express this view of art. The kite string, yanked so aggressively by Daddy, is the fragile string of life, but a string that has to be given a fairly vigorous yank from time to time in order to leave one's impression. Some people, he suggests, hang on to the string more stubbornly than others, with art as their justification.

With dance and chant and taboo and ritual,  
with fairy tale and song and picture and statue,  
with pattern of word and note and colour and  
conduct, they tried to insist that they did  
not hang on simply for the blind sake of hanging  
on. It was for such a short time that the string  
was held by anyone...<sup>21</sup>

Mitchell clearly views more than two-hundred long-gone radio plays as a rather poor way of hanging on through one's art. He is obviously taking literary stock of himself and finds the Jake and The Kid output too insubstantial. His clear dissatisfaction with radio plays emerged during the York University creative writing seminar mentioned at the start of this study. He outlined several reasons for writing and his final reason underlined his need for literary

posterity, a need not well served by the radio scripts. "The ultimate reason why a person writes," he told the students, is

... because you're mortal. And, if you're going to die and know it doesn't mean anything, there is one thing - and I know it's been largely on my mind and it's why I never was able to take the more instant media seriously; the thing that flashes on the eye or the ear. Film writing, or radio drama, or any of the instant media - it just won't do, because, when you do a book, every time somebody in a library picks up that book and reads it, even though you don't know it, but you know that's what will happen - it's incandescing again; it's happening again. There is a much more persisting thing there. I think that sense of your own mortality, of your limited days - I've said on occasion that probably death stands at the back of every single piece of great art. If you encase that illusion - based on something - if you encase it with form in a piece of art, then you give it a life that continues beyond the life of that experience.<sup>22</sup>

Even that assertion must be viewed as suspect, however, since Mitchell also says the notion of instant and ephemeral art is "not an inartistic thing because the artist isn't interested in closures and finishes; in looking back ... for the artist it's a continuing flow of a way of life ... a continuing flow of creation."<sup>23</sup>

Most of the people associated with Jake and The Kid feel that it was sufficient that the series made a major imprint in its time. "Perhaps the form it was in is not as conducive to widespread use... as is a well-written novel," says Fred Diehl, but "it was radio at its very best and stretched the art form ... and gave us a region and a time ... I think he has left a great deal."<sup>24</sup> Harry Boyle suggests the newspaper column or magazine article are even more ephemeral than radio

drama and suspects Mitchell doesn't realize the extent of his radio accomplishment. Besides, he adds, "You never know about the life-span question and, anyway, not all material deserves to live. He left an impression with the radio series and he even has a book of stories out of it."<sup>25</sup> Arthur Hiller also emphasizes the importance of the series in its own time and, echoing Boyle says,

... I don't think that it is necessary for something to be a contribution to the Canadian or any literary heritage, that it go on forever. The fact that you can provide entertainment and deal with humanistic values, as he did, even for a period, is a valid contribution ... To have been able to reach as many people and to have involved as many people and had as many people caring about his literary works on radio, should bring him great joy and satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

Many of the Jake plays deserve to be kept alive for posterity. Some of the scripts may well be published as a result of current broadcast historical and archival activities, such as those at Concordia University's Radio Drama Project. If contractual constraints can be overcome, some of the plays may well be re-broadcast over the CBC or issued as commercial nostalgia items. Many of the Jake scripts were, however, weak and, especially deprived of that "sound support" necessary to bring them to life, might not make memorable additions to Mitchell's printed legacy. Similarly, unless made available in a nostalgia context, the old broadcasts might sound bizarre and unacceptable to today's audience. Both of these problems bring us to the third and final vantage-point in attempting to make value judgements about the Jake plays.

It is perhaps even impossible to assess the Jake scripts and programs objectively from today's perspective. Jake and The Kid 'worked' in its time and circumstances, but these are long past for both the series and for radio.

The plays happened at the right time for both Mitchell and his audience, due to a unique set of conditions that could never be repeated. Mitchell wrote for radio because that was where the opportunities and money were. Jake reached enthusiastic millions because radio drama was one of the rare and nationally accessible cultural outlets with no real competition. Both these facts are difficult to appreciate in today's terms. Mitchell feels writers today would not dream of concentrating on radio writing, but would rather tend to diversify and work their material for several different media. More glamour attaches itself to writing or acting for the visual media and, despite moves toward equity, radio fees are less attractive than those in television and film.

Radio and its audiences have radically changed since the "Golden Days of Radio Drama." Radio, probably because of its information orientation and mobile listenership, can no longer hold a large yet captivated and concentrating audience. Rendered blasé and insensitive by instant satellite TV relays from around the world or the solar system, today's audiences have largely lost their sense of wonder about radio and their ability to lend it their imaginations. Esse Ljungh, who has attempted to revive the radio fare of the 'good old days,'

sadly concludes that today's audience is thoroughly video-trained and video-oriented and has been brought up to "believe that only seeing is believing."<sup>27</sup> He feels that today's audiences are bored, confused or impatient while listening to complex and imaginative sound structures.

CBC Radio Drama, no longer able to command the identification or loyalty of large network audiences, has become a minority and a somewhat elitist proposition. Stylistically and technologically, the radio drama has gravitated towards exploitation of the technological advances open to it in the higher fidelity and more discriminating audience of FM. Stereophonic techniques, including the natural Kunst-Kopf system, have been exploited, as well as some quadraphonic productions, and much of the fare has been highly-experimental in nature. Emphasis has often been upon aural effect and upon the possibilities of such technology for unconventional approaches such as multi-levels of action or consciousness. The emphasis has, therefore, tended to be upon the process and form rather than upon a more popularly accessible story or 'straight' dramatic enactment. Where the emphasis in the "Golden Age" was upon the actors and their story, it has often of late been upon the medium itself and its unorthodox technical possibilities, with the story and actors almost secondary.

In that overall context, it is obvious that a 'fifties radio play could hardly impress by today's media and sound

expectations. The Jake radio plays are both technically and stylistically very passé. Radio, according to Martin Esslin, suffers the same fate as old films.

By permanently fixing the performance as well as the text, these media condemn their products to an inevitable process of obsolescence, simply because their styles of acting, dress and makeup, as well as the techniques of recording, change, so that recordings of ancient radio plays or old films bear the hallmarks of the quaint and slightly ridiculous products of another epoch.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the old, scratchy, acetate recordings of the Jake plays, and even the later taped episodes, must be listened to as part of a series and part of an era. Auditioned casually by the listener of the late 'seventies, these old recordings suffer from all of the drawbacks cited by Esslin.

It is understandable, therefore, that only those with a profound broadcast historical interest and the ability to view the plays in their proper perspective will assess them objectively. Someone who nostalgically remembers evenings spent by the old wooden radio set, often as a family, listening to Jake and The Kid, would enjoy hearing the archival recordings, but quite subjectively. It might even be suggested that, in order to fully understand, appreciate and be moved by the plays, one should have experienced both the broadcasts and the era, first-hand, to summon up the necessary atmosphere and identification. A media and social generation gap operates to remove the present analyst or casual listener alike from the context that shaped and made possible the Jake and The Kid broadcasts. Even the social themes dealt with in the series

are, in and of themselves, largely relevant to today's society, but they would simply not be expressed in that way any more.

Quite apart from a nostalgia context, there are frequently attempts to bring Jake and The Kid to life again. For all the reasons cited, these are probably destined to fail, even if, as is currently rumoured, Mitchell himself might play the role of Jake. Esse Ljungh was brought back from retirement in 1969 to direct Fred Diehl's revival of the series. Diehl exploited all the technological advances and enjoyed generous funds and painstaking re-mix. An attempt was made to bring the productions more up to date, but Ljungh's direction made the series a mere high-fidelity re-enactment of the past, without the magic of that past and without the genius of John Drainie and Tommy Tweed. The plays were broadcast in 1969 and 1970 in the 'Theatre 10:30' slot, where they met with interested but hardly ecstatic audience response. They were also distributed to foreign broadcasters on Transcription Service discs but broke no records for world distribution of a CBC drama production. The revival did not achieve a fraction of the popularity enjoyed by its predecessors. Jake and The Kid simply no longer 'works' in today's context. As an historical or nostalgia item, it can still generate some interest. As an attempt to recreate Canada's media and social past, it cannot succeed. The magic of live radio drama and of that era have gone. "There can be no return to the specific conditions which produced the CBC drama of the 'forties and 'fifties,"

Howard Fink maintains. "The history of 'live' radio drama, superceded by tape, TV and legitimate theatre - is a closed chapter in the book of Canadian drama."<sup>29</sup>

Jake and The Kid, its broadcast legend and its reflection of a time and region of Canada's history, are a very large part of that chapter. The series made its contribution in its time. It provided a satisfying outlet and vehicle for Mitchell's unique art, and for his social comment. It reached and both entertained and enlightened millions of Canadians. What more can be asked of the popular radio play, as art form or as communications medium?

NOTES

CHAPTER SEVEN

- <sup>1</sup>Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August 1978.
- <sup>2</sup>Harry Boyle in introduction to Andrew Allan: A Self-Portrait (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, Nov. 1977.
- <sup>4</sup>Mitchell claims that CBC program official, Neil Morrison, conducted a virtual campaign against the "smut" in the Jake programs, bringing the question of "outraged listeners" up at top CBC meetings. He says he only learned of this when going through mail in Harry Boyle's office many years later. Boyle says, "Morrison had no sense of humour and was not trying to snuff out the Jake series so much as that he just could not understand it." Morrison came out of the student Christian movement and was a straight-laced, old-fashioned moralist," says Boyle and adds, "I think it was scandalous to him, not so much obscene as risqué. He always used to think it was making fun of people. He made a lot of fuss about the series, but out of all proportion to the actual amount of bad mail." (Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977. Personal interview with Harry Boyle, Aug. 1978.)
- <sup>5</sup>Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1977.
- <sup>6</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Nov. 1977.
- <sup>7</sup>Hugo McPherson et al in Fiction 1940-1960, Literary History of Canada, Vol 2. ed. Carl Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 223.
- <sup>8</sup>Margaret Laurence, "A Canadian Classic," Review of Jake and The Kid, Canadian Literature 11 (Winter 1962), pp. 68-70.
- <sup>9</sup>Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 106.
- <sup>10</sup>Martin Esslin, An Anatomy of Drama (London: Abacus - Sphere Books, 1978), p. 7.
- <sup>11</sup>Personal interview with Peter Francis, March 1977.
- <sup>12</sup>For details on audience reaction and psychological view of family serials on radio, see Gielgud, pp. 71-72.
- <sup>13</sup>Personal interview with Al Johnson, January 1979.

- <sup>14</sup>Personal interview with Howard Fink, September 1978.
- <sup>15</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, August 1975.
- <sup>18</sup>Personal interview with Robert Weaver, March 1978.
- <sup>19</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, February 1978.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>W.O. Mitchell, The Kite (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), p. 210.
- <sup>22</sup>W.O. Mitchell, from taped seminar with creative writing students at York University, Toronto, February 1978.
- <sup>23</sup>Personal interview with W.O. Mitchell, Feb. 1977.
- <sup>24</sup>Personal interview with Fred Diehl, August, 1978.
- <sup>25</sup>Personal interview with Harry Boyle, August, 1978.
- <sup>26</sup>Taped exchange with Arthur Hiller, August, 1978.
- <sup>27</sup>Personal interview with Esse Ljungh, March 1978.
- <sup>28</sup>Esslin, p. 33.
- <sup>29</sup>Howard Fink, "Canadian Radio Drama: Some Notes on Its History and Influence," in Journal of Canadian Fiction, Vol. 3 No. 1 Winter 1974, Montreal, pp. 70-72.

# APPENDIX

## A: LIST OF JAKE AND THE KID RADIO PLAYS\* 1950-1970.

BROADCAST DATE	EPISODE TITLE
June 27 1950	"The Oldest Old-Timer."
July 4 1950	(Title unavailable)
July 11 1950	"The Day Jake Made Her Rain."
July 18 1950	"Women Is Humans."
July 25 1950	(Title unavailable)
August 1 1950	"You Gotta Teeter."
August 8 1950	(Title unavailable)
August 15 1950	"Pups and Babies Don't Count."
August 22-Sept 5 1950	(Titles unavailable)
Sept. 12 1950	"Grass Roots is Grass Roots."
Sept. 19 1950	"Jake and the Dirt Farmer's Daughter."
Sept. 26 1950	"Jack-Rabbit Baby."
Oct. 3 1950	Something's Gotta Go!"
Oct. 10 1950	"Turkeys, Turkeys, Turkeys."
Oct. 17 1950	"Is That the Truth?" Part 1.
Oct. 24 1950	"Is That the Truth?" Part 2.
Oct. 31 1950	"The Day Jake Made Her Rain."
Nov. 7 1950	(Title unavailable)
Nov. 14 1950	"I Was a Love Slave."
Nov. 22 1950	"Scandal, Scandal, Scandal!"
Nov. 29 1950	"Jake Trumper, Travellin' Man."
Dec. 5 - 19 1950	(Titles unavailable)
Dec. 26 1950 (Xmas special)	"Frankincents an' Meer."

\* see p. 353.

BROADCAST DATE	EPISODE TITLE
Jan. 2 1951	"Just a Knack."
Jan. 9 1951	"Nature's Got Her Flags a-Flyin'"
Jan. 16 1951	"Lo, the Noble Redskin."
Jan. 23 1951	"Gents Don't Chaw."
Jan. 30 1951	"Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy."
Feb. 4 1951	"A Deal's A Deal."
Feb. 11 - 25 1951	(Titles unavailable)
March 4 1951	"Woman Trouble."
March 11 1951	"Baby Trouble." (Part 2 of "Woman Trouble.")
March 18 1951	"The Man Who Came to Rummy."
March 25 1951	(Title unavailable)
April 1 1951	"The Old Grey Car Ain't What She Ought to Be."
April 8 1951	"A Man's Best Friend Is His Car."
April 15 1951	"Curling Fever."
April 22 1951	"Politics, Politics, Politics."
April 29 1951	"One-Hundred-Per-Cent Canadian."
Sept. 30 1951	"Invention Fever." (Part 1)
Oct. 7 1951	"Any Old Knives." (Part 2)
Oct. 14 1951	"Honey and Hoppers." (Part 1)
Oct. 21 1951	"Prairie's Scarey." (Part 2)
Oct. 28 1951	"Wheat King Junior." (Part 1)
Nov. 4 1951	"Wheat Is Where You Find Her." (Part 2)
Nov. 11 1951	"Watch Them Art'ries."

BROADCAST DATE

EPISODE TITLE

Nov. 18 1951	"Royalty is Royalty." (Part 1)
Nov. 25 1951	"Prairie Flower." (Part 2)
Dec. 2 1951	"History Repeats Herself."
Dec. 9 1951	"Brokenshell Flood."
Dec. 16 1951	"Bitter With the Sweet."
Dec. 23 1951	"The Tongue Is Worse Than The Binder Whip." (Part 1)
Dec. 25 1951 (Special)	"Crocus Christmas."
Dec. 30 1951	"Prairie Lawyers." (Part 2)
Jan. 6 1952	"Lead a Horse to Culture."
Jan. 13 1952	"Going to a Fire."
Jan. 20 1952	"Love's Wild Magic."
Jan. 27 1952	"Earn Money At Home."
Feb. 3 1952	"History's Gotta Be Acc'rate."
Feb. 10 1952	"Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy."
Feb. 17 1952	"The Grim Gash of Death."
Feb. 24 1952	"Crocus Under The Microscope."
March 2 1952	"A Man's Age is His Own Business."
March 9 1952	"A New Broom Sweeps Clean."
March 16 1952	"Political Dynamite."
March 23 1952	"Water Witchery."
March 30 1952	"R.I.P."
April 6 1952	"A Man's Best Friend is His Enemy."
April 13 1952	"The Pipe of Peace."
April 20 1952	"Hoist on Yer Own Puh-tar."

BROADCAST DATE

April 27 1952

May 4 1952

May 11 1952

May 18 1952

May 25 1952

Dec. 25 1952 (Xmas Special)

Jan. 11 1953

Jan. 18 1953

Jan. 25 1953

Feb. 1 1953

Feb. 8 1953

Feb. 15 1953

Feb. 22 1953

March 1 1953

March 8 1953

March 15 1953

March 22 1953

March 29 1953

April 5 1953

April 12 1953

April 19 1953

April 26 1953

May 3 1953

EPISODE TITLE

"No Time to Go." (Cancelled)

"Young Pete."

"No Time to Go."

"Expert on Women." (Or "Women  
Don't Fight.")

"It's a Knack."

"All Is Calm, All is Bright."

"An Old Man's Fancy."

"The Other Side of the Coin."

"Going to a Fire."

"Duel At Dawn." (Part 1)

"Duel At Dawn." (Part 2)

"Love's Wild Magic." (Part 1)

"Love's Wild Magic." (Part 2)

"Not With a Bang but a Whimper."

"Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy."

"Daddy Johnson, Travellin' Man."

"Hometown Laughter."

"Dirt Independent."

"Adults is Humans."

"The Old Gray West She Ain't  
What She Used to Be."

"Earn Money At Home."

"Women On Ice."

"Scandal, Scandal, Scandal!"

BROADCAST DATE

EPISODE TITLE

May 10 1953

"Luck and The Lord." (Or "Nature Knows Best.")

May 17 1953

"Royalty Is Royalty" (Part 1)

May 24 1953

"Prairie Flower." (Part 2)

Sept. 27 1953

"Nature's Got Her Flags

A 'Flyin'." (Revival)

Oct. 4 1953

"Goin' To London to See The Queen." (Part 1)

Oct. 11 1953

"The Finger of Chance." (Part 2)

Oct. 18 1953

"The Old and The Young Of It."

Oct. 25 1953

"Honey and Hoppers." (Part 1)  
Revival.

Nov. 1 1953

"Prairie's Scarey." (Part 2)

Nov. 8 1953

"Mind Over Madam." (Part 1)

Nov. 15 1953

"Unfinished Business." (Part 2)

Nov. 22 1953

"Never The Twain."

Nov. 29 1953

"Human Nature Rears Her Ugly Head."

Dec. 6 1953

"Jake and The Medicine Man."

Dec. 13 1953

"A Relative Matter."

Dec. 20 1953

"And So Is The West."

Dec. 27 1953

"Turn The Other Cheek."

Jan. 3 1954

"Settin' Ducks."

Jan. 10 1954

"Mr. A and Mr. B."

Jan. 17 1954

"Wrong-Turn Greer."

BROADCAST DATE

Jan. 24 1954

Jan. 31 1954

Feb. 7 1954

Feb. 14 1954

Feb. 21 1954

Feb. 28 1954

March 7 1954

March 14 1954

March 21 1954

March 28 1954

April 4 1954

April 11 1954

April 18 1954

Sept. 26 1954

Oct. 3 1954

Oct. 10 1954

Oct. 17 1954

Oct. 24 1954

Oct. 31 1954

Nov. 7 1954

Nov. 14 1954

Nov. 21 1954

Nov. 28 1954

EPISODE TITLE

"Grand Exalted Mediator."

"The Case of the Backward Dog."

"You Gotta Teeter."

"Back With a Vengeance."

"Struck Rich."

"A Man's Best Friend." (Part 1)

"Murder Will Out." (Part 2)

"The Old Gray Car Ain't What  
She Used to Be." (Part 1)

"A Man's Best Friend Is His  
Car." (Part 2)

"Nature's Got Her Flags A'Flyin'."

"Pedigree Is Everything."

"Adults Is Humans."

"The Pipe Of Peace."

"Wheat King Junior." (Part 1)

"Wheat Is Where You Find Her."  
(Part 2)

"Education."

"Old or New."

"Ingredient H."

"What Fools."

"King of All The Country."

"Crocus Culture."

"Daddy and the Gander."

"Male and Female."

BROADCAST DATE	EPISODE TITLE
Dec. 5 1954	"He Built The Country."
Dec. 12 1954	"Hip, Thigh and Shinbone." (Part 1)
Dec. 19 1954	"Hair Is Here To Stay." (Part 2)
Dec. 26 1954	"An Old-Fashioned Christmas."
Jan. 2 1955	"And So Is The West."
Jan. 9 1955	"Sink or Swim."
Jan. 16 1955	"Way Too Late."
Jan. 23 1955	"Fire With Fire."
Jan. 30 1955	"Love's Wild Magic."
Feb. 6 1955	"You Can't Tell About Nothin'."
Feb. 13 1955	"Young Pete."
Feb. 20 1955	"Afternoon of a Young Stream."
Feb. 27 1955	"Elbow Room."
March 6 1955	"Choose Your Partner."
March 13 1955	"Not All Men Have a Price."
March 20 1955	"More Than Meets the Senses."
March 27 1955	"Pups and Babies Don't Count."
April 3 1955	"Bones, Bones, Bones."
April 10 1955	"Jake and the Dirt Farmer's Daughter."
April 17 1955	"Documentary From the Banana Belt."
April 24 1955	"Prairie Lawyer."
May 1 1955	"Time is My Enemy."

BROADCAST DATE

EPISODE TITLE

May 8 1955	"Dr. Winesinger To the Rescue."
May 15 1955	"The Human Way."
May 22 1955	"Invention Fever." (Part 1)
May 29 1955	"Any Old Knives." (Part 2)
June 5 1955	"They Are Always With Us."
June 12 1955	"Gettin' Born."
June 19 1955	"Positive Weather."
Sept. 29 1955	"King of the Wild Frontier." (Or, "King of All The Country.")
Oct. 6 1955	"Earn Money At Home."
Oct. 13 1955	"Visitin' Man."
Oct. 20 1955	"Bull-Ring Johnson."
Oct. 27 1955	"Honey and Hoppers." (Part 1)
Nov. 3 1955	"Prairie's Scarey." (Part 2)
Nov. 10 1955	"Let All the Golden Trumpets Sing."
Nov. 17 1955	"Golden Jubilee Citizen."
Nov. 24 1955	"Hoist on Yer Own Puh-Tar."
Dec. 1 1955	"Phenomenum, Phenomena."
Dec. 8 1955	"Life Is Here To Stay."
Dec. 15 1955	"Little Did I know."
Dec. 22 1955	"All Is Calm."
Dec. 25 1955 (Special)	"Christmas Almanach." (Or, An Old-Fashioned Christmas.)
Dec. 29 1955	"Hearts and Crocuses."
Jan. 5 1956	"The Man Who Came To Rummy." (Part 1)

BROADCAST DATE	EPISODE TITLE
Jan. 12 1956	"Cabin Fever." (Part 2)
Jan. 19 1956	"Women of Crocus, Unite!" (Part 1)
Jan. 26 1956	"Watch Your Language." (Part 2)
Feb. 2 1956	"Mind Over Madam." (Part 1)
Feb. 5 1956 (Special)	"Time is My Enemy." (CBC Stage)
Feb. 9 1956	"Unfinished Business." (Part 2)
Feb. 16 1956	"Never The Twain."
Feb. 23 1956	"Human Nature Rears Her Ugly Head."
March 1 1956	"Turn The Other Cheek."
March 8 1956	"A Man's Best Friend." (Part 1)
March 15 1956	"Murder Will Out." (Part 2)
March 22 1956	"Jake and The Medicine Man." (Directed by Sandy Stewart.)
March 29 1956	"Sweet Reason Conquers All." (Cancelled due to hockey game.)
April 5 1956	"Justice Isn't That Blind." (Directed by Sandy Stewart.)
April 12 1956	"Sweet Reason Conquers All."
April 19 1956	"Auction Fever."
April 26 1956	"Take Her Gentle, Take Her Easy."
Dec. 25 1956 (Special)	"Christmas Almanach."
During 1957. (Repeat series)	(Sixteen episodes - Titles unavailable.)
Nov. 7 1957	"Honey and Hoppers." (CBC 'Folio')

BROADCAST DATE	EPISODE TITLE
Sept. 3 1959	"Ingredient H." (1 Hour, Summer Stage)
Aug. 10 1960	"Earn Money At Home." (CBC 'First Person.')
Fall 1960 (Repeat Series)	(Twelve episodes - Titles unavailable.)
June 23 1963	"Royalty Is Royalty." (CBC Summer Stage.)
June 12 1969 (Revival Series):	"Yes, My Darling Daughter." (Theatre 10:30)
Nov. 24 1969	"King Of All The country." (Theatre 10:30)
Nov. 25 1969	"Mind Over Madam." (Theatre 10:30)
Nov. 26 1969	"The Man Who Came To Rummy." (Theatre 10:30)
Nov. 27 1969	"Cabin Fever." (Theatre 10:30)
Nov. 28 1969	"Well, Well, Well!" (Theatre 10:30)
Feb. 16 - 23 1970	(Five episodes - titles unspecified.) (Theatre 10:30)
July 7 - 11 1970	(Five episodes - titles unspecified.) (Theatre 10:30)
August 10 - 14 1970	(Five episodes - titles unspecified.) (Theatre 10:30)

BROADCAST DATE

EPISODE TITLE

Revival Productions:

June 1970 - Feb. 1975

"King of All The Country"

(World distribution by

"Well, Well, Well!"

Radio Canada International

"Mind Over Madam."

on Transcription Service

"The Man Who Came To Rummy."

discs. (Limited relays.)

"Cabin Fever."

Selected from Fred Diehl

"Woman Trouble"

series on CBC network,

"Love's Wild Magic."

1969-1970.

"One-Hundred-Per-Cent Canadian."

"Nature's Got Her Flags A'Flyin'"

"Hip, Thigh, and Shinbone."

Sept. 1970 - Aug. 1979:

No network repeats

of Jake plays.

\* APPENDIX A - NOTE

This list was compiled and modified from the lists and holdings of the CBC Drama Department in Toronto, The Radio Drama Project, Concordia University, Montreal, and the Special Collections Department (W.O. Mitchell papers) of the University of Calgary Library. It is not complete and there are conflicting dates and titles among the three sources, as well as many missing titles, suggesting the need for further archival research. Some of the conflicting dates and titles may be due to pre-empted programs. Where conflicts were found, dates and titles of those scripts located and studied were used.

There is also conflict as to the starting date of the first Jake and The Kid summer series. This is listed in CBC Drama sheets as June 27 1950 and no script or recording was found for that date. A promotional announcement at the end of the first Jake play, The Liar Hunter, on May 20 1950, indicates the starting date for the Jake series as July 4 1950. However, the pilot episode, "The Day Jake Made Her Rain," is described in its introduction as the third program in the series and was broadcast on July 11 1950. This would indicate that there was, in fact, a first episode on June 27 1950.

# APPENDIX

## B: LIST OF OTHER W.O. MITCHELL RADIO PLAYS: 1949-1979

BROADCAST DATE	TITLE	PROGRAM
March 27 1949	"The Devil's Instrument."	CBC Stage.
May 1 1949	"A Chaperon For Maggie."	CBC Stage.
May 21 1950	"The Liar Hunter." (First Jake script)	CBC Stage.
July 2 1950	"Out Of The Mouths."	Summer Stage.
July 20 1950	"The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon."	Summer Stage.
Nov. 8 1953	"The Devil's Instrument."	CBC Stage.
Feb. 28 1954	"The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon."	CBC Stage.
July 20 1955	"Who Has Seen The Wind."	CBC Wednesday Night.
Feb. 5 1956	"Time Is My Enemy." (Special 1-hour Jake script)	CBC Stage.
Aug. 31 1958	"Who Has Seen The Wind."	Summer Stage.
April 26 1959	"The Devil's Instrument."	CBC Stage.
Sept. 30 1959	"Ingredient H." (Special 1-hour Jake script)	Summer Stage.
Nov. 21 1959	"The Devil's Instrument."	CBC 'Folio.'
July 10 1960	"The Alien."	Summer Stage.
Fall 1960	<u>Foothill Fables.</u> (Fourteen episodes - titles unspecified.)	Series

BROADCAST DATE	TITLE	PROGRAM
Dec. 25 1961	"After Mary's Boy." (Xmas story from <u>Foothill Fables.</u> )	Drama Special.
Dec. 31 1961	"Sixty-Per-Cent Sire." ( <u>Foothill Fable.</u> )	Drama Special.
Jan. 7 - March 25 1962	Foothill Fables. (Twelve episodes - titles unspecified.)	Series
March 7 1962	"The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon."	'Playdate.'
Sept. 16 1962	"Open Up The Door and Let Her Come Right In."	Summer Stage.
Nov. 5 1962	"The Devil's Instrument."	'Festival.'
Oct. 27 - Dec. 29, 1963	<u>Foothill Fables.</u> (Ten episodes - titles unspecified.)	Series.
Jan. 7 - 19 1964	<u>Foothill Fables.</u> (Three episodes - titles unspecified.)	Series.
June 12 1964	"The Kite."	Summer Stage.
April 26 1965	"The Kite."	'Show of the Week.'
May 15 1966	Who Has Seen The Wind."	CBC Stage.
Jan. 14 1967	"Out Of The Mouths."	CBC Playhouse.
Jan. 14 1968	"The Alien."	CBC Stage.
March 3 1968	"The Black Bonspiel of Willie MacCrimmon."	CBC Stage.

BROADCAST DATE	TITLE	PROGRAM
Aug. 1 1968	"The Alien." (Replay).	F.M. Theatre
Dec. 2 - 6 1968	<u>Foothill Fables.</u> (Five episodes - titles unspecified.)	Theatre 10:30
Oct. 26 1974	"Back To Beulah."	CBC Stage.
Jan. 10 1976	"Back To Beulah."	CBC Stage.
Jan. 1976 -		
Aug. 1979:		
No <u>network</u> broad- casts of Mitchell plays.		

## APPENDIX

### C: WRITINGS BY AND ABOUT W.O. MITCHELL

For a complete list of novels, short stories, articles and other works by and about W.O. Mitchell, see anonymous Bibliography in the W.O. Mitchell Papers, Special Collections Department, University of Calgary Library, entitled: A Bibliography of the Published Literature of W.O. Mitchell and Some Criticisms and Reviews of his Writings, 1942 - 1971.

W.O. Mitchell works, or writings about him, cited or consulted for this study, are listed in the Works Cited section that follows.

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Hulet, Tamara Lyn. "The Sense of Place in W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen The Wind." M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, August 1978.

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Leacock, Stephen. My Remarkable Uncle. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1965, p. xi.

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- The Kite. Toronto: Macmillan, 1962.
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