

The Effect of Regionalism on Western Canadian Fiction With a Particular Look at W.O. Mitchell's Novel *Who Has Seen The Wind*

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This paper is divided into three parts. The first is a discussion of Western Canadian regional literary criticism with specific attention paid to the main critical trends. The second part is a discussion of the central issues that contribute to our understanding of the region's influence on the quality of the fiction. The third part attempts to apply some of the conclusions to W.O. Mitchell's novel *Who Has Seen The Wind*.

The most dominant trend in Western Canadian literary criticism attributes a disproportionate role to the impact of the peculiar Western landscape upon the mind of the people and upon their artistic production. It puts the individual in direct confrontation with what it considers to be an alien landscape. The opposite trend reverses the roles of the individual and nature without any further modifications, so that man is seen as the active participant who imposes his attitudes upon the interaction between the individual and his human environment.

W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen The Wind* is a reaction against the two conflicting interpretations of the Canadian West that were dominant in the fiction of his time. It is a realistic attempt to depict all the contradictions present in the region and at dispersing the illusions implanted in the mind of the Westerners. This aim necessitated a panoramic representation of a wide section of the Western society in order to provide a new and comprehensive vision of the entire spectrum of the interacting forces.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first is a discussion of Western Canadian regional literary criticism with specific attention paid to the main critical trends. The second part is a discussion of the main issues that, I think, can increase our understanding of the region's influence on the artistic quality of the works it inspires. The third part is an attempt to apply some of the conclusions reached in the second part of W.O. Mitchell's novel *Who has Seen The Wind*.

Of all the Canadian regions, the West has been second only to Quebec in its attempt to define the main features and characteristics of literary criticism through the analysis of its own literary productions. This exceptional self-scrutiny arises for several reasons. First, there is the effect of the distinct landscape and climate which separate the region geographically from the rest of Canada. Indeed, Francis Douglas says that "Historians of the Prairie West often begin their studies of the history of the region with reference to the region's geography, on the assumption, implied if not stated, that geography has played an important role in the history of the prairie region."¹

Second, there is the late and rapid settlement of the West which has left its imprint on the social structure of the region. Third, there is the huge distance that separates that region from Ottawa, the capital of Canada and the center of power, which when coupled with the settlers' consciousness of being exploited by the central provinces (such as Ontario and Quebec) leads to a political and economic awareness of distinctiveness. Fourth, the recent discovery of oil and mineral resources, and the consequent economic power acquired, encourage an independent search for identity. Fifth, the political and social problems created by the crisis in the province of Quebec set a clear example to be followed, although in a different way, in the West. Finally, and most significantly for literary studies, there is the influence of the highly developed regional studies of the American West which stimulated a similar approach in the Canadian region.

Though many critical essays and books have been written on the Western region, it remains one of the most undefined among Canadian regions. Stereotyped clichés derived from the myth of the West block the way to any objective or scientific approach. There is an insistent attempt at creating a sense of identity that has no relation whatsoever to the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions prevailing in the area. The different critical views that approach this issue are mainly characterized by a one-sided opinion that is unable to conceive the dialectical interaction of the numerous elements that contribute to the idea of the West.

The most dominant trend in Western Canadian regional literary criticism is the one which attributes a disproportionate role to the impact of the

landscape. It emphasizes the effect of such landscape upon the mind of the people inhabiting the region and consequently upon all their artistic productions. Northrop Frye mentions the impact of the Canadian landscape upon the artist's mind:

It is a country in which nature makes a direct impression on the artist's mind, an impression of its primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism, its indifference to the supreme value placed on life within human society, its faceless, mindless unconsciousness, which fosters life without benevolence and destroys it without malice.²

J'nan Morse Sellery claims that regional writing refers to the "individual" and the "particular", while simultaneously "homogenizing" life to present "a unified view of life".³ It considers the individual in complete isolation from his human, social, political, economic, and cultural environment and puts him in direct confrontation with what it considers a pervasive and alien landscape whose vastness and harshness threaten his very existence. Russel M. Brown argues that: "The Western landscape is one without boundaries quite often. So you have to order it somehow to survive."⁴ Henry Kreisel defines man that inhabits this region as:

Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, from the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie.⁵

This narrow-minded view of human life as a mere confrontation between active natural forces and passive human individuals leads Kreisel to affirm that any study of Western literature "must, of necessity, begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind"⁶ and leads Ken Mitchell to state at the beginning of his introduction to a collection of Western writings:

Out of the Prairie West and the emotions evoked by its infinity of each and sky, by its solitude and separateness and harsh climate, has come a body of writing that is different in theme, subject, and tone from that of the rest of Canada.⁷

Naturally, this simplistic, deterministic, and materialistic outlook can only lead to the formulation of a set of stereotyped themes and images closely related to the landscape and imposed upon the works of art in an attempt to define the region accordingly.

Critics, such as Eli Mandel⁸ and Ken Mitchell,⁹ read the impact of nature on the individual as decisive. This insistent attempt at defining the predominant themes in Western literature from the vantage point of the

subservient role of the individual in his relation to nature has led to a violent reaction that has brought an opposite trend to dominate the literary criticism. This trend is mainly characterized by reversing the roles of the individual and nature without any further modifications.¹⁰

Man is seen as the active participant who is imposing his own attitudes and feelings upon the exterior landscape which acts as a passive recipient of these subjective impressions. Frank Davery in "Towards the End of Regionalism" questions different assumptions about regionalism. He considers both "region and regionalism. He considers both "region and regionalism not as locations but as ideologies" within the "nation state, colonialism, and globalization".¹¹ As a consequence of this view, the region is seen not as an influence determining the literary products of the authors but as an imaginative outcome of the attempts of particular authors to define it according to their artistic vision. This view finds its best illustration in the criticism of John Moss.¹² Although he acknowledges the pervasive and determining factor of nature in much of the Canadian experience, he goes on to comment that anthropocentrism has no place: "The landscape and its seasons have no ethics, consciousness. Nature is neither willful nor benign, malevolent nor beneficent."¹³

A similar point of view is also endorsed by Eli Mandel, who, after enumerating the dominant themes in Western literature as presented by Kreisel, only adds:

This is an extraordinary, fine and perceptive list of major themes - or images if you will - of prairie man. For Kreisel, the unifying theme is that of the impact of a particular environment. All that I could add is that I would go further and find the unifying theme and images in the mind itself, projecting onto the land its image...¹⁴

This last quotation reveals clearly the limitation of this approach. Although by reversing the roles of the individual and nature Mandel was able to get rid of some of the illusions nourished by the previous approach, his adoption of the same dualistic view of life led to the endorsement of the same stereotyped themes. As such, both approaches are not really able to increase our understanding of either the region considered or of the literature related to it. Or more accurately, we can say that both approaches distort reality by mechanically imposing a preconceived dualistic view of life upon both the region and its literature.

An attempt to study the relation between the individual and nature as one of dynamic interaction has been made by Dick Harrison in his book *Unnamed Country* and by Arthur Adason in his article "Identity Through Metaphor."

In his *Unnamed Country*, Dick Harrison sees Western Canadian literature as the product of a continuous dynamic process involving:

a basically European society spreading itself across a very un-European landscape. It is rooted in that first settlement in which the pioneer faced two main obstacles: The new land and the old culture. The land was a challenge not only physically but psychologically; like all unsettled territories it had no human associations, no ghosts, none of the significance imagination gives to the expressionless face of the earth after men have lived and died there.¹⁵

The process is crystallized in the continuous attempts of the settlers and the writers at imposing their own culture on the vast wilderness, attempts which take the form of naming it: "Naming is our way of ritually controlling the unknown so that we will not lose it or be lost in it." This attempt at naming continued through several stages. In the first stage, there was a blind attempt at imposing foreign models upon the prairie. In the second stage, the myth of the promised garden provided the necessary terminology to be used in describing the reaction of the inhabitants to the new opportunities available to them in the new land. In the third stage, the optimistic view of the promised garden was replaced by a pessimistic exaggeration of the dark aspects of nature in the prairie. The final stage can be seen as an attempt to get rid of past illusions and to define the prairie by selecting the suitable terminology from the abundant material available to the modern writer. In the words of the Alberta author Sid Marty, the "Chinook" is the "Creator Wind"; its impact is readily seen "everywhere you look"; and "its song is the story of Chinook Country" (1995, 11,35).¹⁷

With all these apparent virtues and the insights it throws on several specific aspects of the problem, Harrison's theory has a few serious limitations. First of all, it ignores the fact that, in the culture of the first settlers, the relation between man and nature was anything but a harmonious one. Second, although Harrison starts from a dynamic concept of the evolution of Western Canadian literature, he lapses later in his argument into a static concept when he sees the successive stages undergone by this literature as purely mechanical reactions to previous stages. He is unable to integrate the economic, social and political material into his main argument. These remain as external information helping only to fill the gaps created by his mechanical understanding of the process. Finally, the most fatal flaw in Harrison's argument is his own belief that nature exhibits certain inherent characteristics independent of man's reaction to it, and that these characteristics can be grasped and articulated only if writers look at it in an objective way. This belief leads Harrison to accuse early Canadian writers of being literally

blind and unable to see the objective reality of the prairie and to his hope that contemporary writers will be able to surpass the limitations of their predecessors. He is unable to realize that individuals' reactions to nature will always reveal the cultural milieu of certain specific historical periods.

Adamson starts with an even more comprehensive view of the problem. For him a region can be defined as

a nexus of place, time and culture. Geographical implication can not be isolated from historical and cultural realities. Man's habitat is subject to a moment in the flow of time we call history and to the inherited subjectivity of the observer... A sense of identity is, largely, what is derived from the confluence of these things that add up to regionalism.¹⁹

Yet, instead of going on to present us with an analysis of this complex reality, Adamson shifts his entire argument onto purely subjective grounds. He believes that modern culture with its rationalism and naturalism has alienated the individual from the organic reality of nature. In this culture, society tries to impose its sense of order upon the Canadian world and to pressure the individual to accept it at the expense of his true inner self.

As such, in order to restore the normal balance, both the individual and the cultural have to be related to nature:

Culture, then, must be in intimate relationship with the land, the land as a correspondence to inner vision...

The tension between man and nature makes the vitality of culture.²⁰

This shift back to dualism leads Adamson to a purely stylistic definition of region which, according to him, can be seen as a

metaphor that is implanted by influences from without, from society, from culture; or metaphor that arises itself in the mind, in the creative imagination, as art... Metaphor relates man to the world in which he lives.²¹

Another critical approach in which the land still figures as a decisive element is, strangely enough, the mythic approach. Here, instead of trying to solve the problems of the earlier approaches by taking a more comprehensive and dialectic view of reality, there is an attempt to disregard this fact altogether as an inartistic material that has to be replaced by mythological creations. This approach can best be illustrated by the works of W.H. New and Eli Mandel.

In his book *Articulating West*, New starts by giving a strictly subjective definition of the West: Whenever one is in the realm of disorder, imagination, irrationality, and myth, he is then in the West, and whenever one is in the realm

of order, reason, and reality, he is in the East. Therefore, the specific location of the West does not really matter; it can be located within the boundaries of Canada or anywhere outside it; it can be a real place or even an imaginary one. Yet, New is writing a book about Canadian writers who write specifically about the Canadian West, thus negating his own argument.

As for the Canadian Western literature, New sees it as a continuous movement towards exploring the unknown which, when articulated in an artistic work, becomes known and thus necessitates movement further ahead into still undiscovered areas. The early Canadian writers were trying to comprehend the reality of the strange landscape with which they came into contact upon their arrival in the West. Because of their lack of the proper terminology to describe their unique impressions, their task was not an easy one. What they were doing in reality was “creating a rhetoric of landscape.” By the middle of the twentieth century a fully artistic language had been developed out of the real landscape through which the writers moved. But since this language is overlaid with a terminology that aims at representing the landscape realistically, the contemporary writer’s “major task was to explore the landscape that is language itself, for the purpose of freeing the imagination from representational strictures”.²²

As such, the myth of the West that New is propagating turns out to be a purely stylistic attempt at ridding the language of most of its contact with the outside reality. This becomes even clearer when he begins to deal with individual writers. Here, instead of trying to clarify what he means by the myth of the West, he only discusses how each author has presented his themes and what are the main stylistic and structural difficulties. This contradiction between the main argument presented in the introduction and the procedures followed in the main body of the book is a natural outcome of the lack of any contact with the real objects that contribute to the idea of the West.

Eli Mandel’s mythical interpretation of Western Canadian novel is based on a very limited definition of regional literature. Thus he claims that

There is no single kind or genre of Western fiction in Canada; there are regional novels, rural novels, ethnic novels, pastorals, urban novels, ethnic novels, pastorals, urban novels. And these in turn, reflect a bewildering variety of concerns and themes: The encounter with the land; the impact of mechanization and urbanization on rural life; the curious rootlessness of the prairie population; the conflict of generations and of varied cultural traditions.²³

Yet, in spite of this recognition of multiplicity, his consequent arguments reveal that the main feature of regional fiction for him is the encounter with

the land. To this idea he adds his firm belief in the fact that "if there is a distinctive regional prairie literature it would have to be mythic."²⁴ Both ideas form the basis of Mandel's theory in which the child has a central position. In prairie fiction "the child-figure is often connected with the prairie landscape."²⁵ The imagination of the prairie writer projects "onto the land its image of redemptive powers in the figure of a child, and is images of demonic powers in a hostile father or tyrant who is the land." The conflict of the two powers is a conflict of generations. It is a mythical one since it enacts the myth of childhood in either of two forms: "a comic one in which the child is identified with the land, and a tragic one, in which the child is alienated from the land."²⁷

Although Mandel's entire theory is built on the mythical nature of childhood and the conflict of generations, he does not bother himself to explain the mythical characteristics, if there are any, of either of them. And later on, in his article "Writing West", he simply shifts the myth to another area whose mythical qualities are also left unexplained: It isn't place that we have to talk about but something more complicated and more compelling, remembered place, a kind of memory, a kind of myth.²⁸

It is very apparent in this article that Mandel is trying to interpret the word myth in a purely subjective and indefinite way in order to fit his own interpretation of Canadian Western fiction, which is entirely derived from the specific features of his own works such as *Another Time*, and of those other writers with whom he sympathizes.

The final critical approach to Canadian western literature I want to consider here is the socio-economic one, which, instead of focusing on the relationship between the individual and nature, focuses upon the interaction between the individual and his human environment. Whether it is the social, political, economic, or artistic quality of the works considered, it considered them in isolation, thus turning literary criticism into a sociological discipline that has nothing to do with literary studies. Thus, in his article, "Prairie Settlement, Western Responses in History and Fiction," Lewis G. Thomas presents a historical study of the social, political and economic evolution of Western society, without even referring to literary works in his article. What he is interested in is the study of the effect of the political relation of the West to the central government in Ottawa and of how it has created a definite set of stereotyped conceptions of the Westerner about his own identity, as well as of how the recent changes in the economic power of the region will help the people get rid of these illusions.

In her article "Given a Certain Latitude: A (Hinterland) Sociologist's View of Anglo-Canadian Literature", Patricia Marchak takes a more literary

approach to the problem. Her arguments are fully supported by literary examples taken from various periods and regions. Occasionally she even provides useful insights into certain literary issues. Thus, for example, she declares that all literature

is regionally specific. I don't mean it happens to be about a place; I mean its central assumptions, its modes of expression, its social and aesthetic concerns belong somewhere but never anywhere. There is no dichotomy between regional and universal: These two terms are not opposites.²⁹

Yet, the main purpose of the article is not to discuss any aesthetic issue, but mainly to prove that since most of Canadian fiction is written by members of the privileged classes, then the resulting fictional portrait of Canadian development is a highly selective and predictably inaccurate portrait.³⁰ And as a result, the rest of the article is an attempt to reveal the contradictions between true social conditions and the novelist's vision of the society.

In order to formulate a comprehensive theory about regionalism in literature that is able to avoid all the pitfalls of the theories already discussed and to illuminate the artistic qualities of the works produced in relation to a specific region, one has to take into account the following basic assumptions. First, a region is a complex product of the dynamic interaction of economic, social, political, historical, cultural and geo-physical forces. Any neglect of any of these forces will directly lead to a distorted vision of the true nature of the region and to a serious misunderstanding of its works of art. This does not mean that the influence of each force in the shaping of the region is equal to that of the others. On the contrary, the relative importance of each of these factors varies from one region to another and from one historical period to another. W. Watson expresses a fearful image of the region saying:

Here all the remoteness of the Western lands, their vastness, the difficulty of ever grasping them, their deceptive openness, their surprising secrecies and above all their huge enigmatic skies challenge men to rethink their ideals and indeed rethink themselves.³¹

Second, Every work of art reflects either explicitly or implicitly, either through the conscious will of the artist or through the unconscious manifestation of unrecognized influences, various regional characteristics. This is so because every artist will be influenced in one way or another by the environment with which he comes into contact during the various phases of his life, and also because every work of art has to be situated in a specific locale and, as a result, has to portray some of the specific characteristics of it.

Third, the impact of the region on the artistic work is reflected in its various elements. Thus themes, structures, symbolism, imagery, style, etc., all reflect to a greater or lesser degree some specific regional characteristics which are not necessarily those of the author's birth place. An author may reflect a region in which he had lived earlier or even one about which he has only heard or read.

Fourth, in the works of art pertaining to a specific region a number of characteristics recur more frequently than others and, as such, help in increasing our understanding of the region as well as of certain artistic qualities of the works concerned as long as we are fully aware that these characteristics do not rigidly define the region in a stereotyped manner, and as long as we are paying as much attention to the differences that are reflected in the works of art which are as illuminating as the similarities.

Finally, the definite geographical and political borders that limit a region do not prevent similarities with other regions. Their only function is to facilitate the research by focusing the attention on a well defined and specific area.

From these basic assumptions, one can draw a set of conclusions that can help in obtaining a wider perspective when approaching individual artists or works of art. First, a region is too complex an entity to be defined by a set of fixed and rigid stereotyped labels. Second, every individual writer incorporates in his works certain specific elements that appeal to his own artistic vision and which differentiate his works from those of any other writer. Third, the recurrence of certain specific regional characteristics in more than one work does not necessarily mean that they have the same artistic significance in each of them. Fourth, in most artistic works, there exist either more than one region or various interpretations of the same region from the point of view of various characters. A full appreciation of the work has to take into account the nature of interaction of these various views. Fifth, because of the constant evolution of the region and the wealth of its inner potentialities that can be discovered or reinterpreted in different ways by either the creative vision of the artist or by the evolution of critical understanding, it is impossible to arrive at a final definition of any region. Finally, all the previous remarks reveal the necessity of adopting a flexible critical approach that is able to adapt itself to the specific characteristics of various individual works of art.

To the above remarks, I would like to add a set of questions which if answered properly will help in clarifying the relation between the region and its artistic productions. First, does the regional material used help in clarifying and intensifying the artistic vision presented in the work of art or

does it only distort and weaken it? Second, is it possible to consider the regional material as an integral part of the artistic experience presented or just an exterior mechanical device? Third, does this regional material provide a deeper understanding of the region from which it is taken, is it interpreted symbolically or mythologically in an attempt to illuminate certain basic issues with which the author is deeply concerned? Is it used to give the illusion of a realistic treatment of the subject matter, or is it manipulated by the author to serve his particular aim? Fourth, is the region presented as a nostalgic escape into the past, as a dominant present reality, or as something thought of as existing in the future? Fifth, is the region presented as an inner state of mind? Finally, is the focal point of work of art the entire region or a specific aspect of it?

W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen The Wind* is a reaction against the two extreme and conflicting interpretations of the Canadian West that were dominant in the fiction of his own time: the pessimistic interpretation which saw the individual as a victim of the tyrannical forces of nature, and the optimistic one which regarded the West as the Promised Land or as the garden of Eden which is being cultivated by the individual in accordance with the will of God. For Mitchell, the West is much more complex than either of these two views. His novel is a realistic attempt at depicting all the contradictory and conflicting forces present in the region and at dispersing the illusions implanted in the mind of Westerners through the recurrent use of stereotyped labels by previous writers. This aim necessitated a panoramic representation of a wide section of the Western society in order to provide a new and comprehensive vision of the entire spectrum of the interacting forces. Thus, we get a full representation of the various social, economic, political, cultural, and geo-physical forces that are operating within the limits of a small town. And what is more important is that these forces are seen from a dialectical point of view.

Who Has Seen The Wind has been widely celebrated as a Canadian Classic. The serious intent of the novel is inseparable from the protagonist Brian's quest for knowledge. At the same time, Mitchell reinforces the shared pursuit of reader and protagonist with symbols, imagery, and motifs drawn from the small town and the surrounding prairie. Mitchell has made of the Canadian setting a convincing environment in which to search for God and the meaning of life and existence. Thus, in every aspect of his novel, Mitchell has introduced the microcosm - macrocosm relation. The little town of the novel is a small world which contains the attempts of man to make a home of the large, alien world of the prairie. And it appears that all men are fighters

for existence, and, that no man can be living for ever and men must be satisfied.

The novel follows Brian's progress from age four to age twelve. Brian is a fine creation – at once a personable small town boy between the wars and searcher for order and stability amid the chaos and anxiety of human experience. During the course of the novel, Brian struggles to comprehend the rare spiritual ascendancy, like wind on the back of his neck that he has sometimes felt. He must cope with death: his dog Jappy is killed; a gopher is cruelly tortured; his friend Fat loses his rabbits; his father dies, and his grandmother dies. He learns to cope with life's imperfections and obstacles. Through it all, Brian's excessive yearning for enlightenment never flags. He learns from the Ben, whose transcendent continuity with the Prairie thrills Brian. He learns from conversations between his school principal and the shoemaker, who open a larger world of the mind and imagination for him.

In some ways, the town, this regional western area, represents the whole human community from a Canadian perspective. The vicious Mrs. Abercrombie and the school board; the Wongs - the China Kids; their father's suicide; the Reverend Powelly and his zealots; old Mrs. O'Connal's memories: together they stand for all Canadian small towns, small towns everywhere. John Moss in his *A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel* indicates in this perspective that it is "the surrounding prairie that allows Mitchell to isolate the town and make it both unique and universal. The prairie provides the spiritual source in the novel. It stretches timelessly; it brings the wind, the touch of God. It offers solitude and renewal. It is the place of death and the source of life."³²

Thus in depicting the character of Brian, Mitchell takes extensive and elaborate care to reveal that the maturity acquired by him is not the result of one or another factor but the result of their combined effect upon his own personal temperament. In other words, Brian's friendship with Ben, the way he is brought up at home, the way he is educated at school, and his various encounters with death and with the people of the town all contribute to his early maturity. In this respect, Michael Peterman argues "The art of *Who Has Seen The Wind* depends in large upon Mitchell's ability to make Brian's development at once dramatic and plausible though much that happens around the boy is heightened for comic effect and rendered melodramatic by Mitchell's moral position."³³ The examples I have given are very obvious and their influence upon Brian is direct and explicit, but there are others which are not as apparent. Thus the economic conditions of the depression years and the social environment prevalent in the town, for example, do not

figure in the foreground, but they also play their role in an implicit way. If we are able to grasp this fact, much of the material that appears at first glance to be insignificant in the development of the main character will acquire new functional importance, and the structure of the book will be seen as more coherent than has been suspected until now.

Mitchell's adherence through the novel to an objective and realistic method of presentation necessitated his treatment of both the progressive and the conservative elements operating within the society he is depicting. Thus, in most of cases, every social type is represented by either two figures standing for the two extremes or by three, with the third standing for a desired compromise. Thus, for example, the educational system is represented by three teachers. Miss MacDonald stands for the repressive function of the system which aims at molding the children in accordance with the dominant social norms and at preparing them for a well-disciplined life within the conventions of the society. Mr. Digby stands for the theoretical rejection of this role which manifests itself in philosophical arguments that are not able to change anything in real life. Miss Thompson combines the resentment of Mr. Digby with a practical mind that enables her to modify not only the atmosphere of the school but also that of the entire town when she stands up to Mrs. Abercrombie.

The same thing could be applied to the representation of the young generation. Here, we have Mariel, who is brought up in accordance with the dominant social norms which repress all her natural feelings and instincts turning her into a devil. On the opposite side, we have Ben, who is brought up in complete union with the forces of nature and who is unable to sustain any real social relationship. Dick Harrison says: "Mitchell creates such charming pictures of children on the Prairies that people don't realize when he's moved on. Mitchell was very aware that because man is conscious, he is separate from the world and therefore alone. Morality resonates through all his work."³⁴ Then between these two extremes we have Brian, who is trying to keep his contact with nature at the same time that he is preparing himself to carry any social responsibility he has to without endangering his own integrity. A third example that is very important is the way in which the landscape is portrayed. Here Mitchell is careful to present both the threatening aspects of the natural forces and the benevolent ones without allowing either of them to dominate the other or to dominate the social life of the town people.

The difficulty of this task is increased by the fact that the action of the novel takes place during the Depression years. This fact is kept in its proper place by various devices, of which one may note two. First, there is the way

Mitchell gives a role to two characters. Brian's uncle is a man who turns the problem into a question of economic development and adoption of modern technology in agricultural projects, thus suggesting that man is not a passive victim who cannot do anything to change his fate. Saint Sammy is a man who is converted by economic disaster into a holy man, who is able to communicate directly with nature and God. Second, there is Mitchell's avoidance of depicting the direct influence of the depression on the lives of the people of the town.

The comprehensiveness of the regional representation is reflected not only in the thematic treatment of the major issues in the novel, but more significantly in the structure and style of the book. Thus, the loose structure of the book can be supported by the central experience presented therein. It allowed Mitchell to juxtapose various incidents one after the other without their being directly related to each other. On the stylistic level, this led to the constant use of catalogues, flashbacks, and poetic style to compensate for the lack of logical coherence, and by the unity of tone, mood, voice, and imagery.

Thus, the desire to belong to a particular region or environment is not only local but universal. It leads the individual to be attached to his own place in an obsessive way, and to a state of wholeheartedness, an awareness that creates a phenomenon of duality, a desire for, as Hartmut Lutz calls it, "authenticated personal identity." To belong to a place's culture, may become especially poignant in people who have been uprooted, driven out, displaced, and resettled by processes of emigration."³⁰ Lut adds that "In much of contemporary postcolonial literature of so-called settler societies there seems to be "a desire, a need, a specific emotional and moral *Befindlichkeit* to identify with the 'new' land in a more profound way, fostering strong desires to create home place out of alien space."³⁶

ENDNOTES

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