In the Words of a Child

Castaway Kid by R.B. Mitchell is an autobiography of his life from early childhood

through his college graduation and marriage. In his story Mitchell uses a strikingly simple

literary style, illustrating the direct thought patterns of an abandoned child, a disillusioned

teenager, and an adult. Incorporated into this simple style and its clear, uncomplicated structure

are literary devices such as similes, metaphors, and personification. Throughout his

autobiography, Mitchell writes with varying attitudes in the various stages of his life; uses

simple, direct sentences with a great deal of dialogue; and incorporates many literary techniques

into his first-person viewpoint.

This autobiography covers a wide span of years, including many different phases in

Mitchell's life. Because of this, the story does not have one continuous attitude or tone

throughout his entire life. On the contrary, the reader is subjected to the veritable roller-coaster

of emotions and feelings Robby is going through at various times. In the beginning of this book,

he is a naïve toddler, abandoned by his effectively single mother, Joyce Mitchell. In response to

this, Robby becomes first needy and later callous and hardened. "Nola was concerned. She'd lost

her puppy-dog kid." This later attitude is shown by his conscious decision to harden his heart.

"Nothing and nobody will ever hurt me this badly again... I am going to be tough—no matter

what." Also his sarcastic humor towards repeated and expected rejection demonstrates his

callousness. "So now this place doesn't want me, either?" Later in life, Mitchell learns to cope

with his terrible childhood and becomes an admirably forgiving man.

The simple syntax used by Mitchell is characterized by many fragments, rhetorical

questions, and dialogue. The way he often utilizes fragments instead of complete sentences

illustrates the confusion and disjointed thoughts he was sorting through as a child. "Not tonight. Tonight it was my chance to cry out with groanings too deep for words." Also, Mitchell often uses rhetorical questions to which there are often no satisfactory answers. An excellent example is repeated with some variation many times throughout the book, "I wish someone would tell me what I did wrong. Why did mother send me away? Why am I so alone?" In general he uses short, direct, simple sentences that would likely come from a child's mind. He rarely uses compound or complex sentences, expressing himself instead through short, even disconnected thoughts. The last main characteristic of Mitchell's syntax is extensive use of dialogue as the primary means of telling his life story. Countless examples from the book show, at times, several pages of continuous dialogue with short interjections of Robby's thoughts. This structure makes *Castaway Kid* an enjoyable and easy read.

Mitchell also uses many literary techniques such as similes, metaphors, and numerous instances of personification in his writing. These elements are seamlessly and discreetly incorporated into the book so that a cursory reading will often miss them completely. The quote referring to Robby as a "puppy-dog kid" is an excellent example of a well used metaphor. Also the phrase, "...the living nightmare that lurked around the corner" shows Mitchell's use of personification to make his childhood enemies tangible and concrete. He often incorporates multiple literary devices into the same sentence. An example of both metaphor and personification is found in a description of one of Robby's internal battles. "That hope was the only thing that kept despair from dragging me into its dark pit."

In writing this book, R.B. Mitchell uses many different attitudes while still retaining simple structure and incorporating a great deal of imagery. In spite of its simplicity, his style is

laced with various literary elements and emotions, keeping the reader enthralled in the story. His

use of somewhat childlike language is synthesized with more complex writing techniques to

make an extremely moving and believable autobiography.